Bloodlines of the Dragon

by PrettyFrog

Summary

Heroes rose. They stood victorious, making their mark upon the world. Now, in a time of relative peace, they must face their worst fear. And a new generation of heroes takes their first strides across the land of Thedas. The children of the Wardens, Champions, Inquisitors, and Kings come into their own.

The daughter of Kirkwall's champion leads the Crown Princes of Ferelden and Kal'Hirol, an Old God, the Dread Wolf's apprentice, an abomination, a kidnapped Inquisition agent, ancient elves, a general, and a spymaster into a battle for the future of the world.

And Thedas must learn to come to terms with the fact that some things are hereditary.
New Beginnings

Salla woke with a start, and immediately grabbed her journal to write down the dream before the memory faded from her. Green light, and people shouting and a cat. Uncle Varric had been there. He'd been frightened. Not many things could actually make her uncle show fear.

She sighed, and went to the window. There were hours yet before dawn, but getting back to sleep didn't seem a feasible option. Her next lesson with Feynriel was in three days. More questions for her growing list. With the trouble in Tevinter, though, he couldn't come to Kirkwall. And there was no way her fathers would allow her to go to Tevinter.

After a moment, she drew a robe around herself and went down to the kitchen. She was still looking when a voice spoke from the doorway. "Varric took them when he left."

"It didn't occur to him anyone else might want leftover cookies?" Salla smiled. "I didn't mean to wake you." She never meant to. And somehow she always did.

Fenris shrugged before he entered and began adding water to the teakettle. "What was the dream this time?"

"We were in the Viscount's Keep. And something happened. I could feel it through the ripples in the Veil." She sat down at the table, and he sat across from her. "People were screaming and panicking. And there was a cat."

"A cat?"

"I thought it was just an ordinary nightmare until the cat. All the chaos, and right in the middle of it there was just this black cat, watching me. And I needed to follow him, but first I had to show him where he was going."

He rose before the kettle could start to whistle, and poured cups for both of them. "So it was a boy cat?"

"Father." She gave him a teasing glare as she accepted the cup. Then she frowned. "Yes. The cat was a him. Not an it or a her. A him."

"We should see about getting another dog." He smiled before his face became serious once more. "In Viscount's Keep, you said? Was there anything I can pass to Aveline?"

"There were a lot of people there. Familiar faces. Agatha was there. There was a woman with one arm."

"The Inquisitor?" Fenris frowned.

"I think it might have been. I can't be sure, I only really saw her the once. Lots of people in fancy clothes, all scared and angry. An interrupted party?" She sighed. "I held my hand out to the cat, and he rubbed his cheek against it. I felt a jolt, and that woke me up." She sipped the tea.

"To the best of my knowledge, the Inquisitor has never been to Kirkwall." He sipped from his own cup. "We can talk to her staff at the estate. She's likely coming to the Chantry dedication."

"Okay." She took another drink, letting the warmth fill her. "Speaking of boy cats, Guardsman Veluc invited me to get drinks tomorrow."
"Not the Hanged Man. You know what kind of riff-raff assembles there."

"You, Papa, and your friends."

"Exactly." He smiled. "Remind him that if he does not have you home at a reasonable hour..."

"He'll have his internal organs rearranged and set on fire. And then you'll have a word with Aveline about which guards are in need of remedial instruction on picking up griffin scat."

He stood, and kissed the top of her head affectionately. "Good girl."

Cullen counted the tiny fingers again. Still ten. The tiny form lay peacefully in his arms. Across the room his wife lay in one corner of the bed, and the mabari hound lay curled as tight as possible in the opposite corner. In the center sprawled his son. How someone so small managed to take up so much space never failed to amaze him.

His daughter made a gurgling sound as she curled some of those tiny fingers around his thumb. He slipped quietly out of the room so as not to wake the rest of his family. "Where were we?" He looked down at the small form. "Right. So, then your mother twirled her staff and shot a bolt of lightning right into the dragon's eye. It roared and leaped back, freeing The Iron Bull from its foul clutches. As it tried to take off, she summoned a storm of fire and ice, battering the beast back to the ground. Seeker Cassandra, shielded by your mother's magic, rushed forward, and put her sword right into the beast's dark heart."

"And the world was saved once more, thanks to the heroic Inquisitor."

He grinned up at Kels. "Shouldn't you be asleep?"

"Minaeve woke up an hour ago with a brilliant idea regarding wing structure and I never understand half of what she says when she starts on physiology. And I can't sleep when she has all the lanterns burning." Kels shrugged. "You?"

"Gavren had a bad dream and we need a bigger bed." Cullen gazed down at his daughter, and trailed a finger down her face. "I was thinking of crawling into his bed when Kailey woke up." He shifted her weight a little as they walked down the hall. "Anything interesting this morning?"

"Viscount Varric sent a letter saying Kirkwall has nearly finished rebuilding the Chantry. Divine Victoria wants to make blessing it a big to-do, and would like the Inquisitor to be in attendance." Kels shrugged. "I get the feeling she wants to make it a bit of a reunion."

"I like the thought, but did it have to be Kirkwall?" Cullen shook his head.

"Walter swears Kirkwall is much improved. He just made lieutenant in the guard." Kels smiled. "Caleb, Salla, and a few of the others are still there. It would be nice to see them again."

"I'll speak with the Inquisitor. You start making arrangements." He tilted his head.

"You do have an estate in Kirkwall, Comte."

"You had to remind me." Cullen glared at the younger man.

Saitada strode into the palace. Trian walked a pace behind her, trying to look dignified. An
armored man, gingered hair going slightly gray, met them in the hall. "Warden-Commander." He bowed.

"Ser Gilmore." Saitada nodded. "The king is expecting us."

"There has been a slight complication. I..." He trailed off with a helpless shrug.

"Wynne is refusing to wear clothes again?" Saitada raised an eyebrow.

A small laugh escaped Ser Gilmore before he caught himself. "Would you like me to escort you to the residence?"

She shook her head. "I know the way." She gave him a half bow before heading in. Trian hurried to catch up with her. She entered the royal residence just in time to see a completely naked three-year-old girl dash through the room and dive under the bed, chased by her gown wielding father. Her mother, armed with an undergarment, came around the other side, attempting to corner the child. The twins stood in the crib, cheering for their sister while a young mabari pup howled along. The heir apparent stood with an older red-haired boy, occasionally calling advice to Wynne. "Yes." Saitada nodded. "These are definitely your children."

"You could help instead of stating the obvious." Alistair shot a glare over his shoulder as he attempted to prevent the girl's escape. Cathiel crawled under the bed after her.

"Where's the fun in that?" Saitada smiled and went to prevent the twins from removing their own clothing in rebellious solidarity.

Once captured, Wynne submitted to the indignity of wearing clothing and having her hair done readily enough. She even demanded ribbons. Saitada lifted Bryce out of the crib and set him on her hip. He immediately began babbling to her and playing with her braids. "So how is mighty Ferelden?"

"Feeling somewhat less dignified than it did at breakfast time." Alistair tried to brush the dirt off his doublet before giving up and heading to the wardrobe to grab a different one. "And Kal'Hirol?"

"We've recovered two more thaigs." Saitada gestured at her own heir apparent. "Trian arranged for Gorim's daughter, Terra, to apprentice with Dagna, and is working on making our ties with the College of Enchanter's more official."

"That's wonderful to hear." Cathiel finished tying the last of the ribbons before retrieving Maric from the crib. Wynne grabbed another ribbon and began decorating her mabari. "Fiona has sent a rather tentative letter requesting leave to build a small tower on Kal'Hirol's trust lands. I assume she's spoken with you already?"

Saitada gave Trian a pointed look, and he cleared his throat. "I've been working with Enchanters Fiona and Lenore on the matter. I brought copies of their plans, and I think the idea has merit."

"Something to discuss over dinner, then." Alistair checked Duncan over and gave the boy an approving nod before doing the same to his companion. "Come. The more dignified dignitaries await us."

#

Her brother was all but bouncing. Just once, she'd like him to act his age. Or his station. Or... a squealing sound escaped her, and she headed to intercept Merrill. "Can I..." Merrill was passing over the bundled infant before Salla could finish the request. She cuddled the tiny form. "Hi little
Varric."

Nearby, one of the riders whistled. "Lieutenant, your fledglings are here."

Uncle Carver jumped down from one of the towers, landing easily. Salla was pretty sure her brother would try to duplicate the feat by the end of the day, and break one or both of his legs. A moment later, Leandra launched herself from the tower, laughing madly. Her father caught her, and swung her up onto his shoulders before walking over towards them.

Caleb was rushing up to him immediately. "You said you thought we were ready for solo flights."

"I did?" Their uncle raised one eyebrow. He looked up at his daughter. "Did I?"

"You did." Leandra giggled.

"And did you pick them out griffins?"

She giggled again. "Aravas for Caleb, and Dorf for La-la."

"Salla, you done cooing up there?" Carver called.

For a moment, she was torn. Ride a griffin, or cuddle a baby. Reluctantly, she handed the infant back to his mother. "Can I hold him more later?"

"We are coming to dinner tonight. You can hold him then." Merrill smiled.

Carver handed Leandra off to Greta, and led them into the griffin enclosure.

Ruya stood in the balcony overlooking the garden, watching Cullen and Kels spar. Gavren watched eagerly, wooden sword in hand, occasionally trying to imitate a movement. She saw a familiar shadow fall across the ground, and immediately headed for the stairs. "Bull."

Iron Bull picked her up and swung her around in a hug. "Hey boss." He set her back down. "Any new news?"

"Another assassination attempt on Maevaris, and a message from Dorian for you." She shook her head. She felt herself start to blush. "Which you are just going to have to imagine because I am not repeating it." She raised an eyebrow. "You?"

"Ran a mission with the new Seekers." He shrugged. "They've got potential. Cassandra sets a pretty high bar. And helped deal with some assassins." He grinned. "I want to meet my niece."

"I just put her down for a nap."

He stuck out his lower lip in an exaggerated pout. "Fine. I'll go be a bad influence on my nephew." He headed into the garden.

She rolled her eyes, and followed.

Cathiel smiled at where her brother was introducing his newest Bann to Arl Teagan. Goldanna's eldest, Cordell, had done well in her brother's service. His only niece had chosen to join the Chantry, and he'd arranged with Saitada to have the youngest of the bunch squire for one of the
knights of the Order of Vigilance. The other nephew was... well, the Red Jennies weren't quite the nightmare they used to be, at least. She was somewhat disappointed Fergus hadn't brought her nieces or his wife. But then, the youngest wasn't old enough to stand yet.

The king was engaged in conversation with young Trian. Cathiel smiled. Saitada's choice of heir had caused a stir. From casteless boy to heir apparent of the most powerful house in Kal'Hirol was a considerable change. Of course, the fact that one of Orzammar's two living paragons had himself been casteless did help. And Saitada had chosen well. The lad had taken over the running of some of House Saitada's holdings and by all accounts they were thriving.

She turned to look at Saitada. "Maybe I should send Duncan to live with Zerlinda for a while."

"Actually, that's not a bad idea. I was considering talking to you about leaving Trian here for a couple months to learn more about Ferelden culture." Saitada looked up at her. "Understanding makes for better neighbors." She shrugged. "And the Deep Roads have never been safer. We've seen nothing but the rare straggler within twenty miles of Kal'Hirol."

"Do you think..." She hesitated. "He had something to do with that?"

Saitada closed her eyes a moment. Then she sighed. "That's my assumption. Have you heard anything?"

"No. You?"

"The last time I spoke with him, he said we would not meet again." Saitada stared ahead at something a thousand miles away. She took a deep breath. "The Wardens are still getting recruits. Everyone wants to ride a griffin."

Cathiel laughed. "Ser Gilmore's having the same problem." She saw a woman moving towards her through the assorted nobles, followed by a young boy and her elven maid-servant. Her eyes trailed over his face. Despite what the rumors said, she really didn't see any trace of Nathaniel Howe in his features. He had the fair hair of his mother. "Teyrna Anora."

"Your majesty," Anora gave a small bow. "Warden-Commander. Keeper Lanaya regrets she could not attend. The settlement is having some..." She sighed. "Difficulties, of late."

"Does the crown need to take an interest?" Cathiel raised an eyebrow. It never failed to surprise her how staunch an elven advocate Anora had become, especially considering what her father had done to the alienage. Of course, considering what her father had allowed to be done in the alienage, it had never failed to surprise her Jerath hadn't gutted the man.

"At the moment, I believe that would do more harm than good. It may..." Anora lowered her voice. "It may be a better solution for the Crown to consider officially granting title to Keeper Lanaya. Arl, if not Teyrn."

"You'd support this notion?" Saitada raised an eyebrow. "It would make the settlement rival Gwaren."

"The settlement rivals Gwaren now. I would rather my neighbors be content. And with..." Anora shrugged. "Things I am not supposed to know about in play, I wholeheartedly support extending friendship to the elves."

"I do not think we are prepared to create another teyrnir, but perhaps it is time we had an elven Arl. I will speak with my husband and Bann Shianni on the matter."

"She'd also contact Brehan, assuming she could pry him away from the Inquisition and the Divine for the matter."
Salla closed the door as quietly as she could. She was halfway down the hall to her room when she heard her father's voice. "What's wrong?"

The tears she'd been fighting back for the last hour started to fall, and she buried her face in Fenris's shoulder as he put his arms around her. "I forgot my cloak at the tavern." She choked out the words. "Heard Veluc talking to his friends. He's only interested in me because I'm the daughter of the Champion and he wants to be guard captain."

Fenris rubbed her back gently. "Do you want his lungs or his spine?"

"He doesn't have a spine. He's a gutless good for nothing piece of wishes he were noble shite."
Salla pulled back and wiped at her eyes.

"Lungs it is, then." Fenris led her into the kitchen and started making tea.

"And then I'm going to melt them and pour them back up his nose." Salla sat at the table, and then took a cookie off the plate Fenris offered. "I really liked him." She swallowed the bite of cookie. Veluc had been the only boy to show interest in her, and he...

"What's wrong with me?"

"Nothing is wrong with you."

"Other than I'm plain and a mage and I..."

"Salla." He caught her chin and tilted her face up to meet his eyes. "Nothing is wrong with you." He kissed her forehead.

"Plenty wrong with him." Salla watched him pour the tea. "Like the fact he's going to be missing his lungs. And be set on fire. And eaten by griffins."

"Hung upside down by his toes and forced to listen to Lord Charr's poetry?"

"Oh, that's a good one." Salla nodded, wiping the tears away again. "Definitely that, after the griffins shit him back out." She took a drink from the tea. "And rashvine in all his armor."

"How about a classic? Tar and feathers."

She moved silently down the roof line, and leaped across, catching hold of the window ledge and pulling herself up. It took her only seconds to work the mechanism, and then the window was open. She slithered inside and shut it behind her, adjusting the latch so it appeared to be still secured. A couple lengthened strides avoided the squeaking floorboard, and she found her objective. A quick twist of the lockpick, and...

Agatha cursed. A moment later, light flooded the room. She shook her head. "A barrier? Seriously?"

"Those are mine." Lenore folded her arms and narrowed her eyes. "You had your share already."

A low growl escaped her. "What did I..." Her head came up. "You warded your candy stash?"
She gave the woman she'd come to think of as a mother a disbelieving look.

"Clearly not an unwarranted precaution." Lenore grinned and lowered the magic barrier. She took the box of carastian candy out of the safe and opened it to offer Agatha a piece. "You could have
"Where's the fun in that?" asked Agatha. She accepted the candy and bit into it, savoring the flavor. "When are we leaving for Kirkwall?" She couldn't wait to see Salla. Letters just weren't the same as actually going boy-watching with her best friend.

"We haven't decided if we are attending." Lenore replaced the candy. "It's mostly Chantry business."

"But..."

"But I suppose House Brosca does have some interest, and we should consider at least sending a representative. If only there were a good candidate. Someone smart. Someone capable. Someone who wants to visit a friend." She narrowed her eyes. "Someone who knows better than to try to steal my candy."

Agatha popped the last of the piece of candy into her mouth. "What candy?"

"That's my girl."

"What's this about another assassination attempt?" Ruya raised an eyebrow at Brehan. "Divine Victoria didn't mention anyone trying to assassinate her in the latest missive."

Iron Bull folded his arms. "That's because the assassins weren't after her." He nodded to Brehan. "They targeted him. Idiots."

Ruya blinked, and turned to stare at Brehan. He sighed. "Someone hired a group of thugs to ambush me on the way back here."

"Not very serious thugs." Iron Bull shrugged. "Krem and I barely had to do anything."

"Were these because you're in a relationship with the Divine, or because you are a representative of the Inquisition?"

He sighed. "With certain rumors..." He shook his head. "The loyalty of elves everywhere is being questioned. The thought that a Dalish elf has the ear of both Divine and Inquisitor..."

"Not to mention the King and Queen of Ferelden and the Warden Commander." Ruya nodded. "I may assign you a guard detail again. She frowned. "Actually, for now I'm just going to assign you the Chargers. We'll be heading to Kirkwall in a couple weeks for the thing." She shrugged. "Cullen has already been in touch with Aveline regarding security, and we'll be bringing our forces, but I want the Chargers in as a less..." She tilted her head. "Formal unit."

"Can you believe it's been five years since we kicked Corypheus's ass?" Iron Bull grinned. "Think we'll get the whole gang together?"

"Sera is already in Kirkwall. Doing 'reconnaissance'." She looked over at Brehan. "Sorry. But she actually spelled the word correctly, so there is that." He shrugged and smiled. "Dorian will be attending in his role as ambassador. If Cassandra finishes her business in Nevarra in time, she'll be there. I haven't heard yet from Rainier or Cole. Vivienne will be attending as Grand Enchanter of the Circle." She smiled. "Cullen and I do have an estate in Kirkwall, so we'll have a base of operations other than the Chantry itself."
Brehan looked up at Iron Bull. "We should head out in advance. Check the lay of the land, secure the estate, make sure the wine cellar is stocked."

"I like the way you think, Songbird."

Ruya rolled her eyes, and left her spies to do their thing.

#

Duncan gestured for Jerath to stand guard. The older boy shook his head in disapproval, but did as he was asked. Duncan crept in closer to listen in on the conversation between his parents and the Warden-Commander, climbing onto a table so he could hear better through the screen. It appeared Keeper Lanaya was going to become an Arl. That was good, he liked Lanaya. She always brought him a toy when she visited. They were still worried about the wolf guy. And worrying about what the other guy, the one his friend had been named for, was up to and what it could mean.

"One of us, at least, should attend the celebration in Kirkwall.\" His father was speaking.

"I can't be away from the twins that long, and I'm not bringing them."

"Well, that makes it an easy choice. Will you be coming?"

"Yes, actually. And bringing Trian. It's past time he met the Divine and the Inquisitor."

Duncan grimaced. It wasn't fair. Just because Trian was older. He was an heir as well. He leaned forward to catch his father's next words and the table he was standing on collapsed beneath him. He tumbled off and landed sprawled in the hallway. Jerath rushed to him just as the king opened the door, the Warden Commander a pace behind him.

"Spies.\" Saitada folded her arms.

"That I sent to bed an hour ago.\" Alistair glared at his son, and then turned his disapproving eyes to Jerath. "Is being his second too much responsibility for you?"

Jerath wilted before his gaze. "No, your majesty."

"You do understand that the orders I give you supersede any he gives you?"

"Yes, your majesty."

Duncan got to his feet. "It wasn't his fault. I snuck out. He just followed to keep me out of trouble."

His father nodded, and knelt before him, looking him square in the eye. "One of the hardest things to learn about being king is that other people must pay for the decisions you make. Since you won't consider the consequences for yourself, consider the consequences for him. This time, he's going to face running drills for Kylon.\" Alistair stood, and stared down at his son. "One day, it may be an assassin's blade. Get back to your room. Jerath, report to Kylon first thing in the morning."

"It's not fair.\" Duncan shook his head and looked helplessly at his friend. Jerath hadn't even wanted to come and now he was the one getting punished.

"Another of the hard lessons a king must learn. To your room."

"Yes, father."
Saitada watched the young prince leave, followed by his loyal vassal. She'd told Alistair of how her brother had once hammered the same point home to her. "You were listening."

"I do that." He shrugged. "Sometimes." He shook his head, and then looked at Cathiel. "I'm going to take those two to Kirkwall with me."

She started to object, and then nodded. "No, that's probably best. He'll need to start learning that being king isn't a fun job." Cathiel shrugged. "Hopefully, he's also learned his lesson about sticking frogs in the pockets of visiting dignitaries."

"Yep." Saitada nodded. "That is definitely your son."

"I hate you."
Kirkwall

The intervening years had brought peace and stability to his life. Most days he even slept peacefully. And yet he still couldn't stand to be below decks. Cullen leaned on the railing, looking out at the water. Almost eight years had passed since the last time he'd been to Kirkwall. He'd been a different man, then. The ship rose and fell with the waves.

His wife and kids were in the hold, having a nap. He hadn't been sure about bringing Kailey along on the voyage, but Minaeve and his wife both knew healing magic. Gavren was enjoying himself immensely, and he was starting to be concerned about the habits the boy might be picking up from the crew.

"There." He looked up from the water at the sound of Isabela's voice, and looked where she was pointing. He could just make out the sight of the cliffs.

"When was the last time you were back?" He glanced over at her.

"About two months ago," Isabela grinned. "Running books and tapestries for the Chantry. The Inquisitor is a very bad influence on my crew." She shook her head. "We haven't engaged in decent piracy since..." She caught the narrowing of his eyes. "Oh, never mind when." She leaned on the railing next to him. "It's changed and it hasn't."

"Suppose that's true of a lot of things." He straightened. "I'm going to go get Gavren. He wants to watch us head into the docks."

#

"Land." Duncan grabbed hold of some of the ropes and pulled himself up for a better view. "Look, Father, land." He rushed up to the front of the ship, followed by Jerath.

"Thank the Maker." Alistair took a deep breath. When he'd suggested bringing his son along, he hadn't quite considered that meant having the boy in a confined space for several uninterrupted days. He was fairly sure the crew was contemplating regicide. He glanced down at Saitada. "Was I --"

"Yes."

"I wasn't --"

"You told me you were raised by dogs."

"But --"

"You once went twelve days without bathing."

"That was --"

"You and Cathiel spent an afternoon going through every variation of plant-related pun available until Wynne of all people threatened your lives."

He folded his arms and glared at her for having a very good point. "At least I never summoned a dragon."

"No." Saitada shrugged. "You just charged in and let it stand on you."
Trian made a noise that sounded suspiciously like a snort of laughter. Alistair shook his head and turned to look at the other woman accompanying him. How Teyrna Anora managed to still look stately and composed after six days aboard a ship was a mystery for the ages. Her son was content to sit in a pile of ropes, out of the way, reading quietly.

Odd, how time could change things. Once, he'd nearly had the woman executed. Now, with Teagan recovering from a broken leg, she was the logical choice to bring as his diplomatic attache. Though he would have preferred to bring Teagan. What had the man been thinking, riding a tilt at his age? He chuckled ruefully. As if he wasn't approaching forty himself. And Saitada's once crimson hair was now half gone to silver. She was what, six years older than he was? He couldn't quite bring himself to ask.

He glanced back at Anora's son. Young Loghain. Another mystery for the ages. Anora had never confirmed nor denied any of the rumors concerning the paternity of her son. The Ferelden nobility had settled on Nathaniel Howe, a decision helped by the man's mysterious disappearance along with their former Warden-Commander. The latter for the second time.

The city began to rise before them. Kirkwall. The City of Chains. He should have a word with Varric about making the entrance into the bay look less... ominous.

#

Gabriel opened the door to find an elven girl. He glanced over his shoulder and called out to his daughter. "I found trouble."

Salla made an actual squealing sound as she flung herself down the stairs and into her best friend's waiting hug. Agatha laughed gleefully as she was dragged into the house and towards the kitchen. Gabriel just shook his head and closed the door. Orana was already pressing food on their guest. And Caleb, showing signs of self-preservation instinct, was nowhere to be seen. He turned to Fenris. "Varric asked us to meet the Inquisitor and some of the other incoming guests while he's seeing to the Divine."

Fenris nodded. "Shall we?"

"He also said to remind you that Magister Pavus is a friend, and to ask you to please leave his spine where you found it."

#

Ruya stepped off the ship into Dorian's hug. He planted a kiss on her cheek before doing a double take at the sight of Gavren. "Maker, last time I saw him, he was..." He glanced at Kailey. "Well, the size of that one."

"Iron Bull's already at the estate." She smiled up at Dorian. "Surprised you aren't there."

"Well, I intended to, but then a thought occurred to me." He shrugged. "I have no idea where your estate is."

"Actually..." Cullen shook his head. "Neither do we."

"And that's my cue." A familiar voice had them both turning to see Hawke and Fenris. "Inquisitor, always a pleasure." He gave a small bow. "Cullen."

A young man standing behind the Champion tilted his head at Kels. "What the hell is that on your face?"
Kels broke into a huge smile and strode forward to hug the man. "Caleb." He stepped back, and brushed a hand over his face proudly. "It's called a beard."

Hawke half turned. "Inquisitor, I don't believe you've met my son. Caleb, Inquisitor Trevelyan."

Caleb bowed. "Well met."

Fenris turned away from where he'd been talking to one of the dock workers, and joined them. Hawke spread his hands. "We are your official welcoming party, so welcome to Kirkwall. Or back to Kirkwall, as the case may be." He grinned. "Come, we'll show you to your estate. You'll love it. It's right next door to mine."

"Maker have mercy," Cullen muttered.

The ship jolted slightly as it came to a rest at the docks. Jerath caught Duncan and hauled him back before he ended up in the water. "Look at the statue." Duncan pointed. "That's the Champion." He stared up at the city. "Look at this place." He turned towards his companion. "I bet we could climb that."

"I bet your father would lock us in the dungeon if we tried." Jerath looked up at the city. Here and there were still signs of damage from when the Chantry had exploded. The new Chantry was visible, gleaming white in the sun.

"Whose that Father is talking to?" Duncan nodded to a tall, red haired woman.

"Guard-Captain Aveline, most likely." Jerath tilted his head. When the king signaled him, he collected his charge and the younger boy and brought them to the rest of the group. Loghain moved to dutifully follow his mother. Duncan kept pointing and starring at various things. He stopped to look at the statue. Jerath shook his head. "Duncan."

"How do you think they keep the fire burning?" Duncan dodged the attempt to grab his arm.

"Probably magic."

"Cause the Champion is a mage, right?" Duncan walked a circle around the statue. "Did he really cut off the Arishok's head?" He tilted his head. "Why'd they give him a sword if he's a mage?"

"I don't know. You could ask him." Jerath followed his prince as the boy went to read the placard.

"How come they don't mention that the Champion is Ferelden?" Duncan frowned at it. "He is, you know. He was even our court mage for while."

"I know. I was there." Jerath put a hand on Duncan's shoulder. "Come on, we've got to catch up with..." He looked back over his shoulder and saw no sign of the king or his retinue. "Shit."

"With shit?" Duncan looked up, then looked at where Jerath was looking. "Oh."

"Your father is going to kill me."

"If we catch up, maybe he won't notice." Duncan dashed in the direction he thought his father had gone.

"Duncan." Jerath chased after him.
Alistair made it to the steps before glancing over his shoulder. Loghain was walking next to his mother. And Jerath and Duncan were nowhere to be seen. Saitada caught his look and began looking around. "Shit."

"Problem?" Aveline asked when she realized they'd stopped.

"We are short one prince and one prince's second." Alistair began walking back to the docks.

"Loghain, did you see where the others went?" Anora looked down at her son. He shook his head.

"Anora, go with one of the guard up to Viscount's Keep in case they manage to get there."

"Yes, your majesty." Anora immediately began following the guard Aveline indicated.

He turned to look at Saitada. She nodded. "Trian and I will go left."

"I'll go right."

Aveline sighed. "I'll head back to the docks." She gestured for the other three guardsmen to start looking.

Iron Bull opened the door of the estate and stared down at Ruya. "Do you have an appoint..." He saw Dorian and stepped forward to pick the other man up in a giant bear hug. "Kadan." He carried Dorian into the house.

Ruya just rolled her eyes and went inside after him. The place was larger than she had expected. And something smelled delicious. She walked from the foyer into the great room.

"Hyaaah." Someone leaped off the balcony, landed next to her, and gave her a huge hug and a sloppy kiss on the cheek.

She laughed. "Sera."


Hawke got a huge grin on his face as Cullen winced and shook his head. He glared at the Champion. "Don't."

"Too late." He snickered. "Cully Wully."
little lords." The speaker glanced over his shoulder at his companions. "Think somebody'd pay us for their..." He grinned, showing a rotting tooth. "Recovery?"

He took a step forward, and Jerath drew his sword. "Get back."

The man laughed. "Well now, we've got a scrapper here. Put that down, boy, before I spank you with it."

Jerath began backing up, moving Duncan with him as he tried to look for an escape route. The man who'd spoken earlier drew a long knife. He lunged to grab Jerath's arm, and Jerath moved through one of the forms Kylon had so recently drilled into him. The blade slashed the man's arm, sending a spray of blood flying. The man snarled. "Run." Jerath called to Duncan. The younger boy obeyed immediately. Jerath parried the man's blow, and opened a wound in his leg. Another of the men tried to grab him, and he felt pain blossom along his side. He slammed the hilt of his blade into the man's face, and ran after the prince.

#

Gabriel nodded to the guard, and turned back to the hall. "Inquisitor, I'm afraid I must call this visit to a halt." He spread his hands. "Apparently, Prince Duncan went missing at the docks. They are trying to look for him without alerting the cities more unsavory elements."

Cullen immediately got to his feet. "We'll help."

Caleb gestured to Kels. "Kels and I can take some of the shortcuts we used to run, see if they got mixed in with the urchins."

He smiled. "Do so." He turned to Cullen and Ruya. "Cullen, shall we give your wife a tour of Darktown?"

#

Duncan stumbled to a halt. "I think we..." He turned to his companion, and his eyes widened. "You're bleeding." His friend's side was stained red.

Jerath touched his side and winced. "It's not too deep, I don't think." He shook his head, swaying slightly as he did. "We need to head back up."

"No." A new voice said. "You need to get that looked at." A young man stepped out of the shadows. "Or you're going to bleed to death."

Duncan gasped as his friend collapsed. "Jerath."

"Well, you're going to do that." The young man sighed and moved to Jerath's side. His fingers glowed white as he pressed them against the wound. "There." He looked up at Duncan, then back down at Jerath. "What did you call him?"

"Jerath."
The young man looked up at him and shook his head. "No, he's far too young to be Jerath."

He blinked. "He's always been Jerath."

"Has he?" The young man frowned. "Really?" He looked back down at the unconscious boy. "Then would you, by chance, be Duncan?"

"Yes."

"We've met."

"Yes."

"He's always been Jerath."

"Has he?"

"Really?"

"Then would you, by chance, be Duncan?"

"Yes."

"Too early for what?"

"But then if I wasn't here..." The young man chewed his lower lip thoughtfully. "Well, that's a very good point." He laughed. "If I wasn't too early, I would be far too late." He bent, and picked Jerath up. "Come on. Let's get you home."

"Home is Ferelden." Duncan picked up Jerath's sword. He frowned as the young man started down a flight of stairs. "Jerath said we needed to go up."

"We will. But we have to go down first. It's by the clinic."

"What clinic?"

"Well, it used to be a clinic. And it might be one again. They aren't sure yet. Or won't be sure then. Tenses."

"You're weird."

Alistair walked into the keep and gave Anora a hopeful look. She shook her head, and he closed his eyes. Not in Kirkwall one day, and his son was missing. And Jerath Gilmore too. If Cathiel didn't kill him, Nesiara would.

Behind him, two young men entered. One wore Inquisition colors. Both were filthy. The one in Inquisition colors bowed. "King Alistair."

The other young man's eyes widened, and he also bowed. "We offered some of the street urchins a reward for information." He hesitated. "One says he saw the boys go into Darktown, and there was an altercation with some lowlifes. He claims the boys escaped, but he doesn't know where they went." He gestured. "My parents, the Inquisitor, and Commander Cullen are searching Darktown now."

"Why take us to a wine cellar?" Duncan turned towards the young man. "And who are you, anyway?"

"The former because those stairs go up." He gestured. "And the latter I can't tell you."

"Why can't you tell me?" He frowned.

"Because you didn't know when we first met. If I say the wrong thing, you might do the wrong thing, and then where will we be?" The young man shook his head, sending a lock of black hair
into his eyes. He set Jerath down, and brushed his hair back irritably.

"Of course I don't know who you are. You haven't introduced yourself."

"I will when I first meet you."

"But..." Duncan shook his head and growled in frustration. One of them wasn't making a lot of sense. He went to look at his friend, and moved the tunic aside. The wound was closing rapidly. Already it looked like little more than a scratch. "Is he going to be okay?"

"Of course. He doesn't die until he's considerably older."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I'm too early. I frowned. "Was I supposed to be here?" He raised an eyebrow at Duncan, and then looked down at Jerath. "Or was someone else supposed to be?"

Duncan stomped his foot. "Why are you asking me?"

"You're the one who would..." I frowned. "Will know. Was knowing? I'm going to need you to tell me then. It is very important that you not forget."

"Forget what?"

"I don't know. You didn't tell me. Pay attention." He stood. "I must be going. I'm not expected until after I leave. You'll meet me again." He smiled. "Who knows, perhaps I'll even meet you."

He watched the young man go back out the way they'd come, and frowned. He turned a slow circle. Alright. He was in a wine cellar. Jerath was hurt, but healing. And there was a crazy man wandering Darktown. He shook his head. This was all starting to sound like one of his father's stories from the days of the Blight. He sat next to his friend, and waited for him to wake up.

#

"She said she's been there all day and hasn't seen anyone use that entrance." Hawke shook his head.

Cullen sighed. "I assume that's how you used to come and go from the Gallows?"

"The times I didn't want the templars to know about, anyway." Hawke frowned. "Let's check the clinic, then head back up to my estate, check in with the others."

"How many secret passages does Kirkwall have, anyway?" Ruya followed the men down a flight of stairs.

"We haven't even begun checking the old Tevinter hideaways yet." Fenris glanced over his shoulder. "What are the odds they got into one of those?"

"I don't even want to think about it." Hawke shook his head. "We've sealed off most of them."

"I fear its far more likely the King will be receiving a ransom notice." Cullen sighed.

"Usual procedure then." Hawke shrugged.

Fenris nodded.
Ruya looked from one man to the other. "Usual procedure?"

"Show up, get the hostage safe, then set everything on fire." Hawke grinned.

"You know, you really think they'd learn." Fenris sighed.

Hawke shook his head at Cullen as they finished looking around the area. "I am so glad you aren't a templar anymore." He casually moved something aside and unlocked a door. "Inquisitors first." He bowed.

"And this would be how you smuggled the mages once you got them out of the gallows." Cullen shook his head and smiled.

#

Duncan looked up as four adults entered the room. Jerath tried to get up and grab his sword, then blinked. "Serah Hawke?"

The man stared, then turned to look behind him, and then turned back towards Jerath and Duncan. "How in the name of Andraste did you two get in here?"

#

Alistair rushed into the estate to find his son behind fed cookies by Orana and Jerath being tended to by the Inquisitor and the Champion. "What happened?"

"We..." Duncan swallowed a bite of cookie.

"I wasn't asking you." Alistair's voice was sharp. "Jerath?"

"We went to read the placard at the statue, and lost sight of you. We went running to catch up, and I guess we went the wrong way." Jerath swallowed. "Some men attacked us. One caught me with a dagger as we were making our escape. Then there was a mage and..." He swallowed again. "I passed out, your majesty. I don't know how we got into the cellar."

He nodded slowly. "I appreciate you protecting my son. I even appreciate you lying to protect him, since we both know the truth is he wandered off and you went after him." He looked up at Ruya. "Is he going to be alright?"

"Whoever healed him knew what they were doing. There won't even be a scar." She gave him a reassuring smile.

His eyes closed, and he took several deep breaths. The boys were safe. That was the important thing. He turned slowly to where his son was standing. The boy wouldn't meet his eyes.

"Duncan."

"Father."

#

Leliana chuckled. "I would have expected it to be an Amell that got lost and had the guard in an uproar."

"No. Though Agatha Amell is here to represent House Brosca's interests, and is staying at the Hawke estate." Brehan ran his fingers through her hair.
She lay with her head pillowed on his chest, listening to his heartbeat. Moments like these were all too few and far between these days, even with most of Thedas knowing she had a lover. "How many Amells is that in Kirkwall?"

"Are we counting the Inquisitor?" He considered. "The Champion, his three children, Carver, his two children, the Inquisitor, her two children, and Agatha, assuming Lenore doesn't change her mind and show up."

"I thought the Champion only had two children." She looked up at him.

"Lady Orana had a son a year or so back. Narus Hawke."

Her fingers trailed over his stomach. "Do you ever regret us not having any children?"

"Not particularly." He caught her hand, and kissed her fingers. "Do you?"

"I am Divine. I have hundreds of children."
Cullen stepped in to help her button the front of the formal tunic. Dagna had been working on some ideas for a new prosthetic, but after the last one had somehow ended up possessed Ruya was a little leery of the dwarf's assistance. Gavren was dressed in a miniature version of the formal attire, and looked so much like his father Ruya couldn't help but smile. Kailey would be staying with Minaeve for the proceedings.

Iron Bull met them by the door, also wearing the formal attire of the Inquisition. "Hey boss. Songbird and Dorian went on ahead, with some of the boys as escorts."

Kels nodded. "Sera took off this morning to..." He shrugged. "Well, the gist was keep an eye on things. She said to tell you..." He swallowed, cleared his throat, and continued. "Muahahahahahahaha."

They stepped out of the estate to find the Hawke family waiting for them. Ruya noted that the formal attire of Fenris and Hawke seemed to incorporate a lot of armor. Hawke gave her a bow when he saw her. "Inquisitor. I was worried Cully Wully would get lost, so we decided to wait for you." A snicker from Kels was cut off by a glare from Cullen. Hawke continued as if he hadn't noticed anything. "This is my daughter, Salla." He indicated a plain-faced young woman dressed in a cloak bearing the Hawke family crest. "And this is trouble, otherwise known as Agatha Amell, here to represent House Brosca."

The beautiful young elven woman dropped into a curtsy. "A pleasure, Inquisitor. Mama Lenore speaks highly of you."

Ruya gave her a small bow. "Lovely to meet you."

Caleb led the way, navigating the streets of Hightown as they made their way to the Chantry. Ruya kept a grip on Gavren's hand until he stumbled. Cullen swept the boy up and set him onto his shoulder without breaking stride.

#

Salla couldn't help but stare. Noble gatherings weren't anything new to her, but this... She was walking into Viscount's Keep as a member of the Inquisitor's entourage. And there was the Tevinter ambassador, greeting the Inquisitor with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. The King of Ferelden greeted her with a smile, as did a rather subdued prince.

She pointed out some of the people Agatha didn't recognize, and Agatha did the same for her. Her father glanced at them over his shoulder before telling her to go mingle and keep trouble out of things. Agatha immediately took her arm and they headed deeper into the Chantry. "I heard Red Jenny is here."

"She is." Salla nodded. She lowered her voice. "Do you think it’s true the Inquisitor is a Red Jenny?"

"Charade is your aunt. You could ask." Agatha led them up to a balcony to get a better view of the proceedings.

"I tried. She just grinned." Salla leaned on the railing next to Agatha. "Anything new in Ferelden?"
"Same problems as everywhere." Agatha sighed. "Everyone's just waiting for something to change so they can react to it. Tevinter and the Qunari are still in stalemate, and lots of folks aren't sure if they want to take sides there."

"What side is House Brosca on?"

"Dorian's." Agatha grinned. "We've been helping where we can."

#

Ruya smiled at Anora. "Teyrna, it's been too long."

Anora nodded. "It has." She looked down at Gavren, then at the boy trailing beside her. "Loghain, you remember Gavren?" The boy nodded. Anora looked back up at Ruya. "The Divine has had an area set up for the children to play together. I was just taking Loghain."

"Splendid idea." Ruya took Gavren's hand. "I think Gavren has had his fill of getting his cheeks pinched."

"I hear young Leandra Hawke bit a de Launcet." Anora smiled. "Not entirely certain I blame her." She led Ruya to a room and attached small garden that had a half dozen templars guarding it, and was under the watchful eye of two grandmotherly looking women in Chantry robes.

Prince Duncan was already present, as was his companion. Ruya gave Jerath a quick look-over, but the lad appeared to have recovered from his recent trials. Duncan's explanation of what had occurred hadn't been particularly coherent, and most of it had been delivered in tears after realizing just how angry his father was. Ruya looked down at Gavren. "Do you want to go play with Loghain?"

Before he could answer, a young girl hopped over to them. She reached out and grabbed one of Loghain's hands, and tried to do the same to Gavren. "You two are on my team."

She smiled at the girl. "And what is your name?"

"I'm Leandra. You're the Inquisitor. She's the Teyrna. This is Loghain. That's Gavren. Duncan says he's too old to play, but he's just being grumpy because they won't let him go back to the table with all the sweets, and Jerath really is too old to play. Fera's team is going to win if we don't hurry." She took Gavren's hand and dragged him into the room. "Come on."

A laugh escaped her as she watched both boys get shanghaied into something apparently involving using every book on the shelf to build forts. "I think they'll be fine."

#

Leliana shifted slightly in her chair, and longed for the days she could be up and mingling instead of dealing with a line of well-wishers. Grand Enchanter Vivienne had positioned herself just to the right of the dias, picking a well lit area to see and be seen. She kept the smile on her face as one of Kirkwall's nobles wished her a long and happy reign in truly atrocious verse.

"Suledin, ma'arlath." She barely heard the whispered words from the man next to her, but they were enough to make the smile real. Brehan stood to her left, Michel de Chevin to her right, both playing the role of bodyguard this evening. Guard Captain Aveline herself also stood at the base of the dias, clearly on duty, and across from her was Guard Lieutenant Carver Hawke. And somewhere in that crowd were the Inquisitor, Cullen, Sera, and the Champion. For all its tragic history, she felt surprisingly safe here in Kirkwall.
She flicked her eyes towards Carver and noted again the stylized dragon tattooed on the side of his face. Temmerin, Talsaad, Reimas, and Dagna of the Inquisition all wore similar marks. And despite Brehan having attempted to question them all at length, none of them would explain exactly what the marks meant. She knew who they had all served. It was possibly the marks were nothing more than an expression of loyalty, to the man and each other. She couldn't help but feel there was more to it.

#

Varric grinned up at Hawke. "You said you had good news?"

"The Prince of Starkhaven decided not to attend." Hawke returned the smile. "He sent the message to me, claiming that missives he sends you have a disturbing habit of apparently going awry. At least, he never seems to hear back from you."

"Tragic." Varric leaned back on the railing. "I was sort of hoping to stick him and Lenore in a room together and see what happens. Sad she couldn't make it either."

"What kind of trouble are we expecting here?" Hawke glanced around the crowd.

"Oh, usual rumbles of disapproval regarding the Divine's reforms. Annoyance she isn't wagging a shaming finger at us here in Kirkwall. Cyril Montfort is in attendance as the Orlesian representative, though it looks like he isn't holding a grudge."

"Well..." Hawke shrugged. "Good?"

"The bad news is that at some point this evening..." Varric took a drink. "You are still expected to give a speech." He shook his head. "You do have one prepared, right?"

"I got to 'welcome friends', and then its pretty much setting something on fire and running for it."

"Yeah, that's what Caleb and I thought." He handed Hawke a piece of parchment. "You're on after me."

#

"Can't I just stab him a little bit?"

Salla shook her head. "No."

"How about poison?"

"No."

Agatha narrowed her eyes. "Fine. I'll set him on fire."

She giggled. "If I wanted him set on fire, I'd have told Papa what happened." She sighed. "Shouldn't really be that big a surprise. Other than my station, what do I have to offer?" She winced as Agatha casually smacked her on the back of the head.

"Don't talk about my best friend like that." Agatha set her hands on her hips.

"Sorry, I'm just..." She sighed and shook her head before putting the smile back onto her face. "This is a party, right? I'm going to be happy. And who knows, maybe I'll find some handsome lord and sweep him off his feet."
"Hmmm..." Agatha scanned the crowd. "That one's pretty."

"That's Cyril Montfort. My father kind of killed his."

"Oh. Well, that would complicate things, wouldn't it?" She tilted her head. "Well, this could take a while."

Leliana clapped lightly as Varric finished his thankfully brief speech. The dwarf did have a way with words. The Champion stepped up as soon as Varric finished. He unfolded a piece of parchment. "Divine Victoria, all of --"

Something exploded, and people started to scream.

Cullen leaped down from the stairs and headed down the hall. A templar tried to block his path before his eyes widened in recognition. "Ser..."

He shoved the man aside and continued forward. A healer was kneeling next to an elderly woman in chantry robes. Several frightened children were cowering behind four shield-wielding templars as another elderly woman tried to comfort them. Two armored bodies lay on the ground. He scanned the faces, and then scanned them again. "Gavren?"

"Comte Rutherford." A younger woman in Chantry robes bowed twice. "Ser..."

"Where is my son?"

"Some of the children were in the garden, my lord." She swallowed. "They are..." She swallowed again. "Missing, my lord."

He headed into the room towards the garden. Another armored body lay on the ground, and an injured templar leaned against the wall as a healer tended him. The templar saw him and tried to get to his feet. "Knight-Captain!"

He didn't bother to correct the man. "What happened?"

"The veil tore, ser. One moment the kids were playing, and the next there were demons." The templar closed his eyes. "We kept the demons off the kids, but when the veil closed, the kids that had been in the garden weren't anywhere."

"Something took my son."

"Yes, ser."

Cullen took several deep breaths, forcing the fear back down. "Who else was in the garden?"

"The Ferelden kids. The prince, his servant, and the Teyrna's son. And..."

"And my daughter." Merrill stepped in from out of the garden. Her staff was in her hand. "It wasn't a random tear. Someone summoned the demons. And there was an oddity to the magic."

"Are they..." He couldn't bring himself to say the word.

Her eyes hardened. "Someone took them, undoubtedly for a reason." Magic crackled where her
hand held her staff. "We'll find them."

She looked at the faces of the worried parents, and felt her heart tighten in her chest. Leliana sighed, and turned towards Brehan. "My agents found several plots regarding the dedication, but nothing to suggest targeting the children."

He nodded. "Mine would agree. There was nothing to suggest any serious attempts to disrupt the proceedings themselves."

"Well, you missed something." Alistair paced the room.

The Inquisitor and Cullen stood to one side. She wasn't sure who was leaning on who. Anora sat in a chair, eyes fixed at some point in the distance, hands clutched worriedly. Carver leaned next to the door, head bowed and eyes closed. Ruya lifted her own head. "What do we know?"

Leliana turned towards Merrill and Dorian. Dorian nodded, and turned to look at Ruya. "Someone opened a rift, and not an ordinary one. I found traces of the same magic Alexius used in Redcliffe."

"Time magic?" Ruya raised an eyebrow. "Why?"

"It's similar enough to one of my own techniques that my theory is whoever took the children sped themselves up. To get in and get the children before anyone could react. Distracted by the demons, the guards didn't even have a chance to see."

"There is more." Merrill's voice was quiet.

"Explain?" Ruya turned her eyes to the elven woman.

"The tear led somewhere other than the Fade. It was..." She narrowed her eyes. "The magic was similar to that used by an eluvian. The tear was used to move them somewhere." She glanced at Dorian. "Or, possibly, some when."

"Who could manage this?" Leliana asked.

Dorian glanced at Merrill. "Well, we could, but it would require lot of lyrium."

"So we know how." Carver spoke without moving. "Now the question is why?"

"No, the question is how do we get them back?" Alistair punched the wall. "How much lyrium do you need to reopen this thing? I'll have Saitada send to Kal Hirol and we'll --"

"We'd need either enough lyrium to fill this building, or I'd have to kill about half of the people in Kirkwall." Merrill folded her arms.

Silence filled the room at her words. Slowly, Leliana nodded. "Brehan, go to Vivienne. I need to know what mages could know enough of this magic to even consider something like this. Dorian, I believe Alexius is still with the Inquisition. Would you be so kind as to find out if anyone has spoken to him about this magic?" Both men nodded and left the room.

Anora stood shakily. "Most Holy, if you'll excuse me, I need to..." She trembled, and Carver moved to catch her as she stumbled. "I need to..."

"I know all of you." Leliana looked around the room at a group of terrified people fully capable of tearing the world asunder. "Right now, I need you all to take deep breaths. We will get them
Ruya stared at the small shrine, and tried to get her thoughts into some kind of order. Her son was missing. Taken. Her sweet little boy. Across the room, Cullen sat in a chair, holding their daughter as if terrified she’d be next. She swallowed, and tried to call up the right words from the Chant. A prayer for her son’s safety.

In the back of her mind, a thought moved along another line. She closed her eyes, and opened herself to the Fade. For a moment, she hesitated, and then she touched the veil. Her thoughts were somewhere between a prayer and a wish. *Solas, if you can hear me. Please. Help.*

Alistair tried to sit, and stood back up after only a moment. He went back to pacing. Saitada watched him quietly, knowing better than to try to comfort him with words. Someone had his son. Someone had taken his son. For all he knew, someone was hurting his son. He looked up at the painting of Andraste on the wall, and shook his head. Prayer was useless. He needed... He needed... He picked up a vase off the desk and threw it against the wall. He followed it with a glass, a small figurine, and a pitcher. Then he picked up the chair and threw it after them. If he could have lifted the desk, it would have gone as well.

He stopped, and stared at the fire. For a moment, he made himself take deep breaths. "Look, I don't know how this works, but..." He shook his head. "You said you'd help. Every time we've needed you, you've been there. Jerath, if you can hear me..." He closed his eyes. "My son needs your help."

Ruya tilted her head at Dorian. "So it’s not actually reopening the tear?"

"It's reopening the tear, but not far. Just enough for Merrill and I to look inside, so to speak." Dorian ran a hand through his hair. "Something to go on."

"I'll take it." Alistair's voice was quiet. "If we can find out where they are by looking through a tear, maybe..."

"We'll know where to send an army." Cullen folded his arms.

She nodded. "What do you need me to do?"

"Opening the tear is going to take most of what Merrill and I have. We'll need you and Hawke to be on hand just in case anything does slip through. And Carver, in case we need to shut everything down quickly."

"Divine Victoria, maybe you shouldn't..." Ruya started to say.

Leliana glared at her. "No. This is exactly where I should be. You have always been there when I needed you." She put a hand on Ruya's shoulder, and pulled her into a hug. "It is my turn to be here for you."

Ruya felt herself tremble as she hugged her friend back. "Thank you."
"Alright."

"We're ready."

She turned towards Dorian and Merrill. They stood on opposite sides of the door. Carver and Hawke stood behind Merrill, while Iron Bull stood near Dorian. She took up her position. Alistair and Cullen both stood near the Divine. It was clear everyone was prepared for a fight.

Magic glowed around the hands of Dorian and Merrill as they wove the magic. She leaned forward as the veil came open. Energy rushed out, and she threw up the readied barrier. Images flashed inside the tear. The same garden, but covered in snow? And then something was coming through. Iron Bull moved in as the pride demon moved toward Dorian. On the other side, she saw two demons move in on Merrill only to be met by the Hawke brothers. She formed the spirit blade in her remaining hand, and slashed through a shade.

The tear started to collapse. A terror demon flung itself at the Divine. A young man stepped between Leliana and the demon, striking it in the face with a staff before sending a blast of energy to finish it off. A second blast took out a pride demon before it finished manifesting, and spread through the room, disintegrating the demons.

Ruya stared. Okay, she could figure out how he'd done that later. She turned to Dorian. "Did you get enough information?" Ruya asked.

"I think so." Dorian got back to his feet with the help of Iron Bull.

"Thank the Maker." Cullen let out the breath he'd apparently been holding.

"Um..." Iron Bull glanced over his shoulder and frowned. He pointed at the young man. "Where'd he come from?"

Alistair pointed the tip of his blade at the dark haired young man. "Who are you?"

The young man returned his staff to his back. "Your majesty." He bowed. "My father regrets that circumstances prevented him from coming to your aid personally. He sends his regards." The young man smiled. "And me."

"Holy shit." Carver's eyes widened. "Kieran?"
Salla sat on the railing, staring down at the entrance to the hallway. "Do you think it worked?"

"I don't know." Agatha paced the carpet. "We should have heard by now, right?" She turned back to Salla. "I mean, it's the Inquisitor and your papa. They are two of the most powerful mages in the world."

"And Aunt Merrill. I wish your mama was here too." Salla chewed the end of one of her braids. "Leandra's going to be alright. The others too."

Agatha looked down at where Caleb was talking to Kels. Kels stood with some of the other Inquisition soldiers and the Warden-Commander, blocking any attempt to enter the hallway. She squinted. Not just soldiers. Templars. Despite his best efforts, Caleb clearly wasn't getting anywhere. While he might have been able to talk his way past Kels, there was no way he was going to succeed in talking his way past Saitada. And if Caleb couldn't talk his way past, nobody could. For a moment, she considered going out the window and looking for a vantage point to watch what was happening in the garden.

She caught a glimpse of red hair and saw Salla rush to intercept the guard captain. "Aunt Aveline..." Her eyes suddenly widened. "Anabel wasn't with..."

"No." Aveline took a deep breath. "Thank the Maker, Donnic's mother was watching her."

Aveline glanced at the guards on the hallway.

"How many were hurt?" Salla clasped her hands. "Do they need another healer? I could..."

Aveline caught her shoulder. "I know. You want to help." She sighed. "It could have been a lot worse if the Inquisition hadn't brought some of their mages. Seven were killed, the rest are recovered enough to be making demands of the Viscount." She looked from Agatha to Salla. "You two should go home."

"If something goes wrong, a healer might be needed here." Salla stuck out her chin stubbornly.

"Your father and the Inquisitor --"

"Could be the ones hurt." Salla folded her arms. "And I'm a better healer than Papa anyway."

She left Salla to argue the guard captain into letting them stay. It wasn't like Salla's argument wasn't valid. Agatha squinted. "Something's happening." She watched the Divine emerge from the hallway, followed by the Inquisitor and the others. She didn't see the kids, but there was someone knew. A tall, black haired, and very good looking young man. She tilted her head. Based on the fact he was carrying a staff, he was probably a mage. And whoever he was, he was making the others very nervous. "Who is that?"

"I had best go find out. You two stay here." Aveline glared at them before heading down the stairs.

They gave a count of thirty before following her.

"Kieran." Brehan raised an eyebrow. "As in the son of Jerath and Morrigan Kieran?"
"Yes." Carver nodded.

"Are you sure?" Cullen raised an eyebrow at Carver.

"It's been about three years since the last time I saw him, but yes. I'm sure."

"Alright, forgive my skepticism..." Cullen glanced over his shoulder. "That guy is at least four inches taller than I am."

"Oh, thank the Maker. Someone else said it first." Alistair leaned on the table. "What now?"

"Hold it." Sera shook her head. "We're all okay with..." Sera glanced over her shoulder. "He's a big demon guy, and he just shows up here now? How'd he know about this even?"

"I called to Jerath. And he answered." Alistair closed his eyes. "Which means Kieran can help." He called over to Kieran. "You can help, right?"

"'Tis why I am here." He walked over to them. "Though it would assist if someone told me what it is I am supposed to help with. It must be more than demons." He raised an eyebrow at Alistair. "You told Father your son needed help."

"Someone took him." Alistair sighed. "Along his second, the Inquisitor's son, Anora's son, and Carver's daughter."

A strange light flashed in Kieran's eyes. "Someone took my cousins?" He turned towards Carver. "Someone took Leandra?"

"Someone or something." Carver nodded. "Someone tore the veil, summoned demons as a distraction, and took the children."

"Well. That is unacceptable." Kieran folded his arms.

Divine Victoria stepped forward. "What do we know now?" She nodded to Merrill and Dorian.

"It's not where they took them," Merrill said.

"It's when." Dorian folded his arms. "The tear showed a point in the same location, but approximately sixteen years in the future."

"Someone from the future stole the children?" Leliana frowned. "Why?"

"Likely to change the timeline." Kieran tilted his head. "Considering whose children they are, imagine what role they could play in future events. Recall what eliminating the Inquisitor from the time stream once did."

"That is profoundly disturbing notion." Ruya ran her hand through her hair.

"Now what?" Alistair leaned on the table. He looked up at Kieran. "Jerath sent you. What do we do now?"

"There are two options. One, we reopen the tear and retrieve the children. Two, we figure out who is behind this and eliminate them before they can manipulate the time stream." Kieran tilted his head. "Three options. We do both."

"I vote option three." Carver nodded.
"Option three." Cullen echoed him.

"Except we don't have the power to..." Dorian trailed off and looked at Kieran.

Kieran nodded. "Once I open the tear, there will be more demons, and I will likely draw the attention of whoever opened it in the first place. I'll need most of you to hold it open so I can deal with that. Aunt Merrill can direct spirits to retrieve the children."

"I'll need some time to handle the summoning." Merrill nodded.

"I suggest everyone else get some rest and prepare." Divine Victoria looked at the hopeful faces. "Will dawn give you enough time, Merrill?"

"Yes."

"It sounds as if we have a plan." Ruya took a deep breath. "I'll arrange to --"

Cullen touched her chin. "I'll handle the lyrium. Kailey needs her mother, and you need rest." He furrowed his brow. "You do as well, Hawke. And you, Dorian. It sounds like we're going to need you all at your best."

Carver nodded. "Kieran, you can come back to the estate with us. It would..." He glanced at the Divine. "Probably best if we didn't have to explain you to anyone."

"Yes, Uncle Carver."

#

Aveline was waiting for them outside the Divine's office. She gave Kieran a questioning look before turning her gaze to Hawke. "Anything?"

"We have a better idea of what happened, and plan for a second attempt in the morning." He raised his voice. "The three of you can go ahead and come out." He waited for his children and Agatha to emerge from around the corner. "Salla, take your brother and Trouble home and tell Orana we will be having an extra guest this evening. And let the Inquisitor's people know she'll be along shortly as well."

"Yes Papa." Salla nodded before grabbing Caleb and Agatha and making herself scarce.

Divine Victoria turned her gaze to Aveline. "How is the Viscount?"

"Worrying himself sick, like the rest of us." Aveline sighed. "Brehan and Sera are all over the city, helping my guardsmen run down leads. I fear we've all too little to go on." She waved a hand. "We've made several arrests, but the threats we've found were rather petty. Most wouldn't have been sufficient to even serve as a distraction to what occurred."

"Three tears." Hawke folded his arms. "Two to sow chaos, one to take the children."

"Brehan considered that the other two tears also had specific targets, and is looking in that direction." Ruya sighed. "We should..."

Cullen pulled her to him. "We should get you home."

"Alright."
Salla cuddled little Varric to her, while Agatha did the same with Narus. They paced the balcony almost in tandem. Orana was in the kitchen. Demons. Dragons. Bloodmages. Assassins. Orana faced every challenge to the Hawke family in the same way. Food. Right now she was making pastry crusts. Her brother sat near the fireplace, coaxing a melody from his lute.

The door opened, and Father entered, followed by Papa and her aunt and uncle. The young man from earlier was with them as well. Something about him felt very odd. Maybe it was because he was a mage? She made her way down the stairs. Caleb was on his feet, questioning their parents. "What happened? No one will tell us anything. Who took Leandra?"

"We don't yet know." Papa shook his head. "But the important thing is we have a plan to get her back and kick the ass of who took her and the others."

"Good." Agatha's voice was fierce.

Merrill stepped forward and held her arms out for little Varric. Salla handed the infant over rather reluctantly. The young man came to stand next to Merrill, and smiled down at little Varric. "He's lighter than Leandra was." He ran a finger down the infant's cheek gently, and Varric cooed up at him.

Orana came out of the kitchen. "I set up a room." She looked back at Papa. "I should put the babies to bed." She took Narus from Agatha, and gestured for Merrill to follow her.

Uncle Carver nudged their guest. "Orana made food, if you're hungry?"

"I'll be fine, Uncle Carver."

"Wait..." Caleb blinked. "Uncle?" He tilted his head. "We have another cousin I don't know about? Who is this?"

"He's..." Papa furrowed his brow. "Complicated."

"No." The young man shook his head. "I'm Kieran."

#

Alistair started to head back to his room, and hesitated. He took a couple breaths before knocking on Anora's door. Erlina opened the door a moment later. "Your majesty."

"How is she?"

"Not well." Erlina looked over her shoulder. "I gave her a small dose of a sedative in her tea, and she's asleep now. He's..." She sighed. "He's a gift, your majesty."

"I know." Alistair nodded. "We know more. We have a plan. We'll be getting them back very soon."

Erlina nodded. She gave him a concerned look. "Would you care for some of the tea, your majesty?"

"I..." He hesitated, and then nodded. "Yes. Thank you."

#

Ruya closed her eyes, and to her surprise, managed to fall asleep. She found herself in Haven, as it had looked during the early days of the Inquisition. Her eyes went to the sky, where the breach
had been. And she felt the Fade seem to ripple behind her. "Solas."

"The spell was focused on Gavren." He stood, hands clasped behind his back.

She took a deep breath. "How did they focus on Gavren?"

He looked down instead of meeting her eyes. "You were pregnant with him when the anchor began to..." He sighed. "A trace of that energy remains upon him."

"Then..." She narrowed her eyes. "Whoever took Gavren found him..."

"Because of me." Solas nodded. "Yes."

"You son of a bitch." She clenched her fist. "My hand wasn't enough?"

"I did not cast the spell, Ruya." Sorrow was visible on his face.

Her shoulders slumped. "No." She ran her hand through her hair. "No. You wouldn't target my son. So who would?"

"Neither of us has any shortage of enemies." He fell into step beside her, and they walked around Haven as they had so often done those years past.

"How many powerful enough to do something like this?"

"The Formless One remains. You killed Ishmael, Hawke killed Xebenkeck, and at it happens, Alistair helped the Warden kill Gaxkang." Solas gestured with one hand. "And the Warden gave Gaxkang's blade to Loghain mac Tir."

"All those children in one place." Ruya sighed. "A perfect target." She took another deep breath. "Are they..."

"They live."

Relief staggered her, and Solas put a steadying hand on her shoulder. It took her a few moments to regain control. "Why would The Formless One take them?"

"Consider who they are. The children of those who reshaped Thedas. Their potential is all but limitless." He smiled ruefully. "Were they other than yours, I might have considered such a notion myself."

"We know who. We know why. We have an idea how." Ruya squared her shoulders. "We've done more with less." She nodded. "Thank you, Solas."

"I wish you luck, my friend. You should get some real sleep." He smiled before vanishing.

She looked around Haven one last time before willing herself out of the Fade.

#

"If you are going to need mages, then I'm coming to." Salla folded her arms.

"Salla..." Papa shook his head.

She set her jaw stubbornly. "You might need a healer, and I'm the best in Kirkwall."
He started to argue, and then sighed. "No. You're right. We very well may. You will stay back and you will follow instructions. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Papa."

Caleb opened his mouth. Papa glared at him. "You and Trouble will stay behind the guards. I'd tell you to stay here, but you'd just go out the window and beat us to the Chantry."

"Probably." Caleb shrugged.

"Solas told you this." Leliana raised an eyebrow at Ruya.

"In a dream, last night." She caught the stump of her left arm in her right hand and sighed. "When..."

"You tried calling him for help." Leliana nodded. "No, I quite understand. It is..." They'd prayed, and old friends had answered. It was both terrifying and comforting. "If this Formless One is targeting you, then we must also consider who it was that came to assist."

Ruya's eyes widened. "Kieran."

"The host of Urthemiel." Leliana wrapped her arms around herself. "And I really don't want to consider how his parents would react if he were harmed."

"Maker." Ruya swallowed. She sighed. "Vivienne has agreed to help us hold the tear."

"There is going to be a lot of power in that room." Leliana half closed her eyes. "And yet we have no choice." She turned to Ruya. "Are you ready?"

"My son is in danger." She squared her shoulders. "I've been ready for hours."

The mages formed a semi-circle around where the tear had been. Kieran was looking it over curiously, head tilted. Salla watched him from where she stood, back behind Cullen and her father. He couldn't be older than she was, and yet not only were they letting him go near the tear, both her father and the Inquisitor appeared to be following his instructions. Something about him tickled her memory, but she couldn't make the thought coherent.

Aunt Merrill stood next to Uncle Carver, eyes closed, clearly already involved in casting a spell. The Grand Enchanter was watching Merrill with a disapproving expression, but holding her silence. A signal of some kind must have passed, because suddenly the room was filled with anticipation. It felt like something big was drawing a breath. Kieran's hands began to glow, and the tear suddenly reopened. She felt as much as saw the rest of the mages join their magic to the spell, pulling and holding to prevent the tear from closing again.

The spirits cross in one direction as demons came from the other. Almost as one, the warriors stepped in. Her father's tattoos glowed brightly as he entered the fray, preventing the demons from getting anywhere near her father. She saw King Alistair, Commander Cullen, the Warden-Commander, and Uncle Carver doing the same for the other mages.

There was a jolt in the tear, and she felt something else try to push through. It was terrifying to the point of being painful, forcing its way in like fire going through a field of dried grass. And then
something on their side hit it back. She saw Kieran's eyes start to glow as he formed a barrier, pushing back with... She'd never sensed anything like it before.

Other demons came through, and then there were other forms. A rage demon moved towards Merrill. Uncle Carver stepped in, and then there was a blond man was next to him, sword and shield helping her uncle drive the demon back. The tear was wrenched and twisted, and snapped shut abruptly. A despair demon sent a bolt of ice at the Grand Enchanter, and then someone was filling it with arrows. It turned on the archer, and a man with a shield stepped between them, blocking the ice.

A pride demon roared, and a fist formed of what felt like the fade itself hit it, staggering it enough for a woman with a greatsword to drive the blade home. A moment later, the demons were vanquished, and everyone was looking around. Her eyes widened. She didn't see the children anywhere. Kieran was shaking his head as if dazed.

"What happened?" King Alistair held his blade still at the ready. "Where are they?"

Across the room, the archer lowered his bow and stared at the king in disbelief. "Father?"

"Well." Papa looked around the room at the five newcomers. "Shit."
Caleb tried not to fidget. Kels and Walter stood nearby, occasionally making awkward attempts to have a conversation. The happy reunion between those who had once been all but siblings had been overshadowed by worry. He turned to see the Viscount coming towards them, followed by the Inquisition's spymaster. "Uncle Varric."

"Anything yet?"

"No." Agatha shook her head. "Thought we heard sounds of fighting, but nobody has come out yet." She narrowed her eyes. "And they won't let us go check."

Aveline returned Agatha's glare with a steady and unyielding expression. She was in full guard captain mode, which meant not even Papa would be able to get past her without a direct order from the Viscount. He shot a glance at Varric. And possibly not even that. "Both Hawke and the Inquisitor were insistent that no one take even the chance of disrupting the spell." Aveline folded her arms.

"No, I get that." Varric sighed. He glanced from Agatha to Caleb. "Where's your sister?"

"In there." Caleb tried to keep the jealousy out of his voice. "In case a healer is needed." He sighed. "I really hope a healer isn't needed."

"You and me both." Varric folded his arms. "Maybe having the Inquisitor and Hawke in the same country at the same time was a really bad idea."

"Especially when that country is Kirkwall." Agatha stood on one leg, putting her other foot against the back of her knee. She glanced at Brehan. "I sent word to Mama Lenore. She's on her way to Denerim but wanted to remind you she can be in Kirkwall in a couple days if needed."

"I think we need her and Brosca exactly where they are at the moment." Brehan frowned. "Her people haven't picked anything up?"

"They've been following some hinky stuff out Tevinter way, and some of the folks they were watching just went silent. Brosca was preparing to send word to you about it when I told them what had happened here. They'll follow up and contact your people." She switched legs. "House Brosca's swords are ready and waiting."

He saw Kels react to Agatha's words. Adding in House Brosca's mercenaries, spies, and mages, virtually doubled the forces the Inquisition could put into play. Add in what Ferelden could field and they had a force to rival the one that had taken down Corypheus. And his fathers would weigh in as well.

His little cousin was in danger. He wasn't entirely sure he considered it overkill.

#

Saitada stared at the young man. He carried a bow rather than a sword and shield, but beyond that he was the spitting image of Alistair the first day she'd met him. He even sounded the same. She found herself rubbing her eyes. Next to him stood a ginger-haired man. He'd positioned himself between... Duncan... and the others in a defensive posture. The left side of his face bore scars from a wound that had narrowly missed taking the eye. That would be Jerath.
She turned her gaze to the others. The woman was tall and dark haired and wielded the massive greatsword easily. That would be Leandra. She stood near a blond and blue-eyed man who wore lighter armor, and held a staff in his hands. Loghain? Or Gavren? Another blond man stood not far from Carver. He'd lowered his sword, but his blue eyes were still wary. His face bore a stylized dragon, identical to the one Carver wore.

"I don't think that was what was supposed to happen." Kieran was looking at the newcomers.

"What the hell did happen?" Hawke stepped forward, staring. He turned towards Kieran, and then Dorian. "And how?"

"I have..." Dorian shrugged. "Absolutely no idea."

Around them, everyone started talking and asking questions at once. Alistair was staring at the younger version of himself, who was staring back in equal shock. Vivienne, Hawke, and the Inquisitor were all asking questions of Dorian and Kieran, who were also asking questions of each other and Merrill. Cullen and Carver were ordering the confused soldiers back.

The Divine's voice rang out, putting a halt to the chaos. A few moments later, the room had been cleared of most of the soldiers. Saitada noticed that Hawke's daughter had managed to remain in the room. Divine Victoria turned towards Dorian and Kieran.

Dorian glanced at Kieran, and then back at the Divine. "Something went wrong."

"No." Kieran shook his head. "It worked. The spirits retrieved them."

"I, er..." Dorian chewed his bottom lip.

"I think we opened the tear too far." Kieran narrowed his eyes and leaned forward, examining where the tear had been. "Pulled from the wrong stream."

"Wait..." Dorian's eyes widened. "You're saying we accidentally broke through into..." He raised an eyebrow at Kieran. "That's even possible?"

Kieran sighed, and shook his head dejectedly. "Mother. Is going. To kill me."

#

"I think everyone should calm down and take a few deep breaths." Leliana raised a hand as the commotion nearly started back up.

Alistair's doppleganger shook his head. "Calm down? I just got dragged to..." He looked around. "Wherever the hell this is by some demon, and you want me to calm down?"

The dark haired woman looked around, and then stepped closer to the man beside her. "Did you drag me into the Fade again?"

"No..." He shrugged. "At least, I don't think so."

The archer glared at them, and then turned back towards Leliana. "Maferath's balls, there are dreadnoughts in the harbor. I do not have time for..." He growled. "What kind of trickery is this?"

"I..." Dorian sighed. "Well, the short story is we may have inadvertently dragged you backwards in time."

"On second thought, I think I'd prefer if this was the Fade." The dark haired woman set the tip of
her sword on the ground, but maintained her wary stance.

"No. Time manipulation has been impossible since the breach was sealed." The mage leaned on his staff. "Even with foci." He focused his gaze on Dorian. "The ramifications of such would be..."

"I don't care about the ramifications." The archer glared. "How do we fix this?"

"That is a very good question." Dorian turned to Kieran. "How do we fix this?"

"I..." Kieran tilted his head. "Well, that's going to take some time and consideration."

"So you don't bloody know." The archer gestured sharply. "Great. Denerim is under attack and we're stuck here."

"Denerim is under attack?" The Inquisitor raised an eyebrow and turned towards Alistair. He blinked, and then gave her a confused look.

"Can everyone put their weapons away?" Cullen sheathed his own sword as he spoke. Around him, the others began to do the same.

"This is Kirkwall." The dark haired woman looked around her. "Why Kirkwall?"

"Well, it is Kirkwall." The mage replaced his staff in its harness.

"Right. Good point." She glared at him. "Are you sure this isn't the Fade?"

"It's not responding as the Fade would, and there are no distortions."

"Um..." She gestured at the people standing in the room with them, and sighed. "What the hell was in those drinks?"

"Please." The blond man near Carver sheathed his blade. "You are a Trevelyan and an Amell. You've got to be used to weird shit happening to you by now."

"I really, really hate that he makes a good point." The dark haired woman sighed.

The archer lowered his bow, but did not relinquish it, nor did the man beside him sheath his blade. "You're Divine Victoria." He stared at Leliana.

"Yes." She nodded, and hesitated for a moment. "Perhaps you can clarify who you are."

"You know who I am." He narrowed his eyes. "Or should, anyway."

"Your majesty, all due respect, but considering your father is standing right there, the dreadnoughts won't be in the harbor for at least another decade." The blond warrior shrugged. "We have a few minutes at least." He gave Leliana a small bow. "I am Loghain Mac Tir, Most Holy."

"Gavren Rutherford." The mage copied the gesture.

"Leandra Hawke." The dark haired woman saluted with a fist over her heart.

The archer sighed, and finally replaced his arrow in the quiver. "King Duncan Therin." He nodded to the red haired man, who sheathed his own blade. "General Jerath Gilmore."

Duncan was king? She glanced at Alistair, and saw him realize the significance of the statement.
And what had Loghain said? A decade? "And how old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"Sixteen years?" Hawke's mouth fell open. "You pulled them from sixteen years in the future?"

Merrill and Kieran exchanged a look. "Oops?" Merrill offered.

The ramifications were... Leliana took several deep breaths. What they had managed with just a year of foreknowledge had saved the world. Sixteen years of intelligence was almost unfathomable. How long would they have? "Give us a moment, we need to discuss this."

Cullen looked back at where his son was standing. His apparently nineteen-year-old son. His mage son. He fumbled for Ruya's hand, and felt her clutch his fingers tightly in response. He squeezed her hand before turning his gaze to Dorian. "How?"

"I'll be honest. I have absolutely no idea." He glanced at Kieran. "Everything about this is rather unprecedented."

Kieran tilted his head and half closed his eyes for a moment. Then he nodded. "We opened it too far, and the battle distorted the energy of the spirits. The streams diverged, and split again, and the spirits followed the trail to the wrong destinations. They found children that had never been taken."

"So they brought the wrong ones back." Hawke folded his arms.

"No, those are the right ones. Leandra, Loghain, Gavren, Duncan, and Jerath." Kieran glanced over his shoulder before turning back to them.

"But they aren't the right..." Hawke stared at him. "Nevermind."

"Fenedhis. The spirits brought the right children from the wrong world." Merrill waved a hand.

"Yes. A world from which they were apparently never abducted."

"So reopen the tear and get our children back." Alistair glared.

"I..." Kieran gave him an apologetic look. "Can't."

Silence reigned for a moment as they stared at him. Ruya found her voice first. "What do you mean, you can't?"

"It wanted to attack, to tear and rip and come through. And had the strength to do so. So I bound it there, frozen between the cracks of time. It is stuck until I catch up with me again." Kieran looked down at his hands. "But so am I."

"I don't understand."

"I bound it with part of me, and that part of me is locked away with it until the binding breaks." Kieran glanced over his shoulder. "Sixteen years from now." He looked up at Carver. "I'm sorry, Uncle. I don't have enough points to reopen the tear."

Carver slowly nodded. "But you said its bound, frozen in time. So it can't hurt us or the children."
"Yes." Kieran tilted his head again. "It was strong then, stronger than it is now. Strength built over years. If we find it now, it won't be able to act then, and the children won't..." He furrowed his brow. "Will not? Did not? Are not taken." He spread his hands. "All resets. I'll be me, they'll be them, it will be gone, faded away in the Fade. This moment will cease to exist."

"So, all we have to do is find a big, powerful demon and kill the shit out of it." Hawke shrugged.

Alistair sighed. "Must be Tuesday."

#

Duncan watched half the people in the room huddle around the Divine. He recognized most of them, but... His father was standing there. Alive. And not just alive, but he walked without a limp. Sixteen years? He kept his voice quiet. "Could this be real?"

Jerath kept his eyes on the soldiers. "There is some precedent in the stories, I suppose."

He nodded, and then glanced at the others who appeared to share his situation. Ser Loghain seemed to be taking the matter calmly enough. And he trusted the knight's blade to back him if needed. It was the other two that were making him nervous. Rutherford and the Lady Hawke appeared utterly fascinated by the situation, and were whispering quietly to each other. He growled softly. "If it is real, then..." His father was alive. Which meant his mother and Jerath's father were also alive. "We could change things."

"Fix things." He could hear the hope in Jerath's voice.

"Save them." He shook his head. "Time travel."

"And demons."

"Right. Must be Tuesday."

Jerath blinked at him. "It was Saturday, my lord."

#

"I think..." Ruya took a breath and looked at her son. He was as tall as his father. "I think we should take our respective children home and we can figure out where to go from here after we've all had a chance to breath."

Vivienne stepped forward. "Inquisitor?"

Ruya turned towards her. "Grand Enchanter?"

"I think, given the circumstances..." She glanced from Kieran to Gavren. "It might be best to arrange a couple of phylacteries."

The thought of her son having a phylactery made her stomach twist. And she really didn't want to consider what Kieran's parents would think of the notion, assuming Kieran would allow such a thing to occur. Before she could answer, Leandra narrowed her eyes and stepped protectively in front of Gavren. "Not happening."

"That's not your decision." Vivienne folded her arms, tapping one well-manicured set of nails against her elbow.

Leandra lowered her head belligerently. "That's where you're wrong. It's not happening. You can
take your little vial, and shove it where the sun don't shine."

Vivienne raised one eyebrow, keeping her face composed. "You seem to have something of a chip on your shoulder, young lady."

She lifted her sword, settling it on her shoulder and adjusting her grip on the hilt. "I've got a big damn sword on my shoulder, Baldie." Leandra stared at Vivienne. "Go on, try it. I guarantee, no matter how many templars you send in..." She assumed a battle stance. "You didn't bring enough."

Hawke laughed into the ensuing silence. "Well, there is no question whose daughter that is."

Carver's smile was proud. "Nope."

Cullen stepped forward. "No phylacteries." His eyes narrowed, and the two templars that had stepped forward at Vivienne's comment moved backwards quickly.

Alistair started walking towards his son before stopping and looking at Loghain. "Maker. How am I going to explain this to Anora?"

#

Salla watched quietly as the Divine joined the King and Warden-Commander in leading three of the 'children' away. Her eyes went back to the other two. Leandra. Her little cousin had grown up to be, well, frankly just a tad scary, calling out the Grand Enchanter like that. Leandra spoke quietly with the Inquisitor's son before they nodded at each other and parted ways. Gavren followed his parents and their retinue out of the room.

Leandra walked towards her own parents. She blinked when she saw Salla standing there. "Lala." She twisted her lips into a smile. "So..." She shrugged. "Hi?"

A moment later Merrill was hugging her tightly. Leandra wrapped her own arms around her mother and patted her back soothingly. Salla noted that Leandra had inherited nothing of her elven mother's petite build, though she did retain her mother's vividly green eyes.

"We should..." Her papa glanced from Leandra to Kieran. "Head back to the estate."
Crossing the Years

Leliana watched Alistair and his son walk down the hall, occasionally giving each other awkward looks. Aside from the bow he carried, she saw almost nothing of Cathiel in the young man. Jerath trailed a pace behind Duncan, clearly still considering himself on guard. She flicked her eyes towards where Brehan had fallen into step beside her, and noted that he too, was staring at the younger version of Alistair.

"This was the dedication of Kirkwall's Chantry."

She turned to look at the other young man. She could hear his grandfather in his voice, despite seeing little trace of the man in his features other than the blue eyes. "Yes. What do you remember?"

"Mostly just the storm that hit the ship on the return voyage." He furrowed his brow. "How long were we..." He shrugged. "Well, missing, I suppose?"

"The chantry was attacked and you were abducted two evenings ago." She sighed. "Your mother is..."

"Fraught with worry, I am certain." He drummed his fingers against the hilt of his sword. "I think Erlina came with us? She is tending to Mother?"

"Yes." Leliana caught Alistair's glance over his shoulder at her, and she waved him to continue on with Duncan and Saitada. She gestured for Loghain to follow her towards Anora's room. "Any idea how best to inform her of the..." She looked him over again. "Situation?"

"I imagine she's going to take this somewhat less well than she did learning Ser Alec had taken me dragon-hunting." He took a deep breath, and murmured something. "Until the last foe has fallen." He opened the door and stepped into Anora's room.

#

Cullen kept looking at the staff on his son's back. Gavren caught the look, and gave him a small smile. Shame clutched at his throat. He should not be surprised his son was a mage, considering his wife was one of the most talented mages in Thedas. And it shouldn't matter. "Is your sister also a mage?"

"No. I'm afraid it is much worse than that." Gavren smiled. "She's an artist." He glanced over his shoulder, and then walked backwards a few steps before turning back to Cullen. "The Chantry dedication? First visit to the estate, yes?"

"Yes." Cullen nodded at where Kels was opening the door of the aforementioned estate.

"What do you remember?" Ruya asked.

"Meeting Leandra. She climbed the fence between estates to come visit, and bit Uncle Kels when he tried to take her back home. Left a scar. He's still holding a grudge." Gavren rubbed the back of his head. "This is..." He followed them into the estate. "I'm not sure what this..." He trailed off when he saw Iron Bull come down the stairs. "Uncle Bull."

"Er..." Iron Bull blinked. "What?"
It took less time than Cullen would have thought to explain what had happened. But then, it was
the Inquisition. Weird things weren't entirely alien to them. Bull immediately started asking what
things he'd killed over the past few years. Sorrow appeared on Gavren's face at the question. "You
and Rainier tangled with one of the great dragons last year. First to kill one since Calenhad, but..."
He sighed. "Rainier didn't make it."

"Oh." Iron Bull hung his head a moment. "What about the others, are they...?"

"Dorian is still in Tevinter, scandalizing the magisterium. Sera..." Gavren frowned. "I don't
actually know where Sera is at the moment. She and Brehan were doing a favor for the Divine last
I heard. The Lady Seeker is on her way to Orlais for a meeting of the Exalted Council, along with
Mother and Father. Kailey is actually in Antiva visiting Josephine and her daughter --"

"Josephine has a daughter?" Ruya smiled at the thought.

"Reyna. Cole and Maryden are currently in Antiva as well." Gavren nodded. "And about ten
years back, Uncle Lukas got tired of being hounded by suitors and had Josephine pick him out a
wife. He's got a son now, Julien."

"And Vivienne?"

"The Grand Enchanter remains in Orlais. There was a..." He hesitated briefly. "Falling out some
years ago. You aren't currently on speaking terms." He looked around, and clearly saw the
question on all their minds. "Fen'Harel is still out there."

#

Caleb's eyes widened as he followed his family back to the Hawke estate. "That's Leandra." Leandra was a cute little almost five-year-old. This woman looked like she could go toe to toe
with Aveline.

"Yep." She smiled.

"But she's..." He shook his head and held his hand out at just below his waist level to indicate the
height she'd been the last time he saw her.

"How?"

"Things when somewhat awry." Merrill exchanged a look with Kieran. "But they can be fixed.
We just need a plan."

"Wow." Leandra was staring at Varric. "I forgot what Uncle Varric looked like without gray
hair." They all turned to look at her. She raised an eyebrow. "What? Thirty odd years of dealing
with Hawkes, he's lucky he has hair at all. Donnic doesn't."

"Good to know..." Varric looked up at her. "I suppose?"

"Okay." Leandra looked around at them. "So, how old am I supposed to be?"

"You just turned five." Her mother gestured. "The Divine was dedicating the new Chantry."

"Oh. So Uncle Fenris doesn't even own the Hanged Man yet." Leandra scratched her head.
"Wow."

"Wait, what?" Papa nearly stumbled as Father laughed. "Fenris owns the Hanged Man?" He
looked at Varric. "What kind of mad city are you running?"

"Hey, you married him." Varric held up his hands in mock surrender.

"What else should we know?" Carver raised an eyebrow at Leandra.

"Well..." She started listing things on her fingers. "The king of Ferelden gets assassinated, the Qunari decide to take a break from fighting Tevinter long enough to reconquer Rivain and a lot of Antiva. And move against some of the Free Marches, and I think they just launched an attack on Ferelden as well. The Inquisitor thinks the Qunari have somehow split into two factions. There are some weird rumors about folks across the sea. The Grey Wardens of the North and South are having a pissing match. Gavren and I are engaged. Empress Celene finally got around to designating an heir but folks are upset because he's married to the Tevinter Archon's youngest daughter and the King of Nevarra is married to the Tevinter Archon's eldest daughter and they are worried Tevinter is trying to become an Empire again the Antivan way plus mages. Nobody outside Ferelden has seen a Dalish clan in a year. The veil is doing weird things and great dragons have been seen in the skies. And some insane cult tried to dig up Lusacan in the wastes only for that entire area to end up turned into pretty much glass for like ten miles in all directions."

"Maker's breath." Varric stared. "Doesn't anything stay fixed?"

"Guess not." Leandra shrugged. "So..." She looked around at them. "Food?"

"I'm sure Orana will have something..." Carver stopped in his tracks. "Wait, you and Gavren are what?"

Alistair rubbed the back of his neck. "You're king."

"Six years now." Duncan's nervous gesture mirrored his own. "You..." He looked down at the ground. "It was just before Wintersend, ten years ago. A bloodmage summoned demons in the palace." He swallowed. "They killed Mother before anyone realized what was happening." Duncan glanced at Jerath. "You shoved me at Jerath and told him to get me to safety, and then you and Uncle Rory..." He cut himself off, and shook his head, motioning to Jerath.

We made it out of the palace and to House Brosca's holding there in Denerim." Jerath took up the story, his voice steady. "Lenore Amell dealt with the blood mage and her people bolstered the guard enough to take care of the rest of the demons. Lord Eamon, a few other nobles, and a third of the guard died that day, but the rest of the royal family was kept safe. Arl Guerrin, Teyrn Cousland, Bann Shianni, Teyrna Anora..." He nodded at Saitada. "And the Warden-Commander formed a council of regents until the king came of age."

He looked at where Jerath stood, and noted again the scars on the young man's face. Had they come from that battle? Or had there been another attempt on his son's life? "Thank you."

"Who was the bloodmage working for?" Saitada folded her arms. Trian looked around the room, and then went to the sideboard and began pouring whiskey into glasses.

"Orlais." Duncan nearly spat the word. "They were slithering around on the border before the pyres were cold. It nearly came to war. They settled for annexing Haven and 'renegotiating' some trade relations. Maferath's balls."

"Language." Alistair's voice was sharp as he gave the habitual correction before realizing he was no longer talking to an eight-year-old boy.
To his surprise, Duncan's face broke into a wide smile, and he actually laughed. When Alistair raised an eyebrow, the younger man shook his head. "It's stupid, but..." He wiped a hand at his eyes. "It's good hearing you yell at me again."

Alistair strode forward and wrapped his arms around his son.

#

His mother's eyes kept searching his face. She was taking it better than he'd expected, but that might have had something to do with the fact Erlina had clearly slipped something into her tea. The Divine and Brehan had remained in the room. Loghain would have objected, but his mother was clearly comforted by the presence of the Divine. And so he took the teapot out of his mother's shaking hands, refilled her cup, and answered the Divine's questions.

At least, he answered the questions he could. Not all the secrets he knew were his to share. Kieran, Carver, and Merrill had all been in the room. If the Divine was meant to know certain things, surely one of them would have been forthcoming. She asked her questions almost casually, but her eyes were sharp. Best not to forget he was speaking with two people who knew enough of the puzzle that even a hint could cause them to put pieces together.

Thankfully, Erlina came to the rescue. As politely as she could, the elven woman chased the leader of the entire Andrastian faith out of the room so his mother could rest. When the door closed behind them, Loghain let out a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding.

Anora's hand touched his cheek, tracing the mark. "You..."

"By choice, Mother." He caught her hand, and smiled at her reassuringly. "My choice, made freely."

Slowly, she nodded. "I..." She sighed. "I should not be surprised, I think. You should..." She straightened her shoulders. "Erlina, please get a bed made up. We should all get some rest."

#

Leandra took a cookie off the plate mostly to keep Orana from continuing to offer her the treat. Her uncle had threatened to banish Agatha to the winecellar if she didn't stop laughing. And her father was taking her engagement harder than he had taken her not being five. Maybe she shouldn't have mentioned it.

"You can fix all this, right?" Her father turned to the dark haired and unfamiliar young man that had accompanied them back from the Chantry.

"Find the caster before the spell is cast. The stone was never..." He frowned. "Will never? Is never? Hmmm..." He shook his head. "The future is part of their past and is then both ways, but if we counter the ripples now do they flow back to then, or do ripples from now counter the from before it becomes to?"

"What?" Caleb looked at him.

"Tenses are hard." He brightened. "Yes, we can fix this."

"I'm sorry. Who are you?" Leandra gestured at him.

He gave her a startled look. "You do not know me?"
"No."

"Oh." He actually looked crestfallen. "I should fix that too. I am Kieran."

"Seriously? Then yeah, I have met you. You just looked different then." Considerably more
glowy. She looked from him to her father, who nodded. "Wow. Alright, so, we find the guy who
cast the spell, kill his ass, and everything goes back to..." She shrugged. "Normal is probably too
strong a word. Alright. So, how do we find this asshole?"

"Wait..." Uncle Fenris waved a hand, and turned towards Kieran. "You said you bound this thing
with part of you. Why can't you just pull that back and then reopen the tear so we can kill it?"

"I considered that notion." Kieran nodded. "I could pull me back, but it would come with me, and
push at the pull."

"So you pull it back with you, and then kill it?"

"No. Well, yes, but that would be bad. 'Tis strong, and hitting it when it is that strong would mean
hitting it very hard."

"Okay..." Uncle Gabriel frowned at him. "You do understand that there are quite a few people
here who can hit really hard, right?"

Kieran opened his mouth, and her father held up a hand. "Kieran, if you hit it as hard as you'd need
to in order to kill it at full strength, exactly how much collateral damage would occur?"

"Well..." He tilted his head and half closed his eyes for a moment. "The structure of Kirkwall
itself would limit the effect from reaching more than a mile or so outside the city itself, and the
Gallows still has some wards in place, so it would mostly just kill everyone in the city proper.
Including me, and Father gets very cross when that happens."

"Well." Varric sat back down. "Shit."

Trian hung back, watching the king talk to the prince. Or the young king. Saitada sat nearby,
occasionally asking questions. The prince or king noticed him standing there, and nodded. "Trian.
Sorry, I almost didn't recognize you. You got..." He caught himself. "Well, taller is the wrong
word, I suppose." He gestured at his chin. "Hairier, maybe. And the crown gives you a few more
inches of height."

King Alistair blinked. "Crown?"

"It was decided Kal'Hirol needed its own king. Trian of House Saitada, first king of Kal'Hirol."
Duncan shook his head. "Orzammar had a collective cow, especially with Kal'Hirol officially
having a thaig on the surface." He glanced back at his father. "We ceded each other a square mile
each."

"Your right as king." King Alistair nodded. "I'm pleased to see the alliance remains strong."

"How big a collective cow did Orzammar have, exactly?" Saitada raised an eyebrow.

"Well..." Duncan grinned. "They were all set to declare war until someone pointed out to them
they'd have to either march through an area still infested with darkspawn or come across the
surface." He shrugged. "They decided that the darkspawn threat was so much less that an invasion
was possible. Except when they sent scouts, that section of the Deep Roads was just swarming. So they armed a hundred or so casteless and chased them out to act as a distraction."

"Maker..." Alistair shook his head. "Feeding..."

Duncan snickered. "Let me finish the story. So the casteless get to the area, and its empty. Not a darkspawn to be seen. They head into Kal'Hirol and get a personal welcome from Paragon Brosca. Apparently, Orzammar forgot that Brosca and Trian used to be casteless. Those casteless pretty much just shrugged and joined Kal'Hirol's army. Naturally, that annoyed Orzammar, so they headed out to invade again. Only to find that section of Deep Roads once again swarming with darkspawn. They tried a couple other routes. Darkspawn. So they decided to try again. Chased out casteless for a distraction. And the casteless once again discovered their route was completely darkspawn free. Made it to Kal'Hirol, and were welcomed."

Saitada ran a hand down her face. "That's..." She nodded. "Actually pretty funny."

"Kal'Hirol had to create two new houses to accommodate the rest of the casteless, who arrived in Kal'Hirol a month or so later," Jerath said. "Though Ferelden acquired a unit of dwarven sappers out of that debacle."

King. He was going to be a king. That was... He shook his head. Stone.

They managed to wait an hour after all the lights had gone out before sneaking down to the room that had been given to Leandra. No sooner had Agatha put her hand on the doorknob than the door opened. Leandra stood on the other side, smiling, and quickly gestured for them to enter.

Salla followed Agatha into the room. "You were expecting us?"

"A mystery and Agatha doesn't have her nose crammed into it?" Leandra shook her head. "That's one thing that hasn't happened in the past sixteen years." She gestured for them to sit before doing the same. "So what did happen?" She looked at Salla.

"Kieran opened the tear, a bunch of demons came out, and then suddenly you all were there, fighting alongside everyone." Salla leaned forward. "You threatened the Grand Enchanter."

"Wait..." Agatha blinked. "She did what?"

"Bitch wanted to make Gavren tranquil." Leandra's eyes hardened. "She pulls any shit his direction, I'm taking her down."


He wasn't surprised to find his father awake, even with the sun still an hour from dawning. Frankly, he'd be surprised if his father had even slept. As he stepped into the garden, he saw his father's eyes go immediately to the staff on his back before settling on his face. "Gavren."

"Father." He glanced into the darkened estate. "Dreams?"

Cullen closed his eyes. "Yes."
"I can make tea. It helps, sometimes." He could see the tension behind his father's eyes.

"Thank you, but I'll be fine."

Gavren nodded. He looked down at his feet. Then he shook his head. "It manifested when I was seven. You were sparring with a new recruit, and trying to get him to fix a problem with his grip. He wasn't listening, so you told him to take a break and go get water. When you turned away, he came at you." Gavren met his father's eyes. "And then his hair was on fire."

For a moment, Cullen stood there silently. And then he smiled. "I imagine that caused him to reconsider his actions."

"You could say that. You dragged him to the water trough and dunked him, then pretty much threw him to Iron Bull. He ended up staying with the Chargers." He shrugged. "You took me into the garden and we played chess until Mother got back. Pretty sure you threw both games I won."

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have..."

"Finding out your three-year-old little soldier is suddenly a nineteen year old mage is an understandable kind of shock." Gavren came to stand next to his father. "Though if it makes you feel better, I do know which end of a sword to hold."

"I'll admit that it kind of does." Cullen rubbed the back of his neck. "Your mother was pretty good with a sword herself, actually."

"Is again. Dagna's apprentice, Terra, made her a new hand."

"Good to know." Cullen took a deep breath. "So..." He looked around the garden. "You play chess?"
"Who is winning?"

Gavren looked up from the chessboard at the sound of his mother's voice. "I'm letting Father win." He'd been expecting his father to focus on defense after the previous game, and had been caught off-guard by the sudden charge of the towers.

"Oh, that's your story, is it?" Cullen moved his mage, thereby sealing the fate of Gavren's king. "Checkmate." He looked up at Ruya. "He won the first two. Our son is rather good at this game."

"Does Kailey play?" Ruya raised an eyebrow.

He shook his head. "No. She never really cared for the game." He looked at the tiny form in his mother's arm and smiled fondly. "Kailey before she learns to talk. Enjoy it while it lasts."

Ruya handed Kailey to Cullen, and put her hand on his shoulder. "Brehan says Divine Victoria wishes to meet with us in the Chantry to discuss where to go from here." She looked across at Gavren as he started putting the pieces away. "What do you know about the Formless One?"

"One of the more annoying cults is dedicated to it. Brehan found some information that made him suspect..." His eyes narrowed. "Is that who is behind this?"

"That is our current theory. What did Brehan suspect?"

"That the cult may have been behind the assassination of King Alistair and Queen Cathiel."

She sat on Cullen's knee. "Tell me everything you know about this cult."

#

Salla sat quietly at the table, listening to the conversation. Brehan had just finished noting down what information they'd learned from Leandra when Kieran entered the room. Immediately, the spymaster turned toward him. "What do you know about the Formless One?"

"Only one of the Forbidden Ones remaining." Kieran tilted his head. "They were corporeal once, until they fled the battle and were banished."

"Imshael was desire. What is the Formless One?" Brehan raised an eyebrow.

"They were all desire, eldest of the gloom. Any animal can feel fear, hunger, or despair, but it takes intelligence to have want beyond need." Kieran's eyes half closed. "Xebenkeck was strongest, she led. The Formless One shifted, the nebulous desire for what one knows they can never have. Weakest, but most subtle and for that perhaps the most dangerous. Envy was born of desire, hatred of those who have what one does not, and the urge to destroy what one cannot have." Kieran accepted the plate of food she offered him, smiling in thanks. "'Tis this we face?"

"Depending on whether or not we can trust information provided by the Dread Wolf." Brehan shook his head. "Can we?"

"To whom was the information given, and why?" He took a bite out of the pastry, shifting the plate to catch the resulting crumbs.

"The Inquisitor. When the children first went missing, she begged for his help."
He swallowed. "Then he would tell her what he believes to be true, though perhaps not the whole." Kieran nodded. "She is his friend, and while he will use her if he can, he does not wish her to suffer pain he can ease."

"And yet he'll still destroy the world." Hawke shook his head.

"She is a mage of considerable power and wisdom. She may survive what is come if he succeeds, but that is irrelevant."

"Irrelevant?" Hawke practically choked on the word.

"There are always those the demons cannot match. Those that despair only makes stronger, that fear cannot dissuade, that base desire cannot touch, and that pride cannot bring down. When darkness threatens, heroes rise. That is the true magic of this world. The music swells, and you dance." Kieran smiled. "It is beautiful beyond words."

#

Duncan walked beside his father as they headed towards the Divine's office. Servants had provided them fresh clothes that fit well enough. He's considered for a moment leaving his armor behind, and decided against it. Demons and mages and who knew what else were about. He didn't miss that his father had also chosen to wear armor.

The Divine gave them a startled glance when she saw them, and then smiled. "Forgive me, seeing the two of you next to each other is very disconcerting."

He bowed. "Last time I visited your court, Most Holy, you called me by my father's name three times." He smiled. "A compliment of the highest order, to be sure."

"Ah. And there is your mother." Divine Victoria's voice was warm with approval. "The others are on their way. Young Agatha turned her sending crystal over to me and I have been in touch with House Brosca."

"Agatha?" Duncan raised an eyebrow. "Agatha Amell?"

"You are familiar with her?"

The elven spymaster was simultaneously one of the best assets to come from his alliance with Kal'Hirol and one of the biggest thorns in his side. "King Trian loaned her services to me shortly after the Qunari launched their attacks."

"King Trian?" Divine Victoria smiled. "I am looking forward to speaking with all of you in far greater detail." The door to the office opened again, admitting the Inquisitor and Commander Cullen, followed by Rutherford. A few moments later, it opened a second time to admit Teyrna Anora and Ser Loghain. "Brehan is filling the Hawkes in on what we have learned thus far, and determining what Kieran can add." Divine Victoria drew a deep breath. "Lenore and Brosca were tracking cultists that recently went silent. Brosca has confirmed that the cultists were devoted to this Formless One"

"Gavren has confirmed that the cult is a problem in their time." The Inquisitor glanced over her shoulder at him, and then at Loghain. "It seems recent information revealed they may have been behind the assassination of King Alistair."

"What?" Duncan's head came up sharply. "Andraste's great flaming ass, that seems like the kind of thing I really should have been informed about."
"Until this moment, I did not realize you were unaware." The Inquisitor nodded apologetically. "Was there a reason he wasn't informed?"

"The information was new and had yet to be verified." Gavren shook his head. "We wanted to be certain, and ensure we addressed the problem of the entire cult rather than a single stronghold."

"They thought I'd overreact." Duncan folded his arms. He caught the look on Ser Loghain's face. "Stop agreeing with them."

"I humbly apologize for acknowledging reality, your majesty."

"Asshole." Duncan muttered the word under his breath before turning his attention back to the Divine.

"I'll admit, killing this cult before they kill me does sound like a good use of our time." King Alistair said, trying to hide his smile.

"We agreed." Divine Victoria inclined her head. "I have begun sending word to my agents, and Brehan is doing the same for the Inquisition, as well as seeing what the Red Jennies and House Brosca can find for us. This Formless One appears to have power on par with the magic that opened the Breach. It is not a threat we can ignore."

Leandra followed her father and uncle into the larger room. Kieran walked a few paces behind her. And Salla, Caleb, and Agatha managed to slip in before anyone could stop them. She saw Gavren standing with his parents, and immediately adjusted her trajectory. And did not miss her father's glare when she did so. That... was probably going to be an issue. No, that was definitely going to be an issue. Which is why they'd been eloping in the first place.

Maps and documents were strewn about on the table. Brehan walked over to add more, and Kieran followed him. It was kind of weird seeing him not glowing. Maybe that had something to do with the depowering that had apparently happened?

Divine Victoria smiled when she saw her. "Leandra. I would like you and the other children to sit with some of my agents. The information you can provide for us would be invaluable. Especially any information that pertains to Fen'Harel's activities."

She saw the younger version of the king narrow his eyes at the remark. Duncan shook his head and glared at Gavren. "No offense, but when it comes to the Dread Wolf, the last person we should be trusting is his fucking apprentice."

Her hand went for the hilt of her sword and she saw the king's bodyguard do the same. "You want to back way the hell off, your royal high-ass."

The room started to stir as people reacted to the lesser king's remark. She maintained her protective position in front of Gavren. His hand touched her shoulder in a calming gesture, and she heard his voice. "Whatever it is you think you know of my nature, I do not wish this world to end any more than you do. I am, as you may have noticed, very much human."

Kieran spoke up from where he stood at the table. "If the Formless One is slain, this moment will not..." He tilted his head, the motion vaguely birdlike. "Would not? Does not occur. The time will be set right, flowing to a shifted future. Changes will build upon each other, and sixteen years from now we will all be standing in a different river. None of you will remember the taste of these waters."
The Divine frowned. "Then we cannot change what occurred?"

"The changes will occur whether you will them or not. Any machinations of the Formless One will not survive his slaying."

"But if it resets, won't it all happen the same way again, with this Formless thing simply coming back?" Duncan frowned. "All looping about."

"Part of me lies outside time and will not reset. I'll be whole and me and remember, and thus the river shifts. No loops. Looping is bad."

"You are saying you can fix this?" The Inquisitor raised an eyebrow at him.

"Yes."


"No." Her father's voice was flat.

"Agreed." Divine Victoria gave her a disapproving look, and then looked past her. "Salla, Caleb, would you be so kind as to take the other children back to your estate."

The look on the lesser king's face almost made being sent away worth it. He looked like he'd just inhaled a lemon as he turned towards the Divine. "Most Holy, I feel it necessary to point out that we are not, in fact, children."

"His royal highass has a point." Leandra took a step back to stand shoulder to shoulder with Gavren. "This is not our first fight."

"We do not know what exactly is going on or what forces are involved here. For all we know, if something happens to you in this time stream you'll be wiped out of existence entirely." Cullen folded his arms, his face stern.

"Keeping you safe is our priority here." The Divine's eyes were sympathetic.

"Look, we faced a qunari death squad and they gave us no trouble at all." Leandra waved a hand casually.

Next to her, Gavren shook his head. "You and I remember that battle differently."

"Yeah." She shrugged. "That's cause you're a worrywort."

"I'm a...?" He turned and stared at her. "You had four broken ribs and a knife sticking out of your leg."

"And they got their asses kicked." She rolled her eyes. "Besides, that's why you carry bandages."

He opened his mouth to retort and Loghain's voice interrupted them. "I'm not sure you two are actually helping our case." Loghain jerked his head at the aghast faces of the rest of the room.

Well. Shit. The Divine's eyes had gone from sympathetic to stone. "Salla?" The Divine raised one eyebrow.

Salla gestured for them to follow her. At the table, Kieran leaned over one of the maps. "We will need --"
"You're going with them." King Alistair gestured towards Salla.

"But I --"

"No." King Alistair shook his head firmly. "Kieran, you're in a weakened state and we have no idea how vulnerable that makes you." He folded his arms. "And frankly your parents scared the shit out me before they became their own pantheon. I really do not want to have to explain to them that we got you hurt or worse."

"I can --"

"We have information. We'll track down this Formless One. If we need your assistance, we know where to find you." The Inquisitor nodded to him.

"Go with the other kids." Her own father's voice was firm.

"Yes, Uncle Carver."

Well, at least the king and the god were also getting sent to their rooms. Small comfort.

#

Leliana watched the children go, though it was clear none of them were happy about it. A Qunari death squad? And... She turned to look at Ruya, and saw the fear on her old friend's face. Duncan had called Gavren the Dread Wolf's apprentice. That was going to require some kind of context. She sighed. "What do we know?"

"We know the cult originated along the border between Tevinter and Orlais." Brehan answered as he moved the map around. "We have the identities of a few members, and are trying to trace them now. Rector is probably our best option to head up the investigation on the Tevinter side, and House Brosca is lending us some of their agents as well."

#

Loghain watched his king pace back and forth and occasionally explode with curses. The Divine had actually sent a guard back with them, led by none other than The Iron Bull. Commander Cullen had sent one of the Inquisition's attaches, a man named Kels, with the order to 'keep an eye on the kids'. He was pretty sure Kels was actually younger than Jerath.

He shrugged, and gave Bull a respectful nod. "Iron Bull."

"You're Loghain, right?"

"I am."

"Knew your grandfather. For an old guy, he kicked some ass."

"Knew you, in the future. For an old guy, you kick a bit of ass yourself."

Bull grinned. "How do we know each other?"

"Competed against you and some of the Chargers at a tournament in Highever, two years ago."

"Yeah?" Iron Bull folded his arm and lifted his eyebrow. "Who won?"

"You went home with the prize for the melee, Grunt went home with the prize for the archers,
Skinner went home with me." He smiled. "So I have to say I did."

For a moment, Bull just stared. And he smacked Loghain on the back and started laughing. "Not bad, kid. Not bad at all." He gestured at his face, in the location of the tattoo. "Don't suppose you'll tell me what that's supposed to mean?"

"If you were meant to know, you would." He shrugged. "So I'm going to start asking you questions with the intention of getting you to reveal more information than you're supposed to. That alright?"

"I like you." Bull nodded.

"Yes." Loghain grinned. "You will."

#

Agatha listened with half an ear as Loghain started getting information out of Iron Bull. Had he implied? No. Surely not. But he was certainly managing to get some useful information. Bull shifted the subject pretty rapidly when Loghain got too close to the Tevinter border. Which meant that was likely where the problem was located. Mama Lenore was fine with sending her to handle a diplomatic thing, but she'd balk at sending her into an actual battle. As if Mama Lenore hadn't been taking on an archdemon at the same age.

"I'm not going to sit around here, twiddling my thumbs." Duncan finally stopped pacing. "I'm the bloody king of Ferelden."

"You're not, actually." Caleb smiled at him apologetically. "And it sounds like if they manage to kill this demon thing, you won't be for years yet."

"All the more reason I should be part of this. That thing killed my father and brought my country to the edge of war."

She glanced over her shoulder to see Trian quietly join them. She sighed, and turned back to Duncan. "The best we can do right now is help them figure out where this formless one is."

"I --" Kieran started to say something, but was interrupted when Duncan started talking again.

"No, the best we can do is join the fight. We've all seen combat. I'm twenty-four bloody years old. Older than most of the Wardens when they saved Ferelden. And we've got more stake in this fight than most."

"If any of them died, would they be wiped from history?" Salla raised an eyebrow at Kieran.

"No."

"What if you died?"

"It would be inconvenient, certainly." Kieran tilted his head.

"Dying is a bit more than inconvenient." Jerath frowned at him.

"Not particularly. Mother kept a piece."

"You mean like how Flemeth put herself into an amulet?" Caleb gestured excitedly. "And Aunt Merrill brought her back on Sundermount and..." His eyes widened. "Oh, that's right. That was your grandmother."
"So you..." Salla bit her lip. "Can't actually die?"

"All things can die."

"But what would happen if I were to try stabbing you right now?" Caleb waved a hand.

"I would warn you politely not to." Kieran shrugged. "Once."

Loghain joined them as the Chargers left to go patrol the outside of the building, leaving them with Kels to watch over them. "Then, if the stories are true, he'd use your entrails to decorate his trees."

"No, that's Mother."

"I don't suppose he told you where this cult is located?" Duncan raised an eyebrow at Loghain.

"On the border between Tevinter and Orlais. I'm afraid that is as specific as I could get."

"Seriously?"

"I'm a knight, not a spy, and he used to be Ben-Hassrath. You're lucky I got that much, your majesty."

"What would you even do if you found out the location?" Agatha raised an eyebrow at Duncan.

"I'd go kill the bloody thing."

"By yourself?" Gavren looked up from where he was talking to Leandra.

"No." Jerath said the word calmly from where he stood behind Duncan.

"And they'd drag me along." Loghain shrugged.

"I'd come." Agatha grinned. "They did take a shot at one of my cousins."

"We'd go.‖ Leandra touched Gavren's shoulder. "Though not following you.‖ She narrowed her eyes at Duncan.

"I am the son of King Alistair of Ferelden."

Gavren stood. "I'm the son of Ruya Trevalyan, the Inquisitor who took down a god."

"Are we determining this based on rank or merit?‖ Kieran raised an eyebrow.

"Rank comes from merit.‖ Duncan narrowed his eyes as he stared at Gavren, his stance hostile.

"Your rank comes from the merit of your parents.‖ Kieran tilted his head.

"I'm also older than you."

"Actually, if we go that route, Salla was born first.‖ Caleb gestured at his sister. "Two weeks before Agatha."

"I have actually existed for the greatest number of years save for Jerath, and he's following me,‖ Duncan said. Salla laughed. Duncan glared at her. "What is amusing you?"

"Kieran, how old are you?‖
"I do not know."

"How can you not know how old you are?" Jerath frowned at him.

"I predate all existing calendar systems."

"What?" Duncan stared at him.

"I am Urthemiel, reborn of the Inheritor, the goddess Mythal, harbinger of the next age." He smiled. "Does that mean I am in charge?"

"No." Several voices said the word simultaneously, Agatha's among them.

"Very well. Then I cast my vote for Salla."

"We aren't voting." Duncan shook his head.

"I vote for Salla." Caleb immediately jumped on Kieran's idea.

"Me too." Agatha grinned, enjoying the panic starting to show on her best friend's face.

"Voting is irrelevant." Trian spoke up. "We don't know how to kill this Formless One, even if we knew where it was."

"It's in Nevarra, and fire should be sufficient."

They all turned to stare at Kieran. Kels eyes widened. "Wait, you know where it is?"

"That's what I was trying to tell them back in the Chantry."

"I've got to tell the Commander." Kels started walking towards the door.

"Jerath." Duncan glanced over his shoulder, and Jerath immediately moved to intercept Kels. Duncan turned back to the group. "You can take us to it? Help us kill it?"

"Yes."

"Alright." He took a deep breath, and then looked towards Gavren. "I'll accept Salla as leader, if you will."

"Wait --" Salla tried to protest.

"Done." Gavren nodded.

"This is insane." Trian shook his head.

"You don't have to come." Duncan nodded to him.

"Yes, I do."

"Why?" Duncan raised an eyebrow.

"Because of him." Trian gestured at Kieran.

"Me?" Kieran looked startled.

"When your father walked into Orzammar, my mother was near starvation trying to keep me fed.
He gave her coin, kept her safe, gave her life back to her and never asked anything in return. Now she's..." Trian took a deep breath. "Everything I have, everything I will become, I owe to him. So if you're going along on this, I am too."

"I will point out that we are still in Kirkwall, surrounded by Inquisition soldiers, the Kirkwall guard, Templars, the Ferelden Honor Guard, the Griffin Riders, and the Chargers." Loghain gestured at Kels. "And him, the guy who just overheard our destination. I give us three miles before they drag us back by our earlobes."

"Well, oh fearless leader?" Caleb grinned at Salla.

Salla felt panic rising. Somehow, she was in charge of... Okay. Getting out of the house would be easy enough. She and Caleb had been sneaking out for years, and the Chargers didn't know about the Darktown entrance. The problem would be getting out of Kirkwall in a way they couldn't be easily followed and that meant... She started to smile. "Out of curiosity, who other than me knows how to sail a ship?"

Agatha grinned and raised her hand, followed by Leandra, Gavren, Duncan, Jerath, Loghain, and Caleb. Kieran smiled eagerly. "I look forward to learning."

Kels shook his head. "You can't be serious." He ran a hand through his hair. "I'm getting the Commander." He tried to go around Jerath, and then a barrier sprang into place around him. He turned back towards them, and his eyes went to the smiling Kieran. "Let me out."

"If I do that, you will alert everyone and that would be very inconvenient." Kieran shrugged.

"Kels, the way I figure it, you have two options here." Gavren shrugged. "You can stay here until Mother takes that barrier down, and then explain to my father that you let us escape instead of alerting the Chargers the moment you realized we were plotting." Salla saw panic start to show in Kels' eyes. "Or you can come with us, in the hopes that you can alert someone before we get to far or that Father will buy that you came along to try to keep us out of trouble."

"Your father is going to kill me."

Caleb cackled. "Grab him. Let's move before the Chargers get back."

"What do you mean they are missing?"

For a moment, Gabriel thought he was going to see Cullen stab a qunari to death with his own horns.

"We were expecting someone to attack them." Iron Bull stood his ground. "Not that they'd sneak out of the house somehow."

"How did they..." Cullen turned towards Gabriel. "You had to have the estate riddled with secret passages."

"And the children dumb enough to use them." Gabriel rubbed his forehead. "They can't have gone far if they tried to leave the city, and we know where all the passages exit." He looked around and noted Carver had already gone to alert his riders. "The guard will have them back within an hour."
The door to the estate slammed open and Isabela strode into the room. "Gabriel Constance Hawke."

"Isa --"

She stalked towards him and drove her finger into his chest. "Do you want to explain to me why your daughter and a group of her friends just stole my ship?"

Seeing no other option available, he sought refuge in audacity. "Well, remember that one time you ran off with a relic?"
"I'm a dead man." Alistair leaned on the table.

"I think Jerath will be under..." Divine Victoria started to say.

"You think I'm worried about him?" Alistair shook his head vigorously. "I've been in Kirkwall a week and I've lost Duncan three times. Do you have any idea what Cathiel is going to do to me?"

He turned to Saitada. "To us?"

Saitada winced. "Oh. Right."

"Ain't a surprise, right?" Sera shrugged as they all stared at her. "I mean, these are your kids we are talking about?"

"How did they even get your ship?" Varric asked, turning back to Isabela.

"Caleb said the Divine wanted to see us. We started heading in, then Cullen's bearded counterpart started yelling that it's a trick. Next thing we know, the pretty boy has us in this little barrier and Salla is giving orders on getting out of the dock." Isabela shook her head angrily. "Teaching your children how to sail was clearly a mistake on my part."

"Kels." Cullen shook his head. "They kidnapped Kels."

"Someday, we are going to look back on this situation and laugh." Hawke sighed. "Forty, fifty years from now." He looked up when Carver came back into the room. "Anything?"

"I've got riders doing sweeps off the coast in teams of two. They've only got an hour head start; they can't have gone that far." When Isabela narrowed her eyes, Carver shrugged. "It may be your ship, Admiral, but it's not you at the helm, and it is certainly not your crew. Frankly, I'm impressed they made it out of the harbor."

"Duncan and Jerath know how to sail, assuming they've kept in practice." Alistair sighed.

"They do?" Ruya turned towards him.

"Duncan's grandmother was the Seawolf. She took her first Orlesian warship when she was fifteen." Alistair shook his head. "Letting them learn seemed like a good idea at the time."


"Sera." Saitada rubbed the back of her neck. "Shoot him."

#

The Siren's Call cut through the water like a hot knife through butter. Caleb stood at the bow, grinning. As soon as they'd cleared the harbor, Gavren and Kieran had put their heads together and managed to conjure up some kind of magic that kept their sails filled. He glanced down at the other man on the bow. Kels had adopted a resigned expression as soon as they'd lost sight of land. "Cheer up."

"This isn't some madcap adventure story, Caleb." Kels shook his head. "You don't know what you
are getting into."

"I was in Kirkwall when the Chantry exploded, same as you." Caleb shrugged. "This isn't my first time facing a demon."

"Facing, or running from?" Kels raised an eyebrow.

Caleb glared. And was forced to concede Kels might actually have something like a point. Still, the others had seen action. Gavren and Leandra had apparently fought qunari. "Jerath's older than you are, and he's been in some fights. And we have Kieran."

"None of which is going to stop Commander Cullen from putting me on latrine duty for the rest of my life." Kels hung his head. "Which is going to be very short, for Minaeve is going to kill me for getting mixed up in this."

"So are you going to marry her or what?"

"You kidnapped me, dragged me onto a boat with a bunch of lunatics, and now you are asking about my love life?" Kels stared at him.

"It passes the time."

#

"You think we are being foolish." His king glanced back at him.

"It is not my place to say, your majesty." And saying it wouldn't make any difference at all. Time had more than proved that simple truth.

Duncan shook his head at him. "Which means you do think I'm being foolish and want nothing more than to club me on the head and drag me back to the most secure room in the palace until I come to my senses."

Jerath shrugged. His friend knew him entirely too well. And knew enough to know that he was perilously close to doing exactly that. "Well, yes."

"This thing killed my parents. Killed your father. Tried to kill my siblings." Duncan folded his arms. "You want to kill it as much as I do."

Jerath did not deny the accusation. That day was far too vividly etched into his mind. The queen's blood splattering across Duncan's face. The king pulling Duncan back and all but throwing him to Jerath. The order to take the prince and run. And the sound of his own father screaming as Jerath had done exactly that. No. He did not deny the accusation. Instead, he looked towards the others on the ship. "And them?"

"They have a stake in this." Duncan shrugged.

"They are not soldiers." The plain-faced noblewoman was a debutante, not a warrior. Though she had managed a plan to get them out of the city fairly quickly. Lady Hawke was formidable but unreliable, and Rutherford was no fighter. Trian knew his way around a blade but was a far better administrator than warrior. He wasn't sure the other Hawke was even armed. Agatha had been no slouch in a fight in their time, but this was a much younger version. Of the two actual warriors, one they'd kidnapped and other..."

"Ser Loghain is." Duncan shook his head. "And this isn't Rutherford or Lady Hawke's first clash
with demons either."

Ser Loghain was a soldier, yes. Despite his youth, he was one of the best the Order of Vigilance had to offer, and that was saying a great deal. Under ordinary circumstances, there were few he'd rather have helping him protect his king. But these were not ordinary circumstances. "Given who has accompanied us..." Jerath looked toward where Salla was showing Kieran how to adjust some ropes. "I must acknowledge that Loghain's loyalty may be called into question." The knight wore the mark of a dragon-god. And one who claimed to be a dragon-god was accompanying them.

"Do you think he is what he claims to be?" Duncan gave Kieran a doubtful look.

"An abomination?" That much, at least, everyone had agreed upon. The rest... "You and I have seen those before." And it was reason enough not to trust. "The specifics of his nature do not matter. They believe he is what he claims, which means that I cannot trust Loghain to put your safety above his. And you heard Trian." 

"I'm asking a lot of you. I know."

"No more than I am willing to give, your majesty."

Duncan put a hand on his shoulder before going to speak with their new leader.

Salla looked up as Duncan walked over to her. He'd told Gavren he'd accept her as leader. She just had absolutely no idea what that was even going to mean. Why had Kieran voted for her in the first place?

"Lady Salla." Duncan gave her a small bow. "If we are headed into Nevarra, our best bet for a port would be Cumberland." He shrugged. "Our only choice for a port is Cumberland."

"Right." Leandra called from where she was going over their supplies with Gavren. "Cause Brosca, the Inquisition, the Divine, Varric, and heck, probably even your father, don't have agents in Cumberland."

"Which is why I was about to point out we should consider not making port at all."

Duncan glared at Leandra. "This is a smuggler's ship. In theory, we could put in at a sheltered cove, hide the ship. Perhaps even have the mages ward it somehow?" He glanced at Leandra. "Rutherford can handle a simple ward, yes?"

"Gavren and Duncan are both authority figures within their respective spheres. A Fereldan individual was arrested on Orlesian soil by Inquisition agents on suspicion of being part of a plot to assassinate a dwarven dignitary. There was some question over jurisdiction." Loghain shrugged. "And, being that the situation involved a Therin, a Trevelyan, and multiple Amells, there were also some explosions, abominations, dragons, and darkspawn. I believe the individual in question was..."
eaten by a werewolf at some point."

"There were no darkspawn," Leandra immediately objected.

"My mistake." Loghain shrugged.

"Um..." Gavren glanced at Leandra.

"No, that was the trip back. Doesn't count."

"To complicate matters further, Duncan is hot-headed and Leandra is overprotective." Loghain shrugged, and went back to helping Trian go over the ship's inventory.

It took her a moment to make her voice work. "I am so very, very sorry I asked." She turned back to the people in front of her. "Duncan, you wanted this, and you must acknowledge you need our help if this mission is going to be a success. You've traveled in time. Think of it as a new beginning." She shifted her gaze to Leandra. "Leandra, you and Gavren agreed to come along and work with Duncan. The only way we are going to win is together." She looked back and forth between them. "I know the stories of what our parents did with groups just like this one. This is our chance to make them proud."

"Assuming they don't kill us for doing this in the first place," Trian added from where he was sitting on the deck.

"Yeah. That." Werewolves? What had she gotten herself into?

---

Agatha plunked herself down where she could look at Kieran. He really was very pretty. "So what are you, exactly?"

"I am Kieran."

"Yeah, I know. That's who you are. But what are you?" Agatha gave him a contemplative look. Her mother had spent ages trying to figure out what exactly was going on with this guy and his parents. "Mama Lenore said you were Urthemiel's host?"

"Yes."

"And your parents, they are also abominations?"

Something flashed behind Kieran's eyes, and his voice was sharp when he replied. "No."

"They are the host of demons aren't --"

"No."

"I thought they were possessed by --"

"No."

"I'm not --" She saw anger on his face and started trying to figure out how to backtrack the conversation.

"Abominations host demons." Gavren's voice interrupted. "Morrigan inherited the soul of the elven goddess Mythal. Jerath and Kieran are slightly more complicated, but there are no demons"
involved in those cases either.” He nodded to Kieran. “He and his father are the hosts of Old Gods.”

“I am. My father's situation is different.”

“Do you mind explaining?” Gavren smiled as he asked the question.

“I am...” He frowned. “I am me, and we are also me.” When Gavren looked at him blankly, Kieran shrugged. “Pronouns are confusing. Kieran and Urthemiel share a single body, and their souls are linked. What affects one affects the other, yet they are separate as well. One becomes the other, and the other becomes the one. Feeling and experiencing the same taste, yet the flavors differ.”

“And your father is different?”

“My sister was badly damaged. She ceased and merged, two souls no longer distinct but twined, pieces from two puzzles to make a single picture. A whole greater than the sum of the parts. One being, one soul. My father.”

“And your mother?”

“Memories of many souls, their will binding her to herself, more whole than she ever was before. Distinct but not separate. And, not or.”

Agatha scratched her head. “So... your grandmother was Mythal. And your mother is also Mythal.”

“Yes.”

“And your father is Jerath Tabris, who used to be a Warden and is now an Archdemon.”

“Yes.”

“And he's your father, except he used to be your sister.”

“Yes.” Kieran gave her a perplexed look, as if he couldn't understand why she was having trouble grasping the concept.

“Alright.” She stood back up. “I'm going to go over there, and try not to think about this anymore.”

#

Leliana sighed at the sending crystal. "Lenore, I'll point out she's your daughter."

The voice on the other end of the crystal sounded frustrated. "I said I was angry, not that I was surprised. Does Cathiel know yet?"

"I don't know." Leliana shook her head. "Is Denerim still standing?"

"I should be in sight of it within the hour. I'll let you know.” Lenore's voice was silent for a minute. "Was it really Kieran?"

"Carver claims to have recognized him. And it could easily have been the boy who was at Skyhold." Leliana sat down. "I think it was."
"What are Jerath and Morrigan doing that they had to send Kieran in their stead?" Lenore's voice responded.

"I asked Kieran that very question. I am just not sure I understood his answer." Leliana's eyes went to the statue of Andraste that dominated the heart of the Chantry. "He said they are keeping the stars lit." She shook her head. "One moment I'm talking to what seems to be a perfectly normal young man, the next I'm speaking to someone..." She sighed. "Well, someone like Cole used to be."

"Where is Cole? I have to imagine he could be of some help."

"I send word to both him and Rainier. They will be joining the search. Cassandra is still in Nevarra, and will meet us at the Orlesian border."

"We have no idea where they went?"

"Other than they went by ship, no. We do not." Leliana frowned. "Though they must have had some destination in mind."

"We picked up Sigrun. We'll take care of business in Denerim and head towards Orlais. I take it we are attempting to keep this quiet."

"Considering who they are?" Leliana waved a hand, forgetting for a moment that Lenore wasn't actually in the room with her. "We have far too many enemies who would love to take this opportunity. Even before accounting for Kieran's involvement. A young man with the soul of an old god would be a prize for many."

"Well, thanks for putting that particular image in my head." Lenore made a vexed noise. "I wasn't planning on sleeping anytime soon anyway."

"Do you think Kieran was right?"

"Kill the demon, time resets? I..." Lenore's voice was quiet again for some time. "I think I'm not willing to take that big a chance on their safety. We find them, drag them home by their ears, and then figure out what to do next."

"Then you are in agreement with every other mage involved. I'll let you know if we find anything."

"Same here. Tell Alistair..." Lenore's voice hesitated. "Tell Alistair I'll break the news to Cathiel, Rory, and Nesiara in person."

"Thank you, Lenore."

Caleb spread out the map. "Alright, so here is the Cumberland port." He traced his finger along the coast. "Isabela has a couple good coves marked. She might think to look at some of her hideaways, but since they don't know where we were heading that's still a lot of ground to cover."

"The big problem is going to be the Lady Seeker is currently in Nevarra, and she's going to be one of the first people the Inquisitor contacts." Agatha chewed her bottom lip. "I'm not sure I'm crazy about being chased by Seekers."

"Please. Cassandra looked for my father for almost four years and didn't find him until two days
after he showed up on her doorstep." Caleb rolled his eyes.

"Yeah, well, back then she didn't have Red Jennies and House Brosca feeding her information." Agatha frowned. "If I try to reach out to any of my contacts, it'll be like sending up fireworks for Papa Zevran."

"It is not too late to reconsider this option. Put in at the nearest port and find an Inquisition safehouse." Kels looked down at the map.

"Not an option." Duncan shook his head.

"It's the Inquisition. They know how to deal with situations like this one." Kels waved a hand. "Maker's Breath, this isn't even our first time dealing with time travel. Ambassador Pavus knows more about that magic than anyone alive."

"He has a point." Gavren shrugged.

Duncan glared at him. "Let's not forget, that demon targeted us. Clearly, we pose a threat to it, and it's likely going to be coming after us anyway. Taking the fight to it keeps our families safe, and gives us the best chance."

"And that is also a good point." Salla fiddled with the end of her braid. "If they are targeting you, keeping on the move is likely one of the best ways to stay safe." She looked down at the map, and then turned towards Kieran. "Where exactly are we heading?"

"Here." He tapped his finger against a location not too far from the Tevinter border.

"How do you know?" Caleb raised an eyebrow. "Spirits tell you, or is it some kind of dragon-god thing?"

"No."

"So how do you know we need to go there?" Duncan asked.

"Oh." Kieran shrugged. "That's where the quest marker is."

"What?" Duncan stared at him in confusion.

Kieran's blinked. "What?"
Trian handed the other end of the rope to Agatha. The elven woman dove off the side of the boat and swam to the shore. She bound the end of the rope to one of the ancient metal rings that had apparently been set into the stone for just such a purpose. "Isn't Isabela going to get angry when she learns we just left her ship here for anyone to find?"

"We'll send her a bird." Caleb caught the other end of the rope with him as they started pulling the ship in.

He shook his head as they finished securing the ship. The debt needed to be paid, and he counted some of these people among his friends, but what they were doing here was foolhardy. Duncan was standing impatiently as the mages discussed the best way to ward the ship. It wasn't difficult to see the young boy who rushed headlong down the stairs in the man. Trian shot a glance at Salla. Duncan had agreed to follow the young woman, and she'd done well enough thus far. He just hoped it lasted. With a sigh, he headed in her direction. "Salla?"

"Yes?" She raised an eyebrow.

"What's the plan?"

"We need more information on our destination. We know the city, but it would be nice to know what building, what defenses it may have, how many allies this thing has, and what it can do." Salla frowned. "And the fact that every spy we know is going to report back to our parents is going to complicate things." She looked around. "We also need some supplies. I found Isabela's gold stash, but we are probably going to need things like lyrium and maybe some more weapons." She rubbed the back of her neck. "Let's head in the general direction of our destination, and try to keep a low profile."

"Alright." It was the best they could do for a plan without more information, anyway. "I'll start figuring out what we need." He turned his gaze towards the bearded man who was once again arguing with Caleb. "You know Kels is going to try to get word out first opportunity he gets."

"We've got enough of a head start that shouldn't be a problem. And Agatha is keeping an eye on him."

"The Seekers are currently in Nevarra."

"There aren't many Seekers, and Nevarra is a good sized country. What are the odds we will run into any of them?" Salla shrugged. "We should get a pack horse of some kind as well. We're unfortunately light on funds."

"Leave the negotiating to me." He shrugged.

"You sure?"

"I regularly conduct negotiations with the Merchant's Guild." He shook his head at her. "Nevarran are easy."

#

Salla fell into step next to Leandra. She was still having a little big of difficulty reconciling the tall young woman with her little cousin. "So, how long have you and Gavren been..."
"Together?" She grinned. "Or just engaged?"

"Engaged, I guess." Fighting qunari, and demons, and darkspawn. It was kind of like the stories of how her fathers had gotten together. Or how Leandra's own parents had gotten together, come to think of it, as well as Gavren's parents. History did tend to repeat itself.

Leandra shrugged and glanced over at her boyfriend. "Gavren, when did I tell you we were going to get married?"

"At the Ostagar tourney."

"Right." Leandra turned back to Salla. "Fourteen years."

She shook her head at Leandra, and laughed softly before looking over at Gavren. "You never stood a chance, did you?"

"Nope." He smiled.

"What about you?" She turned to look at Duncan. "There a queen on the horizon?"

"Teyrna Anora has brokered an arrangement between myself and a Pentaghast woman whose something like ninth in line for the Nevarran throne."

"What's her name?" Salla asked.

"Um..." Duncan furrowed his brow, then glanced over his shoulder at Jerath.

"Eglentyne."

"Wait, really?" Duncan frowned. "I thought it started with an S."

"Eglentyne Sofia Agostina Giacinta Mariella Cassandra Silvestra Teodora Valeria Pentaghast."

"And now I remember why I forgot." Duncan shook his head. "She's..." He shrugged. "Nice."

"I have five gold says you can't tell us what color her hair is." Loghain called from behind him.

"I'll take that bet." Caleb grinned.

Duncan rubbed the back of his neck. "Black?"

Loghain held out a hand to Caleb. "Pay up." He shrugged. "She's a blond." His grin widened. "Like her brother."

"Oh for the love of..." Duncan shook his head. "Asshole." He lengthened his stride to quicken their pace. "We've got work to be doing."

#

According to the map, they were unlikely to make it to the city by nightfall, at least at the pace this group was traveling. They hadn't been underway more than a couple hours when they found trouble. "Well well, look what we have here." The bandits leveled their crossbows. "Isn't this lot fancy?"

Jerath noted the positions of Kels, Leandra, and Ser Loghain out of the corner of his eye. Leandra had positioned herself between Gavren and the crossbowmen. Ser Loghain was walking next to
Trian and would be able to get the dwarven king out of harm’s way. Kels might have been of some use, had he been armed or armored. And that left Kieran, Caleb, Agatha, and Salla undefended. And worse, likely to get in the way. As though being very outnumbered did not make the situation complicated enough.

"You’d be advised to let us pass." Duncan shifted just slightly to his left, for once doing as he was supposed to and letting Jerath provide cover.

"Hand over your gold..." The bandit smiled. "And maybe the ladies, and we might do just that."

"Oh you cannot be serious," Leandra said.

"Are these actual bandits?" Kieran tilted his head.

"Yes, they are actual bandits." Duncan's voice was impatient.

"How exciting. I've never had someone try to rob me before." Kieran actually started to smile. The lead bandit gave Kieran a confused look. "What's wrong with him?"

"Answering that question would take all day." Duncan shook his head.

In response, the bandit shrugged and gestured to him. "The gold. Now. And those fancy swords."

"You want my sword?" Leandra put her hand on the hilt. "Come get it."

"Oh, a dangerous one." One of the bandits leered at her. "Dibs."

"Heh." Leandra grinned. "Your mistake. I'm not the dangerous one."

"Shoot one of them." The lead bandit gestured.

Jerath shifted to stand between Duncan and the bolts, getting his shield into bear just in time... for the bolts to strike something a couple feet in front of him and bounce harmlessly to the ground. He shrugged and drew his sword, glancing back at Salla. "Orders?"

"Well," Salla glanced at where Kieran was standing with his palm outstretched. "I think we ask them politely not to attack us. Once."

Duncan nodded. "You heard the lady."

"Kill them all!" The lead bandit drew his blade.

#

Duncan sent an arrow into a bandit’s throat. He was about to shift his aim towards the left when Kieran rushed forward and leaped into the air. He started to shout and Kieran's form suddenly shifted. What went into the air was a man. What came down was a spider the size of a carriage. He thought two of the bandits might have technically died of shock.

Behind him, he heard Leandra laugh as she strode forward, putting her massive blade to good use. The bandit leader managed to get a good swing at Jerath. Jerath parried it easily before running the man through. Loghain put his own shield to use more as weapon than defense, casually battering his way through the bandits. Both Salla and Rutherford provided some support in the way of spells fired at various bandits. Trian had positioned himself near Salla and Rutherford, keeping his shield between the mages and anyone that might have thought about moving in to attack. And Caleb,
Kels, and Agatha wisely just stayed out of the way.

He fired two more arrows before the battle was finished. The spider freed a corpse from its leg, and then took a step backwards before shifting back into Kieran. "That was awesome." Caleb immediately walked towards Kieran. "What else can you turn into?"

"Anyone hurt?" Salla started looking them over. Her fingers glowed white as she healed the minor wounds taken by Leandra and Jerath. She frowned down at the dead bandits, and then shook her head. "Kels, find yourself some gear. You too, Caleb." She turned to give the rest of them a critical look before glancing at Jerath. "Jerath, would you please ensure everyone is properly outfitted in case this happens again?"

Jerath nodded. Duncan retrieved his arrows before helping himself to the quivers carried by some of the bandits. He noted that Caleb looked rather uncertain before grabbing a couple of long knives. When he passed Jerath, he lowered his voice to a whisper. "When we make camp, give the boy Hawke enough of a lesson that he doesn't stab himself by accident."

"Yes, your majesty."

#

Caleb frowned as Jerath adjusted his grip on the dagger. "That feels weird."

"Your control is greater. Fingers, wrist, and elbow can all shift the blade. You don't have strength, so you'll need speed."

"I do so have strength." Caleb glared.

"You've got strong fingers, but not arms."

"I do so have strength." Caleb put a hand on Jerath's chest and tried to shove him backwards.

Jerath didn't budge even an inch. He gave Caleb an annoyed look. "Don't block. Parry and shift, or at the very least you'll lose fingers."

He looked down at his hands. Losing a finger meant losing the ability to play the several instruments. "Um..."

The other man abruptly swung a stick at him. Caleb brought the dagger up. The stick hit it and knocked it out of his hand. Jerath shook his head. "Loghain?"

"Right." Loghain picked up the dagger and held it the way Caleb had been shown a moment ago. Jerath drew his sword and brought it down. Loghain brought the dagger up to meet it, and redirected the sword to the left before immediately moving in and holding his fist to Jerath's neck. If he'd had a knife in both hands, the blade of the other weapon would be pressed against Jerath's throat.

"Oh." Caleb looked down at the other knife. "But what if he had a shield?"

Loghain flipped the dagger in his hand and flung it. It hit a tree blade first and sank in a couple inches. "Then I suggest not letting him get near you in the first place."

"I do know how to use a sword, you know." Caleb shook his head. It took him three tries to pull his dagger free. "My fathers and Aunt Aveline both taught me. And Salla too."
"Leave me out of this." Salla called over from where she was talking to the other mages.

"I've seen Fenris fight." Jerath shrugged. "He's a force of nature. But he also has lyrium tattoos and a lifetime of training. As for your other father, he's a mage. His sword gives him an advantage simply because few expect a mage to be able to wield one even semi-competently, and he combines it with magic."

"So unless you have tattoos or magic you haven't told us about?" Loghain raised an eyebrow. He offered Caleb a crossbow.

"Or maybe I'll just use a crossbow." Caleb sighed, and took it from him.

"That would likely be best." Jerath nodded.


"Heading up the Imperial Highway is the smart thing to do." Salla folded her arms and looked the group over. They'd ditched their fancier clothing, though they'd kept the nicer armor and weapons. There'd been enough war lately those weren't going to stand out much. "None of us are experienced enough woodsmen to try cutting through unfamiliar forests."

"The Imperial Highway has regular guard patrols." Caleb shook his head.

"Yes, but I doubt they are specifically looking for us. Our parents aren't going to be hanging out banners saying we are lost. They only want their people hunting us." Agatha shrugged. "Trying to cut across country might actually draw more attention than just walking down the highway as if we had a perfect right to be there."

"She has a point." Duncan adjusted his cloak. "Never underestimate the power of a good bluff. The only better option would be to actually dress as Nevarran soldiers."

Trian held up the map. "We should make it to the next town by mid-afternoon."

"Where Kels is going to try to tell everyone where we are." Duncan glanced at him. "Any way we could convince you not to do that?"

"None whatsoever." Kels shook his head. "You kidnapped me."

"We could tie him up, claim we are bounty hunters and he is a prisoner we are transporting?" Salla raised an eyebrow.

"Has that ever worked?" Leandra turned to Gavren.

Gavren frowned thoughtfully before nodding. "Once."

"Really?" Caleb asked.

"Yes." Gavren shrugged. "Sera was being such an obnoxious prisoner all the guard wanted was for us to get out of there before they got stuck with her. I'm not sure Kels could pull it off even if he was cooperating."

"What if we gag him and claim he's a rogue mage?" Caleb tapped his chin thoughtfully.

"It leaves him vulnerable if we get attacked by bandits again." Jerath immediately shook his head.

"Well, we won't do it until just outside town. But it's unlikely we'll be attacked again." Duncan
'When you said it was unlikely we would be attacked again, did you remember to calculate the Hawkes and Amells?' Trian glanced over his shoulder.

Duncan loosed another arrow at the demon. 'No. No, I did not.'

Lenore watched Cathiel pace back and forth, holding one of the twins to her shoulder. Nesiara held the other. 'No.' Cathiel shook her head. 'I refuse to believe one of my children could be that stupid.'

'From the sound of things, you and Alistair were both assassinated at some point, possibly by the entity responsible for this.' Lenore looked into the next room, where Nesiara's daughter was tending to Wynne. Divine Victoria hadn't said if the other children had survived the attack. 'The drive to avenge loved ones can be a powerful force.'

'Hard to imagine where he gets that from, no?' Zevran raised an eyebrow.

Cathiel let out a bitter laugh.

'And our son followed his liege.' Ser Gilmore shook his head, and put a hand on his wife's shoulder. 'I'm not sure if I'm proud or furious.'

'Both.' Nesiara looked up at Lenore. 'Kieran was there? His son?'

'Kind of hard to imagine, but yes.'

'Then they will be fine.' Nesiara shifted the weight of the sleeping child in her arms. 'Mythal is the mother and protector. And Jerath...' She smiled. 'Well, you know him.'

She really wished she could share the other woman's certainty. And yet, at some point in the next few years, Alistair and Cathiel had been assassinated and Jerath had not prevented it. The attack had occurred in the first place. As much as she knew he'd want to help, she had to acknowledge the possibility that he couldn't. 'There are other forces at play here, and Kieran was weakened by what happened. The fact that they've yet to weigh in...'

Silence filled the room. Cathiel was the first to speak. 'I can't leave Denerim. Will you...'

'You do not have to ask.' Zevran held up a hand.

Lenore nodded. 'Even if Agatha wasn't out there with them. Brosca is staying in Kal'Hirol to keep an eye on our network. I brought a couple agents with me to help keep an eye here, and Zevran and I will head out in the morning to help find them.'

'And beat them about the head until they come to their senses.' Zevran shrugged. 'That part may take some time.'

Kels stared ahead at the lights of the town. He was sore, tired, hungry, and filthy. How the hell many groups of bandits were there in Nevarra? The Commander would probably kill him, but...

'Lady Salla?'
"Yes?" The mage was leaning tiredly on her staff.

"If I promise not to try to escape tonight, can I get a drink?"

"Yeah." Loghain nodded. "Same here."
She looked up as Trian walked back to the table that held his erstwhile companions. "I managed to get us a bunk room, for a total of three beds. And before you ask, no, sleeping in the barn is apparently not an option. Though I did manage to procure us some additional blankets. No charge."

Groans greeted his pronouncement. "You did note there are eleven of us, right?" Caleb raised an eyebrow. He grumbled. "I really don't want to spend another evening on the ground."

Trian pointed. "If you think you can do better?"

Caleb sighed. "Already tried."

They headed up the stairs. Fortunately, the beds were large enough to accommodate two people each. Salla glanced back at the others and frowned. "Well, I guess we can draw straws." She plucked some bits of straw from a nearby broom. "Short straws get beds." She offered Trian the first pick. He drew a long straw. Gavren, Leandra, Agatha, Duncan, Kels, and Kieran drew short straws. "Gavren and Leandra, I assume you two don't mind sharing?" Leandra's grin answered that question.

Kieran handed her his short straw. She took it, and then raised an eyebrow. "It gets you the bed."

"There is room." He stepped towards the bed and a moment later a black cat was curling into a ball in one corner. She stared a moment, as something about the cat tried to trigger a memory.

"Huh, convenient." Agatha sat on the edge of the bed and gestured for Salla to join her. "And now we don't have to worry about mice."

Salla saw Duncan and Jerath get into a brief argument, and to her surprise saw that it was Jerath who ended up taking the bed next to Kels. Caleb grumbled good-naturedly before grabbing a blanket and trying to make a pallet out of his cloak.

Trian slipped back into the common room just in time to see Loghain come down the stairs. He waved for the blond man to join him at a table. "Tell me, do you think anything about this is a good idea?"

"The breakfast or the mission?" Loghain gestured to the innkeeper.

"Both, I suppose."

"Absolutely not. I'll get back to you on the breakfast."

He sighed. "And yet here we both are."

"And for similar reasons." Loghain stood to collect their plates from the bar, and set Trian's down in front of him. He went back to get them mugs.

The food looked a bit questionable. Caleb might not be useful in a fight, but the guy had managed to make ship food taste good rather than merely edible. "I suppose you've got a point there. Though Duncan being your king probably added another level." He took a bite of what he was
pretty sure was eggs. "What..." He sighed, trying to figure out how to ask the question. "What kind of king am I?"

"Every house in Kal'Hirol was willing to defy Orzammar to crown you. I would think it obvious." Loghain smiled. "Ferelden is the only nation in Thedas where elves, dwarves, and humans manage to work together. Qunari are still something of an issue." He glanced back over his shoulder at the stairs. "Duncan can be a hot-head and stubborn, but he's a good king."

"Where do you fit into the Fereldan hierarchy?" Trian took a drink from his mug. "I mean, considering the family history and all, you two seem friendlier than I would have expected."

"When Alistair was assassinated, some of the bannorn would have preferred my mother to a boy prince. My mother responded to their call by going to Denerim and reswearing her loyalty to the Therin family. Maric's legacy endures."

"A golden age, I suppose." Trian smiled. "Kind of good that the families are getting along again."

"True, even if it did result in me being married off to Princess Wynne."

Trian choked on his drink. "Wait, you're married?" He stared. "To the princess?"

"Given our current situation, I admit to not being entirely certain."

"You're married." Trian looked down at his plate, and then back up at Loghain. "To the princess. And you..." Hadn't he said something about going home with one of the Chargers?

"Wynne and I have an arrangement that suits us. She has what she needs within reach, and is not concerned about my flexibility."

"Duncan didn't mention that to his father. At all."

"Probably for the best." Loghain shook his head. "I'm not really eager to attend my own execution."

Salla woke, and stared uncertainly at the ceiling before remembering where she was. Agatha was snoring softly beside her. She crawled out from under the blanket, careful not to wake her friend. Idly, she reached over and petted the cat that lay on the foot of the bed.

The cat jumped as if startled and promptly fell off the bed, turning into Kieran as he landed in a heap on the floor. In the next bed over Leandra immediately sat upright and knocked Gavren off into the floor. He yelped, waking everyone else in the room. Both Kels and Jerath went for weapons before getting their bearings.

"Well." Kels shook his head. "This is an auspicious start to the day."

Agatha lengthened her stride a little to walk next to Jerath and Duncan. "This has to be weirder for you than the others."

"Why?"

"You're older." She shrugged. "The rest of them were four or so at the Dedication, but Duncan, you were eight and Jerath you were thirteen. You've got to remember all these people, but now
they are sixteen years shifted."

"It is..." Duncan shrugged. "Weird."

"I can hardly imagine." She looked Jerath over. He was definitely the kid she'd met the times she'd visited Denerim, but he didn't quite look as she'd have expected. The freckles had faded at some point, and his hair had darkened from the more orangey color he'd had last time she'd seen him. The softness of youth was gone from his face, leaving a pleasantly rugged countenance behind that the scarring really didn't detract from. "How'd you pick up the scars? Werewolf? Demon? Ex-girlfriend?"

"Carta, disapproving of the alliance between Ferelden and Kal'Hirol and worried it would cut into their margins." Jerath gave her an odd look before frowning.

"What's the matter?" She raised an eyebrow.

"As you said. Weird." He shook his head. "You were there when it happened."

Duncan chimed in. "Three days later you visited him in the infirmary with the gift of a combat training manual helpfully titled 'How Not to Get Stabbed in the Face'."

She laughed. "Did he read it?"

"It consisted of a drawing of a dagger with a line through it and the word 'duck'." Duncan smiled.

"That's me. Helpful." She spread her hands and grinned.

Jerath sighed.

#

Caleb led the pack horse he and Trian had managed to procure. Salla had been stingy with the coin they had, but they'd found supplies enough. He sighed, and rubbed the back of his neck. Several days of sleeping rough had him missing his bed. Funny how he'd grown used to being a nobleman after years of sleeping in the streets. But none of the others were complaining. And Duncan was a king even.

He missed his lute. Leaving the estate as they had done had left them little time to pack. His clothes itched. And Varric was right, everything outside the city was uphill. "How much longer?"

Kels shook his head. "I thought you wanted an adventure."

"I wanted an adventure. This is just walking." He sighed. "And walking. And walking. And walking." He sighed again. "At least the bandits broke up the monotony."

"Why are you complaining?" Kels raised an eyebrow. "You actually wanted to come."

"We could at least have bought horses."

"Horses cost coin."

"You're enjoying my misery."

"You kidnapped me."

"That was forever ago. Get over it."
Gavren shook his head as he listened to the men behind him. The Caleb of the future had taken over as Kirkwall's seneschal after Bran had retired, and the common consensus was the man would be the next Viscount. He searched his memory, but was unable to recall Salla's role in things other than she'd been a healer of some note.

"You're doing the worrying thing again."

He smiled, and put an arm around Leandra's waist. "I believe you've said you enjoy my brooding face."

"Observing, not complaining." She lifted her face to his for a kiss. "You know, we could go ahead with our earlier plans."

"Do you really want to explain to our parents that not only did we elope, we did it sixteen years ago while fighting a primordial horror?"

"Your parents eloped while battling a primordial horror."

A small laugh escaped him. "The Exalted Council is not primordial." He chuckled. "Though I suppose we could find out where Mother Giselle is these days."

"Did you tell your folks that we are...?"

"Father was having a difficult enough time with the mage thing." He sighed. By the time his magic had manifested, his father had been prepared for the possibility. They'd even talked about it over one of their chess games. His father may have been disappointed that neither of his children followed in his military footsteps, but he'd always supported them. When the Grand Enchanter had broached the idea of making him tranquil, it had been his father that stepped in front of him and told her in no uncertain terms, 'you first.'

"I'm sorry. At least Kieran distracted them from asking you about..." She frowned. "Him." He closed his eyes for a few steps. Of course Duncan would bring that up. He still didn't know how Agatha had found out any of it. Leandra hesitated before continuing. "He's who told your mother about the Formless One. Could he...?"

"Yes. Of course he could." Gavren sighed. "Would he be another matter. No. I don't think he's directly responsible for what happened. I also don't think that he'll hesitate a moment to try to turn it to his advantage."

"We could be furthering his plans."

"I'm a piece he put into play. Everything I do likely furthers his plans, regardless of my personal feelings on the matter. But time magic remains beyond him."

"How certain of that are you?"

"If he could change time, he would have an orb."

"Good point."

"I'm sorry." Kieran blinked and turned towards her. Salla sighed. "About this morning. I wasn't
all the way awake, and when we were in Antiva I had a cat that slept on the end of my bed."
"I was not offended, only startled."

She walked in silence for a time. "How do you learn to take other forms?"

"It is skill as well as spell. One must understand the nature of the beast before one can draw its shape upon the will."

"So you have to spend a lot of time observing the animal first?"

"Yes. Which makes some forms difficult to take. Fish do not like to be watched."

"And you learned how to become a cat from watching a pet?"

"I never had a pet cat." He frowned. "Well, Anders, I suppose." He gave her a contemplative look, tilting his head to one side. "I could teach you, if you've a wish to learn?"

"I..." Salla raised an eyebrow. That raised several fascinating possibilities. If she could turn into a bird or even a cat like he did, she could go anywhere. "I may take you up on that. What would I have to do first?"

"Study the animal. Learn to think as it does."

She looked around their small band. "The only animal we have at the moment is a horse."

Kieran wrinkled his nose. "That isn't a horse."

"Um..." She glanced back at it. "That is definitely a horse."

"No. It may have been born such, but its spirit has been shackled for so long it has forgotten. Freed, it would falter before it frolicked, and limp back to the safety of cage and master. One cannot learn the wild from a broken will."

"Oh." She glanced back at the animal plodding along placidly after them, pulling the cart behind it. "I think I see your point. So you could turn into a wolf, but not a dog?"

"Grandpa Loghain gave me a mabari. It is a good form for exploring Ferelden."

"You've explored Ferelden while pretending to be a mabari?" She gave him a disbelieving look.

"Oh, yes. I've looked in on my cousins from time to time. On my last visit, Shianni's daughter Hanna saw me at the gate and was very insistent I return the toys she kept flinging."

"You..." Salla started laughing. "Played fetch with your cousin?"

"She assured me I was a very good dog, and gave me a ball as a present when she had to go inside for dinner." He grinned. "I still have it."

#

Leliana waved the note as Ruya and Alistair entered the room. "They are in Nevarra. Two days ago, they were in Blinth. All of them are fine, and they are traveling along the Imperial Highway to Nevarra city. Brehan is sending word to our agents now."

"Thank the Maker." Alistair let out his breath as though he'd been holding it the last two weeks.
"Kels got word to you?"

"Presumably. The note was unsigned." Leliana sighed. "Apparently, Kieran knew where to find the Formless One, though the note does not say how."

Ruya looked up as the Hawke brothers entered, accompanied by Cullen and Brehan. "Does Kieran also know how to kill the Formless One?"

"The note does not say. It does, however, include a message regarding where they left Isabela's ship. Champion, if you'd be so kind as to inform her?"

"She's going to insist on coming with us." Hawke nodded.

"You're heading after them?" Ruya raised an eyebrow.

"Of course. We have a plan and everything. Step one. Locate our children." Hawke counted points on his fingers. "Step two. Rescue our children. Step three. Lock our children in the basement for the rest of their lives."

"The ship that brought us is fast." Alistair rose.

"My griffins are faster." Carver nodded to him. "Cullen and Brehan have already informed me they are coming."

"I'm coming as well." Alistair folded his arms.

"I..." Ruya sighed before shaking her head. "Should remain to assist with the research into the Formless One. And Kailey..." She rose and went to Cullen, wrapping her arm around him. "Bring them home safely."

"I will." He bent his head to kiss her.

#

"There it is, Nevarra City." Caleb spread his hands as they looked down over the view. "Hey, can we visit the Grand Necropolis while we are here?" He winced as Agatha batted him in the back of the head. "What?"

"We aren't staying long. Just need to get supplies and see what information we can get without alerting anyone to our presence." Salla glanced over her shoulder at him.

"At least not without ensuring we get a good head start." Duncan shrugged.

Salla turned towards Kels. "You going to be trouble?"

"As much as possible." He nodded cheerfully, and gestured at the sprawling city below. "There is a safehouse, if you feel like coming to your senses."

"You know, I bet the safehouse has a cache of gold and gear." Caleb drummed his fingers against his leg thoughtfully. "We could resupply."

"First you kidnap me, now you are robbing the Inquisition?" Kels stared at him.

Caleb turned to Gavren. "Mr. Rutherford, may we use any supplies in the safehouse?"

"Well, since you asked nicely."
"You don't even know where the safehouse is." Kels folded his arms.

"Yes we do." Leandra grinned at him. "Four doors down from the White Bear Smithy."

Kels shook his head. "N-no. And you don't have a key to get into the cache."

"Hey..." Salla turned to her companions. "Anyone here know how to pick a lock?"

Caleb raised his hand. He wasn't surprised to see Agatha do the same, considering who her parents were. He chuckled when Duncan also raised his hand. "Seriously? You're the King of Ferelden, son of King Alistair."

"And of Cathiel Cousland." He grinned.

"Agatha, you and Caleb get the location from Leandra and Gavren and go see what you can find. Leandra, Gavren, you two keep an eye on Kels. Loghain, maybe give them a hand. I'm sure the Inquisition's agents know about your mark by now, so try to keep out of sight." She shrugged. "The rest of us will go find supplies, an inn with enough beds, and maybe some hot baths."

#

"You do realize that after your father kills me, he's going to kill you?" Kels glared at Gavren.

"He's not going to kill you."

"He is absolutely going to kill me."

"That's what you said when I launched the bags of flour out of the trebuchet and all he did was put you on stable duty for a month."

"Commander Cullen is going to kill me. And when he's done, King Alistair is going to kill me. And then when he's done, Lieutenant Hawke is going to kill me." Kels sighed. "The Teyrna is going to hire someone to kill me, probably from House Brosca."

"Is he always like this?" Loghain asked Gavren.

"Only when we are causing him trouble, so..." Leandra shrugged. "Yeah, more or less."

"And then I'm going to be eaten by an archdemon."

"From what I know of The Warden, he'll probably just stab you in the face." Loghain gave Kels a commiserative pat on the shoulder.

"You are not helping."

Gavren shook his head, and sniffed the air. "Something up that way smells good."

"We are supposed to be staying out of sight." Loghain folded his arms.

"You're supposed to be staying out of sight. We're supposed to be keeping Kels out of sight." Gavren glanced at Leandra. "I'm going to the food stand and get something to eat. The rest of you want anything?" Leandra nodded, followed by a somewhat more reluctant Loghain and Kels.

"Be careful." Loghain warned.

"I'll be fine." He started around the corner, hit something, bounced off it, and landed on his
backside. A moment later, an armored woman stepped into view and started to offer him a hand up.

"Seeker Pentaghast!" Kels' face immediately lit up.

Leandra buried her face in the palm of her hand as Loghain just stared.
Rainier scratched the back of his head and looked at the young man leaning on the wall next to him. "Nevarra city sprawls across a dozen miles."

"Don't forget there is an entire other city beneath it." Kels nodded.

"There are over a hundred thousand people living here."

"Thousands more pass through daily."

"And..." Rainier raised an eyebrow. "How long were they in the city?"

"Twenty minutes."

Across the room, Cassandra's mouth twitched as she tried to hide a smile. Gavren, Leandra, and Loghain were sitting around a table. Gavren had his face buried in his folded arms, and Leandra was rubbing his shoulder comfortingly. Loghain was staring at Gavren with a dumbfounded expression on his face. Kels had immediately told Cassandra where the others had gone, and the Seekers were out retrieving them.

He shook his head. "And he literally ran into her?"

"Bounced off, hit the dirt." Kels sounded positively gleeful.

"Varric wouldn't write that."

"You don't have to be enjoying this quite so much." Gavren's voice was muffled by his arms.

"Yes. Yes, I do." Kels' smile widened. "You kidnapped me."

"I wish I could say I was even surprised." Rainier stared down at the young man he'd last seen as an infant in arms.

"You want to know the part that is truly terrifying?" Kels raised an eyebrow.

"What's that?"

"He and Leandra Hawke..." Kels emphasized the last name. "Are courting."

"Maferath's balls. Can you imagine if they have a kid?"

Cassandra and Loghain both turned to look at Rainier with horrified expressions before breaking into laughter.

#

Caleb blinked when he saw the men in Seeker armor enter the room. How in the world...? He strode forward to meet them. "Thank the Maker you're here. I sent the message almost an hour ago."

The tallest of the half dozen men stared at him. "The message?"

"They've got a head start, we need to hurry. Come on." He started for the door, hoping to get out
of the building before any of them caught a glimpse of Agatha. The men exchanged a look before following him out of the building. He dashed up the street, heading deeper into the city. As they reached the end of the block he pointed to the east and yelled at two of the men. "You, go that way, try to cut them off. You, follow me."

Agatha smiled as she finished picking the lock. The room was fairly well stocked, though with Caleb leading the Seekers on a wild goose chase she was going to be limited in what she could carry. A small pouch of precious gems went into her belt pouch, and she began filling her various pockets with coindrags. A pair of silverite daggers went into her boots, and then she shut the door behind her.

Rather than risk there being a guard on the door, she went for an upstairs window, caught the edge of the roof, and hoisted herself up before running across and leaping to the next building over. She crossed the block before she risked the ground, and immediately began heading back to find Salla and the others.

"So much for the hot bath idea." Duncan sighed. "How did the Seekers know you'd be at the safehouse?"

"Well, considering Kels and the others aren't where we left them..." Agatha threw up her hands. "I'd say they've got a full report on our actions and intentions. In triplicate."

"Andraste's great flaming ass." Duncan kicked a bucket across the alley.

"Calm down." Salla shook her head. "They haven't dragged us back in chains yet. And they don't know everything, just what Kels overheard."

"Yeah. We'll be fine." Agatha waved a hand dismissively. "It's not like a half dozen of the world's greatest spymasters are after us or anything."

"Where's Caleb?" Jerath frowned at Agatha.

"Taking some Seekers on a tour of the city, last I saw." Agatha sighed. "Hopefully, he can lose them and find us."

"Let's figure out where the Seekers took the others, and maybe see what we can do about rescuing them." Salla started walking.

He circled around to the inn, and picked up a few more Seekers, bringing his current total to fourteen. A woman frowned at him. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Agent Walter Marland." He shook his head at her impatiently as he paced back and forth across the alley. "Kels brother?" He tapped his foot. "I can't believe they got away from you. By now, they are halfway through the Necropolis!" He made a frustrated growling noise before stalking towards the tower.

"Maybe we should..."

Caleb spoke over her. "You and you, get the others. You, run ahead and let the Mortalitasi know
we are coming. And for Andraste's sake, keep your bleeding mouth shut. Last thing we need is for everyone to know someone's planning on taking control of their blasted mummies."

He continued walking at a determined pace, hiding his smile as they followed. It appeared he was going to get his tour of the Grand Necropolis after all.

Kels followed Cassandra and Rainier into the next room. Cassandra glanced over her shoulder at him. "Lieutenant Hawke and his griffins are bringing Commander Cullen and a few others to retrieve the children."

He winced. "How angry is the Commander?"

"I imagine he is furious, though I doubt it is directed at you. It was clear you were not party to these events of your own volition."

"What exactly are we dealing with here?" Rainier asked.

"A cult that appears intent on picking up where the Venatori left off." Cassandra made a disgusted noise. "As if the world does not have trouble enough." She gestured dismissively. "Sometime between now and the next sixteen years they manage to acquire themselves power of some kind, power sufficient to tear a hole in time. We must stop them before they achieve this."

"Alright." Rainier straightened. "Where do we start?"

"House Brosca's agents were watching a few cultists. They recently went on the move. Something is occurring, but we know not what." She looked back at Kels. "Kieran said he knew where the Formless One was?"

"Nessum. He wasn't more specific than that, but it's near the border between Orlais and Tevinter."

"Which fits with our information." Cassandra nodded.

"How big is this cult?"

"Small, as of yet." Cassandra frowned. "Oddly, it appears to be led by an elven woman. A mage."

"An elf?" Kels raised an eyebrow. "Then could it have something to do with Fen'Harel?"

"Considering he is the one that told us about the Formless One, that is not something we can rule out."

Rainier sighed. "And The Warden sent Kieran to deal with the matter?" He shook his head. "I remember Kieran. He came down to the stables once and as near as I can tell, had a conversation with one of those big deer."

"Tell me about Kieran." Cassandra turned towards Kels.

"He's..." Kels considered. "Well, he's a shapeshifter. Turned into a giant spider and kicked the crap out of some bandits. He's..." He shrugged. "He seems like a nice, polite fellow, if a bit odd."

He sighed. "And no, it's not lost on me who else that would have described."

Cassandra shoved a piece of parchment at him. "Write down everything you recall him saying. We do not know what Lenore or Brehan might find of use, and both are on their way. I am going to go question the others."
Gavren stared down at the table. The Lady Seeker had separated the three of them, taking them each to different rooms. He hadn't been waiting long when she entered, and stood across the table from him. "I have some questions to ask you regarding your activities."

He sighed. "Why don't we get this over with, and you just ask the question you came in here to ask?"

Her eyes narrowed. "And what would that be?"

He met her eyes steadily. "The same one I've seen in your eyes every time we've spoken for the past twelve years."

They stared at each other as the silence crept around the room. "Very well. According to Divine Victoria, Prince Duncan referred to you as the Dread Wolf's apprentice." She folded her arms and glared, her voice sharp. "What did he mean by this?"

"He meant I am the Dread Wolf's apprentice." He leaned back in the chair, his eyes not leaving hers. "I am also the son of Ruya Trevelyan and Cullen Rutherford, and I grew weary of having my loyalty questioned a very long time ago."

She leaned on the table. "Then I suggest you clarify, immediately."

"Or what? You'll stab some inanimate objects?" He shook his head. "'Blessed are the righteous, the lights in the shadow.' Do you think I have any fear of the woman who taught me what that means? Ask your questions, Aunt Cassie. But don't try to threaten me. I know us both far too well for that to work."

Cassandra's eyes widened. "I..." She shook her head, and nodded. "Yes. I see your point. Please, what did Duncan mean when he called you the Dread Wolf's apprentice?"

"My magic manifested when I was seven. I called up fire. Two weeks later, the nightmares started. A week after that they started happening while I was awake. I hurled fire at things only I could see, and..." Gavren shook his head.

There was a scrapping sound as she pulled out a chair to sit across from him. "You tore the veil."

"More like shredded. Had it occurred anywhere other than Skyhold, with Inquisition soldiers and templars..." He folded his hands and set them on the table. "When the Grand Enchanter learned what was happening, she tried to insist I be made tranquil. That was the last time she and Mother ever spoke to each other. Father and Aunt Minaeve kept me sedated, but the magic was driving me insane. It was killing me." He met her eyes again. "There was one being in Thedas who could help. He did."

"Fen'Harel."

"Solas pulled Mother into the Fade. Told her what was happening was because she bore the anchor while she was bearing me. And that he was sorry."

"What happened?"

"She woke to find my bedroom empty."

"He took you." Sympathy warred with concern on her face.
"To Elven ruins, in mountains we've yet to locate in the waking world. I believe you visited the location once."

She nodded. "His sanctuary."

"And he taught me to control my magic. To guide the flow rather than be swept away by it. To staunch it before it drowned me." Gavren took a deep breath. "Three months later, I woke in Skyhold once more. The official story is that I was taken to a secure location until my 'ailment' passed."

Silence entered the room once more. He watched Cassandra try to decide what to make of the story. Over a decade had passed in his time, and she was no closer. And then she asked the same question she always did when they encountered each other. "Is there anything you learned of his plans? Anything that could help us?"

"No."

"Was that the last time you saw him?"

He considered not answering. Considered lying. "No. From time to time I would enter the Fade and find him there, waiting with another lesson, building upon what he had first taught me as I grew stronger." There was more than a trace of bitterness in his smile. "I've thought a thousand times about turning away when he appears. But there is always the chance he'll let something slip. Teach me something I can use against him. Perhaps he has, and I simply don't know it yet. Or perhaps he's using me to further his own ends."

She nodded. "And how did Duncan learn of this situation?"

"The Sparrow learned to fly from Nightingale, Raven, and Crow."

Realization dawned in Cassandra's eyes. "Agatha Amell." She shook her head. "Where are the others?"

"Thedas."

#

"Do you have any idea the kind of abomination we are dealing with here?" Caleb gestured dramatically. "Maker's breath man, have you left this building in past seven years? Heard of the Imperium?"

The mortalitasi might have been more likely to question him if he hadn't entered the sanctum accompanied by two dozen grim-faced and battle-ready Seekers of Truth. If memory served, that was currently the majority of the order. The man came out from behind the desk and began unlocking the massive iron door. Hopefully, by now Agatha would have made it back to the others and they'd have a good head start. Might as well see how much time he could buy them. The mortalitasi opened the door.

Caleb stepped past the threshold, then turned back to the mortalitasi. "Well?"

"Well?"

He gestured into the catacombs. "We are talking the Exalted Age. Do you want them to get there first?"
"No, no of course not." The man grabbed a staff and some kind of glowing light and started leading them inside.

And now he had a tour guide. This day was starting to look up.

#

Cassandra glared across the table. Leandra glared right back. "Seeker, my mother studied magic with Mythal, my father went into battle at the side of an archdemon, and I'm sleeping with the apprentice of the Dread Wolf. You think you scare me?"

#

The stories were right. The Grand Necropolis was an underground city. A city filled entirely with the dead. He followed the mortalitasi's glowing lantern. Now and then they passed alcoves with bodies seated on them. Sometimes the heads of the corpses would turn to follow them. The Seekers following him occasionally jumped at scraping noises. He adjusted the collar of his tunic to block the scent of moldy incense and decay.

He'd lost track of time when the mortalitasi finally came to a stop. "We have reached the tombs of the Exalted age, my lord." The aged man frowned, and adjusted his light to touch the ground. The dust was thick. "No one has been down here from some time."

"Good. We got here first." He glanced around. The architecture was different from the earlier catacombs. The mosaics depicted battles against darkspawn. If the Qunari hadn't invaded Par Vollen until the Steel Age, how had there been ogres during the Exalted age? Maybe the mosaics had been added later. "This was built just after the time of the Fourth Blight, yes?"

"My lord..." The Seeker woman with the silver knot on her shoulder stepped forward. "Who gave you your information?"

Caleb grinned.

#

Cassandra stabbed a dagger into the table. "You will tell me what I need to know."

Loghain shrugged. "You have very lovely breasts."

#

Kels watched Cassandra pace back and forth in front of over twenty very shame-faced Seekers and one completely unrepentant Caleb. At least when the Commander showed up, he wouldn't be on latrine duty alone. Outside the window, the shadows had lengthened into full darkness. "You followed him through the city and the Necropolis for six hours?"

"We..." A woman with a silver knot on her shoulder started to speak, and then shook her head. "We have no excuse, Lady Seeker."

"No. You do not." She folded her arms, and then went back to pacing. "I must go to the Mortalitasi and make apologies." She drove her finger into the woman's breastplate. "You will stay here and make sure nothing else goes wrong." She started for the door. Rainier hesitated before following her.

Caleb looked around and his captors. "Well, that was fun. No hard feelings?" From the glares,
there were a lot of hard feelings. "So, who is hungry?" He clapped his hands. "I make a mean fish and egg pie."

#

Agatha climbed back down from the roof. Salla raised an eyebrow. "Well?"

"It's grown quiet in there. It’s possible we could sneak in." Agatha frowned. "I'm not exactly willing to fight Seekers though."

"No." Salla sighed. "They may be hindering us, but they are friends." She turned to Kieran. "Maybe you could shapeshift into something and get in there?"

"I don't think that's going to be necessary." Duncan called back softly from where he was peering around the corner. He stepped out into the open and waved.

Caleb, Gavren, Leandra, and Loghain entered the alley a moment later. Loghain had an unconscious Kels slung over his shoulder. Caleb nodded when he saw her. "We've got to get moving. Cassandra could be back any minute."

"Right." Salla gestured to the west. "We've got horses. Come on." She frowned at Loghain. "How'd you get the black eye?"

#

"You mean to tell me that after he led them on a wild goose chase through the Grand Necropolis, they let him cook them dinner?" Brehan rubbed the back of his head as he stared at Cassandra.

"I cannot believe this." Alistair glared into the room that contained some of what were supposed to be the finest warriors in Thedas. Those that had regained consciousness appeared to be nursing headaches. Hawke was tending to them, though he appeared somewhat less than sympathetic to their suffering.

"They are your children!" Cassandra's face was belligerent as she came to the defense of her followers.

Carver turned towards Fenris. "You know, in times like these, I can't help but think..."

"This is all Varric's fault?" Fenris raised an eyebrow.

"Exactly."

Sera cackled. "I am recruiting the shit out of that kid."

Isabela immediately shook her head. "I saw him first."

Cullen sighed, and then looked around the room again. "Where is Kels?"
Chapter 12

"I can't believe you kidnapped me again."

"No, this time we rescued you."

"How do you figure that?"

"You really want to explain to Commander Cullen that we ran off on your watch twice?"

Kels hung his head. "I hate you all, so very much." He frowned. "And which one of you assholes put ribbons in my beard?" He narrowed his eyes when Agatha smiled before going to help Caleb tend to dinner.

"Okay. Talk." Salla gestured to Kels.

"Talk?" He started untying the decorations.

"You reported to Cassandra. Share."

Kels shook his head. "I don't think you get how this works. You. Kidnapped. Me."

"Rescued!" Caleb called from where he was stirring something over the fire.

"How much did you tell them?" Agatha asked. "Do they know where we are going? What we plan to do?"

"You don't even know what you plan to do." Kels glared at her. He spread his hands. "Why are you even doing this?"

"Father instructed me to handle this situation." Kieran tilted his head. "I do not believe he would consider the current status of the situation to be handled."

"A plan would be useful." Jerath rested his hands on the hilt of his sword. "Did Cassandra give you any information on our target?"

"No."

"He's lying." Agatha shook her head. "Badly. So, what did she say?"

"I have absolutely no interest in cooperating with your scheme." He folded his arms.

Salla mirrored his stance. "The way I see it, you have two options here. Tell us everything we want to know. Or..." She gestured at Caleb. "Antivan poetry."

#

Lenore sat down on the edge of Cassandra's desk. "What more have we learned?"

Cassandra folded her arms. "I was able to get an explanation from Gavren regarding the Dread Wolf. It was..."

"Disturbing." Cullen shook his head. "To say the least."

"And Kels was able to provide us with his observations."
"Where is Kels?" Sigrun raised an eyebrow.

"They appear to have taken him with them when they left." Cullen frowned. "I am not certain why."

"Isabela has gone to retrieve her ship, and the others are out with my Seekers searching the town in the unlikely event they are still here."

"You didn't learn anything else?" Sigrun asked.

"I learned..." Cassandra waved a hand. "I learned we should keep in mind exactly who we are dealing with here."

"And what is that?" Lenore turned to face her.

"Your children." Cassandra made a frustrated noise. "I attempted to interrogate all of them. It was less than successful. I tried first with Gavren, and he called my bluff, pointing out they know us very well. I tried again with Leandra, and she called my bluff by pointing out they have no reason to fear us." She shook her head. "I tried a third time with Loghain, and that little..." She glared. "Propositioned me."

From the door came Brehan's voice. "He did what?"

"Wow. That apple fell far from the tree." Lenore shook her head.

"Not really." Sigrun grinned. Her grin only widened when they turned to stare at her. "What? You think I made the trips to Orlais for the frilly cakes?"

"Just..." Cullen shook his head at her. "Stop talking." He turned to Brehan. "Did you find them?"

"Individuals matching the descriptions of Trian, Duncan, and Jerath purchased a dozen horses, and individuals matching the descriptions of Salla and Kieran made additional purchases of gear. And someone robbed an Inquisition safehouse of gold and lyrium vials."

"We'll start for Nessum in the morning." Lenore hopped off the desk. "Dorian is having a couple of his people meet us there." She frowned. "He added that he is very sorry and will make it up to us somehow."

"He said what?" Cassandra raised an eyebrow.

"No. No, no, no." Brehan shook his head and turned to Cullen. "I quit."

#

Duncan accepted the bowl Caleb handed him, and glanced over at where Kels was laying on the ground with a blanket over his head. "He held out longer than I thought he would."

"Yeah. I was worried I was going to have to break out the limericks." Caleb took a seat, and stirred his stew. "With the griffins, they'll beat us to Nessum, assuming they don't spot us from the air on the way in. Keeping off the road is only going to help us so much."

"An elf mage. An escaped slave from Tevinter." Leandra leaned against a tree trunk. "Not a lot to go on."

"So, this mage one of Fen'Harel's pets?" Duncan raised an eyebrow at Gavren.
Gavren narrowed his eyes, but Kieran responded before he could. "The Dread Wolf is no ally of the Forbidden Ones. He was still Mythal's champion when she led the charge to banish them."

"What makes you so sure?" Duncan narrowed his eyes.

"I was there." Kieran shrugged. "And Solas assisted the Inquisitor in killing Imshael in Emprise du Lion. Revenge is a virulent desire. Wrath is not made weaker by being righteous or wrong."

He tilted his head and half closed his eyes, and nodded. "This world trembled at the footsteps of your parents. Will is written in blood. The Formless One does not fight. It corrupts, hiding in the shadows of subverted destiny. You were to be its weapons."

He felt a chill creep down its spine. "It took us to turn us against the world?"

"King Maric failed. King Alistair refused. The great dragons wake only for their own, and heed the blood of Calenhad." He nodded to Duncan. "And it is not just the dragon in your veins, firstborn. You were made before my father cleansed the taint from yours."

"That..." Agatha drew her knees up to her. "You are starting to creep me out just a little."

"He's creeping you out?" Duncan shook his head at her. His father had told him only a little of what had happened in Antiva, swearing to tell him the rest when he was old enough. He'd been killed before he could do so. Had... Had that been why the Formless One's cultists had him assassinated? He turned to where Leandra and Gavren sat. "And I take it Gavren was targeted for similar reasons?"

"Yes."

"It's not going to stop targeting us, is it?" Duncan turned back to Kieran.

"No."

"How much danger are we putting the rest of you in?" Gavren asked.

"Oh no. Get that thought right out of your head." Leandra immediately hooked her arm around his neck and pulled him towards her. "I will use you as a saddle the rest of the trip before I let you ride off on your own."

"Yeah, I think you're going to find the rest of us in agreement there." Agatha nodded.

The others echoed her. He didn't have to look over his shoulder at Jerath. If he pushed, Gavren wouldn't be the only one doing time as a saddle. He looked back at Kieran. "How did you know about my father and Yavana?"

"I read the graphic novel."

He blinked. "What?"

Kieran gave him an equally confused look. "What?"

#

Trian sat quietly by the fire, considering what he'd overheard. No one had mentioned the letter. Or they had merely assumed Kels had been the one to send it. He wondered if what Kieran had told them warranted another letter. Alistair clearly knew of the dragons, but would he know of their significance to the Formless One? Stone, they were traveling towards a land where blood
magic was all but practiced openly.

"Well, you've got your serious face on." Loghain sat down next to him.

"The more information we uncover the more clear it is we have no idea what we are doing." Trian frowned. "I do not like going into a situation blind. And we are hunted by both enemy and ally."

"The additional challenge makes the game more fun."

He shook his head at the blond man. "Nothing about this is a game."

"Isn't it?" Loghain smiled and spread his hands. "And we the pawns of gods."

The campfire flickered, giving the illusion of movement to the dragon mark on the other man's face. The same mark worn by those who had followed The Warden into battle. He glanced at where Leandra sat, talking quietly to Gavren. A mark not worn by the daughter of two of those same followers. Saitada had asked. Even gone to Gwaren to ask Caronel and Valya in person. None would answer. "Why the tattoo?"

"If you were meant to know, you would." Loghain shrugged. "Makes me look dashing though, don't you think?"

"You've fought demons before?"

"I'm a member of the Order of Vigilance. It's kind of our job."

"Darkspawn aren't a problem?"

"If you go looking for them. They've been driven back a long way. Not sure what it's like in other nations. I'm not all that privy to Warden intelligence."

It was almost too hard to believe. Even with the lessened threat of the past few years. "Get rid of the spawn just in time for the qunari to invade?"

"We do like to keep things interesting in Ferelden."

#

Leandra leaned into Gavren, and he draped an arm over her, pulling her still closer. "My father will have his riders out."

"At best, he'll be able to bring a dozen griffins. The forests here are thick enough even close to the road, and its a lot of ground to sweep."

"And how has our luck been running so far?"

"Pretty much the usual." He kissed the top of her head. "So, in addition to being the Dread Wolf's apprentice --"

"Don't." She sat up to look him in the eye. "I'm not going to let you act like any of this is your fault." She caught his robes and pulled him to her, kissing him soundly. "I owe that stupid wolf a punch in the snout, and this demon thing needs to get something through its head." She kissed him again. "You are mine, Gavren Dorian Rutherford."

He kissed her back. "I can live with that."
Salla sat cross-legged in front of Kieran, watching the Fade flicker around him. It looked similar to how Feynriel shifted the Fade during her lessons with him, only she and Kieran were both awake. She concentrated, and began duplicating the weave of energy. It felt raw, unfinished, as if it was waiting for something more. "Nothing is happening."

"Nothing will. Until you will it. You cannot will what you have yet to understand."

"Right. I can't shift into an animal unless I know more about it." She chewed her lower lip. "What animal did you start with?"

"A raven. Experiencing the world from the sky changes its shape, revealing treasures and truths the eyes of a human can never fully comprehend. The form is not enough. As a human, your movement is driven by hips and feet. A bird contradicts, moving with shoulder and hand. To be a bird, you must first learn to fly, until the seeming becomes the same."

She frowned, and nodded. "Could you take other forms? I mean, other human forms?"

"Do you find this one displeasing?" He tilted his head at her.

"No. I meant..." She ran a hand through her hair. Nothing about his current form was anything close to displeasing. Distracting, maybe a little, but not displeasing. "It would be nice to make myself beautiful."

"You are beautiful."

She rolled her eyes. "Now you are poking fun."

"I am not." He shook his head. "I assure you, I am an expert on this subject matter."

"What's that..." She blinked. "Oh. Right."

Caleb held the shield in front of him. "Like this?"

"Angle it down." Jerath made a small adjustment, shifting the angle slightly and raising his arm. "Spell hits, nothing will splatter you in the face."

"Oh. You've fought a lot of mages?"

"King Alistair was a templar once. He often oversaw my training." He'd spared with the king almost as often as he had with his own father. And it had been the queen who'd taught him to use a bow, encouraging him and Duncan equally as they sought their targets. "Draw."

The blade made it out of the sheath cleanly, but the other man held it with knuckles that were nearly white. "Loosen your grip."

"But then it might get knocked out of my hand."

"Keep holding it like that your hand will be numb inside a minute, and any blow is going to send reverberations up your arm." He drew his own sword, showing Caleb the grip.

"Aveline always said if someone takes your blade away, people will die."
"She's right. Snug. Not tight.” While he doubted he could turn Caleb into a soldier, he could at least get him to the point that bandits wouldn't point and laugh. Jerath walked him through a drill, and then stood back to observe. Agatha came to stand next to him. She shook her head and smiled. "You manage to teach him to fight, Aveline will give you the keys to the city."

Jerath shook his head. "Only the Viscount can award those."

She gave him a strange look. "So, we know each other in the future?"

"Yes. Officially you are the diplomatic attache from Kal'Hirol."

"The diplomatic attache from the dwarven kingdom of Kal'Hirol to the human kingdom of Ferelden is an elf?" She smirked. "Does anyone actually believe that?"

"I could not say." Her position of spymaster had never really been much of a secret, especially considering her mother was good friends with several other notable spymasters including the Divine herself. "I doubt it."

"I guess I'm just kind of surprised. I mean, trusting elven spies with everything else going on."

"My mother is an elf." She'd been governess for all the Therin children, and though the attack on the palace had left her a widow Nesiara had refused to abandon them.

"You have a sister too, right? What's she up to in the future?"

"She joined the Chantry. She's a mother now. Somewhere in the West Hills, I think."

"So, Trian's apparently married, and Duncan's getting that way. What about you? You've a lady?"

"No."

"Seriously?" She raised an eyebrow. "Nobody."

"There was someone." Anya's face flashed in his mind, just for a moment.

"Oh. I'm sorry. Was she killed when..."

"She married someone else."

"Oh. I..." She sighed. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't pry."

He smiled. "That's never stopped you before."

#

Agatha watched Jerath walk over to talk to Duncan. His smile had been brief, but it had been... Wow. Her heart was actually hammering. Which, considering he was only supposed to be thirteen years old instead of near thirty, was really not a good thing. As if everything wasn't complicated enough.

Well, if she was supposed to be a spymaster, she'd best get started. She headed over to go through the papers Caleb had swiped from the Seeker.

#

"Wait a minute." Caleb narrowed his eyes. "You're married?"
"Everyone always seems so surprised by that." Loghain shrugged.

"You slept with his fiance's brother." Caleb gestured at Duncan.

"Well, yes." Loghain smiled. "Tenth in line for the throne. I thought about working my way through the line, but number nine was clearly off limits and number thirteen was..." He shuddered, and then frowned contemplatively. "Where is Cassandra in the line again?"

"One black eye wasn't enough?" Caleb laughed. "Isn't she a little old for you, anyway?"

"Have you ever seen Cassandra go into battle?" Loghain let out a low whistle. "Some things are just timeless."

Caleb laughed. "So, what does your wife think of your..." He shrugged and went with "extracurricular activities?"

"Well --"

"Loghain!" Duncan's voice rang out.

Loghain winced. "Your majesty?"

"What have I told you?"

"Mentioning your sister and sexual relations in the same conversation will result in me being bodily flung from the nearest sufficiently elevated surface?"

"Change. The. Subject."

"Yes, your majesty." He glanced back at Caleb and shrugged. "So, attended any good jousts lately?"

#

Leliana waited for the sending crystal to glow. "We have trouble."

"When don't we?" Lenore's voice came back over.

"Rumors have begun to spread." She paced back and forth. "It's no longer just us looking for the children."

"Not an unexpected outcome. And I doubt we'll be lucky enough have them run into Cassandra again."

She tried not to smile. "How did Caleb manage to get away from the Seekers?"

"They let him talk. Give Varric a good kick for me next time you see him. He's been a terrible influence." The amusement left Lenore's voice. "Crows?"

"Among others. Our spies in Rivain think word may have reached the Ben-Hassrath."

"Well. Shit. A cult led by an insane mage, assassins, qunari sticking their noses in..."

"Lenore, if you say this is just like old times I will declare an Exalted March on you personally."

"It's not like old times until we end up in the Deep Roads." There was silence for a moment. "We
are going to end up in the Deep Roads now, aren't we?"

"On the Waking Sea I ply my trade.
Wink, good ser, and tell a saucy tale!
The yarns I spin do please the maids.
So buy the lads a round!

Oh, the Storm Coast may yet claim these bones,
But I'll sail until they do.
So tell the girls I'm coming home,
With coin enough for two."

Caleb sang the Ferelden shanty as they rode through the trees. Gavren joined in on the chorus, his own voice pleasantly deep. They let the melody die away. After a while, he shrugged and turned towards Gavren. "So a human, an elf, and a dwarf walk into a bar..."

Loghain's voice came from behind him. "The human says 'you're lucky you're so short. That hurt like mad.'"

"Stop helping." Caleb shot him a glare. "So some Fereldans are in a bar when a chevalier walks in. 'Hey stranger,' one of the Fereldans says. 'Where are you from?' The chevalier sticks his nose in the air and says, 'I come from a place where we do not end our sentences in prepositions'. The Fereldan nods. 'Oh, I'm sorry. Where are you from, asshole?'"

Gavren and Leandra laughed. Leandra shrugged. "A horse walks into a bar. The bartender says, 'hey'. The horse says, 'you read my mind, buddy.'"

"Oh, I hadn't heard that one." Caleb grinned as several of the others laughed.

Duncan shrugged. "A man walks into a bar and says, 'all Tevinters are bastards.' Another man turns and says, 'I object.' The first man sneers at him and says, 'why, are you Tevinter?' And the second man says, 'no, I'm a bastard.'"

"An Orlesian dowager walks into a bar with a duck under her arm." Triant shifted slightly in his saddle. "A Ferelden walks up to her and says, 'where'd you get the pig?' She sniffs haughtily and sneers, 'this is a duck.' He nods to her and says, 'I know, I was talking to the duck.'"

Caleb snickered. "Alright, whose next?"

"The past, present, and future walk into a bar." They turned to look at Kieran. He tilted his head to one side, and nodded. "It was tense."

He nearly fell off his horse. "That was terrible."

"You do realize that if they are looking for us, they merely need to have ears?" Jerath shook his head at them.
"Hey Kieran?" Caleb called back over his shoulder.

"Yes?"

"After you kill the demon that meddled with time, can you go get the one that ate Jerath's sense of humor?"

"I will certainly try."
Cullen followed Brehan to the tavern, along with Alistair, Hawke, Sigrun, and Fenris. They'd left Carver and his riders to tend to the griffins and continue arial sweeps. The presence of the once extinct beasts was causing quite the commotion in the city, and a crowd was already starting to gather. Sera had gone to locate some of her people, and Lenore and Zevran were presumably doing the same. Cassandra and her people were following on the ground.

The tavern was mostly empty. Two people, both wearing robes and carrying staffs, rose when they entered. The first was a woman near his own age, dressed in darker robes. She nodded. The other was a man who couldn't be older than twenty-five or so. The man started towards them, an eager smile on his face. He didn't miss Brehan wince as he started to make introductions. "May I present Magister Arenda..." He indicated the woman. "And Magister Adralicus." He started to gesture at the man.

"Fasta vass." The man's eyes widened. "You're King Alistair. The Alistair!" He strode forward and grabbed Alistair's hand, gripping it tightly in both hands as he shook it. "I've heard so many stories. You fought the archdemon atop Fort Drakon! What did it look like? How big was it? What kind of fire did it breathe?"

Cullen blinked and glanced at Brehan, who gave a slightly panicked shake of his head. Alistair was starting to look as if he wanted to chew his own arm off as the magister continued throwing questions at him without waiting for answers. Adralicus practically dragged the king towards a table, waving at the bartender. Alistair sent a pleading glance over his shoulder at Brehan, who ignored his predicament to continue introductions. "Magister Arenda, these are Commander Cullen, Senior Warden Sigrun, Hawke, and Fenris."

She bowed. "Your reputations precede you. Magister Pavus indicated that we have an overlap of concern." She gestured for them to join her.

He walked forward, and didn't miss the wary, almost hostile look with which Fenris was watching her. Despite his respect for Dorian, he wasn't sure how he felt about working with magisters himself. "You are Lucerni?"

"We are." She took a breath. "And to get everything out in the open, you should know that both my father and brother were Venatori. My brother's name was Macrinus. I believe your wife killed him at Griffin Wing Keep."

His head turned towards Brehan. The spymaster nodded. "Arenda was passing information to the Inquisition before Corypheus showed himself at Haven, and she was one of the first to throw her house behind Dorian."

"I see." He'd trust Brehan's judgment on the matter.

Magister Arenda set a satchel on the table, and offered some parchment to Brehan. "You requested information about a particular cult and its leadership." She folded her hands. "The cult is led by an elven woman named Siofra."

"A slave?" Fenris asked, his eyes narrowing.

"Yes. One born in Ferelden, in the alienage of Denerim before being taken during the events of the Fifth Blight. She was purchased by Magister Giladius, yet another fool who joined the Venatori."
When her magic manifested, he apparently used her as a research assistant and possibly as one of his test subjects.

"Giladius?" Fenris spat the name.

"Someone you know?" Hawke turned towards him.

"A colleague of Danarius."

"Colleague and student." Arenda nodded to Fenris. "He attempted to duplicate..." She sighed. "Well, you. And he did so successfully." She flicked her eyes towards Hawke. "Including the part where his lyrium warrior acquired a mage lover and they teamed up to kill him."

Hawke and Fenris exchanged a look. "You know, that really shouldn't be funny," Hawke said. Fenris smiled in response.

Sigrun snickered. "That would be this Siofra?"

"It would. They fled together along with some of Giladius's other slaves, leaving quite the trail of corpses behind them. They surfaced again two years ago, and began amassing followers."

"Elves?" Cullen asked.

"They appear to be rather indiscriminate, recruiting and slaughtering both humans and elves, even some qunari. And we have yet to discover their motivation or intent, save for one thing." She offered another parchment to Brehan. "They defile every shrine they come across. Andraste, Old God, Elven, it seems to matter little to them."

Alistair joined them, having managed to extract himself. Adralicus seemed to notice Fenris for the first time, and actually reached out a hand to touch his markings. Markings which immediately started to glow as Fenris glared. Adralicus jerked his hand back, his expression that of a wounded puppy.

"Your assistance is appreciated, Magister Arenda." Cullen spoke up before blood could be shed.

"She seemed pretty okay with the fact the Inquisitor killed her brother." Sigrun shrugged.

"Okay?" Brehan smiled. "She sent a fruit basket." He looked down at the parchments and began spreading them across the table. "Parts of Nessum were built when the Imperium was at its height. What is now the harbor watchtower used to be part of a temple of Toth, and the local necropolis was once a temple of..." He sighed.

Cullen shook his head. "Urthemiel?"

"Fenedhis." Brehan ran a hand through his hair. "Trap, or coincidence?"

"Good questions." Cullen nodded. "I expect you to find the answers." He frowned. He had seen both Hawke and Fenris take the field. And he'd seen them take the field together. The thought of his son going up against such a pair made his stomach twist with fear even before considering there was a demon involved.

Alistair reached over and whacked Brehan in the back of the head. Brehan winced and gave Alistair an indignant look. Alistair glared. "He actually asked me if I knew what had become of
"And if you tell him, you won't have to wait five years to be assassinated." Brehan rubbed the back of his head. "Arenda's information has always been reliable."

"Don't worry, Cullen. If the kids are still on their way here, Carver will find them." Hawke nodded. "His future son-in-law might get brought back in a sack, but he'll find them."

"That's... wait..." Cullen's eyes widened. "What?"

Hawke blinked. "Um..." He raised an eyebrow. "Gavren didn't tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"Well, on that note, I think I'll be turning in. Goodnight, everyone." Hawke rose.

"Hawke." Cullen lowered his head. "Tell me what?"

Agatha climbed down from the trees. "Two griffins, heading in to one of the towers."

"You had to tell them where we were headed, didn't you?" Duncan shook his head at Kels.

"Do I really have to keep reminding you that you kidnapped me?"

Salla sighed. "Nessum is only half the size of Nevarra City, and this time they are going to be actively looking for us."

"Nessum is older than Nevarra City." Kieran tilted his head to one side, half-closing his eyes. "Unstable foundations, and the city built upon itself, again and again. Sepulchral tunnels lie beneath the city beyond those used by the necropolis."

"Secret passages, like those under Kirkwall?" Salla raised an eyebrow.

"Yes."

"Wonderful." Loghain shrugged. "I haven't been lost in the Deep Roads for months."

"They connect to the Deep Roads, but are not part of them."

"And you know how to navigate these?" Salla asked Kieran.

"Well..." He tilted his head again. After a moment, he frowned and shook his head. "No."

"Then how do we get around in there?" Duncan asked. Then he turned to look at Trian, as did the others.

Trian gave them a disbelieving look. "What kind of dwarf do you think I am, magic?"

Jerath took the lead in the tunnels, a branch to move spiderwebs out of their way. Agatha kept near him, her eyes watchful for traps. Trian followed a pace behind, occasionally pointing out weakened areas and times they needed to watch their footing.

"How long do you suppose it has been since someone was down here?" Caleb asked.
Duncan pointed with one of his arrows. "Not that long. You can see where the dust hasn't quite filled in all the tracks, and somebody has marked passages." He shrugged. "Smugglers, probably."

"Loghain, you'll tell us if there are any darkspawn, right?"

"Knight. Not Warden."

"Oh. Right. Oh. Kieran, you can control them, right?"

"No."

"But you did it during the Blight."

"I was an Archdemon then. We hear different music now."

"I have absolutely no idea what that means."

"I think it means if he starts singing we should all run like hell." Gavren shrugged.

"What are you, exactly?" Duncan glanced back over his shoulder. "I mean, Dumat was what, the god of silence?"

"It was slightly more complicated than that. His name had more to do with my sister being the goddess of wishful thinking." Kieran shrugged. "And the 'god we all wish would please just shut up already' is rather a mouthful."

Leandra buried her face in Gavren's shoulder as she laughed. Duncan sighed. "And now you're just fucking with me."

"Have you actually heard the 'verses of silence'? They go on forever, the structure is lacking, the syllable pattern is forced, and the rhyming scheme is atrocious."

"And half the metaphors are just absurd." Caleb nodded in agreement. "I keep expecting it to say something like 'and then he stabbed him in the face like a dignified heron munching a frog'."

"No, sadly, that's just ancient Tevinter poetry in general." Kieran sighed.

"And then they all moved to Antiva and formed their own nation."

"No one else would take them."

"I had an actual question at one point." Duncan frowned. "I think. What was Urthemiel the god of? Bitching about bad poetry?"

"Beauty." Kieran shrugged. "So, yes."

"Beauty? Seriously?" Duncan shook his head. "That's kind of ridiculous."

"And yet you still place candles into carved containers to created pleasing shadows on the wall at Wintersend."

"Yeah but that's..." Duncan frowned.

"And great effort is put into making your Chantries the most attractive buildings."

"That's because..."
"And the hymns are lovely, are they not?"

"I..." Duncan sighed. "Well, shit. Okay. You made your point."

"Wait a minute." Gavren glanced over his shoulder at Kieran. "We do the carved candle holder thing because of you?"

Kieran sighed wistfully. "I always liked the snowflake ones best."

#

"I don't see any way to get this door open." Agatha wiped her hands off on Caleb's tunic, and got glared at.

"It's probably some kind of puzzle door." Gavren gestured at some strange sconces on the walls. "Veilfire sconces."

"You're going to have to light the torches in some particular order." Kieran sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Always with the lighting things." He waved a hand dismissively. "The developers have no imagination."

"What?" Duncan turned around to look at him.

Kieran blinked. "What?"

#

Salla's eyes narrowed, and she kicked at the chains on the floor. "Not smugglers."

"Slavers." Kels spat the word.

Trian nodded. "Not unexpected, this close to Tevinter. Probably a waystation."

"Show of hands?" Salla turned to her companions. "Who wants to go kick some faces in?" She looked them over. "And it's unanimous." She nodded. "We need a plan."

#

Duncan fitted an arrow to his bow and started towards the front of the group. Jerath's arm caught his shoulder and pulled him back behind the warriors. He narrowed his eyes, and Jerath met them steadily. He grunted, and then shrugged and moved to the back lines. Salla glanced over her shoulder. "Alright, we don't know what they've got in there, so take it easy with the spells. We don't want to blow anything up by accident."

"Good point." Gavren returned his staff to his back, switching it out for the sword and shield he'd grabbed out of the gear they'd purchased. Duncan gave him a questioning look, and Gavren shrugged. "Need I remind you I also have a former templar for a father?"

"Kieran?" Salla raised her eyebrow at the other mage. "I can handle barriers if you want to do the spider thing."

"Bad news is the door isn't locked." Agatha sighed. "It's stuck."

"No. Not a spider. Please step back. And Salla, I would appreciate a barrier." Kieran waited for them to move before shaking his head. A moment later a giant bear filled most of the tunnel.
"Heh. Bear-ier." Duncan said.

"Oh for..." Loghain shook his head and groaned.

He'd charged at a bear. This was, however, the first time he'd charged with a bear. Kieran had checked none of his forward momentum after breaking down the door, and the slavers were panicking as they fell upon them. Jerath spun, knocking away an archer with his shield before bringing his sword down on a man trying to draw his own.

Instead of crashing into the opposite wall, the bear shifted back into Kieran who ran halfway up it before launching himself off. A glowing sword appeared in his hand as he joined the battle. Duncan and Caleb took up positions on either side of the door they'd come through, Duncan with his bow and Caleb with a crossbow.

Rows of cells lined one of the walls. After the initial surprise, the prisoners inside began to howl and cheer. Duncan elbowed Caleb, and they moved in to start freeing the captives. Kels and Trian moved in to deal with the reinforcements coming down one of the tunnels. Leandra and Gavren fought on either side of Salla as the mage directed targeted bursts of energy. Loghain had moved in to assist Kieran. Agatha fought back to back with Jerath.

One of the slavers managed to get hold of a lever. He pulled it down. There was a rasping noise as a door near the prisoners slid up into the ceiling, followed by a roaring sound. Duncan narrowly managed to yank Caleb out of the way of a gout of fire as a dragon came through the opening.

Jerath shoved Agatha behind him and brought his shield up just in time to block the next blast of fire. He dropped the shield as it became heated and moved forward as the dragon started towards them. He ducked to one side and jumped as he and the beast passed each other, catching hold of its wing joint in his free hand and using the leverage to land atop the creature. It twisted its neck to try to bite at him and he stabbed his sword into its throat. Blood sprayed as it thrashed, and he thrust the blade in a second time before it went still.

He stood up to see everyone staring at him, including the two surviving slavers. "That was..." Caleb shook his head. "Awesome. You killed a dragon!"

One of the slavers started to move, and Trian rather casually brought the pommel of his axe down on the guy's head. "You don't get to be the King's personal bodyguard for nothing."

Kieran tilted his head to one side and gave Jerath a contemplative look. "Ah. No, that makes sense now."

Jerath blinked at him. "What makes sense now?"

"I had wondered why you were the one they named after my father."

He found himself smiling as he wiped his blade clean.

"I think your shield might be a loss." Agatha handed the item back to Jerath. It was warped where the heat of the dragon's breath had hit it. "I owe you one."

He frowned at her. "Why?"
"It was aiming at me. You could have dodged instead of risking getting your arm burned off." She gave him a concerned look. "You are okay, right? You didn't take any damage?" She caught his arm in her hand. It was slightly red, but there were no blisters.

"I'm fine. I appreciate the concern."

Agatha held on to his arm, though she kept her touch gentle. "That was impressive. It was like it didn't even faze you." She smiled up at him. "Was that your first dragon?"

Jerath shook his head. "No. I've encountered them before, and Duncan and I assisted the Order of Vigilance in dealing with a High Dragon near Gwaren."

"A high dragon?" She batted her eyes at him as she leaned in. "Tell me about it?"

#

Leandra leaned on Gavren, and looked over at where Agatha was talking to Jerath. "He does realize she's flirting with him, right?"

Duncan glanced up at where she was looking. Agatha was all but draping herself over his friend. "No. I can say with utter certainty that he does not."

Gavren looked down at him. "You've got to be kidding me." He shook his head. "Short of actively ripping off his clothes, I'm not sure she could make her intentions any more clear."

"And it's Agatha." Leandra shook her head. "Her breasts practically qualify as deadly weapons."

"Good point." Gavren swallowed as Leandra turned her head back to look at him. "Though they aren't as lovely as yours," he said quickly.

"I love it when you lie to me." She kissed him.

"Would you two get a room?" Duncan shook his head. He glanced back over at Agatha. It probably didn't help that the future version of Agatha had been a long-time comrade in arms that was often prone to treating Jerath like a little brother. What was happening at the moment was actually a bit disturbing. "Let's see what else we can find."

#

"Okay, I get the spiders. If they aren't hungry, they just ignore you." Salla glanced up at Kieran. "But how did you manage to study a great bear long enough to be able to turn into one?"

"Carefully." Kieran twitched a shoulder. "And from above, while in the form of a bird." He handed her a roll of bandages, and she carefully wrapped the arm of prisoner she'd just healed. "You are a skilled healer."

"I learned from..." She trailed off. "One of the best, in his way."

"Ah."

"Is he..." She stood, gesturing for the prisoner to join the others where Trian and Caleb were partitioning out the gold and supplies they'd taken from the slavers. "Alive?"

"He and Nathaniel are assisting my father in his work."

"Were you? I mean, before you came to help us?"
"Father prefers I stay away from anything having to do with the Blight. I was undertaking a different portion of our task."

"What were you doing?"

"Turning mirrors around."

Salla chewed her lip curiously. "What does that mean, exactly?"

"A path is really only useful if you know where it leads."

"I still don't..." Her eyes widened. "You were switching the eluvians?" She snickered. "Can he change them back?"

"Of course. If he realizes which ones I have altered. Finding and restoring them takes time, however, as does recovering his agents. The Inquisitor requested time. We are doing our best to provide."

She leaned back, and slowly nodded. "It's..." She sighed. "All my life I was taught that the Maker had turned his back on us, and we must earn his forgiveness. And then suddenly there were active gods." She looked up at him. "One of whom just..." She gestured at where the prisoners were heading out of the tunnel. "Answered a lot of prayers."

Kieran shook his head. "You led us down here, Salla. You answered their prayers."

"Now, that is a terrifying thought."

"Yes."

#

Kels followed Gavren, Leandra, and Duncan into the next series of rooms. A quick survey showed there was nothing of any real value to be found. Duncan shrugged, and picked the lock on one of the doors. "The King of Ferelden picks locks. That is still such a bizarre notion."

"My mother taught me on a particularly rainy afternoon when I was five. She regretted it almost immediately." He pulled the door open. "We had some visiting dignitaries and to make a long story short, undergarments ended up on flagpoles."

"When Divine Victoria was still with the Inquisition, some of Josephine's undergarments ended up hanging with the banners." Kels shook his head. "Funny how two of the best spymasters in the world were unable to locate the culprit."

"Certain traditions do live on." Leandra grinned back at him. "Odd how one of the greatest trackers who ever lived can never seem to --" She cut off as an arrow caught her in the shoulder, sending her staggering backwards to land on the ground.

Gavren called her name. Kels went for his sword as Duncan went for his bow. Something flashed in Gavren's eyes as he turned towards where the archers stood. Duncan and Kels both froze halfway through drawing their weapons. Where three archers had stood a moment ago there was only red splatter on the walls and a fine pink mist floating slowly to the ground.

"What the..." Duncan swallowed.

"Sweet Andraste..." Kels said simultaneously.
Gavren turned and knelt next to Leandra. Leandra shook her head, and smiled fiercely. "Told you. I'm not the dangerous one."
Chapter 14

Trian held up some documents. "They've got maps of the area. Now we know where we are going, at least." He glanced at the two bound slavers. "Though they tried to keep their ledger in code."

"So we don't have information?" Salla raised an eyebrow.

"I said they tried." Trian smirked. "Moving everything over one letter does not a cipher make." He narrowed his eyes. "They managed to trap the dragon shortly after moving in here. Apparently, they thought it was good sport to throw prisoners to it as an example to the others."

The slavers immediately began speaking up, claiming they had information in return for being released. Salla felt anger starting to give way to contempt. "Find out what they know, and then we'll leave them for the Seekers to find." She shook her head. "Cowards."

She walked over to check on Leandra. The wound in her shoulder already looked weeks healed, and she was fairly confident she'd prevented a scar. She did a quick check of Leandra's range of motion. "Well?" Leandra raised an eyebrow.

"No whacking people with giant swords for a few hours, and I think you'll be fine." Salla rose. "Let's find a place to camp, preferably where the escapees won't lead our folks right back to us, and go over what we've found."

#

Duncan leaned on the wall and slid down to sit next to Jerath. Jerath turned to stare at him. Duncan shrugged sheepishly. "Yes, I wandered off without you." When Jerath continued staring, he sighed. "And someone got hurt. I know better. And I'm sorry." When the stare continued, he shook his head. "We take chances all the time."

"That was a stupid one."

"I don't go off alone." He rubbed the back of his neck. "Maferath's balls. You do remember which of us gives the orders, right?"

"When it comes to your safety?" Jerath narrowed his eyes. "I do. Leandra could have been killed."

"She's a fighter."

"She's not yet twenty-one, and she is not a soldier." Jerath sighed, and leaned his head against the wall. "I should not have allowed myself to be distracted. I apologize, your majesty."

"Oh for fuck's..." Duncan banged his head into his knees. "Anya was right." He saw the shadow descend over his best friend's face. "Shit, Jerath. I'm sorry. That was unworthy of me." He wrapped his arms around his knees.

"She was right." Jerath's voice was quiet.

He didn't want to think about that possibility. "You killed a dragon today, and you're mad at yourself because you didn't take an arrow." Duncan sighed. "You're crazy, you know that right?"
"After twenty-four years of dealing with you?"

"Hey, that was almost a joke. You take a blow to the head or something?" Duncan grinned, and shook his head. After a moment, he nodded. "I don't say it often enough. Thank you."

Alistair looked up as Carver entered the common room. "Any luck?"

"My riders have yet to spot them." Carver made a growling noise. "Even close to the road, the trees are thick enough to make it difficult to spot them from the air." He waved a hand. "I checked in with Cassandra. Her people think they found a couple of their campsites."

"They are on their way here then." Hawke nodded.

"They've arrived." Both of them turned at the sound of Brehan's voice.

"How do you know?" Alistair raised an eyebrow.

"There are catacombs beneath the city, some of which were home to a slaver operation." Brehan glanced down at the parchment in his hand. "At least until a..." He took a deep breath. "Fire breathing bear broke down the door. Testimony includes magic being tossed around, dwarves, elves, and someone jumping on the back of a dragon."

Carver put a hand over his face. Lenore buried her face in Hawke's shoulder as she started to laugh. Hawke turned his head to look at Fenris. "Our babies are all grown up and taking down slavers."

"This is one of the proudest days of my life." Fenris smiled.

"Who jumped on the dragon?" Lenore managed to get out.

"Witnesses say it was a red haired guy."

"Oh for..." Alistair shook his head. "Nesiara just had to pick that name, didn't she?"

"At least he's living up to it." Sigrun smiled.

"I've got people sweeping the area right now. We're not far behind." Brehan nodded. "I'm heading back out."

"We're coming to," Cullen said.

"What do you suppose this building used to be?" Caleb looked around, walking backwards for a moment.

"A temple," Kieran replied. He ran his fingers over some of the faded engravings on the wall.

"Really?" Caleb looked over at him. "One of the..." He stopped, and looked around again. "Are we standing in a temple to you?"

Kieran tilted his head to the side, his eyes half closed. "Water ran down the wall, flowing through bells and moving the pieces, a perpetual symphony, winding down through pools, reflecting and refracting light through colored windows. Light, color, sound, blending in harmony, dancing as
the wind changed."

"It sounds beautiful." Salla looked around, imagining it.

"It was." He frowned, and wrinkled his nose. "There is a discordance to the echoes."

"What does that mean?" Kels glanced back at him from where he had explored a few feet further ahead.

"We are not alone in here."

Caleb snapped his fingers. "Oh. That's how you knew they were here. They holed up in your temple."

"They sought something inside."

"What?" Salla asked.

"I..." Kieran frowned. He shook his head, and then shook it again. His voice sounded surprised. "I do not know. A staff?" He tilted his head again. "I have no memory of this."

"Wait." Gavren walked back towards him. "If its your temple, shouldn't you know?"

"Yes."

"You were asleep a really long time though." Agatha said.

"My sleep was not dreamless. I explored the reflections of the Fade, seeking, learning. I could hear but not answer, feel but not touch, not until awakened and..." Kieran frowned. "We do not like to think of how we awakened." He shook his head. "This was my temple. Its memories should not be denied to me."

"Then how did come you can't remember?"

Kieran broke into a wide smile. "I have absolutely no idea whatsoever."

Duncan blinked. "And you're happy about that?"

"Well, yes." Kieran spread his hands. "Do you know how rare it is for me to find a mystery in this world?"

#

Magister Arenda joined them in heading into the catacombs. Following the trail the children had left was not particularly difficult. Pieces of a broken door hung off the remains of the hinges. "Subtlety is not their strong point, is it?" Hawke looked around.

"Says the apostate who fireballed an Arishok in front of the entire noble court of Kirkwall."

"The templar that failed to notice I was a mage up until that point should really not be making smart remarks."

Cullen shook his head as he entered the chamber. He frowned. Two of the cells appeared to be occupied by bound, gagged, naked men with the word 'slaver' written on their foreheads.

"They left us souvenirs," Fenris noted.
"How thoughtful." Hawke smiled.

"Who..." Magister Arenda turned a slow circle. "Who exactly are we tracking here? I have never sensed residual magic anything like this before."

He was about to say something when he heard an exclamation from Brehan. He strode in that direction. A section of hallway was coated in mostly congealed blood. Tiny bits of bone, skin, and hair were speckled through the mess. He wrinkled his nose. "Sigrun?" Brehan called over his shoulder.

The Warden shook her head. "I don't sense any Blight, if that's what you are concerned about."

"Didn't think so." Brehan shook his head. "And it doesn't look like demonic corruption either. I've not seen anything quite like this before."

"Kieran dealing with a threat?"

"Your guess is as good as mine." Brehan shrugged. "Hawke?"

"It was definitely magic." Hawke frowned. "The closest..." He shook his head.

"Hawke?" Cullen raised an eyebrow.

"Well, frankly, the closest I've sensed to anything like these residual traces is from when I was at Adamant."

"You're saying this magic is similar to the magic used by Solas?" Cullen felt a slight chill along his spine. Whatever Kieran was, he was not the mage that had been trained by the Dread Wolf. Had his son done this?

Hawke met his eyes, and there was concern on the other man's face. "Yes."

"Let's..." Cullen shook his head. "Let's find them."

"I've got something." Fenris held up a piece of parchment. "A helpful someone left us a note."

#

Salla saw Kieran's eyes narrow at the sight of the shattered altar. From the looks of things, it had been broken recently. He knelt, and touched some of the fragments. She knelt beside him. "Are you alright?"

"This was done in anger." He half-closed his eyes, tilting his head to one side. "Focused rage, and mocking pride. And beneath all that, envy and desire." His eyes snapped open. "Hate."

"Is it hurting you?" She put a hand on his shoulder.

"No. I am human as well." He rose. "That part of me understands. They want more than can be given."

"What do they want?"

He shook his head. "Their prayers to have been answered."

She frowned, and glanced at where Duncan was helping search another part of the temple. "King Alistair prayed to your father, and he answered."
"King Alistair asked a friend for help. It is not the same thing." Kieran shook his head. "And I do not yet appear to have fixed anything." He tilted his head. "They are that way." He pointed down one of the corridors.

#

Agatha peered down from the balcony. There were over a hundred people gathered below, at least half of which looked like they could pose a decent threat. And a dozen of those were mages. Slowly, she crept back to the others and reported what she had seen. "There were elves among them, but none carrying staffs."

"And the demon?" Salla glanced over her shoulder at Kieran.

"There are abominations among those below..." He shook his head. "I do not think they are the ones we seek."

"So, what's the plan?" Loghain raised an eyebrow. "Head down, introduce ourselves, politely ask them to tell us their entire plan and then take us to their leader?"

"That never works." Leandra shrugged.

"We need some kind of plan. They have the advantage of this being their turf and we are outnumbered."

"No." Kieran shook his head.

"What do you mean no?" Salla glanced back at him.

"They may have numbers." He narrowed his eyes, and set the end of his staff on the ground before nodding. "But this is my temple."

#

"Excuse me?"

Several of the cultists stood as Caleb walked towards them. They gave him questioning looks, and some of them glanced at one of the people with a staff as if wondering what they should do. "Where did you come from?" One asked.

"Kirkwall." He shrugged. "Do you mind telling me your entire plan and then taking me to your leader?"

Weapons were drawn and the cultists began moving towards him. "Just kill him." The older man with the staff said, waving a hand dismissively.

Caleb called back over his shoulder. "It didn't work."

"Told you." Leandra yelled back.

Beneath his feet the ground shook. The patterns inlaid in the floor suddenly began to glow, criss-crossing the room and connecting back and forth between the ancient statues that stood quietly in alcoves. Shimmering motes of magic danced in the air as water began to spurt once more from long dormant fountains. Green light blazed into life in all the sconces. There was the groaning sound of twisted metal, and the statues began to move. Two stepped into protective positions on either side of him.
Salla focused her magic into directed fire, providing her more martial companions with cover as they surged forward. The statues were too badly degraded by time for their magic to last long, but the advantage they'd provided was considerable. Nearly a quarter of the cultists simply broke and ran when the temple came to life around them. She really couldn't blame them. After over a thousand years, an old god was taking the field once more. If he hadn't been on their side, she'd probably need a change of clothes right now.

A faint glow surrounded Kieran as he focused on his own magic. A similar glow surrounded each of the warriors going into battle. She could feel the spell on her own skin, lifting and enhancing her own magic, making her stronger and faster than ever before. The spells came almost effortlessly. Two enemy mages started to try to focus their own spells only for a surge of energy from Jerath to cancel the spells before they had fully formed. She wasn't sure who was more surprised by that, him or the mages.

Three of the remaining mages and four warriors joined the group fleeing. Salla started to gesture for her companions to follow when the statues started to crumple. She saw Duncan put a final arrow in one of the cultists before turning to catch Kieran as he started to slump. Jerath turned back to his king and gestured to her. "I've got them."

"Right. The rest of you with me." Salla waved her staff in the direction the surviving cultists had run.

Duncan nodded as Caleb got his shoulder under Kieran's other arm. Jerath kept his sword at the ready as they followed the planned route out of the temple to the rendezvous point. They'd gone about a third of the way when Kieran managed to get his feet back under him. "You alright?"

Duncan gave him a concerned look.

"I will be fine."

"We've got lyrium vials." Caleb began rummaging through his pockets.

"Lyrium gives me a headache." Kieran replied. He glanced at Jerath. "You are a templar."

"King Alistair taught me." Jerath nodded. "It's just..." He frowned. "I've never used lyrium, so it has never really worked before."

"King Alistair is a very good teacher. He taught my father as well." Kieran let go of Duncan and began walking unaided.

"Hey..." Caleb blinked. "That's why Uncle Carver doesn't need lyrium to knock Papa out, isn't it? Cause of your father?"

"It was an accident. Father didn't know what he was, then, when he started changing them. He did not even realize he was doing it until it happened." Kieran frowned before glancing at Jerath. "What I have done will fade. I won't be able to make it last until I'm me again. I'm sorry."

"We just successfully defeated ten to one odds, and you're apologizing?" Duncan gave him a disbelieving look.

#
Agatha went up the stairs and launched herself off the landing to hit one of the fleeing cultists with a flying tackle. The speed and strength Kieran had imbued them with inside the temple still appeared to be working. She brought her fist down on the base of his skull, clubbing him into unconsciousness before moving to catch up with the others.

The tunnel had emerged into a large warehouse. Some of the cultists had tried to regroup. Leandra charged, Kels on one side, Loghain on the other. Trian remained back, his shield between any potential attackers and their mages. She was making her way towards helping the warriors when there was a massive blast of fire. She started to scream and realized Salla's enhanced barrier had held. The warriors were dazed and injured, but alive. Two mages stood on a ledge, their arms dripping with blood.

A heartbeat later the mages, the ledge, the stairs beneath the ledge, the wall, and a large section of the neighboring building had gone away. Gavren stood with his hand outstretched. She caught a glimpse of an elven woman and a tall, thin man with glowing eyes before part of the wall collapsed to obscure where they had been standing.

Salla was shouting, and Agatha looked up to realize the rest of the building was starting to come down as well. She ran to help Trian get the others back on their feet before the building collapsed on top of them.

#

Cullen shook his head when he surveyed the wreckage of what had been two warehouses. Magister Arenda was staring, her expression frankly dumbfounded. He turned back to the witness. "You say the mage that did this was a young blond man?"

"Yes, serah." The worker gulped.

He felt Carver's hand on his shoulder. "You know, I had my doubts at first." Carver shook his head as he looked at the still burning wreckage. "But I think your boy is going to fit into the family just fine."
"I need answers."

"Magister Arenda, we are..."

"Commander Cullen, all due respect, but I’ve taken a lot of risks on behalf of the Inquisition and Magister Pavus." She folded her arms. "I was risking my life for your cause even before Corypheus was vanquished." She shook her head. "I’ve heard the rumors, the same as most, and put no stock in them but this..." She took a deep breath. "This is a temple of one of the Old Gods. And it's alive." Her voice actually shook. "Please. I need to know."

Cullen bowed his head. He really couldn't blame her. Or deny her point. Even knowing what he did know, he was finding it hard enough to believe. He’d stood in the war room of Skyhold when The Warden had revealed to them what he really was, and it hadn't hit him quite as hard as walking into temple had. He could feel the tingling of the air around the altar that had clearly been broken and somehow reassembled. "You're right. I just wish I knew how to begin explaining."

He walked away from the altar toward one of the fallen statues. At the gallows, the statues had come to life. One of the many things that had featured heavily in his nightmares over the years. The fact that there was not a trace of red lyrium present was surprisingly little comfort. He looked up at the magister watching him. "The rumors regarding Fen'Harel are true."

"Then..." She looked around. "Did he...?"

"Two of the Old Gods are awake and active as well. Urthemiel is one of them."

"No." Magister Arenda shook her head. "The Warden killed Urthemiel to end the Fifth Blight."

"That is what we were all led to believe, yes." Cullen sighed. "There are two Old Gods awake and active. The Warden is one of them. His son is the other."

Magister Arenda wobbled slightly before sinking to the ground in shock. "Sweet blood of Andraste. This..." She ran a hand through her hair. "We have to..." She swallowed and visibly collected herself. "The world can't know this. It isn't ready."

"I agree."

Leliana watched Ruya pace her office. The note Brehan had read to them over the sending crystal was disturbing, but at least now they knew the particular interest the Formless One had taken in the children. Any knowledge could be put to use. "They are alive."

"They are going to find they are not too big to put over my knee." Orana's voice caused her to turn towards the woman. "And yes, I am including Master Hawke and Master Fenris. I can see them both, right now, a couple of proud fools."

"I don't know, you've kinda got to hand it to those kids. I mean..." Orana firmly moved the plate of pastries away from Varric. He swallowed the bite he had just taken. "I mean what were those kids thinking, running off like that? I'm going to make them scrub every sidewalk in Kirkwall with toothbrushes."
"You do realize what this means?" Ruya stopped pacing and turned towards her. "They might as well have lit a beacon for themselves."

Salla's fingers glowed white as she finished fading the scrapes and burns on Loghain's arm. Blood mages. It could have been so much worse. She glanced over at where Leandra was sitting in Gavren's lap, his arm around her protectively even as they both slept. With Kieran's magic added to her barrier, they'd taken more damage from escaping the burning building than they had the blood-fueled fireball. If it had hit even a minute earlier, it was possible they wouldn't have been injured at all. She'd never felt anything like that before.

She patted Loghain on the shoulder before rising and going to sit next to Kieran. "Are you sure you are alright?"

"Last time I did that I was fueling a dozen Wardens as they crossed Thedas to battle a Qunari vanguard." He tilted his head. "I held the spell the entire night. I was not expecting to hit my limit quite so soon."

"I've seen Uncle Carver jump off a twenty-foot-high tower without batting an eye."

"Uncle Carver followed my father for a long time. Gradual changes built over the years, and my father's capabilities in this particular regard exceed my own." Kieran frowned suddenly.

"What's wrong?" She raised an eyebrow.

He shook his head. "He wouldn't have had to be carried out of the fight, nor would he have let any of you get hurt." Kieran folded his arms atop his knees and rested his chin upon them. "He would have fixed this by now."

She shifted to sit next to him. "I'm sure your father didn't do so well on his first adventure." She elbowed him gently. "And he had Wardens. You're stuck with us."

Kieran smiled. "'Tis not so bad."

Kels stared down at his hands. The soft-spoken mage for who'd once spent an afternoon telling him stories was Dread Wolf. The brusque swamp witch for whom he'd run errands was the goddess Mythal. The elven warrior even the Commander had a case of hero-worship for was an archdemon. And the weird young man that had been traveling with them had brought a temple of Urthemiel to life. He was having some trouble pinpointing the exact moment the world had gone completely mad. "What happens now?"

"We track the cultists, figure out where their leaders went, and kill them." Duncan shrugged.

"Oh. Is that all?" Trian rolled his eyes.

He shook his head. "Commander Cullen is here in the city, along with the Champion. We should regroup with them."

"They'll drag us back to Kirkwall by our ears, and lock us in the basement while they waste time trying to figure out what we already know." Duncan folded his arms.

"Kels might have a point." Caleb gestured back the way they'd come. "Uncle Varric and
Spymaster Brehan would do a better job than we can figuring out what to do with the information we have. All we really know is the cultists were looking for some kind of staff, which they apparently already found.

"And we know the cult is Tevinter in origin." Agatha spoke up from beside him. "House Brosca has contacts. They can figure out where else the cult might be."

"We know where else they might be." Duncan gestured at the documents they'd found in the temple. "We have their intelligence, plus that cultist we were able to question." He pointed to Kieran. "And he's got the best chance of figuring out what they want the staff for anyway."

"I think we should all calm down." Salla stood up.

Duncan sighed. "Look, you guys can do what you like. I'm going after them."

Salla shook her head. "Duncan, we aren't about to let you go off on your own. Give us some time to figure out what we have and we can figure out where to head next. We could all use a good night's sleep anyway."

#

Duncan didn't have to look to know it was Jerath who'd followed him. He smiled. "We're close."

"Kels is right."

He blinked before turning around. "What are you talking about?"

"We have a support network. The best in the world. ." Jerath met his eyes. "And we aren't using it."

"They'll..."

"Is it really so important that it be your arrow that takes this Formless One down?"

"No." His mother's blood had splattered on his face when she'd died. He thought he might be lying. And from the look on his oldest friend's face, Jerath knew it. "You want to kill it too."

"Not enough to get these kids killed for it." Jerath shook his head. "Gavren hasn't said three words since we left Nessum."

"That spell was pretty damn impressive. I wouldn't have thought..."

"Do you know if there were people in that other building?"

A frown crossed his face. "No. I don't."

"Neither does he." Jerath glanced back over his shoulder. "For all he knows, he killed innocent people today. Because he did not realize just what he was in for here. And he is going to have to live with that for the rest of his life." He sighed. "That is not an easy thing."

"Jerath..." He ran a hand through his hair, and turned away. He took a couple deep breaths before turning back. "Look, if you want to leave, I won't..."

"Halam sahlin." Duncan blinked. He could count on one hand the number of times he'd actually heard Jerath speak his mother's language. "Duncan, if you want to invade the Black City, I'll be there, going in first. Just..." He sighed. "Be damn sure this is worth it. You're the one who'll have
to live with yourself if you change your mind too late."

"Alright." Caleb waited until everyone was looking. "Agatha and I managed to learn some things. Our folks are, in fact, here. And Cassandra and her Seekers entered the city this morning. If we stick around much longer, they are going to find us. So, we need to figure out where to go next."

"And we have a lead on that." Agatha waved a hand. "Our folks called in contacts of their own. Specifically, contacts of Dorian's. Odds are, if the cult is going back into Tevinter, they are the folks with some idea where."

"The woman sticks pretty close to the others, but they've been leaving the man to do research in the tavern. And you have to know that's the absolute last place they would think to look for us. And there are catacombs that go right into its wine-cellar."

"Oh for the love of..." Kels shook his head. "You're growing incredibly blase about kidnapping people."

"Well, the last guy we kidnapped is having such a grand time of it we thought we'd share the experience."

"I hate you."

Agatha crept down the hall and peered around the corner. She saw no one in the tavern except a man in magister's robes and the bartender. She drew back, and gestured to Jerath, Loghain, Duncan, and Caleb.

Rather than worry about explanations, the men just walked into the room to where the magister sat, grabbed a limb each, and carted him out of the room. She tossed a coin to the bartender and followed.

"An elven woman, you said?"

"And four men. One of whom looked a lot like him." The bartender pointed to Alistair. "One had a dragon on his face, like that guy." He pointed at Carver.

Lenore ran a hand down her face. "So you didn't call the guard because..."

"One looked like him and one had a dragon on his face. I thought they were with you."

She opened her mouth, and then closed it again and shook her head before walking into the next room. Cassandra was pacing back and forth in front of the two Seekers who she'd assigned to be on guard at the tavern. "You can stop yelling at them." Lenore sighed. "Apparently, the kids came up through the basement, not through any of the doors or windows."

"I am going to strangle them." Cassandra clenched her fists.

"Hey." Alistair's voice was sharp. "Duncan and Jerath are my kids, in case you've forgotten." He folded his arms. "I'm strangling them."

"Why would they take Magister Adralicus?" Carver frowned.
"They are masochists on top of being lunatics?" Alistair raised an eyebrow.

"No." Lenore frowned. "No. They must have a lead, and think for some reason he can help." Lenore rubbed the back of her neck. "Agatha has never met him, but would know he is one of Dorian's people. They must think we have information they don't."

"How can that be?" Carver shook his head. "They've been ahead of us this whole time. If Kels hadn't sent us that note, we wouldn't have even known they were in Nevarra and Cassandra would have been on her way to Orlais."

"We do have an advantage now, at least." Lenore nodded. "Unlike Kels, Adralicus has no reason to be a cooperative prisoner."

Salla handed refilled their guest's cup. "So this was the third Blight?"

Magister Adralicus took a drink. "Yes. Nevarra was still part of the Imperium then. Tevinter allied with Orlais, but both nations refused to press forward into the Free Marches. The temple of Toth was destroyed in the early days of the Blight, but the wards of the temple of Urthemiel remained intact. It was the only building in Nessum sturdy enough to be used as a refuge, and the mages used it as a stronghold as well." He continued expanding on the history of the Blight, and it took them several tried to get him back on topic.

"So the mages might have hidden things inside?"

"Well, yes. Things they didn't want the darkspawn to get their grubby little hands on, certainly. Who knows what treasures may have been abandoned inside before the temple was buried?" He gestured excitedly. "Did you hear what they are saying about the temple now? The statues inside actually activated once more."

Kieran turned to Agatha. "I thought you said this man was a magister?"

"He is a magister."

"Oh, yes." He rose, and offered Kieran his hand. "Magister Adralicus, at your service."

"I think you may be using that word incorrectly."

"Which word?"

Salla elbowed Kieran before he could reply. "You said you were writing to an expert regarding information the Inquisition wanted?"

"Baradies, yes. He studied at the University of Orlais as well as the Circle in Minrathous."

"And where is he, these days?"

"Hasmal, looking into relics recovered from the circle there." He looked up as Loghain entered, and his eyes widened. He actually walked over and caught Loghain's chin so he could examine the mark on Loghain's cheek. For a moment, Salla thought Loghain was going to punch him. "Did you know Guardsman Carver Hawke has a tattoo just like that one?"

"No. Really?" Loghain pulled backwards.

"Oh, yes. I asked him its significance but he wouldn't tell me. Commander Cullen's manservant
was also very reluctant to discuss the nature of his tattoos. His look similar to those used by the Dalish elves."

"Cullen's..." Salla blinked. "You mean Brehan?"

"Was that his name? You know, there was a Warden-Constable by that name during the Fifth Blight. A dwarf, I think. I would have thought King Alistair would know what happened to him, but he wasn't able to tell me. Did you know King Alistair used to be a Grey Warden? I think the queen was one too."

Salla just stared as their kidnapped Magister turned to Duncan and began giving him the history of King Alistair's participation in the Fifth Blight, four times pausing to comment on how Duncan bore a fascinating resemblance to the king. Kels was leaning on the wall, tears running down his face as he shook with silent laughter. "Magister Adralicus?"

"Oh, yes dear?" He turned back to her.

"You were telling us about the cult."

"Oh, that's right. Soifra was one of the elves King Alistair sold into slavery to finance..."

"What?" Duncan's eyes flashed and he took a step forward. Loghain and Jerath each caught the man by an arm and hauled him out of the room.

Magister Adralicus sent a confused look his way before turning back to Salla. "As I was saying, she was originally from Denerim. Her magic must have manifested later." He launched into an explanation on how her master had been fascinated by the lyrium warrior that had been crafted by a Magister Danarius.

"You mean Fenris?" Salla raised an eyebrow.

"Yes. I met him, you know." He gave a low whistle. "He's a work of art. A bit temperamental though."

Her fists clenched and she forced them to relax. "So he made Soifra into one of those?"

"Oh, not her. You can't infuse a mage with lyrium like that, they'd explode. No, it was some human slave. Soifra stole him after she killed her master."

"And then she started a cult?"

"Yes. The Inquisition seems to think one of the Forbidden Ones was involved somehow. That's why I was writing to Baradies. He studied at the University of Orlais you know." He shrugged. "Do you know the Inquisitor fought one of the Forbidden Ones? Imshael, at Emprise du Lion." He started giving them a history of the formation of the Inquisition, which caused Kels to actually slide to the floor. She was starting to be a little concerned the man was actually going to die laughing.

She rubbed her forehead and sighed.

#

They left the magister under the watchful eye of Trian, who actually appeared at least somewhat interested in the the description the man was giving of Kal'Sharok. "So, it looks like this Baradies has the information we need."
“Hasmal is near the Tevinter border.” Caleb nodded. “It's a lead, anyway.”

“I really do think that man is using the word magister incorrectly.” Kieran looked back over his shoulder.

“We'll worry about his grammar later.” Loghain shook his head. “Can I kill him now?”

“I'm going to second Loghain's initiative.” Duncan glared.

“If we could stay on topic?”

“Hasmal it is.”

#

Magister Adralicus followed them as they started down the highway, filling them in on the events of the Chantry explosion in Kirkwall despite Kels and Caleb repeatedly informing him that they were there when it happened. Salla sighed, and took pity, though she wasn't sure which one she was taking pity on. "Tell me more about your friend Baradies."

"He studied at the University of Orlais, you know." He went on for a while about some papers the man had written. "He really is quite brilliant, you know, despite his disability."

"What disability is that?” Salla raised an eyebrow.

"Well, he is...” Magister Adralicus gave sad shake of his head. "Half elven."

Leandra, Jerath, and Kieran all stopped in their tracks and slowly turned around. Salla sighed, and buried her face in the palm of her hand.
"Cullen?"

He looked up from where he'd been sitting with his head in his hands, and leaned back, folding his arms. "Lenore."

She walked over and pulled out a chair to sit across from him. "Talk to me."

"I'm fine."

"And I'm a virgin." She shook her head at him. "Cullen..." She sighed. "I have known you since you were a gangly thirteen-year-old with massive feet and hair that wouldn't stay out of his eyes." She brushed her own hair out of her face. Her voice was quiet. "I've seen you at your worst. And I know there is no way you ever gave your son less than your best."

"He was so busy reassuring me about his staff that he didn't tell me he had a fiancé." He swallowed. "Maker, Lenore. We were such wonderful parents Fen'Harel had to step in."

"Or you were such an inspiration the Mangy Mutt was finally moved to actually fix something he broke." Lenore shook her head, and then a smile came to her face. "I've got a hundred gold says Gavren kicked your ass at chess."

"Two games out of three." He felt himself start to smile.

"According to the guy at the first tavern they stayed at, he also picks the onions out of his soup." She leaned forward and very lightly whacked him upside the head. "What kind of father teaches his son it's okay to dislike onions?"

"It's not the flavor..."

"It's the texture, yeah yeah, I've heard your excuses before." She smiled, and then it slowly faded. "I sent Agatha to Kirkwall to represent House Brosca. And I'm scared shitless that's what she thinks she's doing right now. That she thinks she has anything to prove to..." She swallowed. "Here we are. You're worried you're a lousy father because your son is a mage, and I'm worried I'm a lousy mother because my daughter isn't."

"It sounds..." He looked down at the ground and laughed softly. "Pretty stupid when you put it that way."

#

"I'm..." Leliana stared at the crystal in her hand. "Going to need you to repeat that."

"No, you aren't." Brehan's voice came back over.

"Naked, hands and feet bound, hopping down the road with rabbit ears glued to his head?" She looked up at the faces of the others in the room. Most of them were staring at Dorian, who was staring at the crystal in her hand. "Did he say why?"

"You should sit down."

"I am sitting."
"Liar." She heard him take a deep breath. "Apparently, they 'overreacted' to his description of his contact. For reasons he cannot fathom, three of them took special exception when he mentioned his contact was..." Brehan's voice imitated a Tevinter accent. "'A product of miscegenation that had managed to overcome that disability.'"

Dorian winced. "And he..."

"I'm not done." Brehan's voice sounded like he was having trouble not laughing. "He went on to say that he felt very slighted that they would judge him for disapproving of the 'mixing of the species'. He assured us he was very open minded, and cited the fact that he believed Magister Pavus to be an exemplary person despite his openly indulging in his own 'unnatural urges'. Did I mention he was explaining this to Hawke and Fenris, in a room that also contained Lenore, Zevran, Carver, Sera, and myself?"

"How badly am I going to pay for this later?" Dorian asked. Iron Bull patted him on the back in a comforting gesture.

"Zevran has started you a tab." There was a murmur from the crystal that she couldn't quite make out, and she heard Brehan assure someone he was getting to that. "A bit later, after Cullen had sent the various Amells and Sera to their respective rooms, Magister Adralicus apologized and said he should have remembered he was in the south. Then he helpfully informed me that there was actually a rumor that the White Divine herself had an elven lover."

"Wow, Songbird. I imagine that came as something of a shock to you." Iron Bull barely managed to get the words out. Leliana rolled her eyes.

"In any case, we know from him that all of the kids are alive and in good shape. Though he is concerned about the mental well-being of Kels. Apparently he's prone to unexplained fits of hysteria." There was another murmur, and Brehan hushed someone. "He claims the kids were discussing whether to head to the University of Orlais or the Circle in Minrathous when they left him behind. Except when we backtracked to where they'd left him, someone had left a scrap of paper with the word 'Hasmal' on it. Some of us are heading in on griffin-back and doing sweeps, the rest will follow on horses."

"I'll reach out to our contacts in Val Royeaux, just in case."

"Magister Arenda is doing the same in Minrathous. If nothing else, it will lay a false trail for whoever else might be looking for the kids at this point."

#

"Didn't we meet Magister Adralicus once?" Gavren looked down at Leandra.

"The name is vaguely familiar, but I'm pretty sure I'd remember encountering that walking disaster." She shook her head. "I can't figure out how he has lasted three years in the Magisterium."

"If he was a member of a group opposing you, wouldn't you try to keep him alive?"

"I..." Leandra frowned. "See your point, yes." She looked back up at him. "Are you okay?"

"I know better that to lose control like that." He sighed. "I could have killed people."

"You didn't know how much more adding Kieran's spell in was going to do."
"That's not an excuse. I shouldn't have opened up that much."

"Blood mages threw a fireball at your fiancé." She put an arm around his waist, and felt his arm go over her shoulders.

"Stop making light of it."

"Gavren, you can't go through life afraid of your own magic." She sighed. "You're the most over-controlled person I know." She pulled him closer. "And you didn't lose control today, even with an old god feeding your magic and a couple blood mages involved."

"Leandra..."

"You threw out force, not fire, and hit their spell." She glared up at him. "Or do you think La-la and I don't talk to each other?" She caught his neck and pulled him to her for a kiss. "You killed some bad guys. If it will make you feel better, I'll give you a good spanking later."

"Oh for..." He turned bright red.

She laughed. "You are such a Rutherford." They walked for a while before she let out a wistful sigh.

"What's wrong?"

"We were in a temple of Urthemiel..." She shook her head. "With Urthemiel. We should have had Kieran perform a wedding ceremony." She whacked him lightly in the belly. "It would have been awesome, with it all glowing like that and those statues fighting everywhere. I mean, we even had the King of Ferelden to stand as a witness, and I so could have gotten Caleb to give me away. And I bet Kels would have stood up for you. Well, after he pointed out how your father would kill him for it."

"You are insane."

"I can't believe we missed that opportunity." She threw up her hands.

He caught her and spun her towards him before dipping her into a kiss. "Absolutely nuts."

#

"Dammit." Caleb saw the bolt miss the deer by almost a foot. The buck started to run, and an arrow caught it midleap. It stumbled another couple steps before falling. "Show off."

Duncan smirked, and replaced his bow over his shoulder. "City boy."

"Says the guy who grew up in a palace." He sighed, and followed Duncan and Jerath towards where the deer had fallen.

"I was what..." He glanced over his shoulder at Jerath. "Ten?" He shrugged. "When Mother handed me over to Arlessa Lanaya for a month. She promptly handed us over to some of the hunters. Getting only piece of stale bread for dinner does a pretty fast job of teaching you not to miss."

Caleb chuckled, and glanced at Jerath. "You got dragged along for that too, I suppose?"

"Yes."
"The first night he saved some of his dinner and gave it to me. The next night they told him if he did it again he'd eat what I ate. The third night he ate stale bread." Duncan shrugged. "The fourth day I didn't miss." He gestured at the dead deer. "And he learned the proper way to gut a kill."

Jerath put a hand on Caleb's shoulder, and offered him a knife hilt first. "Which you will now be learning."

He took the knife, and sighed.

#

Kels made it two cycles before dropping one of the sticks again. "Dammit."

"It just takes practice." Agatha was currently juggling two rocks, a fork, a heel of stale bread, one of Salla's shoes, and a knife hilt, occasionally crisscrossing the items in front of her.

"Wait until she starts doing it with knives." Trian didn't look up from where he was idly carving slivers off a stick.

"Rather she do it while naked." Loghain called over.

"You first." Agatha waggled her eyebrows challengingly.

"Do not give him ideas." Kel immediately began shaking his head. He picked the sticks back up and started trying to imitate Agatha's movements again.

"What would be the point of juggling while naked?" Trian glanced over at Loghain.

"The part where the juggler is naked." Loghain shrugged. "Same as the point of naked singing, naked wrestling, and naked jousting."

Agatha dropped the shoe and the knife hilt. "Please tell me at no point in the future does naked jousting ever become a thing."

"What did I just say about giving him ideas?" Kels glared at her.

#

She half closed her eyes as she formed the barrier, feeling the Fade dance around it, vibrating in tune. "I can almost hear it."

"'Tis beautiful, yes?" Kieran stood behind her. He laid his hand on her arm, and she felt him twist the veil around her barrier just slightly.

Her eyes widened as the world around her seemed to spark into more intense clarity. He moved away to stand in front of her, smiling in challenge as he twirled his staff. She could feel the spell as it formed, and shifted the barrier almost instinctively in response. His spell struck it and bounced back, striking his barrier before fading away.

The barrier dropped as her concentration broke. "It sent it back." She shook her head. "It actually sent your spell back at you."

"Hold it steady." He twirled his staff again, and then twisted it in his hands. It separated into two pieces. The piece in his left hand resembled an axe, while the piece in his right resembled a sword. He struck out with the weapons as if moving through a drill. Each time the blade hit her barrier there was a spark as the energy from the blows were redirected back at him.
When he stepped back, she lowered the barrier. "Each time it reflected back, it was like..." She frowned. "Like it was coming back into my barrier as well, energizing me."

"Yes." He smiled. "Harmony, back and forth. Action reaction. Dirth'ena enasalin, dancing their way across the battlefield to the rhythm of the primal chaos. Listening, hearing the music and shifting the steps in time with the changing patterns. Cathartic energy restoring the soul. Mi'sulahn, the song of the blades." He laid a hand on her arm once more. "Touch the barrier to me, shift, listen."

"It's..." She closed her eyes again. "Humming. Like wind over reeds and --" Something cut across the melody, wrecking the harmony. "Wait." She reopened her eyes. "Something hap --" Her eyes widened when he held up his hand, bleeding from where he'd cut it on the blade of his staff. "I sensed your injury through..." She smiled, and stepped forward, her fingers glowing white to heal the wound. "Through the barrier I put around you."

"You can shift further, counter the melody with your own notes."

"Heal..." She stared down at the vanishing wound. "Through a barrier?"

"Yes."

She smiled up at him. "Teach me."

#

Carver touched the reins of his griffin lightly, and Sulevin responded by starting a spiraling descent. She landed far enough away from the Seekers to not panic their horses, and he dismounted. Sulevin went towards the nearby river for a drink. Cassandra tossed the reins of her mount to one of the others before walking towards him. "Any sign?"

"A campsite a couple miles ahead had this." He handed her a whittled stick on which the Inquisition's sigil had been carved.

She nodded. "Good. He's leaving us a trail."

"They are using magic to cover their tracks."

"You are certain."

He shrugged. "Morrigan and Merrill each had a version of that spell, and one of the first things they did together was improve upon them. No way Kieran isn't an expert with it, and I've got ten gold says there was something similar on the list of spells Fen'Harel taught Gavren."

"Would one of the mages be able to pick up the residual traces?"

"That's one of the things they improved upon."

"Naturally." Cassandra folded her arms. "Not to mention Leandra is your daughter, and you managed to keep ahead of Brehan."

"He's with Greta, running low sweeps. Greta and Atisha are the most nimble pair we have. He spots a track, they'll land him on it." He rubbed the back of his neck. "There are clouds to the west. Flying in the rain is dangerous for the griffins."

"Head back to Hasmal. Do not risk your mounts."
"Good luck." He started to turn back towards Sulevin.

"Carver." He turned towards Cassandra. She sighed, and shook her head. "He brought a temple to life." Her eyes went to the mark on his cheek. "Loghain wears the same mark."

That did not surprise him in the least. He wasn't sure yet how he felt about the fact his own eldest child did not. It was something he had accepted without hesitation, but a small part of him was pleased it was not a burden she carried. "I saw."

"I need to..."

"Cassandra, if you needed to know, you would."

"Gavren is my best friend's son."

"And he's apparently engaged to my daughter." He frowned, and then narrowed his eyes. "You think Kieran is a threat to them."

"I..." She nodded. "Yes."

He looked down at his hands, and then shook his head. "And you aren't sure what side I'll take if it turns out you are right."

"Can you blame me?"

No. He couldn't. She didn't know, and couldn't understand. But he could give her what small comfort he could. "Leandra is my daughter, Cassandra." He met her eyes steadily. "Whatever else I am, I was a Hawke first. Remember that." He shrugged. "There is a good campsite another two miles up the road. Safe journey."

#

"He's turning various shades of purple, and the Commander is holding his clipboard in front of his face trying to block out the sight. Iron Bull just sort of sits up a bit and says 'oh, hey Cullen."

Kels shook his head.

"I cannot believe they were having sex on the wartable." Caleb laughed.

"That thing is surprisingly comfortable." Leandra shrugged, and grinned. "And sturdy." Gavren immediately turned bright red.

Kels gaped. "Gavren!"

Gavren shook his head. "Oh, like you and Minaeve never..."

"We most certainly did not!" His eyes widened when Gavren and Leandra both grinned. "Oh, no. We didn't?"

"You've got two kids, Uncle Kels. I'm guessing you did a couple times."

"That's not what I..." Kels shook his head. "I very much regret starting this conversation."

Salla shook her head. "Isabela once tried to embarrass Papa by leaving one of her 'written dedications' where he could find it. He got it published."

"He did not." Trian stared.
"The Randy Dowager gave it four scarves." Caleb put a hand over his heart.

Kels winced. "Maker, I remember that. The Viscount made sure Seeker Pentaghast received an autographed copy."

"Who'd have thought my father would be the normal one of the family?" Leandra shrugged.

"You were conceived on the back of a griffin a mile above the ocean."

Leandra stared at Kieran. "How do you even know that?"

"They neglected to secure their clothing while in flight. Uncle Caronel memorialized the event in one of the murals he painted."

"You're telling me that on an island somewhere out in the middle of the ocean there is a painting of my parents having sex on the back of a griffin?"

"Yes."

Leandra folded her arms atop her knees, buried her head in them, and groaned as the others laughed.

"I'd tell Trian it's his turn to share a story, but I'm still working on figuring out how Warden-Commander Saitada is his father." Caleb shrugged.

"It's a dwarf thing. I'd share a story, but my parents are pretty much impossible to embarrass." Agatha shrugged. She grinned. "Though the time Mama walked in on a certain king and queen of Ferelden testing the weight limit on a chandelier was pretty funny."

Duncan choked on the bite he'd taken. Jerath hit him in the back, and he coughed a couple times before taking a drink from his canteen. "And I am now traumatized. Thank you for that."

"You're welcome." Agatha grinned. "So, Loghain, have you been caught?"

"By your mother or with your mother?"

Agatha dropped her bowl. "What?"

Duncan started laughing. "Loghain, if I could knight you again, I would."


#

It was approaching sunset when they got their first sight of Hasmal in the distance. "Camp or keep going?" Salla glanced back at her companions.

"Keep going." Caleb shrugged. "I'd wager we can be there by midnight, and asleep in a real bed ten minutes after that."

Jerath shook his head. "Waiting until morning would give us the chance --"

"Real beds."

"-- to scout out --"

"Fresh sheets."
"-- the area and make sure --"

"Hot baths."

"-- we don't run --"

"Clean clothes."

"-- into any --"

"Warm bread."

"-- problems or --"

"Cold beer"

"I'm going to have to side with Caleb on this one." Trian shrugged. "Beer is good."

"I could go for a beer."

"Yeah, I vote beer."

"I'm casting my vote for a change of clothes."

"I'm going to have to side with certain people taking baths."

Agatha shook her head. "Jerath has a point. None of us has even been to Hasmal before. We sure we want to arrive in the middle of the night?"

"I want my own room, at least four doors away from Trian's snoring."

Salla rolled her eyes at Kels before turning towards Jerath. "Sorry, I think you got outvoted."
"So this Baradies is a mage?" Leandra sat in the chair Gavren pulled out for her, and patted his knee when he sat down next to her.

"According to our magister friend." Agatha shrugged. "Who I'll point out also claimed Brehan Mahariel was a dwarf despite having just spoken to him that morning. I'm just hoping we are in the right town at this point."

Salla chuckled. "Alright, I think we split up into teams and start searching around. Gavren, you and Leandra take Kels and head north into the residential district. Loghain, Agatha, check out the docks and maybe check around the alienage, then meet up with them. Duncan, you and Jerath take Caleb and head into the upper market district. Trian, Kieran, and I will see what we can locate in the lower market and then meet you at the noble quarter. We'll all meet back here at nightfall."

"Lord Brehan?"

He turned. "Magister Arenda."

"I've received word back from my contacts." She shook her head. "Word about what happened in Kirkwall has reached various ears. Details are a bit mangled, but the information that several people were pulled from a point in the future has spread."

"Frankly I'm surprised it took this long. And the events in Nessum?"

"A living temple? That news hit Minrathous five minutes before it happened." She shook her head. "Most of the attention seems to be focused on Val Royeaux, but..." She sighed. "Griffins don't go unnoticed. People know we are here. It's only a matter of time before..."

"Before those kids do something else stupid to draw attention to themselves."

"I was trying to phrase it more politely than that, but yes." She folded her arms. "Which does bring to mind another concern."

Brehan raised an eyebrow. "What's that?"

"They aren't particularly cooperative, and they..." She frowned. "Apprehending them safely might present some problems."

"If the choice is between harming them and letting them get away..." He sighed. "No, I see your point. We may need to bring them in for their protection, considering just how big the threat might get. Time to bring in some alchemists."

"I'll ensure the mages with us are versed in paralysis and slumber spells."

"If we send a bird now, it will be in Kirkwall in two days. And there is an Inquisition safehouse."

"Give it a rest, Uncle Kels."

"We should at least send them the information we've found. Gavren..." Kels shook his head.
"You know Brehan, and Iron Bull, and Sera. They could uncover the truth in minutes."

Gavren sighed. "We'd be putting them in danger."

"Maker's breath." Kels stared. "You can't be serious. Gavren, it's the Inquisition. It's..."

"My parents. They've had enough demons messing with their heads. This one is my problem." He rubbed the back of his neck. "Like you said, there is an Inquisition safehouse. You want to walk away, Leandra and I won't follow. We shouldn't have dragged you into this in the first place."

Kels stared at him. "How dare you." He clenched his fists. "You think there is anything in this world that could make me go to Commander Cullen and tell him his son is in danger and I walked away?"

"Flames, Gavren." Leandra laughed. "You do recall you're talking to the man whose sole concern about facing down assassins was that he got their blood all over the report your father was expecting?"

#

Brehan nodded to the bartender, and passed him a small pouch of coins. "Send a messenger immediately if you see any of them."

"Will do."

He turned and started for the door just as it opened to reveal a young blond man with a dragon tattooed on one side of his face, accompanied by a lovely elven woman. Blue eyes stared back at him in surprise before the door abruptly slammed shut again. Brehan shook his head and laughed.

#

"Was that Brehan?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"There is no possible way, in a world the size of Thedas, that we open a door to a random tavern and find the Inquisition's spymaster on the other side. The world simply does not work in such a manner."

"That was Brehan, wasn't it?" Agatha raised an eyebrow.

Loghain nodded. "Run."

#

Duncan shaded his eyes with one hand. "Griffins."

"Well, shit." Caleb sighed. "Maybe it's a coincidence?"

"Or maybe Kels managed to get a message out?" Duncan sighed.

"Looks like Salla might have been successful." Jerath gestured at where others were heading towards them.
He headed down to meet them. "You found something?"

"An herbalist knew the name. I've got an address." Salla nodded. "He's in the noble district."

"Let's collect the others." Jerath started walking.

"No time." Duncan shook his head. He gestured to the north. "Griffins. Our folks are here. Let's go see what this Baradies knows and get moving before they catch up to us."

"I'd prefer additional backup."

"We'll be fine." Duncan shrugged, and nodded to Salla. "After you."

#

Agatha stumbled to a halt, and glanced back at her companion. "I think we lost him."

There was a faint scraping sound, and then the Dalish spymaster landed right in front of them. Agatha took a step backwards in surprise. "How'd you...?"

Brehan shook his head at her. "You do realize I've been doing this since before you were born?"

"Would it help if I pointed out we have you outnumbered?" Agatha raised an eyebrow hopefully.

"No."

"Well..." Agatha sighed. "Shit. Okay, new plan. Loghain, tackle him so I can warn the others. We'll rescue you later."

"I'm not..." Loghain frowned and shifted his weight from foot to foot. "Particularly comfortable with that idea." When she gave him a disbelieving look, he shrugged defensively. "What? He fights dirty."

"Loghain!"

"Ugh. Fine."

Brehan sighed.

#

"This is where we were supposed to meet the Agatha and Loghain, yes?" Gavren glanced back at his companions.

"I told you I spotted griffins." Leandra sighed. "How did they know we are here?"

"You remember earlier, when I made a point about spymasters?" Kels smiled.

"Wipe the smug off your face, it's starting to drip." Leandra glared at him.

Gavren sighed. "We've got the address for Baradies." He shook his head. "And if the Inquisition is here they are probably waiting. Let's see if we can intercept the others."

#

"In hindsight... ACHOO... splitting up and running in opposite directions would have been a much better idea."
"That is the benefit of experience."

"We'll know next time."

"Next time I'll use rashvine."

"Now that's just... ACHOO... mean."

Lenore walked into the common room when she heard Brehan talking to someone, and sighed. An unfamiliar young blond man with a tattooed face had her unconscious daughter slung over his shoulder. "What happened?"

He sneezed. "I failed to learn my lesson about walking through town with Amells the first time." The blond man shook his head, and glanced at Brehan. "Where should I put her?"

"In a barrel." Brehan pointed at a nearby bench. He looked up at Lenore. "Deep mushroom. She'll wake up in another half hour or so."

The young man limped to the bench and laid Agatha on it. He straightened back up and winced. Lenore frowned at him. "Are you injured?"

"Mostly his pride." Brehan answered before the young man could. "Lenore Amell, Loghain Mac Tir, though I do believe you've technically already met."

"You kids are causing quite a bit of trouble."

"You cannot convince me that comes as a surprise to you." Loghain shrugged, and then sneezed. He started to say something else, and then sneezed again. "Flames, that stuff is --" He sneezed again.

Brehan sighed. "Come on, I'll take you to wash up."

Salla knocked on the door. When there was no answer, she frowned and turned to her companions. "Let's get the others, try again this evening."

"Better idea." Duncan moved past her. "Make sure no guards are looking our way." He pulled a lockpick out of his pocket.

"That might not be a good idea." Jerath shook his head.

"We can get in, look around, get the information we need, and be gone again without him even knowing we were here." Duncan glanced back at Salla. "No trail."

She nodded. "Be quick about it."

Caleb snickered. "Ferelden politics are awesome."

"Please don't get us into a war with Nevarra." Trian sighed, and went to keep a lookout.

Lenore's fingers glowed white as she performed a small healing spell for Loghain. "Where are the others?"
"I forget." He shrugged.

"We've got agents all over the city." Cullen folded his arms. "We will find them."

"After this morning, I'm inclined to agree." Loghain rubbed the back of his neck. "Five gold on Brehan."

"So noted." Lenore folded her arms. "Since you agree, why not just tell us?"

"Cassandra punched me. It hurt my feelings." He leaned back in the chair.

Cullen frowned, and turned to Cassandra. "You punched him?"

"He so very much asked for it." She narrowed her eyes.

"All I did was admire your breasts." He shrugged, and smiled up at Lenore. "Yours are also quite lovely."

Rainier's laughter was cut off by Cassandra elbowing him in the stomach. Sigrun made a choking sound as she fought against laughter of her own. Lenore raised an eyebrow at him. "Why thank you. You're here looking for Baradies?" She folded her arms. "We've got two agents inside his home and four more watching." Her voice became serious. "Loghain, what happened in Nessum?"

"If you're asking, then you know." He grinned up at her. "You're a mage. You probably know more than I do."

"And you are a knight of Ferelden." Alistair's voice came from the doorway. His voice hardened. "You do recall who I am, yes?"

"Yes, your majesty." Loghain looked down at his feet. She couldn't blame him. Even as long as she'd known Alistair, it was still a little bit frightening when her friend vanished and the king took his place.

Alistair stepped into the room. His face was stone as he stared down at the young man. "And you do recall your oaths, yes?"

"Yes, your majesty." Loghain's voice was little more than a whisper.

"You will tell me where the rest are staying, and you will answer Lenore's questions and do as she tells you. That is an order."

Loghain swallowed. Lenore actually felt herself starting to feel sympathy. He nodded, and winced as he spoke. "Winter Rose Inn, near the south gate."

Alistair nodded before striding back out of the room. Cassandra, Cullen, and Rainier followed.

#

The heavily curtained windows let in barely enough light to navigate the hallways. Jerath looked around the corner before continuing, and frowned. There was dust on tables, but he could see light coming from various rooms ahead. And if the Inquisition knew enough to come to Hasmal, surely they had to know why. "Something's off." He readied his shield.

"You sure you aren't just paranoid?" Caleb raised an eyebrow.
"He's a professional bodyguard. Of course he's paranoid." Trian readied his own shield. "Doesn't make him wrong."

"The Veil is thin here." Kieran tilted his head. "It rumbles beneath the echoes."

"I'm going to interpret that as 'we should get out of here'." Jerath started to wave them back. Inquisition soldiers should be watching the place, at the very least. So where were they?

"I'm going to interpret that as we are on the right trail." Duncan shook his head.

"We should get the others." Salla frowned. "If it does come to a fight I'd like Jerath to have some blades backing him up." She blinked. "No offense, Trian."

The dwarf just shook his head and smiled. "None taken."

Duncan rolled his eyes. "We're tracking down a bookworm. Come on." He started walking forward.

Jerath sighed, and followed, lengthening his stride for a few paces until he was again in front of Duncan. He saw a shadow move in the room ahead, and held up a fist to halt the others. Both Kieran and Salla readied their staffs, and Duncan notched an arrow. He nodded and stepped into the room.

A tall, thin man was standing near a desk, frowning down at a piece of paper in his hand. He looked up with Jerath entered. "Ah." He blinked, and his eyes went to Jerath's shield before going back to his face. "Hmm..." He frowned. "I'm sorry, who are you?" His eyes suddenly widened as the others entered behind him. "Oh! Of course, you're the ones Magister Adralicus mentioned, aren't you? The ones that wanted my expertise." He smiled widely and held out the paper he was holding. "Your timing is perfect."

His hand went to the hilt of his sword as he started to walk towards the man. Suddenly the air in front of him shimmered as a barrier sprang into place. Kieran's voice was sharp when he spoke. "Jerath back away."

He drew his sword as stepped back, positioning himself between the tall man and the others. "Kieran?"

The man's smile changed to one of satisfaction when he shifted his gaze to where Kieran stood. "Well, well. And here you are." He showed just a hint of teeth. "Finally."

"I don't see anyone." Leandra frowned. "Maybe the Inquisition already caught the others and took them in?"

Gavren shook his head. "They'd still have people here watching in case the rest of us showed up."

"Gavren."

He turned at the urgency in Kels' voice. Kels was behind a pile of crates. He walked over to see... "Maker's breath, is that...?"

"Scout Pelan." Kels shook his head. "Single thrust, up through the back and into the heart." He looked up from where he was kneeling by the body of the man in Inquisition colors. "He never saw it coming, wouldn't have been able to shout a warning."
"Fuck." Gavren unlimbered his staff as Leandra drew her sword. "It's a trap."
"You've been waiting for us?" Salla raised an eyebrow at the man inside Kieran's barrier.

He paced back and forth inside it's confines, occasionally raising a hand to trail his fingers along the barrier, sending sparks flying. "A very, very long time." He smirked. "I was starting to worry Mythal wasn't going to take the bait. And look at you." He turned his gaze back to Kieran. "Her own child, no less." He shifted his gaze to Duncan. "And the Firstborn." He chuckled. "I'm sure the Fire will be along soon enough."

"The leading expert on the Formless One." Caleb chuckled. "Oh, that was clever. Anyone found anything, they brought it to you." When Trian and Duncan looked at him questioningly, he shrugged in self-defense. "What, I can't admire a good con?"

Baradies laughed. "I do adore a graceful loser."

"You're the one in the cage." Duncan narrowed his eyes. "About to get his ass kicked."

"Ah. I see. You think I am at your mercy." Baradies rolled his eyes. "That you have found me alone, unguarded, helpless in my undefended sanctum?"

Well, put like that... Caleb pulled the winch on his crossbow, and noted Trian draw his own blade. Jerath hadn't relaxed an inch, even with Kieran's barrier between them and the threat.

Kieran tilted his head, and frowned. "You are bluffing."

A violet light appeared in Baradies' eyes. "Am I?" He smiled, showing teeth. "After all I set in motion to achieve this moment, you think I am unprepared for it? Your mother's petty jabblings at history are nothing compared to what I have done, boy. I've toppled empires with a few whispered words."

"You seriously think we are going to fall for that?" Duncan shook his head.

"Your grandmother did." Baradies smiled at him. "Calling for a vote to disband the circles after an apostate destroyed Kirkwall's Chantry? What was she thinking?" His voice was filled with mocking concern.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I see. " Baradies glanced back at Kieran, and shook his head slowly. "He doesn't know. You'd think, being friends and all, your father might have mentioned to Alistair that his mother was alive and well."

"Kieran?" Duncan glanced at him out of the corner of his eye. "What is he talking about?"

"Grand Enchanter Fiona and her ill-advised love affair with King Maric, of course." Baradies waved a hand casually.

"You're lying." Duncan drew back his bowstring and aimed the arrow at Baradies' face.

#

Lenore narrowed her eyes at the young man in front of her. If this was him cooperating... "Your grandfather sent assassins after me and I didn't want to punch him this badly."
"You married the assassin my grandfather sent after you." Loghain shrugged. "And you didn't even have the courtesy to invite him to the wedding."

She shook her head, and walked over to where Sigrun was sitting in a chair, struggling not to laugh. "Stop encouraging him." The words might have held more heat if she'd have kept the smile off her face while saying them.

Sigrun laughed again before glancing up at Lenore. "Can I get your opinion on something?"

"Sure."

"On a scale of one to just plain wrong, how bad is it to be thinking dirty thoughts about a former lover's grandson?"

Lenore rolled her head, and then considered the question. "Normally I'd say just plain wrong, but there are a lot of extenuating circumstances in this particular case." She shook her head, and glanced back at where Loghain was sitting in the chair, making absolutely no attempt to hide the fact that he was looking at her rear end. He even winked at her. "Though I really have my doubts that boy is a Mac Tir."

Sigrun started to say something when the door opened to admit Rainier. "Thom, they find them?"

"Found their rooms and collected their gear." He shrugged. "Cassandra is waiting with a couple of her Seekers in case they come back. Cullen and King Alistair have gone to check in with Carver and let him know what we've found." He walked over to Loghain. "I knew your grandfather."

"You're the fifth person to tell me that today." Loghain shrugged. "Did you know him as well as Sigrun did?"

"What?" Rainier raised an eyebrow.

Sigrun fell out of her chair. "Oh Stone."

Lenore buried her face in her hand. "Well, thank you very much for that mental image."

"You're welcome."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Rainier glanced at the laughing Sigrun before looking back at Loghain.

"Just admiring your shoulders." Loghain leaned back in his chair. "And the beard. The whole package, actually. The broody warrior with the dark past. That just..." He smiled up at Rainer and sighed admiringly. "Works."

Lenore just shook her head as she watched Rainier catch on to what was happening and begin turning various shades of red and sputtering. "Maker's breath, do you ever stop?" She folded her arms.

"No, not while I'm awake." Loghain shrugged. "Or when I'm asleep, for that matter."

"I've got a few more questions." His constant divergence was very distracting. Sudden realization came to her mind, and she looked around. She narrowed her eyes. "Starting with..." She focused her gaze on Loghain. "When was the last time anyone saw my daughter?"

His smile was the picture of perfect innocence. "Lenore?" Sigrun stood up.
"He's been distracting us so she could make her escape and get a head start." Lenore shook her head. "Sigrun, stay here, keep an eye on him. We might need to be on the move, if the kids know we are here. Rainier, let's go spread the word."

"How much trouble could one girl be?" Rainier saw Sigrun, Lenore, and Loghain open their mouths and sighed. "No, don't answer that. Knew it was a stupid question the moment I said it."

"Kill this thing and be done with it." Jerath shifted his stance only slightly.

"He'll have to drop the barrier to do that." Baradies shook his head and looked at Jerath. "I'll break your spine, and you can watch while I kill the dwarf and the little birds."

He only narrowed his eyes in response. The templar abilities might not work without Kieran's assistance, but they might provide him a slight edge anyway. The blow would have to be quick, or the thing might be able to heal. He put his weight just slightly forward, prepared to move the moment the barrier dropped.

The barrier shifted, slowly shrinking the cage. "That is not an opportunity I will give you." Kieran took a step forward.

Baradies just shook his head. "We both know you are not going to kill me, old friend. Not after I went through such effort to bring you back." He raised one hand, and a second barrier seemed to form inside the first, stopping the first barrier from moving in and pushing back against it. Colors seemed to shimmer in the air where the magics touched.

"You had nothing to do with any of it." Kieran narrowed his eyes. His hands glowed as held the barrier in place.

"A thousand little nudges of history. Not just for you, but to ensure you had generals when the day came." The glowing eyes of Baradies intensified. "A whisper in Uldred's ear, and he spared one single templar. A murmur in a dream, and an Architect crafts a plan." He laughed. "A tug at the reins, and a Magister's wife and son take a shortcut. A hiss, and a general leaves his king to die. All of history is my playground."

The glow of the barriers intensified. "There is a difference between acting, and taking credit for the action." There was a slight tightening to Kieran's voice.

"You wound me." Baradies actually looked offended. "Varla was an exemplary student." He shook his head. "And your father was such an adorable child."

A slight spark shook the barrier, and a heartbeat later it exploded. Multicolored energy flowed back into Kieran, sending him flying backwards to strike the wall hard enough to send cracks through it.

He lifted his shield as another bolt of energy came towards him, and another barrier intercepted it. He heard Salla shout, saw an arrow and bolt loose at the abomination only to bounce harmlessly away. Baradies shifted, and there was a flash of green before a pride demon stepped out of the fade a few feet in front of him. Jerath got his shield up just in time to block an incoming blow. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Trian move in to deal with a rage demon. Caleb was kneeling next to an unmoving Kieran. "Run." He yelled as he parried another blow. "Get him out of..."

"He's getting away." He heard Duncan shout. Baradies had indeed turned and started heading away. Duncan followed.
"Duncan!" Jerath started to take a step after him. The rage demon knocked Trian off his feet, and the dwarf just barely managed to roll out of the way of the next blow. If he left after Duncan, the others would be lucky if the lasted ten seconds with Kieran down. He cursed and turned back, slashing his blade across the leg of the pride demon.

Gavren didn't bother to knock. He aimed his staff at the door and blew it inward. Kels and Leandra moved in ahead of him, weapons at the ready. There was shouting down the hallway, and they headed in that direction.

Caleb was using his cross bow as a club as a shade attacked him. A rage demon was pressing Trian back, hammering at the dwarf's shield. Salla was kneeling next to Kieran, trying to get him back up while simultaneously holding a barrier against two shades. And in the center of the long room, Jerath was somehow managing to keep a pride demon from getting to the others, but more shades were moving in towards him. He didn't see Duncan. "Leandra, get Salla." Gavren opened himself to the Fade and incinerated one of the shades pressing Jerath.

"Duncan went north." Jerath yelled before bringing up his shield to block another blow from the pride demon.

"Kels," Salla yelled.

"On it." He dashed off down the corridor.

Another rage demon started coming out of the tear in the veil. Gavren called his magic to him, shifting and warping the veil, severing the connection. The rage demon twisted and bulged out of shape before being sucked back into the Fade. He brought his hands together as he used his magic to grasp the tear and reseal it. The resulting backlash deformed the two adjacent shades, easing the pressure on Jerath.

Jerath felt his arm go numb from the reverberation of the pride demon's blow against his shield. "Alright then." He shifted, switching to attack instead of defense, and lunged forward, ducking beneath the pride demon's swing and slicing a gash across his side. Rather than continue moving forward, he spun and kicked off, reorienting his momentum and coming back at the pride demon. He took a glancing blow that opened a gash along his own shoulder. This needed to end fast. He abandoned defense completely and began using the shield as a secondary weapon, bashing it into the creature's knee and knocking it just slightly off balance. A tiny opening, and he sent his blade into the demon's form again. It roared, striking back with a backhanded assault. He ducked beneath, rolled, and came up to drive his sword into its gut. Its body shuddered before coming apart.

He turned, and went to deal with the shades. "Gavren, Leandra, help Kels." He slashed the blade through the nearest shade. "Go."

Both obeyed.

Sigrun gestured at the table, and Loghain set the saddlebags down. "Alright, I think that's everything."

"So pleased I could handle the physical labor for you."
"That's what you get for getting yourself captured." She shrugged, and offered him a cup of water before taking one for herself. "Don't pick fights with Wardens, even ex-Wardens. Would have thought a member of the Order would know better." She took a drink. "Well, that killed some time."

"If I had known all you wanted was to be entertained, I'd have offered to dance for you. A little spicy shimmy." Loghain downed the cup she'd given him.

Her own cup fell out of hand. "Stone."

He blinked. "What?"

"Oh Stone. Shit shit shit." She stared at him. "You're not Nathaniel's kid, are you?"

Loghain's eyes widened, and he immediately started shaking his head. "Sigrun."

"I ran with them, in case you've forgotten." She picked up the cup she'd dropped, and stared down at it. After a moment, she nodded. "Guess it's not really the kind of thing you want getting around is it?"

"You could say that." Loghain's voice was quiet. "The last thing my mother needs is the world knowing she found some comfort in the arms of a man who bore a passing resemblance to the love of her life. She's paid enough for what her menfolk have done." He shook his head. "I promise you, Nathaniel doesn't mind the rumor at all."

She nodded, and set the cup on the table. Her eyes closed, and she willed away the tears that had tried to come before reopening them and looking up at him. "And your actual father?" He did remind her, on some level, of the man her friend had been before... everything. "Does he at least know he's got one thing in his life he can be proud of?"

"Yeah." The answer came quietly. "He does."

Her own voice was little more than a whisper. "And?"

"Yeah." He met her eyes. "He is."

"Good." She took a ragged breath, and forced her emotions back down. It took her three tries to paste on a smile and resume the semblance of cheer. She clapped her hands, and nodded. "So, the others aren't back yet. What now?"

He shrugged, and then grinned. "Well, there appears to be a perfectly good hayloft going to waste."

#

Duncan raced down the corridor in the direction the abomination had gone. He barely saw the flash of movement ahead. That thing was responsible for this entire mess. Kill it now, and his parents would still be alive then. He came around the corner and sent an arrow after it.

The arrow bounced off something. An elven woman stared at him, and then gave the abomination a questioning look. Next to the woman was a human man covered in white tattoos, and a small group of armored men. Duncan notched another arrow and sent it at his target.

There was a flash of light from the elven woman as she swung her hand almost negligently, and he felt his skin grow cold and painful as ice coated him. He tried to draw back his bow, and gasped in
pain as his very skin cracked at the movement.

"Don't kill that one." The abomination gestured at the armored men, and two started down the corridor towards him.

He couldn't make his legs move enough to flee. One of the men reached for his arm, and then a blade came down, severing the man's arm just above the elbow. Kels spun in, slamming his shield into the second armored man and knocking him to the ground. The warrior sent a glance down the corridor. His eyes widened. "Oh shit."

Duncan managed to break one of his legs free from the ice as the woman started to intone another spell. Kels started to raise his shield, and then apparently thought better of it. He dropped the shield, grabbed Duncan, and threw them both around the corner.

#

Kels hauled the future king down the corridor, hampered by both the fact Duncan could barely move to aid him and the fact that he was clearly causing the other man pain dragging him around. Blood welled from cracks in frozen skin.

There was shouting behind him, and he looked over his shoulder to see the armored men giving chase. He quickened his pace as much as he could, eliciting a cry of pain from the man he was carrying.

Ahead of him Gavren and Leandra came around the corridor. Leandra leaped, bringing her massive blade down on one of the men who had nearly caught them. "A mage." Kels jerked his head in the direction he'd come from, and he saw Gavren nod. He looked back to see the woman and the tattooed man following, along with the glowing abomination. "Shit."

"Get behind me." Leandra grabbed Duncan's other arm and helped Kels do what Gavren instructed.

Green energy seemed to glow around Gavren, and then there was fire moving down the corridor, warping floor, ceiling, and wall as it seemed to pass in a wave of motion. Chunks of burning ceiling and wall fell into the corridor, almost as if the entire building was melting.

Kels handed Leandra his sword before swinging the now unconscious Duncan up into his arms. "Come on, we need to get the others and get out of here."

#

Agatha found them halfway way back to the inn, and her eyes widened. "Oh shit, what happened?"

"Baradies is the Formless One." Salla shook her head. "Where is Loghain?"

"We got caught. Our folks know about the inn." Agatha bit her bottom lip, and surveyed them. Kels and Caleb were carrying a badly injured and semi-conscious Duncan between them. Jerath was limping, and it was clear from his armor that he'd recently taken a few blows. Trian was cradling his shield arm, and she saw no sign of his shield. Kieran and Salla were both leaning heavily on their staffs, and Gavren was shadowing Kieran as if concerned the man was going to have trouble staying upright. She wasn't sure she blamed him. "Loghain kept them distracted so I could warn you but..." She frowned. "Maybe we should go to them."

"We'd be putting them in danger." Salla glanced back at Kieran. "And maybe ourselves as well. We need to find someplace to hide."
"Loghain and I found a couple abandoned warehouses early in our search. One of those might work. Come on." Agatha gestured, and began leading the way.

#

She glanced down into the barn below and froze. She made a silencing gesture, and crept to the edge to peer down for a better view. Four figures were moving below, swift and silent. They were on the tall side, but thin, and something about how they moved made her conclude they were elves. The armor they wore was not like anything she'd seen before.

Two of them spoke quietly to each other, confirming her conclusion that they were in fact elvish. She glanced at her companion, and saw her own confusion mirrored on his face. The hood of one of the men fell back as he caught it on something hanging on a frame. He was bald, and a tree pattern was picked out on his pale skin in green. She'd seen Solas only once, and there was a trace of resemblance in the shape of the features. She mouthed the word 'sentinels?' to Loghain, and saw him nod in return.

The man pulled his hood back up and quickly rummaged through the saddlebags, placing something inside before gesturing at his companions. A glow came to the man's eyes as he waved a hand to erase the footsteps they'd left. The group left as quietly as they'd come. Sigrun's eyes narrowed. So there had been an ulterior motive in putting them on this particular trail. She kept her voice low, pitched not to carry. "Trouble."

" Noticed."

"Can you find the other kids, and I mean fast?"

"I can."

"Go. Get them out of here. Send word if you can, but be careful, we know he's got spies everywhere." She shook her head. "I'll warn the others."
Chapter 19

Loghain headed down the alley. He ducked back behind some crates, and took a deep breath. Agatha would have intercepted the others before they got back to the inn, hopefully. The question was, where would she take them? He frowned, and then reached. *I could use a little help here.* A tiny wisp glowed into existence, and then began moving to the east. He smiled. *Thank you.*

#

Agatha slipped back into the warehouse, carrying a basket. She set it down, and began passing out food. Duncan lay on a makeshift pallet, apparently unconscious. Salla was sitting next to Jerath, wrapping bandages around his shoulder with the assistance of Kieran. Agatha carried the basket over, and offered Jerath some of the contents. "Are you alright?"

"I'll be fine." Jerath took an apple from the basket.

She nodded. "Our folks have everything we left at the inn. That gives us about twenty gold between us, and whatever else we happen to be carrying on us." She looked around.

"Which is not much after that fight." Trian shifted and winced. "Kels and I lost our shields, and Caleb's crossbow is busted." He glanced at Jerath. "My armor can be fixed, but yours is beyond what skill I've got."

"And we still need to rescue Loghain." Agatha nodded.

"Rescue Loghain?" Kels shook his head. "He's with your folks. He's the safest of all of us."

"Was it telling the truth?" Gavren stood up. He stared at Kieran. "Did that thing..." He clenched his fists. "Was it responsible for what my father went through?"

"I do not know." Kieran tilted his head. "It is..." He looked up at Gavren. "Possible."

"Possible?" Gavren gestured sharply with one hand. "That's all you can say? It is possible?"


"To get you." Caleb ran a hand through his hair, and shook his head before looking back up at Kieran. "All to get you." He took a deep breath. "He called you 'old friend'."

Gavren whirled back around to face Kieran. "Did you..." He swallowed. "Did you let him get away?" He started to take a step forward, and Leandra moved to put a hand on his shoulder. He wrapped his arms around her, burying his head in her shoulder as she held him.

"It was not my intention."

"Not your intention?" Kels stood and started pacing. "Yeah. And the Dread Wolf didn't intend for Corypheus to put a hole in the world. He wanted to do that himself."

"Kels..."

"Dammit, Celeb, he's an archdemon. He's..." Kels kicked a broken crate across the room. Kieran flinched. "He's the reason Evelina had to take us to Kirkwall in the first damn place. Or have you been pretending to be a Hawke for so long you've forgotten?" He narrowed his eyes. "Or maybe you really are a Hawke. It was your father who helped Anders, wasn't it?"
Salla slammed the butt of her staff against the ground. "Enough." She waved her hand. "This is the legendary Inquisition? A few words out of a demon, and you start falling apart?" She shook her head. "The stories are well known, even outside the Fade. Lies, half-truths, and manipulations. Are you so foolish as to believe the only danger from a demon is its claws?"

The silence was broken by the occasional shuffle of feet as various people did their best not to look at each other. It was Trian who finally spoke. "What now?"

"We need to get out of town." Agatha stood up.

"We are safe enough here." Caleb shook his head. "Nobody is going to find us."

They all turned at the sound of Loghain's voice. "I've got ten gold says you are wrong."

#

"You actually let him go?" Alistair stared at Sigrun.

"You'd rather the kids not be warned ancient elves are hunting them down?" Sigrun held her ground. "Letting him go was the only option I had."

"Are you sure they were sentinels?" Brehan raised an eyebrow.

"Sneaky magic-using armored really tall elves with trees on their faces?" Sigrun rolled her eyes. "You're right. Could be anyone."

Alistair turned back to the items they'd recovered from Baradies' estate. He picked up a shield, marked with curved griffin claw that had become the sigil of House Saitada. Trian's shield, bent and damaged from repeated blows. Trian's shield, with blood on it. Six dead Inquisition agents, and signs of a battle against demons. And part of the building had burned down. For all he yet knew, Duncan and Jerath were dead under that rubble. He tossed the shield back down on the table. "Trian was attacked, and hurt."

Sigrun stared down at the ground, and sighed. "Anyone told Saitada yet?"

"Alistair?"

He turned towards Brehan. "What?"

"We found runes in several locations in our gear, not just the saddlebags Sigrun spotted." Brehan's eyes were hard. "We've got at least one spy among our people here, and if Sigrun hadn't gotten lucky, we'd likely have led them right to the kids." He shook his head. "For all we know, it was the Dread Wolf who set this in motion in the first place. Who knows more about manipulating spirits than he does?"

"Maker." Alistair rubbed the back of his neck. "Are we sure Adralicus isn't the spy? He's the one that told the kids about Baradies."

"Adralicus wasn't even the one who brought Baradies up in the first place. He just happened to have a passing acquaintance with him and letting him handle the correspondence got him out of our hair."

"So whose idea was it to contact Baradies?" Alistair raised an eyebrow. "There is your spy. I want to talk to whoever suggested him in the first place."
"You are." Brehan met his eyes steadily.

"You..." Alistair deflated a little. "Dammit Brehan, I didn't mean to..."

"I know." Brehan shook his head.

"How'd you know about him?"

"Spy reports aren't the only things I read." Brehan twitched a shoulder. "He wrote a book on Gaxkang."

"I know that..." Alistair frowned. "Didn't Jerath and I kill something by that name?"

"Gaxkang the Unbound, one of the Forbidden ones. The Formless One's brother, so to speak."

"Great." Alistair gestured. "So on top of everything else, it's personal."

#

"You sure about this?" Kels raised an eyebrow.

"Let's see. We've got an old god, the Dread Wolf's apprentice, the Champion's kids, a dwarf and an elf with a dwarven dad, and a guy bearing the mark of an archdemon." Caleb gestured. "Who'd look for us here?"

He looked around the old Chantry undercroft and was forced to concede Caleb's point. Salla had pointed out they'd be expected to vacate town as soon as they'd received the warning, thus it made sense to stay put in a good hiding place. From the dust, it was clear nobody came down here often, and Kieran's spell had replaced the dust and cobwebs to prevent anyone from noticing their passage.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Salla making the rounds of tending to the wounded. He owed her an apology. He just wasn't sure how to phrase it. The Hawkes weren't to blame for what Anders had done. They'd suffered for it more than most. The Champion had even risked his life to come to the Inquisition to help.

Kels sat down on a crate, and tried to make himself comfortable. Loghain's report was more than a little disturbing. Sentinels. He'd heard stories from the Arbor Wilds. The sentinels had proved to be dangerous adversaries, just as dangerous if not more so than the red templars. He wasn't sure what frightened him more, the thought of them being agents of Fen'Harel, or the thought that they might not be.

#

"Truth twisted to become lies, shifting into the minor key. Piercing tones and dissonant harmonies, ending on a sour note." Kieran sighed. "I lost my focus."

"It got to you." Salla put her hand on his arm.

"It will not happen again."

"Are you..." Salla gave him a concerned look. "Alright?"

"I am. Your healing spells are exemplary."

"I'm not talking about the part where you got put through a wall." She frowned. "Okay, I am, but
I'm also talking about the rest of it." She shook her head. "Kels had no right to..."

"He was not wrong." Kieran's voice was quiet. "I was that creature. Drowned out by my own melody."

"I don't understand." She glanced at him. "I read stories, of the Old Gods. How does beauty become..." She drew one of the dusty blankets around her shoulders. "That?"

"What do you think of Jerath's scars?"

She blinked. "I..." She shrugged. "I guess I haven't thought about it."

He held out one hand. "When danger threatened, he met it without hesitation. And he stands still, proof of a greater love. He wears his courage on his face, for all to see, trophies of who he is when it matters most." He held out his other hand. "Yet they mar features that would otherwise be handsome. A flaw, displeasing and distasteful. A string out of tune, distracting from the well-played harmony until the flat is all that can be heard." He held up one hand higher, then the other, as though weighing something. "What do you think of Jerath's scars?"

Salla considered the question. "When..." She nodded. "When you put it that way, they are beautiful."

"I forgot that, for a time. Want became desire, and desire became obsession, until all that remained was a need for aesthetic perfection. No flaws. No wavering brush strokes. No missteps." He lowered his hands. "No scars." He shrugged. "Focus on chord and tempo and key until one forgets what moved them to sing in the first place. I fell."

"I see, I think."

"I will not fall again."

#

Duncan stared up at the ceiling. He'd tried to get up a little earlier, but Salla had ordered him to lay back down. Apparently, Kels had broken his leg when dragging him free of the ice. His skin still tingled here and there, and itched from the healing.

King Maric had an affair with Grand Enchanter Fiona. His grandmother was Grand Enchanter Fiona. He looked over at where Jerath was sitting near him. The man hadn't said a word to him since he'd regained consciousness. Agatha was sitting nearby, cutting up an apple and occasionally offering Jerath a slice. His grandmother was still alive. She'd just abandoned his father and walked away. His father had sheltered the mages, and she'd repaid him by bringing Tevinter into Redcliffe, an act that could have destabilized the entire country. Her own son. She'd known.

The Warden had known.

Kept the secret.

How had he known?

Bryce had been nine years old when Nesiara had found him creating patterns of frost on a window with his fingertip. Finding an answer to that mystery was less comforting than he had hoped. And the worst part was... "You realize this makes me a quarter Orlesian?"

"Andraste's sanctified tits." Loghain's voice responded. "The horror, the horror."
"Asshole." He smacked his head back into the pallet. "If I start eating snails, somebody stab me."

Leandra raised a hand. "Dibs."

Trian set the crossbow down and looked up at Caleb. "Sorry."

Caleb sighed and looked over at Agatha. "We need a new dwarf." He gestured at Trian. "This one is defective."

"You'd think at some point in your recent training someone might have mentioned a crossbow is not a parrying weapon." Trian shook his head.

"So this is Loghain's fault." Caleb glared at the knight. Loghain winked and pursed his lips in a kissing motion. Caleb rolled his eyes. "I've still got my knives, I suppose."

"Ah. Glad to know I don't just have to worry about being stabbed by my enemies." Trian rubbed his wrist.

"You okay?" Caleb gave him a concerned look.

"I've sparred, trained." Trian frowned. "Never really done the 'fighting for my life' thing before." He sighed. "Not sure I care for it."

"Yeah." Caleb nodded. "Not exactly like the stories make it out to be." He glanced at Agatha. "How'd you end up getting caught?"

Agatha stuck out her chin. "Brehan fights dirty."

"Told you so." Loghain called over.

"So you two told them where we were staying?" Caleb frowned.

"Loghain did." Agatha pointed at him.

"Why?"

"King Alistair told me too." Loghain shook his head.

"And that's reason enough to sell us out?" Caleb gave him an aghast look.

Duncan looked over at them from where he was laying on a pallet. "Why would you tell my father where we were hiding?"

"Because I'm Loghain Mac Tir! Trying the patience of King Alistair Therin sounds entirely too much like the absolute last thing I would do."

"He wouldn't have executed you..." Duncan frowned. "Probably. You could have lied."

"I also could have told him I'm the reason his daughter isn't a virgin." Loghain waved a hand. "How would that have worked out for me?"

"Oh you..." Duncan glared. "Asshole."
Leandra followed Gavren into one of the alcoves. "You alright?"

"No."

"Want to talk..." She was cut off when he grabbed her and kissed her, pressing her back against the wall. She put her arms around him, pulling him close. "Guess not." She wrapped her leg around his ankle and toppled him onto a pile of old sacks.

#

Salla examined Duncan. The wounds had vanished, leaving behind no scars, and the magic had knitted the broken bones back together. "Okay, you can get up and move around now if you want."

"Finally." Duncan stood. "Appreciate the healing."

"Is he alright?"

Salla nodded to Jerath. "He's fine."

"Completely recovered?"

She glanced at Duncan, and then nodded. "Yes."

"Good." Jerath turned and punched Duncan across the face, staggering the other man. Duncan would have fallen if Jerath hadn't caught him by the front of the shirt. Jerath nodded politely to Salla. "Please excuse us." He dragged the other man out of the room.

"Um..." She glanced at the others. "Should we be concerned about that?"

"I vote no." Caleb shrugged.

"Seconded." Loghain helped himself to one of the apples.

#

"Maferath's balls, I think you broke my nose." Duncan shook his head. "Alright, I get you are angry."

"I told you to run." Jerath folded his arms.

"Dammit, Jerath." Duncan gestured. "It was getting away." He started to move back to the door, and Jerath slammed him into the wall.

"I told you..." Jerath met his eyes. "To run."

"You don't give the orders, in case you've forgotten." Duncan tried to shove him away.

Jerath grabbed him by the front of the shirt and lifted him off his feet before shoving him back into the wall. "No. Your father gave them. And I recall, very clearly, the last order he gave me." Jerath lowered him back to the ground. "Keep you safe."

Duncan sighed. "That thing is responsible for killing my parents."

"I remember." Jerath narrowed his eyes. "I was there. And you were not the only one who lost a father that day, in case you have forgotten."
"It didn't just kill my father..."

"I was there, Duncan. I saw your mother die. I saw your father draw his blade." Jerath shook his head. "I saw my father tell yours to run." Jerath's fist slammed into the wall next to Duncan's head. "Maybe if he'd fucking listened, they'd both still be alive."

"Jerath..."

"You nearly died." Jerath shook his head. "You do realize that if I had followed you, Trian, Caleb, Salla, and Kieran would have died. And if Kels and the others had been just a little slower, you'd be that thing's prisoner." He waved a hand back at the other room. "There are nine other people in there. Some of them are barely more than children, Duncan. Some of them have already been hurt because of this. And you could have gotten any or all of them killed."

Duncan stared at him. "I..."

"They could have died, screaming, the way my father did. Are you prepared to live with that, your majesty?"

He dropped his eyes and stared at the ground. "No."

"You think left my father behind to die because I wanted to? Your father threw you to me and ordered me to keep you safe. Those were his last words." Jerath released him. "If I tell you to run, you run."

"Jerath..."

"If I tell you to run..."

Slowly he nodded. "I run."

"Swear it."

"I swear."

#

Agatha watched Duncan walk away. Jerath shook his head, and rubbed the back of his neck. "You're like something out of a storybook."

He turned to face her. "What?"

"The faithful knight, taking on dragons and demons." She smiled up at him. "And the occasional king." She laid her hand on his chest. "A hero, shining armor and all."

"I'm a soldier, not a hero."

She moved forward until her body was all but pressed against his. "In the future, what are we to each other?" She smiled coyly up at him. "Are we friends?"

"Five months ago there was a diplomatic function. A man approached Duncan with a petition. Bowed, said the right words. I didn't know his name or anything about him. I had no reason to suspect he was any variety of threat." He looked down at her, and took a step back. "And for no reason other than a signal Agatha Amell gave me from across the room, I killed him. Without hesitation."
"That's..." She stepped back and shook her head in frustration. "Not really the kind of answer I was looking for."

"I know what answer you were looking for." His voice was quiet.

"Then why..." She gestured. "You just don't find me attractive or something?"

"The first time I saw you, you took my breath away." He folded his arms. "I was twelve, and if I have my calendar correct, it was just over a year ago."

"I..." Agatha frowned, and then nodded. "You tripped over the rug in the trophy room."

"I don't exist, Agatha. Not this version of me, anyway. We succeed in this, I'm going to go back to being a thirteen-year-old boy, one who will grow up into a different man." His smile was gentle. "I'm just a storybook."

She could feel the tears pricking at the back of her eyes. "That's my luck, isn't it? Everything I've ever dreamed turns out to be exactly that." She shook her head. "Just a dream." She turned, and left the room before she started to cry.

#

"What now?" Kels looked around at the various faces. A night spent in a dusty storehouse hadn't resulted in any of them looking particularly well rested. He was opening his mouth to suggest, once again, that they return to the Inquisition safe house, when Salla spoke.

"Sentinels." She frowned. "What do they want with us?"

"I would think that was obvious." Duncan gave pointed looks at Kieran and Gavren.

"Hey Kieran..." Caleb leaned forward, his expression thoughtful. "If the Sentinels are bound to Mythal, can't you track them?"

"I cannot."

Caleb started to sit back, and Gavren spoke up quietly. "I can."

They all turned to look at him. "You..." Salla raised an eyebrow. "Can?"

"Not in my time, because he is the one who taught me the trick." Gavren smiled. "But here and now?" He nodded. "I can track them."

"Alright." Leandra punched a fist into her palm. "Let's go hunting."

#

"Excuse me?"

Carver glanced down to find a dirty-faced boy of maybe twelve. "Yes?"

"Are you Mr. Carver Hawke?"

He nodded. "I am."

The boy held out a folded piece of parchment. "A man with a tattoo like yours said if I gave this to you, you'd let me touch one of the griffins." He smiled eagerly.
"Happens he was right." Carver took the parchment, and handed it to Greta. She immediately dashed off in the direction of the inn. "This way."

Ruya felt her knees go weak. Next to her, Minaeve also sagged, and she put her arm around the young elven woman. Anora sat heavily in the chair behind her, and Merrill accepted a hug from Varric.

"Oh Blessed Stone." Saitada took several deep breaths. "They are alive. I'm going to kill them."

Brehan's voice came over the crystal. "You're in line behind Alistair, Cullen, Hawke, Carver, and Lenore." There was a murmur she couldn't make out, and then Brehan's voice returned. "Now for the bad news. Our expert, Baradies? He is the Formless One. According to what Loghain's letter said, it claims it was behind a lot of things."

"What kind of things?" Leliana asked.

"The name 'Varla' was mentioned."

"Oh." Leliana put a hand on her desk to steady herself.

"That's..." Ruya began shaking her head. "Maker. Brehan, we never accounted for Varla's orb."

"Which explains why the sentinels may have shown up. Solas knows about Varla's orb as well."

Brehan sighed. "And that Varla had somehow managed to unlock it."

"The Formless One is interested in the children." Leliana nodded. "And..."

"The orb could have been the power source for the original event."

Ruya walked over and leaned on the desk. "We've already seen it do similar." She frowned. "Did the note say where the kids were going?"

"No. And it apologized for it. Caleb apparently suggested we pick two or three locations at random and search there to provide a helpful decoy." Brehan's voice became tinged with amusement. "And Loghain is apparently betting ten gold that if I do so, I'll pick out their destination anyway, and wondering if I hate working with Amells, Hawkes, and Trevelyans as much as he's starting to."

"Dorian is on his way back to Tevinter. Have some of our agents join him." Ruya considered a moment, and shrugged. "They might be able to uncover helpful information in addition to it not being an unlikely destination."

"The University of Val Royeaux is too obvious." Leliana frowned. "You said the letter claimed the Formless One was behind various events. What locations?"

It was a moment before Brehan responded. "Denerim, obviously. Ostagar. The Architect's plans regarding Urthemiel in the first place. And Uldred's actions at the tower."

She felt a chill in her spine. Cullen. "We'll send word to Denerim, and get agents moving to the Fereldan tower."

"You have got to be kidding me." Salla shook her head. "Try again."
"I tried twice." Gavren folded his arms. "Same answer both times."

"I have to admit, it's the last place I'd think to look. For them or us." Caleb glanced down at the map. "Do we tell our folks?"

"There..." Salla sighed. "Might be a few hard feelings."

"A few?" Leandra glanced at her.

"Come on. It's been a lot of years. He's even written to Papa a couple times." Caleb gestured at the map.

"You do remember how Inquisition forces helped Aveline kick his ass, right?" Kels sighed.

"Well, shit." Loghain looked down at the map. "Starkhaven."
"It's not as shiny as I was expecting." Caleb looked down at where the city of Starkhaven could be made out in the distance.

"Why were you expecting it to be shiny?" Kieran glanced at him.

"Sebastian always was. Isabela used to use him as a mirror." He sighed. "I liked Sebastian. He was nice. Tried to teach me how to use a bow."

"Until he threatened to raise an army and burn Kirkwall to the ground, and put a bounty on Papa." Salla frowned. "Doesn't he still have a bounty on Papa?"

"That only matters if Papa goes to Starkhaven."

"Sebastian is the man that put the bounties up?" Kieran's eyes narrowed. "He put one on my father as well, after he heard the rumor my father had recovered Anders."

Kels snorted. "I can't imagine there is an assassin or bounty hunter in the world stupid enough to try to take that job."

"Seven."

"What?"

"There were seven stupid enough to take that job." Kieran tilted his head. "A group of tal'Vashoth mercenaries. They threatened Uncle Carver with their saarebaas." He smiled. "It was very amusing."

"He's got a grudge against my father too then," Leandra shrugged.

"Brehan was of the belief he had a grudge against the Commander as well." Kels shrugged. "Probably more so since the Inquisition backed Aveline on the Commander's orders."

"Guessing he's not going to be on good terms with my grandfather then either." Loghain shrugged. "Though that's not a surprise."

"Stone, who here isn't this Sebastian fellow going to be holding a grudge against?" Train glanced back at his companions.

"Um..." Caleb frowned. "Well..." He looked back. "Jerath's name might be an issue, not sure how he'll feel about Duncan, Lenore's feelings on various matters are pretty well known, so I guess..." He looked back at Trian. "You."

"His father is the Warden Commander."

"Ah. Good point." Caleb shrugged. "Nope."

"The last time he saw Caleb and I was a decade ago. Unless we introduce ourselves, there is a good chance he won't even recognize us." Salla sighed. "Admittedly, our luck on going unnoticed has been lacking just a little."
"Any ideas what to do for coin?" Trian glanced back at the others.

"We could always do what Papa Brosca used to do in times like these." Agatha stretched her arms over her head. "Go find and rob some bandits."

"I don't suppose Starkhaven has an Inquisition safehouse for us to rob?"

"The Inquisition isn't exactly welcome in Starkhaven." Kels frowned. "I think there is a cache, but I'm not sure where it is located.

#

"Fenris."

"Cullen."

Cullen leaned on the ramparts next to the elf. The sun had yet to peek over the edge of the horizon. "Can't sleep?"

He sighed. "Salla..." Fenris shrugged. "She has strange dreams, at times, and wakes during the night. I would find her in the kitchen, and we would talk over tea. I keep waking up thinking I hear her moving in the hallway."

"Gavren used to wake up in the middle of the night and crawl into bed with Ruya and I." He turned, and shook his head. "Do you ever find it ironic?"

"Ironic?"

"You and I have more cause to hate and fear mages than most." He shook his head. "And we ended up marrying two of the most powerful mages in Thedas." He looked back at Fenris. "Is it difficult, raising a mage child?"

Fenris stared up at the sky. "It is."

"How do you manage it?"

"I have seen mages do horrific things in the name of power. I have hated and feared them with good reason." Fenris shrugged. "And all that pales before one simple truth."

"What is that?"

"She is my daughter."

#

Alistair found Brehan going over a map. "Sending your birds?"

"Wondering if it is worth the effort to send agents to Ostagar." He frowned. "I'll sent a bird to Fenarel, let him take a look just in case, but any trail that might have been present has long since been trampled over." He straightened. "And Fen'Harel searched Varla's last known location. If there had been any trace to be found there, he would have."

"I uh..." Alistair sighed. "I heard about the assassins sent after you."

"Were I you, I'd be more concerned about the ones going to be sent after you."
"Brehan..." Alistair folded his arms and leaned on the table. "How close did they get?"

"I came out of it without a scratch."

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"The ones they sent after me succeeded. Or will. They kill Cathiel, me, Rory, some others. And then later on their boss punches a hole in time and goes after our kids."

Brehan tossed the marker he was holding down on the table. "And you're wondering why, if Jerath answered you now, he doesn't stop it then?"

"Same question occurred to you." Alistair shrugged. "Thoughts?"

"The assassination..." Brehan sighed. "Things like that are fast. He may not have had time to intercede."

"And now? The letter said Kieran got hurt. And still..."

"I wish I knew." Brehan looked down at the map. "Any idea where else to send agents?"

He picked up the marker. "Nope." He tossed the marker up, caught it, and then shrugged and tossed it up higher. It tumbled a few times, hit, bounced, and came down again point first to stick in the map. "There you go. Starkhaven."

"Well. That should be fun."

#

"So you can't turn into any fish?" Caleb raised an eyebrow at Kieran.

"It is difficult to observe them properly."

Caleb frowned, and shook his head. "We've got fish in our fountain, I watch them all the time."

Kieran tilted his head. "Then you know how they breath?"

"I..." Caleb blinked, and considered. "Well, no."

"Dolphins are easier. They just hold their breath. But they need salt in their water, or their skin burns."

"Oh, that's awesome." He turned to Salla. "You should learn dolphin."

Salla rolled her eyes at him, and finished wringing out her dress. She hung it on a tree branch next to Agatha's, and then looked down at her shift. It was already drenched. She shrugged, and turned back to dive into the water. Trian sat on a rock near the shore, combing out his beard. Kels and Gavren were deeper in, apparently trying to drown Loghain with the encouragement of Agatha and Leandra. She hadn't heard what he'd said, but odds were he deserved it. Jerath and Duncan were racing up stream. The bodyguard was in the lead by half a length.

Caleb cannonballed into the water a couple feet from her. She immediately began splashing him back. He started using both hands to drench her, so she called up magic and started using that. "Cheater!" He started to turn towards the shore, and a cat made of water tilted its head at him.
Caleb blinked. It pounced, splashing onto him and leaving him sputtering.

"Not bad." Gavren’s voice said. He half closed his eyes, and the surface of the water near him swirled as it formed into a small dragon, which immediately took off. Almost immediately, a griffin leapt out of the water to give chase.

The two creatures engaged in mock battle above the surface of the river, occasionally sending splashes of water onto the cheering onlookers. Gavren and Kieran directed them to soar upwards, locked in a fight, before finally spiraling downward to slam into the water and send a wave over the swimmers.

"Okay, that was awesome." Caleb said.

#

Clean and somewhat refreshed, they made their way into Starkhaven. Caleb found himself looking around the city curiously. Sebastian had told him a few stories of his home, back in the years when he and Papa had been friends. It had as more people as Kirkwall, but where Kirkwall had built up, Starkhaven had built out. He could make out the ruins that had been Starkhaven’s mage tower. It didn’t really surprise him that Sebastian hadn’t rebuilt it.

The city itself was grand, especially compared to Kirkwall. But then, it was wealthier, handling trade with Antiva, Tevinter, Orlais, and Nevarra. And it hadn’t exploded or been invaded recently. And had probably not been built as a Tevinter ritual chamber that resulted in a deliberately thinned veil.

Trees lined walkways made of granite, and fountains dotted the marketplace. He found himself glad they’d bothered to clean up before entering. They’d have drawn even more attention otherwise.

"Starkhaven still has sanctions on trade with Ferelden." Duncan was giving the city a disapproving look.

"He’s still holding a grudge over sheltering the mages?" Salla raised an eyebrow at him. She, Kieran, and Gavren weren’t carrying their staffs. Starkhaven wasn’t quite openly hostile to mages, but they’d still draw questions. Loghain and Jerath had both complained about the Orlesian style masks they were wearing, but they had the most distinctive faces.

"There..." Duncan shrugged. "Well, we also had your father for a court mage before he went back to Kirkwall. At which point, we replaced him with a Grey Warden mage that happens to be his cousin. And..." Duncan rubbed the back of his neck. "He learned that The Warden and his people had spent time in Gwaren and demanded the Teyrna be held accountable for sheltering Anders. I was not particularly diplomatic in my response."

"Really?" Caleb glanced back at him. "What did you tell him?"

"Um..."

"Piss off." Loghain grinned when he answered.

"Ferelden politics are awesome." Caleb snickered.

"Didn't hurt us much. We don't need anything Starkhaven has a monopoly on, and most of our Free Marches trade goes through Kirkwall anyway. We trade openly with Kal'Hirol, so our lyrium doesn't go through carta or Tevinter." Duncan winked at Trian. "There are benefits to playing
nice with the dwarves.”

"Like not getting stabbed in the knees." Agatha spread her hands.

"That too."

#

"Learn anything?" Agatha raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah, being penniless refugees isn't any more fun now than it was when we were kids." Caleb folded his arms.

Kels chuckled. "We aren't exactly penniless."

"Twenty-one gold for eleven people isn't exactly going to go far, especially when we need to replace armor." Caleb sighed. "And I really don't want to sleep in a barn or on a sidewalk."

"I remember when a barn would have been a luxury. You got soft." Kels put his hand on Caleb's shoulder, and patted his cheek.

"You're mocking me again."

"You kidnapped me."

"Rescued!"

#

Leandra took Gavren's hand as they walked. "You don't think the Vaels are in league with the cult, do you?"

Gavren shook his head. "I doubt the prince even knows about the cult. Starkhaven is centrally located, but avoided most of the problems of the recent years. And the prince isn't welcoming to the Inquisition or any of the other forces most likely to trip the cultists. Frankly, I'm surprised it’s not a refuge to more groups like this one."

"Vael is a good man, just a bit of a pretentious ass." Leandra shrugged. "Do you think he knows?"

"Knows?"

"About..." Leandra sighed. "Fen'Harel, and Mythal, and Kieran, and all of it?"

"We can't rule that out. He knew enough to know Anders ended up back with the Wardens." He frowned. "And we don't know that the cult is here, just that the sentinels have a base here. I'm somewhat more willing to believe he might have some kind of alliance with them."

"We need more information."

"I think that's the Inquisition's motto." He narrowed his eyes, and squeezed her hand as they passed the gates of a particular estate. "There."

"Not exactly what I was expecting." Leandra frowned, and continued holding his hand as they strolled past. "Not exactly a hideout."

"Safer for them, I suppose. Guards aren't going to come across them randomly." He frowned.
"Could be they've acquired a patron of some kind."

"Let's tell the others."

#

"Why would sentinels be aligned with the cult?" Agatha shifted the pillow behind her to a more comfortable position. Once again, they were all sharing one room, which meant there was some sharing of beds.

"The cult is tearing down shrines, and you know Fen'Harel's opinions on the gods." Gavren sat behind Leandra, rubbing the woman's shoulders. Agatha thought she could actually hear Leandra purring.

"It's also possible they aren't aligned at all." Loghain looked up from where he was playing some board game with Trian. "Maybe they want whatever it was the cultists took from the temple. Or maybe they just want us. Rumors had to have gone round by now." He frowned. "I don't even want to think about what the Dread Wolf could do with sixteen years of information on the future."

"Did you tell our folks about the staff?" Salla turned towards him.

He furrowed his brow. "I'm not sure I did. What do we know about the staff anyway?" He turned towards Kieran.

Kieran raised an eyebrow. "What staff?"

"The staff they took from your temple," Salla said.

"They took a staff from my temple?" Kieran's eyes widened.

Silence fell on the room. Gavren took his hands off Leandra's shoulders. "Kieran, you're the one that told us they took a staff from your temple."

"I..." Kieran tilted his head to one side, and his eyes half closed. Several heartbeats passed. "Are you sure?"

"Very." Salla folded her legs under her. "You were surprised by it, because you couldn't remember a staff being in your temple..."

"And now you don't even remember that much." Gavren rubbed his head.

"If it was in my temple, I would remember." Kieran shook his head. "My temples do not keep secrets from me."

"You said that too." Gavren frowned. Then his eyes narrowed. "Cole used to be able to make people forget certain things, including himself. Could..." He stared at Kieran. "Could something like that even affect you?"

"But why just him?" Salla shook her head. "I mean, if it's that powerful, wouldn't it affect the rest of us too?"

"These are very good questions." Kieran tilted his head again. "We are going to need to find the answers."

"We need to get a spy into that estate."
Kieran nodded. "I have a friend who can help."

"He's kidding, right?" Kels looked at Caleb.

"I certainly hope so." Caleb's facial expression was skeptical.

Kels folded his arms and rubbed the bridge of his nose. Twenty feet away, Kieran was standing at the base of a tree. Holding an argument with a squirrel. An argument that he appeared to be losing, much to the man's annoyance. Salla stood a couple feet from them, apparently fascinated.

Finally, Kieran came back over to them. "He's already been keeping an eye." He waved one hand. "He said the sentinels are looking for the Tilde Staff, which the Formless One has found but seems to be unable to use." He glanced back at the squirrel, and then tilted his head and frowned. "He claims the sentinels intend to destroy the staff."

"Why would the Dread Wolf want to destroy the staff?"

"They are not working for Fen'Harel." Kieran frowned.

"So what were you arguing about?" Gavren raised an eyebrow.

"I was attempting to convince him to go back in and see what else he can learn, but he believes I should not be involving myself in the matter of the staff." Kieran's eyes narrowed, and he wrinkled his nose. "He threatened to tell mother if I do not drop the matter."

"Maybe he should." Gavren glanced around. "We can deal with the Formless One, and leave the staff to her and your father."

"Perhaps." Kieran nodded. "We should do what we can to ensure that Fen'Harel and the Formless One do not get the staff in the here and now, however."

"Wait..." Caleb shook his head. "I'm stuck on... 'the squirrel threatened to tell your mother'."

"The squirrel is an abomination?" Agatha gave the small furry creature a dubious look. It chittered at her.

"She did not mean to offend you." Kieran turned to the squirrel. It chittered at him again. "Yes, I know." It chittered and squeaked. "She called me one too, if it makes you feel better." It gave a curious squeak, and then squeaked something else. "Don't be mean." It squeaked one last time before running off. Kieran shook his head, and turned back towards Agatha. "You hurt his feelings."

"Agatha..." Leandra gave a disapproving shake of her head.

"What kind of spirit is it?" Salla stared in the direction the squirrel had gone.

"Wisdom." Kieran shrugged. "Though more like curiosity, I suppose. He did agree to see if he could locate cultists for us. I told him to be careful, as the Formless One may be able to sense his nature."

"Does he have a name, or is he just called 'Curiosity', like Justice and Vigilance?" Salla asked.

"He was, but Aunt Merrill dubbed him Fluffy, and now he only answers to that."
"Yeah, that sounds like mother." Leandra chuckled. "At least most of the griffins got dignified names."

Duncan sighed. "Can we get this conversation back on track, please?" He shook his head. "While..." He sighed reluctantly. "Fluffy gets us information, we should see about getting gear."

Salla nodded. "We could check out the Chanter's Board, see if there is anything good."

"Clearing rats out of basements for a few coppers doesn't sound particularly useful." Trian sighed.

"I was thinking more letting Caleb convince people we are a mercenary band and seeing what jobs we could find that way." Salla shrugged. "Worked for Papa."

"Alright. Maybe we could also get into the Chantry library and see if we can't get any information on this staff." Trian nodded.

"We might also want to let our folks know about the staff." Gavren folded his arms. "At the very least, they need to be able to respond if someone like Fen'Harel does get hold of it?"

Kieran gave Gavren a curious look. "What staff?"

"Are we going to have to re-explain it to him every time something distracts him from it?" Duncan raised an eyebrow.

"Looks like it." Salla shook her head, and took Kieran's arm. "Maybe I'll have you write it down."
Chapter 21

"This is kind of nice, in its way." Gavren nodded to the man sitting across the chess board from him.

Kieran raised an eyebrow. "Chess?"

"No." Gavren chuckled. "This..." He shrugged. "Person version of you."

"I do not understand." Kieran tilted his head.

"Leandra and I..." He shrugged. "We know you in the future. Sort of. Just not like this."

"Leandra did not recognize me at the estate." Kieran moved his piece.

"I wouldn't have either, at least not until you started casting spells. When we've met you before, you're more like..." Gavren moved his own piece. "More like a force of nature. This glowing being that occasionally yanks us into the Fade to give us a mission, information, or warning. I've only seen you outside the Fade a couple times."

"I..." Kieran frowned. "I am sorry."

"You've saved our asses, so don't be." Gavren smiled. "It's just..." He laughed. "You're not going to be quite so intimidating now."

The knight took a pawn. "If we are successful, you will not remember this me."

"Oh." Gavren sighed. "I keep forgetting that part." He shook his head. "But you'll remember, right?"

"Yes." Kieran nodded. "I will..." He smiled. "Introduce myself more properly the next time around."

"Do that." Gavren smiled. "I think we could be friends."

#

"Alright, how are we doing?" Trian looked down at the items spread on the table. He did a quick count of the coin. "We are up to thirty-five gold." He glanced at the sword. "But it appears the weapon shortage issue is taken care of. We can probably sell off the excess." He glanced at the shields. "Those are all pieces of shit, so the 'Kels and I need shields' thing is still in play." He looked up at Jerath. "How about armor?"

"Lighter than I prefer, but will serve for now." Jerath settled the splint mail over his shoulders.

"Other supplies?" Salla looked at the table. She frowned. "What are those?"

"That merchant who had his shipment intercepted was lying about having the coin to pay us." Duncan shook his head. "So we took a two of his boxes and called it even."

"Instead of five gold you have..." She did a quick count. "Twenty-four bottles of Ferelden Whiskey." She sighed. "That's great. Really."

"Hey, those things will come in handy if we have to bribe anyone." Caleb looked up from where
he was playing cards with Agatha and Loghain.

"Honestly..." She shrugged. "Not bad for three days of work."

"We've also got a place to stay. It's a house in the not great section of town, but its secure enough and it's a little less likely for anyone who might recognize us to trip over us there." Kels shrugged.

"And on the information front?" She looked around.

"There is a man with white tattoos. He has been seen coming and going from one of the noble estates, one near the royal palace," Kieran tilted his head. "It is located some distance from the estate where the sentinels are hiding." He gestured at Agatha. "We watched for a time, and saw a few others, including the elven mage that may be the cult leader."

Salla nodded. "Describe her?"

"Minor chords in higher octaves, piercing and angry, with an isochronal shift to raucous tempo divergent from the ambient."

She stared at Kieran blankly before shifting her gaze to Agatha. "Describe her?"

"Bit shorter than me, thin build. Blond, wears it in a short cut. Blue eyes, dresses fashionably." Agatha waved one hand. "She's usually accompanied by the tattooed guy, but even if she's not she has at least two other armed folks with her."

"Did..." Salla tried not to smile. "Fluffy get us any more information?"

"The sentinels are staying in the estate of a scholar named Iain Hendry, who is wed to a woman named Aileen Kenric."

"Kenric?" Gavren raised an eyebrow. "Any relation to Bram Kenric?"

Kels nodded. "An elder sister. Iain was one of the scholars that was allowed to study the Temple of Mythal and the remains of the vir'abelasans."

"That would explain how he came into contact with some of the surviving sentinels." Salla chewed her lower lip. "What role does Bram play in the Inquisition?"

"He requested help from the Inquisition with his expedition in the Frostback Basin." Gavren leaned back in his chair. "When they found Inquisitor Ameridan." He turned towards Kieran. "Your father was part of that." He shrugged. "Bram isn't an official member, but he remains strongly affiliated. He was even one of my tutors for a while."

"Would he be involved?" Salla asked.

"No." Gavren chuckled. "Bram's not exactly the kind of man who can keep a secret." He frowned. "If I have my timeline right, he's in the Frostbacks now, excavating..." He glanced at Kieran. "The temple of Razikale there."

"Father doesn't mind." Kieran smiled. "He rather liked the skald."

"I am going to tell Bram that, just to see the look on his face." Kels chuckled.

#

Leandra stared at Kels. "What if we sent you in?"
He blinked. "Me?"

"You're Cullen's right hand. You could say you are stopping in as part of some sort of routine thing, and see what information you could get."

"He's not going in there alone." Jerath folded his arms.

"No. You, Agatha, and Caleb are the best options to send in with him." Leandra looked back at Kels. "Well?"

"I've..." He shrugged. "Well, I've heard worse ideas."

"Except it appears that the sentinels know about us." Salla shook her head. "Might be better for mages to go in, to counter if spells start." She frowned. "Caleb, Kieran, Gavren, Leandra, and myself will go in with Kels." She sighed. "I still don't like this idea."

"The rest of us will be nearby then." Duncan shrugged. "In case you need help. But short of sending the squirrel back in, this might be our best chance."

#

He knocked sharply on the door. It was almost a full minute before it was opened. The butler led them inside, and sat them down in a parlor. A few minutes passed before Lord Hendry came to meet them. "Lieutenant Kels." He bowed. "Forgive me, I was not expecting you."

"Quite alright, Lord Hendry." He returned the bow. They'd switched their initial plan slightly, and it was and Leandra that had accompanied him and Caleb. "I was not expecting to drop in, but there is a situation with which you may be able to assist us." As agreed, he indicated Caleb. "Agent Bralic had some questions regarding the temple in the Arbor Wilds."

"We came across information that suggested that when the sentinels departed the temple, they left in more than one group. We were wondering if you found anything that might have suggested why." Caleb kept his smile polite, and his tone almost bored.

"A pleasure, Agent Bralic." Lord Hendry held out a hand in greeting, and Caleb took it.

"He's lying." A voice came from the hall before Lord Hendry could answer.

Lord Hendry yanked Caleb's hand, pulling the young man off balance. Caleb stumbled forward, and Lord Hendry spun him around, locking his arm behind him. The lord's other hand came up with a dagger, and he pressed it against Caleb's throat. "You don't say." Kels reached for his sword, and Lord Hendry used the knife blade to tilt Caleb's head back slightly. "Don't move."

An elven man stepped into the room, sword already in hand. He leveled it at Kels, laying the tip on his shoulder. Three other men entered, also armed, moving in to surround Leandra and Gavren. Two elven women remained in the second doorway, arrows leveled at Kieran and Salla. Another man entered, moving to stand next to Lord Hendry. He reached up a hand, pulling back his hood to reveal an elven face marked with green vallaslin. His eyes were more silver than gray. "Lay your weapons down." He gestured at one of the other sentinels. "Go fetch the others."

"Rethink your actions." Kieran's voice was quiet.

"We know who --" Lord Hendry started to say.

"Clearly you do not." Kieran's eyes narrowed. "Or you would not be holding a knife to one of my
friends."

"Go." The sentinel that had spoken gestured again at the other sentinel.

The sentinel took two steps before Kieran's voice froze her in place. "Venavis, Ionai." The rest of the sentinels shifted uncomfortably.

The sentinel that had spoken glanced at the woman Kieran had addressed before turning his gaze back to Kieran. "I said to lay your weapons down."

"And I said to rethink your actions." Kieran drew himself up to his full height, and a strange light glimmered behind his eyes. "You know what I am. You've seen me before. And right now..." His voice became deeper and more resonant with each word. "You are angering me."

"Iain." The sentinel gestured.

Lord Hendry swallowed fearfully before releasing his grip on the knife. It fell to the floor, and he released his grip on Caleb before stepping away, his hands spread out in a placating gesture. The sentinels lowered their weapons.

The light faded from Kieran's eyes, and he turned towards Salla. His voice returned to its normal, cheerful tones. "There were questions?"

#

Caleb touched his neck, and saw Salla's face grow worried again. He gave her a smile he hoped was reassuring. That had been just a bit closer than he liked, and he wasn't exactly sure how he felt about how the situation had been resolved. The glowing eyes and strange voice... He liked Kieran. But he'd liked Anders too. It was just never really a good thing when your friends started to glow. He forced himself to pay attention to the conversation.

"Why not come to the Inquisition?" Gavren was asking the leader of the sentinels, who had given his name as Melavan.

"We had discussed doing so, before encountering Lord Hendry." Melavan nodded to the nobleman. "We thought it best to remain..." He sighed. "Apart."

Kels frowned. "From the reports we received, far more than six of you survived the events in the Arbor Wilds. What happened to the rest of you?"

"Some of them headed Mother's call, and serve her still."

Melavan nodded to Kieran. "And the rest joined Abelas, in answering the call of Fen'Harel."

"And you?" Duncan raised an eyebrow.

"For all his words, all his cries for justice..." Melavan shook his head. "In the end, he turned on her as well. But we..." He inhaled, and folded his arms. "Our duty was..."

"You endured, for her sake. And she left you behind." Kieran's voice was sorrowful.

Melavan closed his eyes, and slowly nodded. "Yes."

"Where do you come into all this?" Duncan turned to look at Lord Hendry.

"Delaon was separated from us, and injured by some contaminated warriors still in the area."
Melavan gestured at the shortest of the sentinels. "He collapsed from his wounds while attempting to return to us. Iain came upon him while following some trail markers. We discovered him tending to Delaon's wounds."

Lord Hendry smiled. "They thanked me, and said they'd let me go unharmed." He glanced around at the sentinels. "I started to walk away, and then..." He sighed. "Well, they needed somewhere to go. My camp seemed as good a place as any to let them get their bearings and decide what to do next."

"We took so long making up our minds, he invited us to come back to Starkhaven with him." One of the female sentinels spoke up.

"They've been helping me with my research and expeditions ever since." Lord Hendry looked around. "I've learned more in the past five years than..." He spread his hands. "Than most have learned in the past thousand."

"None of that explains why you were in Hasmal." Loghain spoke up from where he was leaning on the wall.

"He's got a point." Salla gestured. "Why were you following us?"

"We weren't." Melavan tapped his fingers against his arm, and then sighed. "When we left the Arbor Wilds with Iain, there were seven of us."

"Enara." The name was said by an older looking sentinel, and there was anger in his voice.

"With Iain's aid, we were looking into some ruins in a swamp in Antiva. We crossed paths with another group doing the same thing. They captured Enara." Melavan's fists clenched. "Tortured her for information. The Formless One knew what questions to ask. We trailed them to Nessum, and then..."

The eyes of all the sentinels turned towards Kieran. "Ah." He rubbed the back of his neck. "I can see how that might have attracted your attention."

"I'm still having a very hard time believing it, personally." Lord Hendry shifted his position. "Despite what I've seen in the past few years."

"You were hunting our quarry." Melavan gestured with one hand. "The Inquisition was hunting you." He gestured with the other hand. "Tracking them seemed like a reasonable chance to find you." He frowned. "And yet, you found us first." He shook his head. "How?"

Salla narrowed her eyes. "We'll tell you that, if you tell us what you know about the Formless One, this cult, and their plans."

The sentinels exchanged looks, and then Melavan nodded. "We will agree to this."

She turned, and nodded to Gavren.

"Fourteen years from now some of the sentinels currently following Fen'Harel break away from him. They start killing rather indiscriminately, including killing some of his loyal agents." Gavren leaned back in his chair. "He will teach me how to track the impressions you leave on the veil, and lets the Inquisition hunt them down. That solves his problem, while keeping us busy and distracted." Gavren shrugged. "He apparently developed some kind of ward for those who remained loyal, preventing what he taught me from being useful against him."
"You learn magic from the Dread Wolf..." Delaon stared at him. "Fourteen years from now?"

Caleb chuckled. "You might all want to sit down."

Lord Hendry sat down, and almost immediately stood back up. "Incredible. This is..." He laughed. "Terrifying. And incredible." He ran a hand through his hair. "Gods, time travel, ancient elves..." He turned back towards them. "Any moment now I'm going to wake up and realize I should not have eaten those purple berries."

Trian nodded. "I know that feeling."

The rest of the sentinels introduced themselves. Tisallan was the oldest of them, though he seemed content with letting Melavan be their leader. Enara had apparently been his granddaughter. Deloan was Melavan's younger brother. Ionai was Deloan's wife and had been Enara's cousin. Alai was the other woman among the sentinels, and was apparently Melavan's niece. Noamin, the youngest of the group, was unrelated to the others, but had apparently been Enara's apprentice. They divided into smaller groups, to ask questions with the intention of comparing notes later.

"How have you managed to keep something like this a secret for five years?" Kels stared at Lord Hendry.

"It wasn't my initial intention." Lord Hendry ran a hand through his hair. "I thought I'd interview them, get some firsthand accounts, and then publish everything. And then..."

"They stopped being research, and started being friends?" Trian nodded.

"Exactly." Lord Hendry looked around the room. "And more. For over a thousand years, we've kept repeating the same mistakes, over and over and over again. History gets written by the victors, and then rewritten. Taking them in..." He leaned on his desk. "It was a chance to get truth. To learn what really happened and maybe..." He shook his head. "We cannot change the past, but we can learn from it."

"You realize..." Kels sighed. "Of course you do. Publishing the truth is going to make you a lot of enemies."

"And take their sanctuary from them." Lord Hendry nodded. "It's all written. Melavan and I agreed. They'll help me, with research, translation, finding sites, putting it together. And in return, my work will not be published until after my death."

"Maker." Kels rubbed the back of his neck. "You won't get to see it."

Lord Hendry laughed. "Son, I see it every day. Do you realize how old Tisallan is? I've walked through the ruins of an ancient elven palace with a man who was there the day the first stones were laid. Most are lucky if they can figure out what a building was used for." He smiled. "I know that the man who put in the stained glass windows always added a cat figure to one, because his daughter loved cats." He unrolled a piece of vellum to reveal a sketch of a magnificent archway. "Ionai's work. Isn't she amazing?"

"That's --"

He pulled a sheaf of papers out of his desk, and spread some out. They contained rather odd glyphs. It took Kels a few moments to realize he was looking at musical notations. "Tisallan's work. I'm trying to find a craftsman who can duplicate the instrument he used to play based on
sketches and description. It no longer exists in this time, you see, and he cannot duplicate all its capabilities with the harp or lute."

"Wow." Kels couldn't quite stop his own smile. "I can only come up with about a dozen people Spymaster Brehan wouldn't kill to take a look at that."

"And I can come up with a few hundred people, people of not inconsiderable power, who would kill to see it destroyed." Lord Hendry replaced the papers. "I will turn this over to the Inquisition, someday."

Trian slowly nodded. "I would..." He nodded. "Duncan is the King of Ferelden. I will be King of Kal'Hirol. When the time comes, we will see your work preserved."

"Thank you."

#

"So this cultist woman, Siofra..." Salla shook her head. "She's doing this because she's angry at the gods?"

"Yes." Melavan nodded.

"Why?" Salla stared.

"We exist." Kieran's voice was quiet when he replied. "Voices calling, asking, praying, pleading, building to a deafening crescendo none can hear. We exist, but we do not answer. She begged for help, alone in the dark, and no one answered her. Silent and empty, as Corypheus found the void. She thinks she can do it better. She does not understand."

"Can you blame her?" Melavan turned towards him.

"No." Kieran shook his head. "Not for the anger. Her actions, however, are a different matter."

"On that we agree." Tisallan spoke up from where he was sitting. "She would follow the path of Corypheus." He shrugged. "She learned, somehow, what Fen'Harel did to Mythal."

"Two mortals have taken mantles, even with the Veil in place." Melavan nodded to Kieran. "Three, if we count you. She would do the same."

"And she thinks this staff could help her?" Salla looked from Tisallan to Melavan.

"What staff?" Kieran frowned at Salla.

Salla opened her mouth to explain, and blinked in surprise when Tisallan actually started laughing. Melavan rubbed his eyes and gave a relieved sigh. "Um..." She looked at them again. "I think I missed something."

"The wards remain in place." Tisallan nodded in satisfaction. "The Formless One and his new pet have not managed to overcome them."

"If these people are telling the truth, they won't manage that feat for another sixteen years." Melavan folded his arms. "We have some time, at least."

"These wards..." Salla sat up straighter. "They are why Kieran can't remember the staff?"

"Yes."
"Who put up these wards?" Salla asked.

Melavan and Tisallan exchanged a look. Melavan nodded to Kieran. "He did."

"I..." Kieran blinked. "What?"

"Is the settlement still there, in your future?" Noamin asked.

Duncan nodded. "Keeper Lanaya will be given the title of Arlessa officially..." He furrowed his brow. "Actually, I think that's going to occur this year. My father was planning on discussing the matter with the Divine to ensure she'll back him up, being that Keeper Lanaya is a mage." He nodded at where Trian was talking to Lord Hendry, along with Kels. "Kal'Hirol builds a trade outpost under the settlement about a year after Trian becomes king."

Noamin nodded. "I've thought about going. Claiming to be a Dalish that left his clan, taking up a new identity. A fresh start."

"You could tell Lanaya who you really are. She'd be thrilled."

"That would defeat the purpose of..." Noamin sighed. "Having an ordinary life. Forgive me, I just find it hard to believe elves are actually welcome somewhere in this world."

"My mother is elvhen." Jerath nodded to Noamin.

"After my parents were killed..." Duncan swallowed. "I don't know what I would have done without Nesiara. She kept me and my siblings sane, in the aftermath. In many ways, she's been a mother to me as well." He half-closed his eyes. "Bann Shianni remains on my council, and if I have my way someday her daughter will advise my own child."

"I believe you."

"What is this staff, exactly?" Salla asked.

"An item of considerable power." Melavan replied. "One that should not be in the hands of this cultist."

"That much we gathered." Salla folded her arms. "Is it something like my father's staff? The one the Grey Wardens used to seal up Corypheus."

"No."

"He is lying." Kieran glanced at Salla. "Which you likely already knew."

"Yeah, he answered that a little too quick." Salla narrowed her eyes. "What's it called?"

"Let it be, child." Melavan answered.

Tisallan said something in elvish, and Melavan replied in the same tongue. The two argued. After a few minutes, Kieran turned to Salla. "Tisallan thinks they should tell us, and hopes that information will be enough to warn us away. Melavan is concerned that not all of us can be trusted, with Gavren worrying him in particular. Tisallan does not believe the Inquisitor's son would willingly aid Fen'Harel, but Melavan pointed out the aid does not need to be willing for
Fen'Harel to make use of it. They are planning to send one of their number to the Inquisition to let them know where we are so that we can be retrieved, and are considering inviting us to dinner with the intention of drugging us to make that easier. They do believe the Inquisitor to be a wise woman, and agree she will destroy the staff rather than let it fall into the wrong hands. It is called the Tilde Staff, and they believe the fact that I was the one that hid it in the first place is all the more reason why they should keep me away from it now. Tisallan seems to believe that the reason I eliminated my own memories of the staff was to keep myself from knowing and revealing how to bypass the wards after I fell."

"And apparently they think the fact your ears no longer point somehow means you forgot how to speak elvish." Salla nodded. "Let's let them keep talking, maybe they'll tell us something else."

Melavan said something else in elvish, but Tisallan laughed. Melavan shook his head in disapproval. "We have no wish to harm any of you, but we will not be permitting you to leave this estate."

Salla turned back towards Kieran. "He thinks he can stop us from leaving the estate."

"This should be greatly entertaining. Perhaps we will allow Caleb to utilize the limericks this time?"

"Hey now, that's just mean."

#

"How old are you, exactly?" Loghain raised an eyebrow at Alai.

"A little over two thousand." Alai glanced back at him. "You?"

"A little under four." He grinned.

She stared at him for a moment, and then laughed.

#

"Let's say we agree with you." Salla gestured at Melavan. "Because honestly, we do. If this cult woman or Fen'Harel want the staff, it's better to destroy it than let them get their paws on it." She folded one leg up under her. "Why not help us get it?"

"You are unprepared for the danger you would face. Fen'Harel, as he is now, would easily be a match for Corypheus, and the Formless One is a peer to them."

"Xekenbeck was a peer to them, and my Papa kicked her ass." Salla waved a hand. "Kicked Corypheus's ass too, for that matter."

Tisallan raised an eyebrow. "And how did that work out for him?"

"I..." Salla glared. "Okay, fair point." She shook her head. "But risking you is just as bad an idea. You're thousands of years old, and the only sentinels that seem actually interested in helping the world."

"She is correct." Kieran nodded. "We would prefer you not be risked."

"We, at least, know what we are getting into." Melavan's voice became firm.

"So enlighten us. What are we getting into?"
"You are a very stubborn young woman." Tisallan shook his head.

"She's Fereldan." Kieran smiled.

#

"It can't be a ward." Ionai shook her head. "It must be some kind of inherent flaw in the spell he taught you, something he can take advantage of."

"I suppose that does make a certain kind of sense." Gavren frowned. He concentrated, casting the spell slowly while she watched.

"There is no blood magic involved, but it bears passing similarities to a binding ritual."

"I thought the same, but I haven't been able to use it to track spirits."

"No, it's tied to something else. Something inherent in us, but also something he figured out how to remove from those who remained loyal."

"There are a few similarities to the magic used by phylacteries."

Ionai raised an eyebrow. "Explain?"

He filled her in on the process of creating a phylactery, and then she started to nod. "Of course. Pure blood. I imagine if you could find those among the Dalish with unbroken lines, it might work to detect them as well."

Gavren's eyes widened. "Before I mastered it, I picked up Brehan on the edges a few times. He's from a long line of Keepers."

Leandra looked back and forth between them. "So... how helpful is this?"

"I have no idea." Gavren smiled. "Yet."

"It is odd, seeing our magic in the hands of a shemlen." Ionai chuckled. "Perhaps this world is not as alien as we feared."

#

"Lady Salla," Melavan took a deep breath. "Please understand. The being sitting next to you was not always what the Tevinter twisted him into. For reasons I cannot begin to fathom, he seems inclined to listen to you. Do not let him pursue this."

"You think it will endanger me?" Kieran raised an eyebrow.

"We know it will." Tisallan sighed. "How much do you remember, of what you were before?"

"Voices raised in harmony, echoing the spells as they cast, intertwining, reflecting, each measure building upon the next, as each verse was born beneath the sky." Kieran's voice became sad. "The song was never meant to end."

Salla glanced at Kieran, and then back at Tisallan. "He matters to you."

"Very much so." Tisallan nodded. "You must know that some spirits are stronger than others."

"Their strength is based on the virtue to which they aspire."
"A simplistic answer, but the gist is accurate." Melavan nodded. "Do you know what he used to be, before the Tevinter twisted him as they did so many other things?"

"He tried to explain it to me once before." Salla nodded. "Beauty."

Tisallan shook his head. "No, child. More than that. Inspiration. The Muse." Tisallan closed his eyes, and then nodded again. "I will not allow him to be twisted again. Not by the Formless One. And not by the shemlen."

Kieran frowned. "Tisallan?"

"Yes?" Tisallan's eyes were wet when he looked at Kieran.

"I am sorry. The me you remember, before..." Kieran's voice was gentle. "The cadence has changed. That song will never be played again." Tisallan stood, and left the room. Melavan watched him go, and sighed. Kieran hung his head. "I am sorry."

"I unsettle you." Delaon stared at Agatha.

"Understatement of the century." Agatha stared at him. "I mean, I'm not really much of an elf, but I feel like..." She swallowed. "Wow."

"How can you not be much of an elf?" Delaon asked.

"Well, my mother is human, and one of my fathers is a dwarf."

"I..." Delaon blinked. "What?"

"Huh." Caleb shook his head, and then looked up at her. "In this group, who'd have thought you'd be the they have trouble with?"

"You are set on this path?" Melavan gave them a stern look.

"Yes." Salla nodded fiercely. "We stand the best chance of --"

"Getting yourselves killed." Melavan shook his head. "Or far worse." He stood, drawing the attention of the rest of the room. "I have made my decision."

Salla rose, and folded her arms across her chest. She raised her voice. "This is the part where he informs us he'd going to be keeping us in the estate while he sends someone to fetch our folks. It's going to make for a very awkward next few minutes, because we don't actually want to hurt them, or mess up Lord Hendry's lovely house and nice belongings."

Melavan stared at her for a moment, and then shook his head. "The Formless One is seeking you, with his cult of fools. My bargain is this. Remain here, under our protection. We will outfit you, and provide you with food and shelter, as well as assist you in uncovering his plans. And we will defend you should he attack." He folded his arms. "Or go. We follow, tracking you wherever you try to hide, using thousands of years of knowing what we are doing. We turn you over to your parents. We assist them in sealing you into cages, to be fed through the bars, until you come to your senses."

"Give us a minute to talk it over." Salla gestured at her companions, and they huddled together
briefly. She met each of their eyes in turn, and saw them all nod. Without saying a word, she nodded as well and turned back to Melavan. "We'll stay. We left some of our gear behind where we were staying. We'll need to retrieve it." She gestured at Caleb and Agatha.

"Delaon, accompany them." Melavan nodded to the sentinel, who followed Caleb and Agatha out.

Lord Hendry stood. "I'll prepare rooms. I let many of my servants go, as a security measure, so I apologize for the poor accommodations." He chuckled. "Didn't really think I'd be hosting a king anytime soon."

"We'll be fine," Duncan assured him. "At this point, I'm appreciative of any hospitality."

Salla looked around, and counted heads. She ran a hand down her face. "Where is Loghain?"

Melavan blinked, and looked around as well. "And Alai?"

"Maferath's balls." Duncan winced. "Somebody remind me to execute that asshole."
"I can't believe you."

"I've only known him for a few months, and I believe it." Caleb snickered.

Duncan stared at Loghain. "What if we had decided to fight it out?"

"Well, then I improved your odds by taking one of them out of the battle." Loghain shrugged.

"Explain yourself." Salla folded her arms.

"I saw an opportunity to further my education by gaining the benefit of experience." Loghain grinned. "And you wouldn't believe what I --"

She held up a hand. "I changed my mind." Salla shook her head. "Stop talking."

"You remember the part where you are married?" Duncan glared.

"Well, yes. Your sister is rather unforgettable."

"Asshole."

Caleb frowned. "Duncan, if you have a problem with him, why not say something to your sister?"

Loghain laughed. Duncan rubbed his forehead. Next to him, Jerath actually smiled. "He did."

"Yes, and that was the day you utterly failed me as a bodyguard."

Jerath shook his head. "I handle demons, dragons, Orlesians, and assassins. When it comes to your little sister..." Jerath shrugged. "You're on your own."

Salla glanced over at where Loghain was making no effort to conceal his amusement. "Someone want to let the rest of us in on the joke?"

His smile only widened. "Let's just go with 'Duncan was not the one that inherited the Therin boots of ass-kicking'."

She shook her head, and glanced over at where Melavan was having about as much luck admonishing Alai. Noamin spoke up from where he was quietly observing. "What kind of woman did you marry?"

"Fereldan." Loghain smiled.

#

Leandra moved through the form Delaon showed her, switching out her normal sword for a spear with a slightly curved blade. The form was designed to be defensive, to hold an attacker at bay until they wore down and provided an opportunity to perform a counter strike. "This is designed for a staff?"

He nodded. "For a mage to defend themselves in a situation in which magic is in appropriate, or for when their magic is spent." He moved over to Gavren, correcting his footwork.
"Seems like it would work well enough for an axe." She shifted, switching to one of the more aggressive forms her father had taught.

Delaon gave her a surprised look. "You have already studied the rushing waters?"

She blinked, and stepped out of the form. "No, that's something my father..." She nodded. "My father is Carver Hawke. He trained with The Warden."

"I've heard of the man." Delaon gave her a respectful nod. "Your mother is Mythal's high priestess, yes?"

"Well..." Leandra furrowed her brow. "I'm not sure they'd put it that way. Apprentice and friend, maybe."

"Still, an impressive lineage." He raised an eyebrow. "But you do not have magic?"

"No. I take after my father." Leandra shrugged. "Right down to being human."

"The past few years have shown me that we may have judged the shemlen too harshly. Another lesson learned too late." Delaon gestured with his own spear, and began demonstrating another form.

#

Agatha gave Jerath an appraising look. "You look good in elven style armor, but why wear it for drills?"

He shrugged. "It moves a bit different than I am used to. Need to settle it in, get used to it. Ideal is to avoid a hit, but that's not always an option. So I need to know where I can take one without it bogging me down."

She moved in to assist as he began removing the armor. His tunic came up slightly, and she saw a scar on his side. She touched it lightly. "What's this one from?"

"Qunari spear. First time fighting them, didn't realize how long a reach they had." He set the breastplate on the stand.

"And this one?" She touched one on his bicep.

"Arrow, during a skirmish on the Orlesian border."

Her fingers went up to the one on his shoulder. "And this one?"

"Fork, during a state dinner."

"What?" She couldn't quite stop herself from smiling.

"Assassins attacked. Lady Goswina Trevalyan tried to..." He shook his head ruefully. "Help."

"And she helped by stabbing you with a fork?"

"I think she was aiming for the assassin." He put the last piece of the armor back on the stand. "But she is Antivan, so one never knows."

"Actual jokes from you." Agatha smiled. "And I thought running into ancient elves was the weirdest thing going to happen in Starkhaven." He smiled back at her, and she felt her knees go a
"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have..."

"It stopped mattering a long time ago." He shrugged. "We should find the others, figure out our next moves."

"Right."

#

"Your wife really doesn't have an issue with your behavior?" Loghain sat back in his chair. "Should she?" He shook his head at Caleb. "As fond as Wynne and I are of each other, we married for political reasons. Her lover and I are friends, and the three of us often enjoy each other's company."

"I..." Caleb nodded. "Oh. She's got someone. Who is he?"

"She..." Loghain corrected the pronoun with a low chuckle. "Is a lovely young vashoth, who serves as her maid. Duncan tries very hard to pretend the situation does not exist."

"I'll bet. Isn't Ferelden currently at war with the Qunari?" Caleb frowned.

"Pela is vashoth, not Qunari." Loghain frowned. "Which is one reason Wynne has chosen to make her home in Gwaren, rather than remaining in Denerim."

"What about the other boys? The twins?" Caleb waved a hand. "What do they think of all this?"

"Bryce is Lenore's apprentice, will likely be replacing her as court mage sometime in the next few years. Maric and Teagan's son Xander are squiring for Ser Kylon, Duncan's guard captain."

"I thought Jerath was Duncan's guard captain." Caleb glanced over at where the red haired man was talking quietly with Agatha.

"Technically, Jerath's rank is general, but his primary duty is keeping the king out of trouble." Loghain chuckled. "A full time job, as you might have noticed. He also acts as a military adviser, and Ser Kylon reports to him rather than the other way around." He shrugged. "So does Ser Alec, the leader of my order."

Caleb nodded. "I never asked..." He sighed. "Where am I, in the future?"

"You are the Seneschal of Kirkwall. The consensus is that when Varric steps down, it will be in your favor."

"And Salla?"

"That, I don't know." Loghain furrowed his brow. "I know she's a healer of some repute, but other than she was part of relief efforts for a plague that hit the Avvar a few years back, but that's it." 

#

Salla and Kieran looked over the information Melavan had provided. Considering how long they'd been watching the cult, she'd expected a bit more. "I think our advantage is that they are hunting us as much as we are hunting them."

Melavan instantly shook his head. "I will veto any plan that involves using one of you as bait."
"Nowhere in our negotiations did we give you veto power over our plans." Salla leaned on the table and stared up at him. "Using one of us as bait might be our only option."

"I'm curious as to who put you in charge." Melavan narrowed his eyes.

She pointed at Kieran. "He did."

The sentinel started to object, and instead merely growled in frustration. "Using brute force to bypass the wards would require considerable power. Such would leave a mark, one we..." Melavan frowned. "Or for that matter, Fen'Harel, could detect. And they would likely not be successful anyway."

"It sounds like Kieran is the only one that could bypass the wards." Salla chewed her lip. "This staff..." She glanced at Kieran. "It's from before he was actually Urthemiel?"

"What staff?" Kieran gave her a perplexed look.

"Just trust me. I'll explain it in a bit."

Kieran nodded to her.

"No and yes. He was already known as Urthemiel, but he had not yet fallen to become the 'Old God'." Melavan shook his head.

"What makes this staff powerful?"

"I..." Melavan sighed. "I have absolutely no idea. It was crafted by his first high priest, a man named Othalias."

"A melody woven around soft beats on a steel drum. He saw the notes before they were played." Kieran tilted his head, his eyes half closed. "Deceptively simple in harmony."

"But why is the staff powerful?"

"What staff?"

Salla sighed. "The Formless One knew about the staff, but clearly, not enough to bypass the wards."

"It is likely he knew nothing of it save that it was powerful and located in the temple." Melavan frowned. "That would be enough to interest him, especially if his intention is to lure you in." He went silent a moment, and then sighed. "As for why it is so powerful..." He met her eyes. "That I do not know. The staff your father uses once had another purpose, and it can absorb other energies to empower itself. This may be similar, and considering who it was once used by, the energies it may have absorbed would be powerful indeed."

#

"I'm not overly comfortable with us being in Starkhaven." Fenris frowned. "Doesn't Sebastian still have a bounty on you?"

Hawke shrugged. "Two hundred gold to bring me in alive."

"Out of curiosity, have any been stupid enough to try?" Alistair raised an eyebrow.

"A few. Last was what..." Hawke shrugged and glanced at Fenris. "Two years ago?"
"I have a hard time fathoming it."

"He actually put a bounty on The Warden as well." Hawke shrugged.

Carver laughed. "Believe it or not, there was even a group stupid enough to try for that one."

Alistair put a hand over his heart and closed his eyes in an expression of mock grief. "Those poor bastards." He let his hand fall to his side. "What are the odds the kids are actually here?"

"Surprisingly good." Brehan spoke from the doorway. "There are scattered reports of odd elves, and a group of mercenaries that recently arrived that fits the description of the kids."

"Loghain's tattoo?" Cullen looked up.

"Two members wore Orlesian masks. A blond and a red head." Brehan folded his arms. "No mention of spells, so the kids may have learned to be subtle. Impressive, for a group containing three Hawkes and an Amell. We could be on the wrong trail, but..."

"Something tells you we're not?" Cullen nodded. "Tell me about these odd elves."

"Just a few sightings, and not of more than two at a time." Brehan looked around the room. "As hard as it is for this particular group, we do need to keep our own heads down." He frowned. "Last thing we need is the Prince of Starkhaven arresting the King of Ferelden."

Gavren raised an eyebrow at Salla. "Did you get enough from Melavan?"

"He doesn't know as much as I'd hoped." She leaned back. "We may need to stay longer, let them drop their guard a little bit more."

"I'm hurt by their lack of trust." Caleb stuck out his lower lip.

"You are planning to take their gold, gear, and information." Kels shook his head. "Then run."

"The real question is do we tell the Inquisitor about them or not?" Salla looked around the room. "Gavren?"

"Mother will be annoyed at Lord Hendry, certainly. But I don't think she'd go as far as to be angry at him over hiding the sentinels." He frowned. "His heart was certainly in the right place. I think she'd be more disappointed they didn't come to the Inquisition. And I don't think she'll trust them."

"Do we trust them?" Agatha asked.

"No." Duncan said.

"Yes." Kieran said at the same time.

Duncan turned towards him. "They are kind of keeping us prisoner."

"They have no wish to harm us, or to allow anyone else to harm us. And they will keep their word as they have given it."

"You sure about that?" Duncan gave him a disbelieving look.

"They have spent thousands of years keeping their word. Not a habit one can easily break." Kieran
tilted his head a moment. "Melavan in particular will also not take chances with the safety of Lord Hendry. He knows well the value of friendship and loyalty, and honors that pact."

"So we can trust them..." Salla nodded. "And we can't. But at least we know where the line is going to be." She chewed her lower lip. "Loghain, I don't suppose you could --"

"No." Loghain's voice was flat.

She turned to stare at him. "You don't even know what I was going to ask."

"You were going to ask me to use pillow talk to see about further swaying Alai."

Salla sighed. "Well, yes."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I do, deep down, have a modicum of self-respect, and I do not manipulate my bedmates."


#

Agatha padded lightly after Ionai, and felt a rush of satisfaction when she received an approving nod. Both were dressed in servant's clothing, the better to remain unnoticed in the brief times they did have to walk where they could be seen.

From their vantage point, they could see the house the cult was using. Now and then, people arrived. Few stayed more than an hour before leaving again. Baradies occasionally met people on the porch, accompanied by Siofra. She counted almost two dozen visible guards, six of them qunari. She pitched her voice low so as not to carry. "I see several ways in, but I'd bet they are all warded and trapped. A couple are too obvious."

"Invitations." Ionai nodded. "We could bypass them, but not quickly."

"Maybe with a distraction?" Agatha glanced down at the other woman.

"Perhaps. Let us return to the others."

#

"What have we learned?"

"The Formless One, in his guise as Baradies, is playing the role of local lord." Kels nodded to Salla. "His estate is well guarded. It could just be by hired guards and mercenaries, but Agatha and Ionai saw enough to lead us to the conclusion that all the staff of the estate are cultists. They are meeting with some of the other nobles, but we don't yet know for which purpose." He glanced at Delaon.

Delaon took over the report. "It would appear some of the Inquisition managed to follow you here. We have identified them as Spymaster Brehan, Commander Cullen, King Alistair and his court mage, and Kirkwall's Champions." Gavren winced. Loghain quietly began banging his head on the wall. Delaon gave them an amused look.
"Unfortunately, we have also discovered that we are not the only sentinels in Starkhaven."

Melavan folded his arms.

Salla turned towards Kieran. "Your mother's people?"

He shook his head. "If they were, they would have come to the door."

"You mean she knows where you are right now?" Leandra's head came up.

"Mother and Father are quite capable of tracking me through the Fade."

"Ah." Salla sent a look at Melavan. "So at least two gods clearly think we are capable of handling this on our own."

"Or they know you have accepted our protection," Melavan immediately countered. Salla opened her mouth to argue with him again.

"Or they are occupied with another matter." Tisallan's voice was cold, and stopped them both. "A notion that should be concerning all of us." He glanced at Kieran, who nodded.

Melavan took a deep breath, and continued. "No, it is not the sentinels who remained loyal. The group that has come here is led by Abelas."

"Which means Fen'Harel has decided to get involved." Leandra shifted slightly, moving in front of Gavren in a protective manner. Salla doubted the woman was even consciously aware she had done so. "And that just complicates the shit out of everything."

"We could use Fen'Harel's forces as a distraction. Get in and get the staff while they are dealing with each other?" Caleb looked around.

"Oh, yes. Brilliant. Let's trick the god of tricking." Trian rolled his eyes. "After that, we'll go pick a fight with the god of ass-kicking."

"Isn't that Kieran's dad?"

#

Gavren waited for Leandra's nod before he began gathering his magic to him. One distraction, coming right up. At least he knew this building was unoccupied, and there were few in the streets this early in the morning. He unleashed the spell, and the building exploded. Leandra immediately grabbed his collar and dragged him back under cover as shrapnel went flying.

They followed Noamin back through the sewer tunnels. The plan was to position themselves in case the others needed backup.

#

Duncan followed Agatha and Ionai. Jerath and Noamin were only a few steps behind. As expected, the other sentinels had immediately gone to investigate the explosion. He wasn't sure how Ionai and Noamin felt about going up against their one-time comrades. Those doubts were quickly dashed when Ionai punched the sentinel left on guard in the face. As the sentinel staggered backwards, Agatha hit him in the face with a handful of gray powder.

Jerath and Noamin quickly dumped the unconscious man rather unceremoniously into a nearby barrel. Duncan assisted the women in gathering everything in the small building that even
remotely looked interesting, shoving it all into sacks.

They walked back through the city as if they hadn't a care in the world.

#

"Well?"

"The Dread Wolf isn't exactly foolish enough to commit his entire plan to paper." Melavan gave them a disapproving look.

"And yet, this so was not a waste of our time," Salla grinned. "We have all their information on the cult, including locations of cult hideouts."

"Now, as you promised, it will be turned over to the Inquisition." Melavan folded his arms, resuming his usual stern posture.

"Oh, we did that already," Salla nodded to him, and grinned.

"I..." He blinked, and then started to glare. He waved one hand at Kels. "Handing it to the Lieutenant does not count."

"Well, then you should have clarified that beforehand." Salla met his glare with one of her own.

"Da'len..."

"Melavan, I understand your feelings on this matter." Salla imitated his stern posture. "I get where you are coming from. I do, after all, have two fathers of my own." She narrowed her eyes. "We all have parents. I don't know why you thought we'd give you any less shit than we give them."

Behind Melavan, Tisallan casually held his hand out to Lord Hendry. Lord Hendry sighed, and set a small coinpurse in it. Tisallan tucked the coinpurse away and went back to watching quietly.

#

"A building exploded."

Brehan nodded at Alistair.

"And it wasn't them?" Alistair gestured at Hawke and Lenore, both of whom opened their mouths to object to the insinuation before exchanging a look and giving matching shrugs. Considering how little alike they looked, the family resemblance often amazed him. He nodded. "Gavren then?"

"We can't be certain," Cullen said. He sighed. "But it is not unlikely. The odd part is the building appeared to be unoccupied, and it blew up while there were few nearby to be injured."

"The kids needed a distraction." Alistair frowned.

"That was my guess as well." Brehan leaned on the table, looking down at their map of Starkhaven. "We just don't know why, and this doesn't help us determine where they are hiding." He shook his head. "I've spoken with the Inquisition's agents in the area, though there admittedly are few. We do have a couple other contacts in the area that might be able to help us contact the prince quietly."

Alistair grimaced. "Ferelden and Starkhaven aren't exactly allies."
"Nor are Kirkwall and Starkhaven." Fenris shook his head.

"Or the Inquisition and Starkhaven." Cullen nodded to Fenris.

"Or Cullen and I personally and Starkhaven," Hawke added.

"Can we just set fire to the city now and get it over with?" Lenore frowned. "What about calling in our magister friends again? Starkhaven is close to the Tevinter border. He might welcome them in."

"Who are these contacts you mentioned?" Cullen asked Brehan.

"Lord Iain Hendry and his wife, Aileen Kenric."

"Kenric?" Cullen nodded in recognition of the name. "Related to Bram?"

"Older sister."

"Kels would know of both." Cullen rested his hands on his sword hilt. "Might be worth checking out."

#

"Think he'll show us a bit more respect now?" Agatha looked over at where Melavan was putting a sparing sword back in its rack.

Jerath rolled his shoulder, wincing slightly as he did so. "I sincerely doubt it."

"You put him down two matches out of three. That's got to count for something." She sighed. "Though it would help if you didn't agree with him about us staying out of trouble."

"I think that ship sailed." Jerath leaned his shield next to the armor stand.

"Then hit a storm, caught fire, ran aground on a reef, exploded, and sank." She offered him a glass of water. "I thought about what you said."

He took the water from her. "About what?" He took a drink.

"You being someone else." She sighed. "And I realized, if time resets..." She looked up at him. "I will be too. None of this will have happened." She laid her hand on his chest. "Which means that all we really have are these moments."

His eyes went to her hand. "And what does that mean?"

"I really have to say it out loud?" Agatha shook her head. "Again?" She bit her lip. "What if we don't win? That we can't change things and this is the new future? Am I supposed to just pretend nothing in the now matters?"

"I saved you from a dragon." Jerath set the glass down. "Now, what? You want me to sprinkle rose petals on a bed and carry you away on a white horse?"

"Maybe." She sighed. "But I think I'd settle for you just tearing my clothes off." Agatha laughed softly. "And I wanted that a few days before there was even a hint of dragon, so --" She was cut off by him kissing her.

Agatha wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him back. She jumped to wrap her legs
around his waist, and he caught her easily. Immediately, she started unbuttoning his shirt. He used one hand to support her, and fumbled for the door handle with the other. Her last coherent thought for a while was that they'd somehow ended up in a storeroom.

Oh well.

At least it was private.

#

Salla sat upright. The dream began to fade immediately, and she frantically tried to call it back. A dragon in the sky, and rocks falling all around. Blood in the water, and fire in the sky. She was halfway to the door before realizing she wasn't in her room at the estate. Fenris wouldn't be there, with a cup of tea and the safety of his presence. For a moment, she leaned her forehead against the door frame, and sighed.

Two kings and a god were following her lead, and she'd spent most of the day arguing with a man who predated the oldest human nation in existence. The followers of a god that wanted to destroy the world were hunting them, and another cult that wanted to rule the world was in possession of an artifact that might enable them to do just that. It was stupid to think a cup of tea with her father would make any of this easier. She missed him terribly. Quietly, she slipped out the door and went looking for the kitchen. Tea wouldn't help, but it couldn't hurt.

The kettle was just starting to boil when she felt another presence enter the room. She turned to see Kieran giving her a concerned look. "You are not sleeping?"

"A dream woke me." She removed the kettle, and poured the tea, filling a cup for him as well before putting the kettle where it would stay warm.

"You are a dreamer. That is not surprising." He sat down next to her.

"I'm not sure I am. I can't do the same things Feynriel can do."

"You cannot?" Kieran raised an eyebrow. "Or you do not wish to?"

"What do you mean?" She turned towards him.

"Gavren is more powerful than I am, but he keeps his magic leashed because he fears what he could do if he did not." Kieran added a small amount of sugar to his own tea before offering it to her.

"Gavren..." Salla stared down at her tea before looking back at him. "Is stronger than you?"

"Here and now?" Kieran nodded. "Yes. I know more than he does, but in raw offensive strength, he has the advantage."

She shook her head. "I feel like a duckling trying to lead a couple lions into battle."

"Not a duck." He smiled at her. "A hawk." He tilted his head at her. "The lions may be strong, but the hawk can fly."

"Suppose it's not surprising that the god of beauty has a way with words." She smiled down into her teacup before taking a drink. She set the cup back down, and turned again to face him. "A hawk." She gave a slight nod. "Alright. I can be that. A Hawke is all I've wanted to be since..." She squared her shoulders. "I am a Hawke. And kicking ass is what Hawkes do."
"I do not believe there are any who would argue with that particular statement." Kieran nodded.

She moved to brush back the hair that fell into his face when he did so, and hesitated. He reached his hand up to catch hers, and then leaned forward. She met the kiss, half closing her eyes. A small part of her brain registered that he tasted faintly of ripe strawberries fresh from the garden. Her fingers tangled in his hair, and then she pulled back. He gave her a surprised look. "This..." She tried to get more words out, and failed.

He frowned, and shifted awkwardly. "Did I do it wrong?"

"I..." She shook her head. A thought came to her. "Have you ever kissed anyone before?"

"No." Kieran tilted his head. "At least, not that kind of kiss." Red crept into his cheeks. "I hoped you would like it.

Starkhaven. Leading kings to save the world. Ancient elves. Forbidden Ones. And she'd just been a god's first kiss. Laughter began to bubble out of her. He gave her a dumbfounded look, and she shook her head. "I'm sorry. I did like it. I just..." She swallowed another laugh. "I have no idea what is even happening anymore." She smiled. "I liked it."

"I..." Kieran tilted his head. "You are confusing me."

"I suppose it's only fair." She took his hand. "You've been confusing me since you arrived in Kirkwall." She hesitated, and then pulled him to her for another kiss.

The tea cooled in the cups, forgotten. Neither noticed the figure move away from the door.
Caleb looked into the room and frowned. Salla wasn't in her bed, and Agatha's didn't even look slept in. He shrugged, and started walking towards the kitchen. After clearing a couple of full teacups off the table, he busied himself making breakfast. Melavan entered just as he'd nearly finished. "Tea?"

"Ma serannas."

"Ionai tried teaching me to make some kind of elven pastry, but we couldn't find the right spices." He offered Melavan one of the tarts. "I had to improvise."

Melavan tentatively took a bite. He gave a low chuckle. "A noble who can cook. Will wonders never cease."

"I was born a farmer." Caleb shrugged. "And so was my Papa."

"Nobility that was earned, rather than awarded." Melavan nodded. "I suppose that is --" He cut off and reached for his sword.

A moment later, Caleb heard the shouting. He tossed the tray onto the table and went for his crossbow, cursing himself for not putting on the armor. Melavan waved him aside. "Sound the alarm and run. Your folks are at the Quiet Mare Inn." The sentinel headed into the hallway.

Caleb went to do what he was told.


Jerath had just finished helping her don her armor when Agatha heard the shouting. Without a word, they immediately headed towards Duncan's room.


Leandra dove for her sword when the door was kicked open, and saw magic start to glow around Gavren's hands. She moved into a defensive position and stopped short. The men entering were dressed in the armor of Starkhaven's city guard. They began shouting at her to drop her sword, and she looked over her shoulder at Gavren. He gave her a frustrated look, but nodded, and the magic vanished from around his hands. She sighed, and dropped her sword. Immediately, their arms were grabbed, and they were dragged from the room.


Duncan rolled under the bed as he heard the steps coming from the hallway. The door was kicked open, and men entered. They hesitated, talking briefly. He blinked when he heard their voices. The Starkhaven guard? This was not a complication they had been expecting. Most of the men left the room to continue through the house. There was no way to get his bow into position, so he drew his knives and waited for the right moment.

Before he could go on the attack, one of the guards fell. The second started to turn, only to get tackled to the ground by Jerath. A solid blow to the man's jaw put him down. Duncan immediately rolled out of his hiding place and to his feet, nocking an arrow as he did so.

Agatha shook her head. "I get the sense you boys have done this a few times."
"It's almost boring at this point." Duncan shrugged before he and Jerath followed her out of the room.

#

"Trouble." Tisallan's head came up.

Salla saw the guards coming and immediately put up a barrier. She felt Kieran reinforce it, and it shimmered in front of them. The lead guard narrowed his eyes, and looked over his shoulder. "Get the templars."

"Kieran, they are the city guard." She whispered the words.

"You do not wish to hurt them." He nodded in acknowledgment.

"That complicates things." Tisallan practically growled the words.

"They aren't the bad guys. We need to get out of here."

"Right." Kieran stepped in front of them both. "Hang on."

A moment later, they were clinging to the neck of a griffin as it launched itself into the sky to the shock of the staring guards.

#

Caleb saw guards taking Loghain and Alai to the room with the others. Gavren and Leandra were already there. Delaon and Ionai were on the roof. They helped Trian out the window. Kels went next, and started to gestured for Caleb to follow. He started that way when he heard a shout of protest.

He turned to see a guard raising his sword on Lord Hendry. As the blade started to come down, Melavan's blade caught it as he interposed himself between them, and he kicked the guard back. "Go." The sentinel shouted, and Lord Hendry stumbled backwards and started to flee, blood pouring down the side of his face. Caleb caught his arm and shoved him at Kels just as an arrow caught Melavan in the side. The sentinel crumbled, and Caleb saw a familiar face.

"Get him out." Caleb turned back, ignoring Kels shouting after him. As the archer aimed another arrow at the wounded sentinel, Caleb stepped between them, holding up his hands in a warding gesture. "Sebastian!"

The tip of the arrow wavered, and then the archer lowered the bow. "Caleb?"

#

"Maker's breath!" Alistair stared at the burning estate. Men and women wearing the armor of the Starkhaven city guard stood, clearly on guard. "What happened?"

"The guard raided it, on orders of the Prince himself." Zevran shook his head. "They took several prisoners, one of whom had a dragon tattoo."

"Loghain." Cullen stared at the flames.

"We need to move. They are searching the area for the ones that escaped." Zevran gestured.

#
Gavren examined Melavan's wound. Very little blood was coming from it, but he was pretty sure that was because the arrow itself was staunching the wound. If the sentinel moved wrong, or he tried to pull the arrow out, Melavan would bleed out quickly. Even if he'd had bandages and potions, there would still be little he could do. A wound like this required magic. Or a lot of luck, and luck wasn't exactly their strong point. As the number of templars guarding them could attest. "You'll be fine."

"You are a very poor liar," Melavan replied.

"That's why I prefer chess to diamondback." He looked up at Caleb. "Tell them without healing, this man will be dead in a couple hours."

Caleb immediately stood and went to talk to the guards. He argued with them for several minutes before one of them left. Caleb began pacing the length of the cell they'd been tossed inside. Gavren turned to look at the others. Leandra was unharmed, as was Noamin. Kels had a knot on his head from where he'd been struck. Loghain and Alai had been less cooperative captives. Both had amassed a collection of bruises. Alai had a broken arm, and Loghain was nursing fractured ribs in addition to a dislocated shoulder. Out of the dozen guards that had dragged the two in, only two hadn't had to go seek a healer of their own.

The others had either escaped, or... He didn't want to think about the ‘or’.

He had Leandra hold Loghain while he put the man's shoulder back into place. Loghain grunted, but nodded in thanks. He knelt next to Alai, but as far as he could tell, the break was clean. Without anything to set it, there was little he could do.

"Was anyone killed?" Cullen paced the room. Alistair was clearly trying not to do the same thing.

Brehan opened his mouth to answer when another voice spoke up. "Possibly." Trian entered, followed by two sentinels carrying a bleeding human man between them. "Kels took a gauntlet to the head trying to go back for Caleb, and Melavan was hurt badly."

"Trian?" Alistair strode towards the dwarf and began checking him for injuries. "Are you..." He stared at the two elves, and frowned.

Trian turned. "These are Delaon and Ionai. Lady Lenore, please, Lord Hendry needs healing."

"Lord Hendry." Cullen nodded at the name.

At Lenore's direction, the two elves laid Lord Hendry on a bench. Fenris and Brehan immediately stepped forward to divest the sentinels of their weapons. Neither protested the action. Trian, however... "King Alistair, these are allies. I'd be dead if not for them."

Alistair nodded. "They've surrendered, and will be treated fairly. But until we know what is going on, they will be remaining prisoners."

"So start telling us what is going on." Hawke folded his arms.

Agatha leaped the gap between roofs, catching Jerath's hand. He pulled her up easily. "Well?" Duncan asked.
"They've got three sentinels in there, one of whom is hurt bad." She frowned. "No dwarven prisoner, so Trian apparently made it out. I heard a couple templars talking about someone shape shifting into griffin and flying off with a woman and an elf. Pretty sure that would be Kieran and Salla, your guess is as good as mine as to which elf."

"Any idea where Trian would head?" Duncan looked at his companions.

"Well, he's smart." Jerath shrugged. "Straight to our folks, I imagine."

"You think we should do the same thing?" Duncan frowned, and then shook his head. "We have armor and weapons."

"So..." Agatha raised an eyebrow. "What, you want to storm the jail?"

"No." Duncan shrugged. "I want to find Kieran and Salla. Then storm the jail."

"He sucks at politics." Agatha turned towards Jerath, who just rolled his eyes.

#

Leliana paced her office. It had been difficult, returning to Val Royeaux with her friends still in need. At least with the crystals, they could remain in touch. She'd just finished speaking with Dorian, an unfortunately unproductive conversation.

The crystal she'd been given by Agatha suddenly glowed, and she swept it up in her hand. "I'm here."

Her eyes narrowed at Brehan's tersely given report. "Prince Vael took them prisoner?"

"We don't even know how he learned they were there in the first place." Brehan sounded furious. There was a murmur, and Cullen's voice came again. "My guess is either the cultists or Fen'Harel's sentinels tipped him off."

"A demand from the Sunburst Throne will make the prince see reason."

"It had better. Otherwise..." Brehan sighed. "They are holding it together right now, but I've a room full of parents about to declare an Exalted March of their own."

"We can at least let Saitada know that Trian is alright."

#

Kieran stood with his head tilted, as if he was listening to the wind. Salla watched silently until he nodded and turned towards them. He took a deep breath. "Melavan is injured. Without healing, he is going to die. Some of the others are injured as well, but they should recover from their wounds. Caleb, Gavren, Leandra, Kels, Loghain, Noamin, Melavan, and Alai are prisoners."

"That was Sebastian with the guard." Salla shook her head. "Why would he..." She growled. "Oh for the love of..." She gestured angrily. "This can't still be about Anders."

"He still hasn't withdrawn the bounty on your father," Tisallan said.

"And now he has my brother." Salla let out a breath. "No. Despite that, I can't see Sebastian hurting them. Not Caleb, not any of the others."

"I am not as certain." Kieran's voice was quiet.
"It's also possible that this Sebastian is just a tool of the cult." Tisallan looked back towards the city. "Either blood magic or the Formless One could have clouded his mind. Especially with that rage to build upon."

"He hates the song so much he would play the same tune." Kieran shook his head. "We will need to find the others. The coda is being written."

#

Caleb walked to the bars of the cell when he saw the man in white armor. There was a trace of gray along Sebastian's temples, but his face was unlined. "Sebastian."

One of the guards growled, and he struck the bars with the flat of his blade. "That's Prince Vael to you, rat."

"Enough." Sebastian's voice rang out. "Caleb." He nodded. "When they told me you were among the agents, I did not wish to believe it was true."

"Agents?" Caleb raised an eyebrow. "What are you talking about? Who told you?" He shook his head. "Never mind." He gestured. "Melavan, the man you shot. He needs healing."

"The demon worshiping elf?" Sebastian narrowed his eyes. "I thought better of you, Caleb."

"Melavan doesn't worship any demons." Caleb shook his head.

Sebastian shook his head gravely, and turned to the man in templar armor next to him. "Separate this one from the others. I would be certain his mind is his own."

"Yes, your grace." The templar moved to the door of the cell.

Caleb immediately stepped back and folded his arms. "I'm not going anywhere."

"I don't want to hurt you, Caleb." Sebastian sighed. "Your mind has been clouded by these blood mages and their associates."

He retreated as the templars entered. Noamin immediately stood to interpose himself between him and the templars, and Caleb saw hands go to swords. He immediately protested. "Wait. Sebastian, wait. Call them off." He swallowed, and stepped around Noamin. Noamin frowned, and then nodded. Caleb went to the door, and let the templars pull him out. "Please, Sebastian. Don't let Melavan die."

"Your compassion does you credit." Sebastian nodded. "I fear, however, it may be misplaced."

"Please."

For a moment, Sebastian just stared at him. And then he nodded and gestured to one of the templars. "Ask one of the healers to come, and tend to the wounded."

"Thank you."
Chapter 24

Gavren reached for his magic, feeling along the edges of the wards. The wards themselves were magic, and every barrier had a weakness. Even the veil could be breached. He watched the healer work, stayed back, cooperated. And searched for the weakness.

Melavan was taken to just outside the wards, and under the watchful eyes of the templars, the healer used just enough magic to stop the bleeding before bringing him back into the cell. He saw the frustrated look on Noamin's face, and new its cause. With wounded, escape options would be limited. Fighting their way out had gone from a bad option to not an option. At least the healer had left herbs and bandages.

Caleb had not been brought back to the cell. Perhaps the matter could still be solved diplomatically. He sat down next to Leandra, and her arm went around him. "Well?"

"I could shatter the ward." His voice was barely above a whisper. "But I'd do a lot of structural damage, and likely tear the Veil. I'll have to put up the barrier fast, which means I won't be of much help the first minute of the fight."

"We'll have the advantage of surprise. I'll be able to get a sword before the templars recover. It will be just like Val Firmin."

"We lost at Val Firmin."

"Well, yeah, except that part."

#

"Is her hat on too tight?" Hawke threw up his hands. "Leliana thinks we can solve this diplomatically?"

"Do you really want to subject Kirkwall to another war?" Brehan stood his ground. "The Inquisition doesn't have the forces to back Aveline up anymore, and your brother's griffins are too few in number to make up the difference."

"Kirkwall won't need to rely on the Inquisition." Alistair's voice was cold. "If those children are harmed in any way, Aveline will have the entire Silver Order."

"And the entirety of House Brosca," Lenore added. "Not to mention the Order of Vigilance."

Brehan opened his mouth, and then growled. Keeping the peace would be a lot easier if he didn't feel like grabbing an axe and going in himself. Lord Hendry was still unconscious. He turned his gaze to the other prisoners. Sentinels. Actual ancient elves. Any other day, he'd be running the risk of frolicking at the notion of getting to talk to them. Today, however... "You said there were six of you?"

Delaon nodded. "Melavan was wounded in the fighting. I saw Alai fighting alongside young Loghain. If he was captured, she likely was as well."

"Rebel sentinels." Cullen frowned. "Forgive me if that is a hard notion."

"It is one we are still coming to terms with ourselves." Delaon sighed. "We were not sure what to do after. After Lord Hendry saved my life, he invited us back to his camp for tea." He shook his
head, and gave a small smile. "That was five years ago."

Ionai looked up from where she was hovering protectively above the unconscious nobleman. "It was excellent tea."

The door opened again to admit Carver. "The Inquisitor filled me in. I've got a dozen riders a few miles outside the city, waiting for word, and I brought some scouts with me. The Chargers are also on their way."

"You made very good time." Brehan nodded to him. "I'm heading out to search the hidey-holes the sentinels gave us, see if the kids holed up in any. Don't kill anyone while I'm gone." Brehan rose and left the room.

"Even with Salla and Kieran, that's going to be a monster to crack. And he's got a lot of templars." Agatha frowned. "Maybe if we had Gavren to take on the building, we'd have a better chance."

"I'm open to suggestions." Duncan held up a hand to Jerath. "Except that one."

"Well, I'm agreeing with him. If we want to get the others out, we are going to need help. Since we can't find Salla and Kieran..." Agatha sighed. "That leaves getting in touch with our folks. They might even be able to handle this peacefully. At the very least, we need to let them know so they can deal with Prince Jackass."

"No."

"Your majesty..." Jerath sighed. "All due respect..."

"Either we find Salla, and follow her plan, or you do what I tell you." Duncan narrowed his eyes.

"Should you change your mind, they are at the Quiet Mare Inn." Jerath met his eyes calmly. "Melavan found them three days ago."

Caleb looked across the table, and sighed. "We aren't agents, and we didn't come to Starkhaven to cause trouble."

"And yet I found you with a group of subversive elves." Sebastian leaned back in his chair. "I have heard the news, Caleb."

"Yeah, and you played right into his hands." Caleb gestured in frustration. "We are working against him."

"And you expect me to believe you happened upon..." Sebastian shook his head in disbelief. "Rebel sentinels?"

There was no way to explain without telling Sebastian about Gavren, and if he told Sebastian about Gavren there'd be no way to convince him they weren't agents. "Sebastian, you used to travel with Papa. You know how Hawke luck works."

A ghost of a smile came to Sebastian's face. "A fair point. How is your sister?"

"Well, assuming your guards didn't hurt her, she's fine."
"I had ordered my guards not to harm any of you."

"Yeah, that's why Loghain has a bunch of broken ribs."

The trace of warmth vanished from Sebastian. "Tell me of him."

His eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"He holds a particular interest for me."

"Sebastian, I don't know who told you about us, but they clearly filled your head with a lot of nonsense. Who is it you think we are with?"

"Gavren Rutherford." Sebastian gestured with one hand. "Son of the Inquisitor, who should be three years old and most certainly is not. Leandra Hawke, and I believe you know her parentage. Same. Kels Marland, right hand of General Cullen, currently with the Inquisition and formerly a Knight-Captain who failed at his most sacred duty. Three sentinel elves, servants of the abomination claiming to be an ancient elven goddess. And Loghain Mac Tir. In the house of Lord Hendry, a supposed scholar who supposedly works for the Inquisition. I hold no particular ire for the Inquisitor, but she has been fooled before."

"I still use the recipe for fish and egg pie you gave me." Caleb shook his head. "The one Deidre used to make for you."

"Caleb..."

"Sebastian, we are not your enemies. We never were. We never will be." He clenched his fists. "Bounty hunters, wanting your gold, came for Papa almost a dozen times. You know Papa. You know what happens to folks that try killing him. Almost a decade, and he's never once come burning down your door. He could. And you know it. But you were part of his family once, and that matters to him."

"I..." Sebastian sighed. "Caleb, you are not free to go. Not until..." He stood. "But you will be treated as my guest." He left the room.

Caleb rose, and went to the window. Was the dragon mark why Sebastian had a particular interest in Loghain? Surely he had to know just how stupid sticking his head into that beehive would be.

#

Salla let Tisallan take the lead. When it came to moving stealthily through a city, he had just a bit more experience than she did. They came to a halt in an old warehouse. Salla glanced at Kieran. "Any luck tracking the others?"

"Trian is with your parents. Duncan, Agatha, and Jerath are together, but they keep moving."

"As we should." Tisallan turned towards Salla, and then his eyes widened. Immediately magical blades sprang to life in each hand. She called up a barrier as she turned, and then held up a hand. "Tisallan, no." She nodded to Brehan. "He's a friend."

"Salla, Kieran." Brehan walked towards them. "Thank the Maker you're alright."

The blades vanished, but Tisallan retained his wary stance, moving to stand protectively in front of
Salla and Kieran. Brehan slowed his steps a few paces away. "Are you Noamin or Tisallan?"

"He is Tisallan. Tisallan, this is Brehan, spymaster of the Inquisition. Trian has told you what happened?" Kieran raised an eyebrow.

"He did. Lord Hendry, Delaon, and Ionai are also with..." Brehan frowned. "How did you know we had Trian?"

"From his icon."

"What?" Brehan blinked.

"Don't ask." Salla shook her head. "Duncan, Agatha, and Jerath are still out there and on the move."

"Let's get you back to the inn, and we'll start looking."

Kieran tilted his head to one side, and pointed. "That way."

"Alright. Let's hurry before they start moving again." Salla gestured towards Tisallan, and the three of them started heading that way.

Brehan immediately moved to intercept. "We need to get you to safety."

"We don't have time. We need to catch Duncan before he does something stupidly heroic." Salla shook her head. "He is such a Therin. Go back and let our folks know we are okay."

"Salla, I'm not really sure why you think I take orders from you." Brehan folded his arms and placed himself between her and the door. "You're going back to your fathers, preferably before they start setting things on fire."

Her eyes narrowed. "Which is why you should go back and reassure them we are alright."

"Salla..."

"Dirthari, believe me when I say arguing with that child is an exercise in futility." Tisallan shook his head.

"I wasn't intending to argue." Brehan shook his hand. "I was intending to shove her in a sack."

His hand moved, and less than a heartbeat later Tisallan had him pinned with his arm locked behind him.

"Lady Salla?" Tisallan glanced up at her.

"Well..." Salla shook her head. "We can't leave him here. I guess we are kidnapping him."

"Good thing we got all that practice with Kels." Kieran smiled.

#

Lenore saw Lord Hendry start to stir, and immediately went to his side. He immediately began looking around, and his eyes went to where Delaon and Ionai were sitting. "Melavan?"

"Alive last we saw." Delaon nodded to him.

"What was he thinking?" Lord Hendry shook his head. "We agreed I was the expendable one."
He looked around, slowly becoming aware of his surroundings. When he saw Cullen, he swallowed. "Commander."

"Lord Hendry." Cullen folded his arms. "Your agreement with the Inquisition was to inform us of any sentinel sightings."

"Circumstances changed." Lord Hendry sighed.

Cullen's face was furious as he took a step forward. Immediately, Delaon and Ionai were on their feet, placing themselves between him and Lord Hendry. Magic glowed around both. Hawke and Fenris immediately stepped to Cullen's side, and she saw Alistair reach for his own blade.

"Enough." Carver's voice rang out sharply as a pulse of energy came from him. The magic around Hawke and the two sentinels vanished. "Do you know who I am?" He stared at the two sentinels. They exchanged a glance before nodding to him. "Sit back down." Wordlessly, they both obeyed. He glanced at Cullen. "Their presence in Starkhaven was known, and they were being watched. They are not enemies."

"Watched?" Cullen gave him a confused look, and then his eyes widened.

Ionai's voice was quiet. "Mythal?"

"Has known where you were since you left the Arbor Wilds." Carver nodded.

Hawke glared at his brother. "You've been holding out on us."

Carver shook his head. "You knew about the kids being in Starkhaven before I did. If anyone had told me, I would have informed you of the presence of the sentinels."

Alistair punched the wall. "As soon as Brehan returns, it's time to discuss going to the palace."

Lenore stood. "I would have thought he'd be back by now."

#

Leandra looked up as footsteps came down the hall. Gavren was tending to Melavan, and was clearly worried about the man's condition even after the healing. The footsteps slowed, and a moment later the prince came back into view. Her eyes narrowed. "Where is Caleb?"

"Safely away from you." Sebastian folded his arms.

"Melavan is feverish." Gavren didn't look up from where he was changing the poultice. "I'm going to need embrium."

"That can be arranged." Sebastian nodded, and turned his gaze to Loghain. "If he answers a question for me."

"Loghain." Gavren nodded to the man.

"Ask away." Loghain nodded.

"Where is your father?"

"Well, that is kind of an issue. I kind of need an answer for the who before we can address the where." Loghain shrugged. "But if it helps, the last time anyone saw Nathaniel he was with The Warden."
Sebastian slowly nodded. "Gavren, in your estimate, how long does the elf have to live?"

Gavren looked down at the unconscious Melavan, and sighed. "He won't last until morning."

"Well." Sebastian looked back at Loghain. "You have until then to reconsider your answer."

To Leandra's surprise, Loghain just started laughing. "That's what this is about? That's how they got to you?" He actually snorted. "You are getting played so hard I'm surprised you can still figure out which end to shit out of. You should consider asking your new friends how they knew that particular piece of information." He waved a hand. "He's in Qarinus, Red Star district. Ask for Lord Balith. I'd wish you luck, but you're planning on using me as a hostage."

"I trust you will be smart enough to continue cooperating." Sebastian nodded.

"Then you really don't know anything about me at all." Loghain grinned.

"There are far less comfortable cells available." Sebastian narrowed his eyes.

"My father got into your palace, and killed dozens of qunari without your guard even noticing he was there until the servants complained about the smell of rotting corpses." Loghain's grin widened. "Ah..." He shook his head. "They didn't tell you that part, did they? All those barrels of gaatlok, strewn throughout the noble houses of Starkhaven? And a qunari vanguard waiting less than a hundred feet from where we stand now. You want a fight?" He chuckled. "You're going to get one."

"Remove this one to the lower cells." Sebastian gestured at a group of guards. "Then see to it the mage has whatever healing supplies he needs."

Kels and Alai both tried to protest Loghain's removal from the cell, but relented when the knight waved them back. Leandra tried not to curse. The plan she and Gavren had was a good one, but it wouldn't work if they had to go looking for Loghain. She saw the knight glance back at her and wink. She turned back towards Gavren so as not to betray anything with her own expressions.

"He's not Nathaniel's son." Kels shook his head. "I doubt anyone ever considered..."

"Which means Loghain had a good point. Whoever tipped Sebastian has a lot more information than we do." Gavren frowned. "This doesn't smell of wolf."

"The cult." Leandra sighed.

"Will they hurt him?" Noamin asked.

Alai chuckled. "I'm more concerned he's not going to leave any of them for us."

#

"The guards are starting to relax." Duncan nodded to the palace. "They seem to think if something was going to happen, it would have."

"The security hole by the servant's quarters is too obvious." Agatha frowned. "It's a trap."

"Even if we get to the others, we still need to get back out." Jerath used his finger to trace a pattern in the dust. "They won't have arms or armor, and we can't be sure of finding any for them. And for all we know, some of them are hurt."

"What about a distraction?"
"Under these circumstances, if something exploded in another part of the palace I would immediately send guards to reinforce the cells." Jerath looked up at Agatha.

She made a vexed noise. "So we need a bigger distraction."

"No." Jerath took another look at the palace. "We need --" He whirled, drawing his blade as he did so and positioning himself between whatever had caught his attention and his companions. Almost immediately, he started to relax.

Duncan started to laugh. "We were just thinking we needed a couple mages."

"Glad we could oblige." Salla nodded.

Agatha's eyes widened when she noted who was with them, and she snickered. "Two decades of experience isn't so useful against two millenia, is it?"

Brehan glared at her. "So pleased I could amuse you."

"Do we have a plan?" Kieran looked around.

"Jerath was just getting to that." Duncan gestured at the bodyguard.

#

"We'll head up to --" Alistair cut off when Carver staggered slightly.

Hawke immediately rushed to his brother's side. Carver closed his eyes, and shook his head as if clearing a daze. His head came back up. "Kieran would like us to create a distraction at his signal, which should be coming in the next hour. Also Brehan is fine and he hopes we are all the same." He shook his head again. "I hate when they do that."

"They..." Alistair blinked.

"Kidnapped Brehan?"

"Oh he is never going to live that down." Lenore started laughing.
"Until when?" Caleb strode into Sebastian's office, dodging the guard that tried to grab him. If he was to be treated as a guest, he had every intention of abusing the privilege.

"Your fathers are somewhere in the city." Sebastian turned towards him. "Are they merely looking for you, or do they have another reason to be here?"

"I asked a question first." He folded his arms and narrowed his eyes.

"You..." Sebastian gave a slow shake of his head. "Are definitely Hawke's son. I have sent a message to Kirkwall. Once your parents and the Inquisition have left my city, peacefully, I will send you, Gavren, Leandra, and Kels on your way."

"What about Loghain, Naomin, Melavan, and Alai?"

"I will be turning the elves over to the Divine."

"Well that's a..." Caleb frowned. "And Loghain?" When Sebastian failed to meet his eyes, Caleb took another step forward. "And Loghain?"

"He will be remaining in my custody."

"Why?" Caleb shook his head. "He can be an asshole but he's never done anything to you. Maker, he's technically not even four years old yet." He leaned on Sebastian's desk. "Is it because of the mark?"

"He is no longer your concern." Sebastian gestured at one of his guards.

"The only way I'm leaving without an answer is if you have them drag me." Caleb glared. "He's my friend."

"Caleb..."

"He's my friend." Caleb stared at Sebastian. "Who is he to you?"

"If he was that good a friend, you'd know." Sebastian leaned on the other side of the desk. "If the information he gave me proves to be accurate, then..." Sebastian straightened and turned to stare at the fire.

"Then what?"

"Then Loghain's fate will be in the hands of his father."

Caleb blinked. "What the hell does Nathaniel Howe have to do with this?"

"His father isn't Howe." Sebastian didn't turn around. "His father is the abomination that destroyed Kirkwall's chantry and plunged the world into war."

"His..." Caleb sat down heavily in the chair. "Anders?"

"It's been the better part of ten years..." Sebastian nodded. "But he will pay for his crime."

"Or what?" Caleb leaned forward.
"Or his son will never see daylight again."

"Wow." Caleb stood, and gave Sebastian a disgusted look. "Elthina would be so proud."

#

"That still won't get the cells open." Brehan shook his head at Salla.

"Gavren will handle getting the cells open." Kieran nodded confidently. "The difficulty is going to be getting to Caleb. He is in the main part of the palace rather than in the cells."

"Why would he be there?" Tisallan raised an eyebrow.

"Because..." Salla sighed. "Because Sebastian would never hurt me or Caleb."

"He set fire to a building you were in." Tisallan shook his head.

Brehan glanced at Tisallan. "And the only reason your friend Melavan is alive is because Caleb stepped between him and Sebastian. Salla is right. Sebastian won't hurt Caleb." He turned his eyes back to Salla. "I won't pretend the sentinels aren't in danger from him, but I sincerely doubt he'd hurt any of the other children."

"Loghain." Kieran narrowed his eyes.

"Why would he hurt Loghain?" Duncan asked.

"To hurt Anders."

"Why would..." Agatha's eyes widened. "Oh."

Kieran tilted his head, and then turned to stare at Brehan. "I suggest you do not misuse this information."

"Fenedhis, I intend to pretend this conversation never --"

A squirrel suddenly rushed into the middle of their group and started chittering madly. Kieran stared at it. "Now?" It chittered again. "Well, that's going to require a change in plans." It squeaked. "Go to Trian." The squirrel immediately rushed away.

"My squirrel is a little rusty, but I think he just said the cult is about to hit the palace?" Salla raised an eyebrow. Another day she'd have laughed at the dumbfounded look on Brehan's face.

"They are already inside." Kieran straightened up. "And Abelas is on the move as well."

Jerath growled. "We won't have time for stealth."

"Take Agatha with you." Brehan nodded to him. "I'll get inner door." When Salla gave him a surprised look, he shook his head. "We don't have time for a new plan, so yours better work."

"Ir enaste, Dirthari." Tisallan rose.

Kieran took a deep breath, and his eyes glowed slightly. "It is time."

#

He felt the moment they were beyond the ward, but let the guards taken him the rest of the way
down the stairs. The manacle on his wrists were solid and heavy. Out of the corner of his eye, he examined his captors. The one to his left was close enough to his height and build. There was a slight touch of another magic to him. Time then. Loghain took a deep breath, and pulled the Fade around him. His hands phased through the manacle, and he caught it easily.

Then he whirled and smashed it into the face of the man next to him.

#

Carver staggered slightly, and then he turned to the others. "Change of plans. The palace is about to come under attack. They need our help."

"Let's move." Cullen started for the palace.

#

Gavren felt a touch to his magic. It wasn't as strong as it had been in the temple, but it still reinforced his own magic. Just enough of an edge. "There is our signal. Noamin, Alai, be ready with barriers."

He stood, and drew deep. Loghain and Caleb had been dragged away. Perhaps Starkhaven needed a message sent.

#

The sound had them all turn. Lenore felt her jaw drop. Stones and debris were raining down from what had a few seconds ago been Starkhaven’s guard tower. The entire top level had been blown apart. Before the stones could hit the ground they suddenly began to whirl as if they were feathers caught in a whirlwind. And then they were all striking some target she couldn't see.

#

"Holy shit." Kels looked around at the open air around them. "Holy shit."

Gavren let the green light continue to glow around his hands as he turned towards where the guards were standing, staring with open mouths. "Drop your weapons." He let the magic trail up his arms in green flames. "And run."

They did.

#

"Maker's breath." Brehan stared up. "What was that?"

Kieran smiled. "Gavren has decided to make some noise."

#

"All hell just broke loose." Agatha glanced up.

"That would be the signal then." Duncan fitted an arrow to his bow, and nodded to Jerath.

Jerath returned the nod before kicking the door open.
Caleb caught the edge of the desk as the building shook. Sebastian immediately leaped to his feet. "What was..."

"Your grace..." A guard rushed into the room. "The palace is under attack."

Sebastian drew his bow. "Send additional forces to the cells."

"We should take this one back to his quarters." She grabbed Caleb's arm, and started to pull him away.

Caleb started to follow, and then he saw the blood on the back of her armor. "Sebastian, she's not a guard." He yanked his arm away, and she started to reach for him again.

An arrow took her in the throat, and she fell. "Get down." Sebastian yelled as he took aim at the men who began rushing into the room. Caleb dove to the ground and rolled behind the desk.

#

Leandra picked up a sword, and kicked a shield towards Alai. The elven woman strapped it to her arm and smiled fiercely. Gavren looked up from where he'd just finished casting the healing spell on Melavan. Kels immediately caught the elven man's arm and put it over his shoulder, supporting his weight.

"Plan?" Naomin asked, moving into a protective position near Kels.

"Duncan, Jerath, and Agatha are heading towards the main hall." Gavren picked up a sword of his own.

She tested the heft of the blade, and gave a satisfied smile. "Ten gold says we get there first."

#

The cult had clearly expanded its numbers with mercenaries. Loghain freed his sword from his foe's ribcage. Not very talented mercenaries though. Clearly they'd decided to go for quantity over quality.

Fortunately, wearing the armor of a Starkhaven guard meant the other Starkhaven guards simply assumed he was one of them. Not a particularly wise assumption to be sure, but it was making his life easier. He only had to fight the people actually attacking him.

He was halfway to the gate when he heard a couple of the cultists yell something about killing the prince. A vexed growl escaped him.

#

Duncan's arrow caught the enemy mage in the chest. Jerath spun in, using his shield to stun a cultist. Agatha promptly moved in to stab him. She stayed at his back, covering his flanks as they moved in. They were most of the way through the room when a group of qunari entered. Immediately their saarebas began to glow.

And then their saarebas was charcoal. Duncan laughed. "We were just coming to rescue you."

Leandra grinned in response. "Less talking, more stabbing."

Gavren gestured with one hand, and all the qunari were suddenly pulled into a tight circle, crashing into each other. He made a punching motion, and then they were on the ground, easy prey for the
warriors. "We need to find Loghain and Caleb."

Jerath frowned. "They aren't with you?"

Caleb barely managed to get the sword up in time to parry a blow aimed at Sebastian's back. His counter-strike did little damage to the mercenary, but it did provide enough of a distraction for Sebastian to put an arrow in him. "Are you hurt?" Sebastian asked.

"No." Caleb shook his head. "You?"

"I've had far worse." Sebastian touched his shoulder, and gestured for him to follow. "I need to get you to safety."

"You said Papa is here. If we get to him, he'll help."

"I'm fairly confident your fathers are not happy with me at the moment."

"Yeah, imagine how they are feeling about me." Caleb looked around and frowned. "Where the hell are your guards?"

"Searching the city for the rest of your friends." Sebastian growled.

"Well..." Caleb swallowed as another group of mercenaries started down the hallway towards them. "Shit."

Sebastian reached for another arrow, and then hesitated. "Lady Davena?"

The woman leading the mercenaries smiled at him. "We've no quarrel with you, Prince Vael. We are here for the boy."

Immediately Sebastian stepped in front of Caleb. "No."

She spread her hands, and gave a half bow. Magic started to glow around her hands. "We've been good friends to you these past few years, my prince. You can keep the Mac Tir lad. And our allegiance."

He notched an arrow to his bow, and drew it back. "Maker bless your children in their hour of need."

Caleb hefted his sword, noting unpleasantly that Sebastian was down to three arrows. "This is not going to be fun."

Something hit the mercenaries from behind. Sebastian took advantage of the distraction to put an arrow in the mage's throat. A man in the armor of the Starkhaven guard took the head off one of the mercenaries as Sebastian fired his last two arrows. As soon as the guard had downed the last of them, Sebastian began retrieving arrows. "Thank the Maker, he sent you just in time."

"Oh, the Maker had nothing to do with me."

"Loghain?" Caleb's jaw dropped.

The knight tossed Sebastian a full quiver. "This is really not how I planned to spend my afternoon." He hefted his sword. "Let's get you two out of trouble, shall we?"
"Loghain has retrieved Caleb," Kieran reported.

"I think we are done here. The gates are open. Our folks can get in, and Duncan can get the others out." Salla nodded.

"Time to rejoin your companions then." Tisallan started back towards the hallway.

"Or better yet, your folks." Brehan shook his head. "Tisallan, surely you can reason with --" He went silent as other sentinels stepped out of the shadows. Considering Tisallan's immediate reaction was to step in front of Salla, he had to assume these were not allies. He moved to stand between them and Kieran.

"Tisallan."

"Abelas."

The yellow eyes of Abelas turned towards him. "And you would be Brehan. It would be best if the two of you stood down. I have no desire to harm either of you."

"Abelas, you know me far better than that." Tisallan shifted his grip on his blades. "The only way you come to them is through me."

"I am disappointed. I never thought you would be a traitor to your own kind?"

"Traitor?" Tisallan laughed. "From you, that's a compliment."

"I will regret this, old friend." Abelas waved a hand. "Masal din'an." Magic glowed around his hands.

Brehan felt a spell slide off the barrier one of the mages must have placed on him. He hefted his axe as two sentinels came towards him. Spells from Kieran and Salla struck against the barriers of the sentinels. He parried a blow and slammed the pommel of his axe into the face of a sentinel, shattering the man's nose and sending him staggering backwards. Tisallan parried a blow with one of his swords, and gutted his attacker with the other.

A spell from Abelas struck Kieran, sending the man to the ground. He heard Tisallan shout a warcry in response. He parried another blow, keeping the sentinel from getting past him to the downed mage.

The rest of the sentinels started to move in, and abruptly froze in their tracks. Abelas's eyes widened.

A voice came from behind him, from Kieran's position. A voice that was decidedly not Kieran's. It was deep, resonating in his bones.

"Andaran atisha'an." Brehan turned to see Kieran back on his feet. His eyes burned with emerald fire that sent curls of pale green smoke trailing upwards. The same energy trailed over his entire body in a web of power. In his hand a staff formed from green fade-stone was forming. His lips curled into something between a snarl and a smile. "Da'len."
A group of Starkhaven guards started to block their way, then recognition seemed to dawn on various faces. "My lords."

Alistair narrowed his eyes. "Your country is under attack. Shouldn't you be rallying to your prince?"

"Our orders were to reinforce the cells to..." The guardsman swallowed.

Cullen rubbed his forehead. "It would appear before we can save the children..."

"...we have to save Starkhaven." Hawke nodded.

"Ferelden, Kirkwall, Kal'Hirol, and the Inquisition." Lenore waved a hand, casually blasting one of the mercenaries. "To the rescue."

The guards just sort of looked at each other as Alistair and Cullen led the group past. Then they shrugged, and fell in behind them.

#

"I think we've cleared them out of this section of the palace." Kels looked around.

"Your parents will undoubtedly have been drawn here." Melavan winced as he turned towards them, but was able to walk on his own. "We should take you to them."

"He's got a..." Kels frowned. "Gavren?"

The mage shook his head. "Something is off."

Immediately all of them went on alert. "What's wrong?" Duncan asked.

"I'm not sure. The feel of..." He turned towards the sentinels. "Can't you feel it?"

Melavan and Alai both shook their heads, but Noamin nodded. "The Veil stirs."

"We need to get to the rendezvous point." Leandra drummed her fingers into the hilt of her blade.

"We may also need to warn our parents." Gavren turned towards her. "They need to know what is going on."

Slowly, Melavan nodded. "I will take care of that. I am only slowing you down at the moment anyway." He turned towards Noamin and Alai. "You will contact me as soon as they are safely out of the city."

Both nodded. "Thank you, Melavan." Gavren nodded to him.

"Hunt well."

#

Trian knew King Alistair was fairly angry at the situation, as was Commander Cullen. He really couldn't blame either of them. It was just that until this moment, he hadn't realized both men were
sadists.

Magister Adralicus gestured wildly as he filled Delaon in on the history of the war between Orlais and Ferelden. It was reasonably accurate, except for the parts where he kept getting Maric and Alistair confused and claimed the Fereldens had won the Battle of West Hill. When he switched over to telling the story of the Fifth Blight, the two members of the Ferelden Honor Guard that had accompanied Carver just stared at him with open mouthed amusement. Lord Hendry had given up trying to correct the magister and sat with his head on folded arms. Ionai appeared to have gone into a meditative trance of some kind.

He stood, and walked back towards the bedroom. The sound of Magister Adralicus's voice was mercifully silenced by the closed door. He was considering getting a drink when he heard a scratching sound.

There was a squirrel at the window. It gave him an expectant and annoyed look. Trian winced as he opened the window. "You've got to be kidding me." It chittered at him, and pointed with one paw. "The king, commander, champion, and court mage are on the way to help." The squirrel chittered again and tapped one of its feet. "Stone and Ashes."

He swept two coinpurses into his pocket, grabbed a sword that had been left leaning against the wall, and followed the squirrel out the window. "If you tell anyone I held a conversation with you, I'm turning you into a hat."

It squeaked and led him down the alley.

#

"I'm noticing some holes in Starkhaven's security." Loghain slammed his shield into a mercenary's face, and then opened the man's throat.

"Like the part where a Fereldan knight managed to overcome his guards and break out of jail?" Caleb snickered, and reloaded the crossbow he'd taken off a mercenary.

Sebastian put an arrow into the last of the oncoming mercenaries. He quickly retrieved what arrows he could. "This way."

"It kind of figures, doesn't it?" Loghain glanced at Caleb.

"What does?"

"I finally get to rescue a prince, and it's that one."

"He's probably got a white charger in the stables. You and Alai could ride off into the sunset."

"I don't suppose there is any chance I could get you two to take the fact that a cult is trying to perform a coup in my city seriously?" Sebastian glanced over his shoulder at them.

"Should we tell him about the fact the cult is led by one of the Forbidden Ones?"

"Let's not ruin his day."

"Blessed Andraste." Sebastian growled.

"I think we are annoying him."

"He did technically kidnap us."
"We kidnapped Kels."

"Rescued!"

Loghain started to retort, then grabbed Sebastian, pulling the man to the ground a split second before a fireball exploded at his location. He rolled to his feet and flung his sword, catching the mage in the stomach. Then he charged, shield forward, sending the mage's companion flying. Caleb caught the man with a crossbow bolt while he was still in the air. Loghain put his foot on the mage's chest and retrieved his sword. "Are these people trying to kill us or him?" He gestured haphazardly at Sebastian.

"They seemed like they wanted to take me in alive." Caleb reloaded the crossbow. "But they told Sebastian he could keep you."

"Which does bring to mind a question." Loghain peeped around the next corner, then gestured for the two of them to follow him.

"What's that?" Caleb asked.

"Are we his prisoners, or is he our prisoner?" Loghain grinned.

#

For several heartbeats, the sentinels just stared. And then as one they turned around and started running. "A sleep spell," the deep voice said.

"Not one of his better plans." Tisallan shook his head.

Brehan shifted his grip on his axe. "Um..."

The glowing eyes turned towards him, and narrowed. "I remember you." He showed a hint of fang in his smile. "Fort Drakon. The elf with the ballista." He tilted his head, and then growled. "You shot me."

"I..." Brehan stumbled backwards as the glowing being started towards him. The sentinels had run like hell at the mere sight of this creature. Maybe they were the smart ones.

"Urthemiel." Salla's voice rang out. The glowing being turned towards her, and she gave him a stern look. "Stop playing with your food." She gestured. "The others need our help."

He felt his jaw hit the floor. The old god gave a slight shake of his head, and glanced back at Tisallan and smiled with what appeared to be genuine amusement. "Fereldans." He stepped closer to Salla, putting a hand on her shoulder. "You know, the last time a ruler of a city treated me with this much discourtesy..." He held a hand out to Tisallan. "I leveled the place." Tisallan took his hand and there was a flash of green light.

They vanished.

Leaving him alone in Starkhaven's palace.

And possibly in need of a change of pants.

#

They found the Starkhaven guard captain trying to take a report from one of his guards. Alistair took some mild satisfaction from the man nearly choking when he realized who they were. Then
he stepped back and let Cullen handle the matter. As a member of the Inquisition, he could at least pretend a legitimate reason to be storming the palace.

"Most of our people are dealing with a riot near the docks." The guard captain swallowed. "If not for the tower exploding, we never would have realized the palace was under attack."

"And where is Prince Vael now?"

"He was in the residence." The guard captain glanced at Hawke, and paled just slightly. Cullen clearly didn't miss the meaning. "Who was with him?"

"Prince Vael had us release Lord Caleb from the cells. Said he was to be treated as a guest, but not allowed to leave the palace." The guard captain took a deep breath. "We've not accounted for the whereabouts of any of the pris..." He swallowed. "Prince's other guests."

"Order needs to be restored. Quickly." Cullen began giving orders to the guards. The guard captain started to protest, and cut off when fire appeared around Hawke's hands. The rest of the guards leaped immediately at the commander's orders.

#

"It's not locked, it's jammed." Duncan looked up from the door handle. "Something on the other side is blocking it."

Gavren shook his head. "Without knowing what, I'm not sure it is wise to just knock it down." He glanced around. "And I think I've done enough structural damage to the palace."

"He did kidnap us." Leandra frowned.

"Ahem." Kels raised an eyebrow at her.

"Someone give me a boost." Agatha gestured at the upper window. "I can get in, go around and get the obstruction clear."

"Not by yourself." Jerath shook his head. "I'm still hearing fighting."

Noamin handed Gavren his shield. "I'll go first, cover her while she takes care of the locks."

Alai stepped up as well. "Elves to the rescue."

Kels knelt, and boosted Noamin through the small window. As soon as the sentinel's voice came back through, he lifted Agatha up, and then Alai.

#

He followed the squirrel into the stables where it squeaked expectantly again. Trian frowned. "They couldn't have sent a note with you or something?"

The squirrel chittered, and then ran up one of the stall doors. It touched the latch, and then squeaked at him again.

"You do understand these are horses, not acorns, right?" He groaned, and started grabbing tack. "And I'm a dwarf. You're lucky I even know the difference between a saddle and a bridle."

Squirrel wasn't one of his languages, but he was fairly certain he'd just been called something rude.
"How many more of these guys are there?" Caleb reloaded his crossbow.

"I fear I am running low on arrows." Sebastian fitted another arrow to his bow.

Loghain let out a small laugh when he saw another figure come through the door. "You owe me ten gold." He called out.

Brehan brought his axe down into the skull of a mercenary. "You owe me an explanation."

With a second blade in the melee, the remaining four mercenaries went down quickly. Loghain cleaned the blood off his sword, but didn't sheath it. "Spymaster Brehan, Prince Sebastian Vael. We were just..." He frowned, and glanced at Caleb. "Did we decide if we were rescuing him or taking him prisoner?"

Sebastian shook his head, and began retrieving arrows. "Where are my guards?"

"Dealing with a riot near the docks, as near as I can tell." Brehan handed Caleb a crossbow bolt. "I caught a glimpse of your parents earlier." He gestured. "That way."

"Um, before we..." Loghain shook his head. "Sigrun did tell you..."

"She let you go." Brehan nodded. "And you kept your word about checking in and letting us know everyone was okay."

"Oh good."

"Let's find your folks." Brehan sighed. "I need a drink."

"That's..." Loghain shifted his weight. "Going to be an issue."

"Why?" Brehan raised an eyebrow.

"Our folks are that way." Loghain pointed. "We are going that way." He pointed in what was nearly the opposite direction.

Sebastian frowned. "When you asked me about the best way to the servant's garden..."

"Loghain." Brehan narrowed his eyes.

"Look, Brehan, you can take Sebastian with you. We don't particularly like him anyway." Loghain took a deep breath, and then shook his head. "I am called."

Slowly, Brehan nodded. "Caleb, I don't suppose you are going to come to your senses?"

"I'm going with Loghain." Caleb glanced at Sebastian. "Let Papa know that the palace might not have come under attack at all except Sebastian wouldn't let the cultists take me."

"You can't be about to let them run off." Sebastian shook his head at Brehan. "I could point out they are still technically my prisoners."

"You could." Brehan acknowledged the words with a nod. "But how do you suppose that is going to work out for you?"

"Are you threatening me?" Sebastian took a step forward.
"Yes." Brehan showed his teeth. "I am. A tragic day. The palace of Starkhaven came under attack, and alas." He spread his hands. "The Inquisition sadly arrived too late to save the prince from his own stupidity. Don't make me more annoyed at this situation than I already am." He gestured. "Loghain, Caleb, get moving. Check in as soon as you are safe."

Loghain saluted.

#

Noamin looked around the corner, then padded ahead lightly. Agatha followed, with Alai a pace behind. A man in dark armor stepped from a door a pace from Noamin, a naked blade in his hand. Noamin parried the first and second blow, and then strange markings on his opponent blazed with white light.

Agatha gasped as the man's hand went through Noamin's chest. The sentinel made a choking noise, and then fell as the man pulled his hand free. A slow smile spread across the man's face as he stepped over Noamin's body and started towards her and Alai. Other figures began emerging from the same room.

"Run." Alai pulled her arm.

She followed the other woman back the way they'd come.

#

Gavren heard Agatha's shout for them to run. "Agatha!"

"It's a trap. They are coming. Go." Her voice came back through the opening. "We'll meet you at the first inn."

He started to aim his staff at the door and Jerath caught his arm. "Trust her."

"Right." Gavren nodded. "Let's move."

#

Agatha went around the corner to see a man in Starkhaven guard armor. She was about to gesture a warning to Alai when she saw who was with him. "Caleb."

Loghain's voice came from under the guard helmet. "Agatha, Alai." He took a step towards them. "What's wrong?"

"Noamin is dead." Alai shook her head, and her voice was raw. "The lyrium warrior and some of his people are behind us."

"The door to the servant's garden is just this way." Loghain gestured. "We should be able to get out of the palace through there."

#

"What the hell were you even thinking?" Hawke stood only a few inches from Sebastian. Cullen considered calling the mage off, but had to admit to himself that the only reason he wasn't currently punching Sebastian was Hawke was in the way. And Fenris had beaten him to it. Blood still dripped from Sebastian's nose. He turned towards Brehan. "You let Loghain and Caleb go?"
"They weren't exactly giving me an option." Brehan shook his head. "What did you want me to do, knock them both unconscious with enemy forces all over the place?"

"Caleb was alright?" Fenris turned towards Brehan.

"I would never have harmed Caleb." Sebastian shook his head.

"He was fine. And Sebastian is telling the truth. Caleb swore the only reason Sebastian was attacked at all is he was protecting Caleb from the cultists." Brehan nodded. "Salla is fine too. Absolutely insane, but fine." Brehan rubbed the back of his neck. "Maker, she may be the safest person in all Thedas."

Alistair frowned. "What does that mean?"

"It means..." Brehan took a deep breath. "Urthemiel recently informed me that he has a very clear memory of the events that took place atop Fort Drakon."

"Oh." Alistair swallowed.

"Shit." Lenore stared.

"The moment he showed up, Abelas and a dozen sentinels..." Brehan gestured. "Folks that work for none other than the Dread Wolf himself, turned around and ran like rabbits."

"And you left Salla with him?" Hawke turned towards Brehan.

"Maker, Hawke." Brehan spread his hands. "Salla was the one giving the orders. She told Urthemiel to take her to the others, and they promptly vanished. I didn't think magic could even do that."

"What about the others?" Alistair folded his arms. "Duncan and Jerath?"

"They are well."

They all turned at the sound of the new voice. Cullen stared at the sentinel. The man started to give a bow, but winced. "Who are you?"

"I am Melavan. The others are on their way out of the city. Two of my people remain with them, and will send word back as soon as they are safe." He met Cullen's eyes. "Three of my people were not captured."

"Delaon and Ionai are back at the inn." Cullen nodded to him. "They are fine."

"Tisallan is with Salla and Kieran." Brehan added.

"They've asked me to provide you with the information at our disposal." Melavan squared his shoulders.

"Order has been restored to most of the palace, and the guard is returning from the city." Alistair nodded.

Sebastian sighed. "Thank you. If..." He swallowed, and then straightened. "King Alistair, Commander Cullen. Given the circumstances of today’s events, I would like to offer Starkhaven's forces to assist you in dealing with this cult."

Lenore's hands glowed white as she touched Sebastian's face. Then she went to Melavan. Alistair
nodded to Sebastian. "Ferelden accepts your offer of an alliance, and hopes this is the beginning of a continued friendship." His voice held just a hint of threat.

"The Inquisition accepts as well." Cullen nodded, and turned towards Carver. "You said the Chargers were on their way. The Iron Bull can root out any remaining pockets of cultists in the city."

#

Gavren looked back at the palace. "I'll give her ten minutes, and then we are going in after her."

"I was only planning to give her five." Jerath nodded.

"Looks like the fighting is mostly done." Duncan gestured towards the smoke rising from part of the city.

"Any sign of Salla or Kieran?" Leandra

"Not yet, but they were with Brehan. Possible he managed to get them to our folks." Duncan sighed. "I'm more worried about Caleb and Loghain."

"Your folks appear to have taken control of the palace." Kels frowned as he looked out the window. "Odds are Caleb, Loghain, Salla, and Kieran are with them." He glanced back. "Possible by now Agatha is as well."

"Kieran was sure Trian was with our folks?" Gavren turned towards Duncan.

"Yes." Duncan shrugged. "Brehan confirmed it." His lips twitched slightly. "Kieran sent Fluffy to him."

"Oh. Good." Gavren rolled his eyes. "Everything is fine then."

"Well, at least with you guys kidnapping Brehan..." Kels twitched a shoulder. "The Commander isn't going to be quite so mad at me."

Leandra slung her arm around his shoulders and put him into a headlock. "We rescued you." She ruffled his hair before releasing him.

#

Loghain and Alai hefted their blades. The group of mercenaries started towards them, and then stopped, dazed looks on their faces.

A deep voice drifted through the garden. "You are terrible mercenaries." Kieran walked towards them, glowing with green light. Tisallan and Salla walked with him. "Find something better to do with your lives."

Blades were dropped from hands as the mercenaries started wandering off. Caleb started to snicker. Salla smiled as well. "Let's go get the others."

"Noamin has fallen." Kieran's deep voice said.

"Yes." Alai nodded. "The lyrium warrior."

Trails of magic came from Kieran's clenched fists. Salla made a pained sound, and shook her head. "Let's find the others, and get out of Starkhaven."
Kieran gestured casually, and a barrier appeared on the doorways behind them, blocking anyone from following. He started walking out of the palace. "This way."
"You're..." Duncan blinked. "Glowing." Kieran's eyes had lit a couple times, but this was something else entirely. The man's entire body was criss-crossed with green light. And perhaps most disturbingly, Alai looked like a mouse trying very hard to show terror in front of a cat.

"Observant of you." He shrugged.

"Why is Kieran glowing?" Duncan looked at Salla.


"Most likely until morning." Kieran nodded.

"Wait..." Duncan looked from Salla to Kieran, and back. "If Kieran is asleep..."

"Oh. Urthemiel, this is everyone. Everyone, this is Urthemiel." Salla gestured.

Kels raised a hand. Salla glanced at him, and he swallowed. "Permission to panic?"

"It's fine, he's still on our side." Caleb nodded to Kels reassuringly, then frowned and turned towards Urthemiel. "You are still on our side, right?"

"If I wasn't, you would be able to tell." Urthemiel shrugged. "The running and screaming is usually a dead giveaway."

"See." Caleb turned back to Kels.

"Yeah." Kels took a deep breath. "I think I'm going to go ahead and panic."

"Do it quietly." Urthemiel nodded to him.

"Okay."

Hawke sighed. "Really, what were you thinking?" He shook his head as he looked over the wreckage of what had been Starkhaven's guard tower, and then turned towards Sebastian. "You may not have known the cult would attack, but you had to know messing with the kids was going to end in part of your city exploding."

"I..." Sebastian couldn't meet Hawke's eyes. "Maker, they dangled the bait in front of me and I couldn't wait to take it. I did know it was stupid. And I swear to you, Hawke, I ordered my guards not to harm any of them."

"One of your guards drew steel on Lord Hendry." Melavan spoke quietly from where he was standing near Cullen. "And you shot me."

"I heard rumors about sentinels." Sebastian gestured with one hand. "I thought you and Hendry were keeping the children prisoner." He sighed. "Until Caleb spoke up, I considered you a threat." His eyes narrowed. "I'm not convinced I'm wrong on the matter."

"Got something here." A guard's voice called their attention over.
Brehan nodded. "This is where we encountered Abelas." He looked over the two dead sentinels.

"Your work?" Alistair raised an eyebrow at him.

"Tisallan." Brehan shook his head.

"Renanin." Melavan gestured to one of the corpses. "Hanir." He pointed to the other, and sighed. "Hanir was one of Tisallan's students."

"Ir abelas, hahren." Brehan's voice was quiet.

"Ma serannas, da'len." Melavan closed his eyes. He shook his head, then turned his eyes to Cullen. "I request leave to see to their bodies."

Cullen nodded and gestured to Brehan. "I'm sure Brehan can assist."

Hawke frowned. "There is residual magic here. Some I can figure out, but there is something else, something..."

"Like nothing I've seen before." Lenore turned a slow circle.

"Urthemiel." Hawke rubbed the bridge of his nose. "My daughter ran off with Urthemiel."

Sebastian turned to the guards. "Extend the search outside the castle. Send word at the first sight of any of them."

"Yes, Prince Vael."

#

"Alright, we are going to need supplies." Salla frowned. "Rapidly becoming the story of our lives. What we had was in Lord Hendry's mansion. Whatever wasn't destroyed is currently under guard." She sighed. "Poor Lord Hendry."

"Our folks will make sure he comes out of it alright." Leandra tried to sound reassuring.

"He sacrificed much to aid us." Alai's voice was low. "A brother when we needed one."

"His work will not go unrecognized. Nor uncompensated." Urthemiel nodded to her.

"Good to know." Salla smiled, and then frowned again. "Though that doesn't solve our supply problem. We've got some weapons and armor picked up from the dead mercs, but most of its crap. We should have done what Loghain did and rob the Starkhaven guards." She turned towards him. "You didn't kill them, did you?"

"Well, I suppose that depends on how long it takes before anyone goes looking for them." Loghain shrugged.

"What do we need most?" Salla rubbed the back of her neck. "Kels, thoughts?"

"Panicking."

"Oh, right."

"A solution to that problem lies in that direction." Urthemiel pointed. "Trian is also waiting."
"Alright. Let's move." Salla headed in the direction he had pointed.

#

"You..." Gavren gave Trian a disbelieving look. "Robbed our folks, and stole their horses."

"It was not my idea."

The squirrel chittered proudly.

Kels stared at Gavren. "I could point out we also robbed your folks."

"That was just a safehouse. It doesn't count." Caleb shrugged.

"Right. That excuse is absolutely going to stop the Commander from killing me." Kels rubbed his forehead.

"Would you mind letting our folks know we got out of the city okay?" Salla reached out and petted the squirrel. It squeaked at her and rubbed its head against her hand. "I bet Uncle Carver would take you back to Aunt Merrill." The squirrel chirped happily and ran off.

"Anyone want to explain to me why Kieran is glowing?" Trian glanced up at him.

"I am not Kieran."

"Trian, meet Urthemiel. Urthemiel, meet Trian." Caleb waved a hand. "And now let's get out of town, because if our folks catch us we are in so much trouble."

"We..." Trian stared. "What?"

#

Alistair went to check in with those in Sebastian's office. Fenris was still glaring at the prince, and he thought the elf's tattoos were glowing just faintly. Hawke entered behind him. "It would appear the reason nobody was killed when the tower exploded is someone neatly piled all the debris in the middle of the courtyard." He grinned at Cullen. "Your son apparently remembered his manners in the middle of a jailbreak."

"I am so very proud." Cullen pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed.

Hawke hesitated a moment, and then shrugged. "What he did..." He gestured. "Breaking down an anti-magic ward, exploding a tower, and preventing fallout? Lenore and I couldn't have done that." He shook his head. "Lenore and I couldn't have done that working together."

Cullen stared at him. "Hawke, you and Lenore are two of the most powerful mages in Thedas."

"A fact of which I am well aware." Hawke nodded. "And neither of us could have called magic to us inside that ward, let alone enough to blow apart a stone tower without hurting anyone inside." He turned towards Sebastian. "What bait did they dangle in front of you to make you decide taking that one on was a good idea?"

Sebastian leaned on his desk. "Anders."

"What does Anders have to do with any of this?" Hawke raised an eyebrow.

Carver's voice came from behind him. "The answer to that question doesn't go beyond this room."
His voice was hard. Cullen, Hawke, and Alistair all turned towards him, and Carver rolled his eyes. "Be honest. When you hear 'stupid enough to sleep with the general's daughter', is it really Nathaniel that comes to mind?"

"Oh." Alistair's voice was quiet. "Loghain."

"Anders..." Hawke slowly shook his head. "Has a son." His head came up sharply and he turned towards Sebastian. "And what exactly were you planning on doing in regards to said son?"

"I just wanted the location of Anders."

"Well, then, you should have asked nicely." Carver shrugged. "Qarinus. Red Star District. Ask around for Lord Balith, and you'll get his attention." Carver folded his arms. "Can't promise that will be good for you, but you'll get it."

"I suppose you are going to aid him." Sebastian stared at Carver.

Carver laughed. "Well, let's see." He started ticking points off on his finger. "Anders was a fairly powerful mage before he was possessed. He's spent the past decade in working with The Warden. He's effectively the High Priest of an Archdemon. You messed with the most precious part of his life. He's not going to have to look far for backup, considering who and what the kid's grandfather is." He switched hands. "You also threatened the child of the aforementioned archdemon, a man who was known for being overprotective and prone to acts of violence before he started a new pantheon. And the child's mother is the elven goddess of motherhood and protection. Said child is also the host of an Old God. The boys and their allies just proved that the Starkhaven guard, all the mercenaries a cult could hire, and the vanguard of the Dread Wolf are at best an inconvenience to them. And one of the kids you threw into a cell was my daughter." He let his hands drop.

"Not to mention Loghain's mother is my teyrna and he himself is a knight in service to my son." Alistair folded his arms. "And your guards went after my boys as well."

"And one of the kids you threw into a cell was my son." Cullen nodded.

"I think you also may have annoyed the Divine." Fenris leaned back in his chair.

"And you still have a bounty out on me." Hawke shrugged. "You might be approaching 'too stupid to live' territory."

Sebastian sighed. "Caleb had already convinced me to revoke the bounty." He shook his head. "I will be honest. He had just about nearly convinced me to abandon this before the attack by the cultists. I..." He took a deep breath. "I am not certain what I was thinking. I was just so focused on...

"Your desire." Carver banged his fist against the door. "When all this started, Kieran told us the Formless One was a desire demon, one of the most powerful of such creatures."

Sebastian's face went pale. Hawke reached a hand out and put it on his shoulder comfortably.

#

"Why is no one else disturbed by this?" Trian gestured at the glowing being.

"I'm panicking." Kels nodded to him. "Quietly."

"Is it helping?" Trian looked at him.
"Not really." Kels swallowed.

"Mind if I join you anyway?"

"No, it's fine. I'd hate to panic alone."

"You aren't." Jerath said quietly. Alai made a sound of agreement.

"Good to know some of you have sense." Tisallan's lips twitched.

"You are one of the people not panicking." Duncan shot a glare over his shoulder. "So what does that say about you?"

"He has walked the Amber Path," Urthemiel answered.

"Yeah, that clarified exactly nothing." Duncan shook his head.

"I will try to phrase it differently. He has knelt before the Sulahnven, in the hall of scintillant exaltation, offering panegyric veneration in jubilant aria."

"That didn't help." Duncan sighed.

"The concordat was proposed in excruciating tribulation before the tabernacle of imprecation when he espoused the chanteuse"

"That doesn't help either."

"Perhaps I could convey the concept in a simplified lexicon?"

"Maferath's balls, you're doing that on purpose." Duncan glared.

"Your father repeatedly stabbed me." Urthemiel shrugged. "Be grateful I'm contenting myself with snide remarks."

"I'm going to shut up now." Duncan swallowed.

#

"Why are you glowing green?" Caleb asked.

"I dislike glowing red." Urthemiel shrugged.

"Are all the gods sarcastic?" Caleb raised an eyebrow.

"Yes." Kels shook his head. "Yes they are." He ran a hand down his face. "And I hate what knowing that says about my life."

"He's just annoyed I won't let him burn down Starkhaven." Salla shrugged.

"He's just annoyed you won't..." Kels stared at her. "Let him burn down Starkhaven?"

"She has some sort of pesky morality..." Urthemiel waved a hand. "Thing." He pointed. "And here we are."

There was a shout as they came upon the campsite. One of the people there grabbed for a bow. Jerath started to shout as the arrow came flying in their direction. Urthemiel caught it several inches from his chest. "I'm going to ask you not to do that." He snapped the arrow in half.
"Once."

"It's okay." A young woman stood up, gesturing for others to halt. Two of the other griffin riders got hold of the others who had gone for their weapons. "We know them." She looked from Salla to Urthemiel to Caleb and then back to Urthemiel before shrugging. "Or we thought we did. What the..." Greta started to ask.

"Hey, Greta." Salla nodded to her. "We are short on gear. So we are stealing your supplies. Hope you don't mind?"

"A rather questionable pesky morality thing." Urthemiel shook his head.

Greta looked from Urthemiel to Salla, and then back again. She nodded. "Help yourselves."

"Thanks."

Urthemiel tilted his head at Greta. "Would you pass a message to the spymaster for me?"

#

"Any sign of them yet?" Alistair paced back and forth, trying not to give in to the urge to strap his shield to his arm and go looking himself. It wasn't as if he didn't trust Sebastian... or rather, it wasn't just that he didn't trust Sebastian. His boys were in danger. And not just from the cult. The forces of the Dread Wolf had made an appearance.

"Not only is there no sign of them..." Cullen looked ready to start stabbing people himself. "Apparently our forces back at the inn lost Trian."

Alistair kicked the wall. "For the love of..." He waved a hand. "You led the army that took down Corypheus. Hawke put down a Qunari invasion. I'm the king of Ferelden." He growled. "How can a less than a dozen kids be giving us this much trouble?"

"Probably because they are our kids." Carver answered as he entered the room. "I sent word to my riders to start searching outside the city. The kids are probably on the --"

A small gray creature came flying through the doorway. It did a circuit of the room before leaping from the desk to Carver and climbing up him. The squirrel reached his shoulder and began squeaking.

"What the..." Hawke started to ask.

Carver shushed him and nodded to the squirrel. "All of them?" The squirrel nodded and squeaked again. "Where?" The squirrel hesitated, then gave an apologetic squeak. "No, I understand." It made an inquisitive chitter. "She's missed you too." There was a hopeful chirp. "Of course you can." He offered the squirrel a bit of something out of his belt pouch. "Make yourself cozy in my pack." The squirrel took the item from him, shoved it into its mouth, squeaked again, and rushed back off.

"You are going to explain that..." Hawke stared at his brother. "Right?"

"He's a friend of Merrill's." Carver shrugged. "The kids have regrouped and they are all alive and safe. And heading out of the city."

"The squirrel..." Alistair sighed. "You know, being that your cousin once got into a rhyming contest with a tree, I don't know why I'm even finding this strange."
"Where do we go from here?" Duncan asked.

"The ruins in which we first encountered them are located in Antiva," Tisallan said. "Perhaps they return there?"

Urthemiel shook his head. "The cult is already fleeing the city. West, back into Nevarra."

"It gets us out of Starkhaven, so it's as good a direction to head as any." Leandra shrugged.

Salla nodded. "Kels, are you done panicking?"

"Mostly."

"If we head back into Nevarra, where is the first Inquisition safehouse we'll find?"

"Back in Hasmal." Kels furrowed his brow. "One of our agents is a seamstress, and maintains one in the basement of her business."

"She'll report back our presence." Agatha frowned.

"I'm not worried about that." Salla shrugged.

"Why not?" Duncan turned towards her in surprise.

"Duncan, somehow, our parents found us in Starkhaven." She gestured towards Tisallan. "He says they got there a few days after we did. Pretty sure no matter where we go, our parents will be following close behind."

"I don't suppose you could convince whoever is helping them to stop."

"Your question implies a willingness to make the attempt."

Her smile became a frown. "You think we are going to need them."

"Each decision you make branches more paths before you, changing with the choosing. You have already altered the flow of time and stretched boundaries of reality." Urthemiel's glowing eyes swirled slightly. "Ripples no longer reflect enough to be read, and thus I cannot be certain you will not."

"That's fair." Salla nodded.

"Sers..." A guard stuck his head into the office tentatively. "We seem to have something of a situation here."

"Explain."

"We found some of the mercenaries still alive, but..." The guard shook his head in confusion.

"Well, we aren't sure what is going on."

Sebastian glanced at Hawke, who nodded and followed him and the guard out of the room. The guard led them into the gardens of the palace, then gestured. A man dressed in servant's clothing bowed when he saw them. "My lords."
Hawke stared for a moment. "What are they doing?"

"As near as I can tell, serah, they are making topiaries." The servant turned back towards where the two men were working. "I thought about asking the guard to stop them..." He shrugged. "But they are doing a really good job."

They continued staring for several minutes as the two heavily armed ruffians pruned the hedge shape. Footsteps caused them both to turn, and they saw Cullen approaching with several of the guard, accompanied by Melavan. "Is that supposed to be a fish?" Cullen raised an eyebrow at the topiary.

"I..." Sebastian rubbed his forehead. "Actually, I think I kind of like it."

"You should ask them to do a mabari next." Hawke pointed at one of the untrimmed hedges.

"Your guards found another of the mercenaries." Cullen pointed back the way he had come. "He is sitting in your southern guard tower, painting a picture of the ships in the river. And a messenger from the chantry claims that two more are insisting on being allowed to take vows."

"I don't suppose you can explain this?" Hawke turned to look at Melavan.

"You've seen the effect spirits can have on mortals." Melavan gestured at the men working on the hedge.

"Urthemiel..." Hawke shook his head, and then pointed at the gardening mercenaries. "Did that?"

"The first time the elves called upon the spirit that eventually became known as Urthemiel..." Melavan smiled. "What he inspired was nothing less than Arlathan itself." He swallowed. "The Muse walks the world once more."

"Maker's breath..." Sebastian stared.

#

"You're not like Cole."

"Cole was Compassion." Urthemiel nodded to Gavren. "There are overlaps between emotions, certainly. But we stem from different sources."

"And sometimes the line between spirit and demon is a thin one." Gavren frowned. "Cole became angry when he couldn't help." He sighed. "Can I ask why..." He shook his head. "I am not sure how to phrase it."

"You wish to know why I do not answer prayers."

"Yeah." Gavren nodded. "I guess I do."

"A farmer prays for rain, so that his crops will grow. A traveler prays for sun, so he may reach his destination safely. An old woman prays for a peaceful ending to come quickly, while her grandchild prays for more time with her. A mage prays for freedom while a templar prays for them to remain in their cage. Soldiers on both sides of a battle pray for victory." Urthemiel spread his hands. "Whom shall I answer?"

"But can't you steer them on a better path?"

"As the Wolf intends to do?"
Gavren nodded slowly. "I see your point. Who defines better?" He sighed. "But if you are inspiration..."

"Anders was inspired by justice. Meredith was inspired by faith. Corypheus was inspired by pride." Urthemiel shook his head. "I inspire what lies within the heart, and the heart of a mortal can be a treacherous place to wander."

"I see." Gavren nodded. "Thank you."

#

"You..." Alistair stared at the young griffin rider that had come with the report for Carver. "Let them take off with all the supplies?"

She shuffled her feet. "Look, your majesty, I know you do things a little differently in Ferelden."

She squared her shoulders. "But I'm from Kirkwall. I have a very strict policy about arguing with glowing people."

Alistair opened his mouth, and then shut it again and rolled his eyes. He growled. "My son, the future king of Ferelden, is robbing people."

"I seem to recall during the Blight..." Brehan started to say.

"You shut up." Alistair held up a finger without bothering to turn towards him. "And that was mostly Brosca." He furrowed his brow. "And Lenore. And Zevran. And Jerath." He glanced back at Brehan. "Didn't they steal Loghain's crown?"

"And were rather annoyed they couldn't convince you to wear it to the Landsmeet." Brehan's lips twitched.

"Whatever happened to that thing, anyway?"

"Lenore uses it as a paperweight." He heard a snicker from Magister Arenda before she managed to compose her face once more.

Greta looked back and forth between them, then suddenly brightened. "Oh, he did ask me to pass a message to the spymaster."

Brehan raised an eyebrow at her. "And what is that?"

"Um..." She took a deep breath. "He said it's either ma shem'nan or emma sahlin'nan. And that your accent is bad enough without you butchering the idioms."

Alistair tried very hard not to laugh at the look on Brehan's face. And failed. Badly.

"For over a thousand years, the Imperium has been calling to the Old Gods, with no response."

Magister Arenda frowned. "One finally shows himself, and the first thing he does..." She turned towards Brehan. "Is correct your grammar?"

"Apparently," Brehan said through gritted teeth.

Magister Adalricus was practically beaming. "This is the best day ever."
Chapter 28

"Iain." Melavan smiled at the sight of the scholar.

Lord Hendry immediately stood and walked towards him. "You crazy..." He shook his head. "What were you thinking? You could have been killed! I..."

Melavan put his hand on Lord Hendry's shoulder. "Peace, lethallin." He nodded to Delaon and Ionai, and took a deep breath. "Noamin has fallen."

Delaon closed his eyes, and Ionai hung her head. Lord Hendry made a pained noise. "Oh Mel. I am so sorry."

#

Salla saw the glow fade from Kieran, and he gave her a confused look. She smiled. "Back with us?"

He tilted his head slightly, half closing his eyes. "I did not anticipate that particular vulnerability."

"I'm not sure it's a vulnerability. Your alter ego is a bit..." She shrugged. "Well, he's not quite as nice a person as you are." She furrowed her brow. "Though he did help us. I admit to being just a little surprised by that."

"We are not wholly separate individuals. If he was unwilling to take on this quest, I would not be either. We walk the same paths." He touched her hand. "I hope he did not disturb you."

She leaned forward and kissed him. "He didn't. But I am glad to have you back."

Kieran smiled, and returned the kiss.

#

Ruya stared at the crystal in her hand, trying to process what her husband was telling her. "And he is certain it was Abelas?"

"He claims the sentinel with him at the time, Tisallan, called Abelas by name." Cullen's voice held sympathy. "Their target appeared to be Kieran."

"What about this staff?"

"Assuming we can trust the information provided by Melavan, it is an item powerful enough that an Old God not only personally hid it away, he erased his own memory of it completely. Melavan claimed that even now, Kieran cannot retain the memory of anything regarding the staff."

"It's possible Solas's interest has nothing to do with the staff. Kieran is vulnerable, and the son of the two biggest threats to Solas's plans." Ruya started to pace the room. "And the sentinels with the children?"

"One of their number, Noamin, died protecting the kids. Two remain with them, Tisallan and Alai. At least according to the most recent sighting of the kids." Cullen's voice came back over the crystal.

"What do we know of them?"
"Alai's mother was the sister of Melavan and Delaon. If I'm interpreting what they said correctly, she was in that library place you found through the eluvians when Fen'Harel created the Veil. That combined with what he did in regards to Mythal seems to have soured them on him fairly well. Though they have clearly stated that they have no interest in going to war against the sentinels that did follow Fen'Harel and are reluctant to even give us information on them." Cullen sighed. "I sympathize. Even with what I knew the other templars were doing, it was hard to raise a blade against them."

"I know. Assure them we won't ask them too."

"Like the others, Alai is an arcane warrior. She's apparently much heavier on the warrior than the arcane. Ionai mentioned that Alai has a 'fondness' for young Loghain, and when Lenore pressed..." She could almost hear Cullen blushing. "Well Lenore is continuing to express her doubts that young Loghain and Old Loghain are related in any fashion."

"Oh Maker." Ruya shook her head. "I think I'll leave that part out of what I tell Anora."

"Melavan reminded me that Alai is a sentinel, and they held their duty as protectors for thousands of years. He seems certain she will stay with the children to defend them until relieved of that duty."

"And the other one?"

"Tisallan." Cullen was silent a moment. "The one the cult killed earlier, Enara, was his granddaughter. Noamin was Enara's apprentice and surrogate son. Tisallan already killed two other sentinels defending Kieran, one of whom was a former student, and Brehan said Tisallan is the one that took him prisoner when he tried to bring Salla and Kieran in. Melavan..." Cullen swallowed. "He said the only reason Tisallan came with them was Enara and Noamin, and admitted he is not sure which direction Tisallan would otherwise have gone."

"But he was willing to fight Abelas?"

"Brehan made a comment about bringing Salla back to us in a sack. Tisallan's response was to nearly dislocate Brehan's shoulder, and he informed Brehan that if he made any moves Tisallan could possibly interpret as a threat to Salla, Tisallan would snap his spine."

"Threat to Salla?"

"Yes."

"Not to Kieran?"

"Tisallan didn't seem to be of the opinion Brehan could present a threat to Kieran."

"That..." Ruya shook her head. As formidable as she knew her spymaster was... "He might have had a point. Though I did once see Brehan push Jerath into a river." She stared down at the crystal. "So this Tisallan is both willing to defend the kids and has reasons of his own to want to deal with the cult."

"There is more, though you'd have to get Brehan to confirm details. They used a lot of elvish words I didn't understand, but the gist of it seems to be that Urthemiel and Tisallan have some kind of previous acquaintance due to Tisallan's wife having been a disciple of some sort. All three sentinels agreed that Tisallan would be perfectly willing to kill anyone he thinks is a danger to Urthemiel. Cult, follower of Fen'Harel, or..." Cullen sighed. "Us, if it came to that. And that he might have a liberal interpretation of 'danger' in that regard."
"Great." Ruya leaned on the wall and bowed her head. "So we've got a loyal defender and a wild card with the kids."

"For the time being, Melavan has accepted my authority, and the others are following his lead. Which is good, because it's keeping them from assassinating Prince Vael. They are rather angry regarding his treatment of Lord Hendry." It was several seconds before Cullen continued. "The matter of Lord Hendry is complicated. He violated his agreement with the Inquisition, and thus with the Divine, and thus technically is a criminal. However..." Cullen's voice became frustrated. "If I attempt to arrest him, I'll also have to arrest the sentinels, which will cost us their cooperation. Melavan was quite willing to die protecting Lord Hendry, and had Carver not called the other two off, we'd have already had an incident."

"What's this about Carver calling the other two off?"

"He used his templar abilities, then asked them if they knew who he was. It seems they did, and that was enough to get them both to settle back down." Cullen's voice was quiet when he spoke again a moment later. "Carver informed us that Mythal knew of the sentinels' presence in Starkhaven and had chosen to leave them be."

"More secrets." Ruya sighed down at the crystal.

"There is..."

When the crystal remained silent, Ruya frowned down at it. "Cullen?"

"No, you need to know, because it could be a factor. One of the secrets that has recently been revealed is the current location of Anders. Which Carver has apparently known all along."

"That is how the cult got Sebastian to work with them?" Ruya closed her eyes and considered banging her head on the wall. "Capture Leandra to blackmail the information from Carver?"

"No." Cullen took a deep breath. "It seems that..." He sighed. "Young Loghain is Anders' son. The cult apparently offered to let Sebastian keep Loghain, and gain their assistance in dealing with Anders, in exchange for the rest of the children. Sebastian refused that offer, which I think is the only reason Hawke didn't set him on fire over recent events."

"Well." Ruya actually did bang her head on the wall. "Shit. Who else knows this information?"

"Sebastian, his guard captain and a couple others in his guard, who knows who in the cult, myself, Alistair, Hawke, and Fenris. And I suspect Brehan knows, but I'm not sure how long he's known. Carver confirmed the information, and made it very clear how bad an idea following up on it would be."

"I..." Ruya sighed. "I'll talk to Anora. As gently as possible."

#

"Melavan instructed me to send word as soon as you were safely away from the city." Alai folded her arms.

"We sent Fluffy back." Salla nodded.

"I..." Alai shook her head. "Lady Salla, I'm not certain that counts."

Salla sighed, and then nodded. "The problem is sending a message that cannot be intercepted."
She frowned. "Agatha, does House Brosca have any ciphers that might work?"

"Yes, but it's likely Fen'Harel has spies in our ranks as well, so..."

"Ugh."

"Not to mention just sending a message would give them information on which direction we went when we left the city."

"I'm kind of assuming Fen'Harel knows that already. He's got to know we'd still be following the cult." Salla rubbed the back of her neck, and then suddenly smiled. "No, I know what to do."

---

Gabriel looked around the Fade. Why had he dreamed himself into the Kirkwall's templar hall? Granted, the place no longer made him nervous even if it did once again host templars, it was just an odd place to find himself. He was starting to focus to send himself elsewhere when...

"Hawke."

He turned, and smiled. "Feynriel." He started to open his mouth, and then sighed. "Oh for the love of..." He shook his head. "Why didn't I think of that?"

"Salla and I do have some prearranged signals." Feynriel smiled. "It's good to see you, even here. I am on my way to Minrathous to assist Magister Pavus. Salla asked me to let you know they are all safely some days outside of Starkhaven and Kieran is no longer glowing."

"Both something of a relief. Can you keep an eye on her?"

"Two or three years ago, I would have said yes." Feynriel shook his head. "She's grown in strength and skill since then, and can hide from me easily enough now. But she promised to meet me at our normal place for lessons in three days to check in again."

"How did you find me?" Gabriel raised an eyebrow.

"You were sent to my dreams once before, and this was the location. I pulled on the echo. It's a trick I unfortunately have yet to teach Salla, which is why she couldn't come to you directly." Feynriel smiled. "And I think she's a little afraid you are going to be angry at her."

"I am absolutely furious at her." Gabriel narrowed his eyes. "Running headlong into danger like..."

"Like a mage who once risked his life against templars, demons, and slavers to save a boy he'd never met." Feynriel put a hand on Gabriel's shoulder. "Only to later risk worse than death in the Fade to save that same boy?"

"I am apparently a lousy role model." Gabriel shook his head. "How is your mother?"

"She's well. She runs a shop in Gwaren now."

"Do give her my regards."

"Take care of yourself, Hawke."

---
"I admit, having tents does make being on the road a little easier." Caleb stirred the pot over the fire. "But I'd still like to get an actual bed."

Trian poured coins back into a pouch. "We've two hundred seventeen gold, horses, gear, and weapons." He looked up. "How are we doing on other things?"

"We've got adequate healing supplies." Gavren examined one of the bags. "This staff is the next best thing to a broom though." He tapped the staff he'd taken from the healer on their way out of the jail, then gave Salla a curious look. "Where did you get that staff?"

She touched the faintly glowing green staff. "Kieran and I weren't able to grab our staffs when leaving the estate. Urthemiel made this one." She trailed a hand down it. "He just sort of grew it out of the Fade."

"Could..." Gavren frowned. "Could this Tilde Staff be something like that?" He shook his head. "We should have thought to ask Urthemiel while he was here."

"I did." Salla shrugged.

"And?"

"He said, 'what staff?'" She rolled her eyes. "But my guess is you are on to something." She offered the staff to Gavren.

He took it from her, and let out a low whistle. "This is..." He balanced it in hands. "Different." He wrinkled his nose, and offered it back. "Itches." He wiped his hands on his tunic after she took it from him.

Salla looked down at the staff. "What do you mean itches?"

"Like a prickling in my hands when I touch it." He raised an eyebrow. "You're not getting that from it?"

"No." She waved Kieran over. "Can you explain?"

"It is tuned to your key." Kieran nodded. "He plays a different harmony."

"Tisallan, could the Tilde Staff be something like this one?" Salla turned towards him.

"Staffs are not my area of expertise." Tisallan folded his arms. "However, you may be on to something. Though that would imply that it was Urthemiel himself, rather than Ostalias, who made the staff."

"What are we discussing now?"

"I'll explain in a bit."

"Alright."

Gavren looked at the staff in Salla's hand. "That one is at least as powerful as Hawke's. Something made by Urthemiel at the height of his power, wielded by a mage as powerful as Fen'Harel?"

"As if we didn't have enough nightmare fuel." Duncan said quietly.

"That would also explain why they need Kieran." Jerath began gathering the dishes. "Urthemiel crafted it, and warded it. He is the only one that can unlock it." He frowned. "And for some
"That is not a comforting thought." Kieran frowned.

"No. It certainly is not." Kels stood, and started taking the tents down.

#

"And my accent is fine."

Even though he wasn't actually in the room, Leliana controlled her urge to smile. She was afraid he'd hear it in her voice. "And it is natural there would be some lingual shifts over thousands of years, as well as multiple dialects."

"And if I was butchering idioms, Jerath would never have passed up the opportunity to make a smart remark about it."

The laugh did escape her at that point. "Especially considering how often you directed that particular idiom at him." She shook her head fondly. "And I seem to recall you and Solas yelling at each other in elvish on at least one occasion."

"Anyway, Feynriel said Salla reported the kids had all regrouped and made it safely out of Starkhaven, but had not determined their next destination. They did arrange another time and place for checking in, and Feynriel said he will bring Hawke along for the meeting. He might be able to bring some others, but made no promises, and reminded us that the Fade is dangerous enough for mages."

"I recall." Leliana shook her head. "I'll let Dorian know to expect Feynriel."

"Ar lath ma, emm'asha."

"And I you, vhenan."

#

Salla watched Kieran and Gavren set wards around their camp. Considering their track record with buildings, it seemed to make more sense to remain outside the city. And this way, enemies would have a harder time sneaking upon them. Her brother had grumbled about the lack of real beds before further lamenting the loss of their confiscated whiskey. Or he had, until Kels had threatened to gag him.

Loghain and Alai were out gathering firewood. She could only hope they actually remembered to bring some firewood back when they were done. Kels and Trian were going over maps and trying to restore what notes they had. She was starting to think Kels just had some sort of compulsion towards making reports. Tisallan was showing Agatha some combat techniques using a small sickle like weapon in each hand. Duncan was going through the arrows they'd collected, repairing some and rejecting others. A few feet from him, Jerath sat with his back against a tree, and she thought the man might just be asleep.

"You okay, Lala?" Leandra came and sat down next to her.

"Just trying to decide where to go next. I had thought we'd dealt a considerable blow against the cult back in Nessum, but they still had the resources to throw a lot of mercenaries at us."

"Not very good mercenaries." Leandra shrugged. "I think it's closer to they threw a lot of barely
armed desperate men at us." She sighed. "Even in our time, the Inquisition is still dealing with rogue templars, mages, and Venatori turned bandit after all the trouble."

"Is that what you and Gavren do?"

"The Inquisitor and the Divine have a lot on their hands, and can't be everywhere at once. So, sometimes they send Gavren." Leandra smiled at where Gavren and Kieran were having a friendly argument about types of wards. "Just the fact that he is the Inquisitor's son is enough to soothe a lot of ruffled feathers."

"And when it's not?"

"He's also a pretty good diplomat. And if diplomacy fails..." Leandra touched her sword hilt. "There is me." Her smile faded. "We win more than we lose, but you can see the storm clouds coming." She looked down at her hands, and rubbed at her fingers. "Did I tell you we were eloping?"

She shook her head. "No. Somehow you failed to mention that."

"Our folks want us to wait. They say we are too young." Leandra shook her head. "But it's him and me. Always has been. Always will be." She chuckled. "You'd think our parents would be the first to understand something like that."

"You'd think our parents wouldn't be surprised about any of this. And yet the only ones not freaking out are Kieran's folks."

"And Loghain's father." Salla drew her legs closer to her. "Though that might be because my fathers are involved and there are still a lot of hard feelings there."

"Yeah." Leandra furrowed her brow. "I bet Prince Vael isn't having a very good week." She smirked. "Which one of your fathers do you think punched him first?"

"Fenris." Salla nodded. "Definitely Fenris." She turned towards Leandra. "When this started, our information put the cult at the border between Tevinter and Orlais. I think they are heading back that way to regroup."

"That makes sense. With the entire Starkhaven guard, our folks, and the Chargers underway, they'd want to put some distance. The Inquisition doesn't have forces in Tevinter, and even sixteen years from now the Lucerni would be hard pressed to rally a significant military challenge. Even with the Black Divine being a reformer."

"Then we head that way."

#

Loghain put his arm around Alai, and she leaned into him. "Brehan is with the Inquisition. He will see that Noamin is treated with respect."

"He didn't want to stay in Starkhaven." Alai sighed. "He was thinking of going to Ferelden. Joining the settlement there." She smiled sadly. "Taking up a craft again, perhaps finding some apprentices to ensure what he knew lived on. He and Enara used to shape images in crystal. And now they are both gone. There is no one left in all the world that knows how anymore."

"The world is made smaller by his loss." He held her tightly as she wept.
Anora held the teacup in both hands, staring down into the liquid inside. "I thought I was barren. Maker, I was past forty. Didn't realize I was pregnant. Just thought I was getting old a little sooner. I..." She sighed. "My son was a gift, Inquisitor. A wish I'd been making for so many years. When my father told me goodbye, he told me my wish had not gone unheard."

"It's true then." Ruya half closed her eyes.

"I know. You're wondering what I was thinking." Anora shook her head. "I wasn't. I know you met Anders, a few times. He looked like Cailan, shared some of the same traits." She turned the cup around in her hands. "Not a strong resemblance. Just enough that..." Her smile was sad. "Just enough that a sad old woman could sometimes pretend for a few precious hours she was with the one she loved. I was the same for him. I don't love Anders. He doesn't love me. But we share a son, and he is so very precious to us both."

"Anders knows about Loghain then."

"He visits. He brings Loghain books. Sometimes a toy or other trinket as well, but always books. Sometimes I'll come into Loghain's room to tuck him in, and find Anders there, reading him a bedtime story." She took a sip of the tea, and then her face hardened. "I trust Prince Vael has been informed of the potential consequences of going near my son again."

"Carver Hawke..." Ruya nodded. "And for that matter, Cullen, Alistair, Hawke, and Fenris, all made that very clear to him."

"Good."

Duncan hid a smile when he saw Jerath gently brush some of Agatha's hair away from her face. It was good, seeing his friend take a few minutes for himself. A little weird, seeing him and Agatha look at each other that way, but good. He ran a whetstone over the blade of one of his knives. Jerath stepped in to spar with Tisallan, and Duncan gestured for Agatha to sit with him.

"How many knives do you carry anyway?" Agatha glanced at the knife in his hand.

"Usually around four. You?"

"Right now I've only got ten. I haven't had time to put all the sheaths and stuff in my new gear yet. Next time we pass through a town I should get some thread."

"I recall an occasion one of the Inquisition's agents visited my court. Charter, I think her name was. For some reason, we ended up taking bets on which one of you was carrying more knives."

"Who won?"

"Nobody. We could never get either of you to divest yourselves of all your knives so we could count them."

"Papa Zevran told me about a time he'd gone on a job with eighteen knives, and ended up not having enough. So now, before heading out, official House Brosca policy is to always carry at least one more knife than enough."

"And how many is enough?"
Agatha winked at him. "Oh, Duncan. A girl can never have enough knives."

He chuckled, and tested the edge of the knife before replacing it and drawing a different one. "So you and Jerath."

She went still for a moment, and then nodded. "Yeah." She was quiet. "It an issue?"

"He's my best friend." Duncan slid the whetstone over his knife. "Has been my entire life."

"What was her name?" Agatha's voice was quiet.

"Anya."

"And she..."

"The scar, the one next to his heart?" Duncan tested the edge of the blade. "It was an arrow. He saw it at the last second, no time to do anything but step into its path. So he did. If he'd hesitated at all, I'd have died that day. Instead, he nearly did." He replaced the blade, and then drew the one from his boot. "When he recovered, Anya asked him to go to Highever with her. A new life. A safe life." He turned the knife over in his hands. "And he said no."

"So she went alone."

"She threw his ring back at him and said she wasn't going to waste her life on a man convinced he was born to die for another. Left Ferelden altogether." Duncan looked down at the whetstone. "Twenty-four years, he's been at my side. My sword and shield. So..." He met her eyes. "Break his heart, and I might just kill you."

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Duncan, I've got the feeling you and I could be good friends."

Cullen looked down at the map. "Are you sure?"

"As sure as memory can be. Unfortunately..." Melavan shot a glare towards Sebastian. "Someone set fire to the information we'd gathered."

"Well, the three of you seem to mostly be in agreement on the locations."

"And the Dread Wolf's spies are all too good at what they do. I'll see about getting agents to these locations, as carefully as possible."

"I'll show you to the rookery." Sebastian nodded to Brehan and led him out of the room.

"I suppose it is too much to hope the kids don't have this information?" Alistair raised an eyebrow at Melavan.

"All of them had a chance to look it over."

"Including Kels?" Cullen looked up.

"Kels was the one that took dictation while we translated."

"Then they are likely doing better than we are. Kels hasn't forgotten a report detail in eight years."

"And Trian practically runs a noble dwarven house. Safe to say the kids are doing all right on their
logistics." Alistair shook his head.

"Kels..." Melavan folded his arms. "He at one point claimed they had kidnapped him."

"They did." Cullen nodded. "Though I think at this point he's a willing enough prisoner."

"He was rather afraid of your wrath. The phrase 'latrine duty for the rest of his life' was uttered multiple times."

"Considering they also managed to kidnap Brehan..." Alistair chuckled. "Which I haven't given him nearly enough grief over."

"I trust Kels." Cullen shrugged. "He's family, and if I thought he was going along for an adventure rather than because he was trying to look out for Gavren, I would be angry."

"I suppose that does explain why Kels and Jerath seemed to be the only two with any sense. Both along solely to protect their charges." Melavan nodded, then looked up at Alistair. "Though it does appear your son knows the value of such loyalty."

"I am pleased to hear it." Alistair smiled. "He..." He shrugged. "Well, as a child, he tended to take it for granted."

"While they are young, and prone to the mistakes of youth, you have raised fine sons. Though I admit to being somewhat surprised at your eventual choice of son in law, all things considered."

"Wait..." Alistair blinked. "What do you mean son in law?"

"I..." Melavan looked taken aback, and then his eyes widened. "You..." He shifted his weight from foot to foot. "They didn't tell you."

"You." Alistair narrowed his eyes. "Tell me."

"After..." Melavan glanced over his shoulder as if contemplating the distance between himself and the door. "Duncan made a reference to Loghain being married to his younger sister."

"I..." Alistair took several deep breaths. "I..." He clenched and unclenched his fists. "Okay, did they happen to mention whose idea that was? I need to know who to execute."
Salla looked over the map, then chewed on her lower lip. "House Brosca and the Inquisition are very good at what they do." She touched a couple of the marked locations. "Starkhaven is an anomaly, both because it lacked a strong Inquisition presence and because the Inquisition wasn't worried about that enough to have much of a covert Inquisition presence." She frowned at the map again. "Nor did other groups, such as Fen'Harel or the Ben'Hassrath."

"You're thinking that if they are retreating to a backup base, it's going to have to be in Tevinter." Agatha nodded. "But not too far to the north."

"We still need to figure out where exactly to go, and how to get there. I'd like to stay off the main roads, but we are still lacking in folks that have woodlore." Salla shook her head. "Maybe we shouldn't have let Brehan go."

"What is this thing you have about kidnapping people?" Kels stared at her.

"He was a fairly cooperative prisoner." Salla shrugged. "These are the ones Fen'Harel knows about. My guess is they'll be somewhere else entirely."

"He thinks he's smarter than Mythal, and trickier than the Dread Wolf."

"Caleb?" She turned towards her brother.

"Baradies. This Siofra may think she runs the cult, but he's the mind behind it. And he has a history of hiding in plain sight. Plus he likes to think of himself as clever, and wants to get under people's skin." Caleb leaned on the table. "A hundred gold says they've got a base here, and its where they are headed."

They all stared at where his finger was pointing on the map. "That..." Duncan started to nod. "I think he might be on to something." He shook his head. "They could have allied with any noble. They picked Sebastian Vael."

"He wrote books on himself." One side of Gavren's mouth curled up in a thoughtful smile.

"His plan so far has been pretty elaborate and flashy." Agatha folded her arms.

"It fits with how everything has been going for us so far." Loghain shrugged.

Kieran tilted his head slightly and then nodded. "Pride."

Salla stared at the city name just above Caleb's finger. "Solas."

#

"The safe path is down the river and then up the Imperial Highway." Alai shook her head at Duncan.

"That almost doubles the distance we have to travel." Duncan held his ground. "And who knows what they can do with more time to plan?" He turned to Salla. "Tell her."

"Actually, I think she's right." Salla patted her horse.

"What?" Duncan raised an eyebrow.
'We've a history of our own. Charging right in." Salla shook her head. "They set one trap for us already based on that." She sighed. "And it killed Noamin." She turned to face Duncan. "They have more people than us, know the territory, and we are at a disadvantage on the road. Plus the last thing anyone would expect is for us to do the sensible thing."

"So you are going to give them more time to prepare?" Duncan narrowed his eyes. "We need to..."

"Duncan." Salla took a deep breath. "You agreed to follow me. This is my decision."

He stared at her for almost a full minute. Her eyes never left his. "Maferath's balls." He wrinkled his nose, but nodded. "By your order." He stalked off to tend to his own horse.

"Well done."

Salla almost jumped at the sound of Tisallan's voice. "Thank you." She hesitated a moment. "Can I ask you a question?"

"I sincerely doubt I could stop you." He caught the horse's head and began putting on a bridle.

"Why weren't you afraid of Urthemiel?"

Tisallan adjusted the bridle, and petted the horse's neck before answering. "Why weren't you?"

"I..." Salla blinked. "Actually, that's a pretty good question. He's..." She glanced back at where Kieran was helping pack a tent. "I guess I knew I didn't need to be."

"There is danger yet ahead, Mirthadri." Tisallan nodded. "Be wary."

#

"Should be easy enough." Gavren shrugged.

"I thought you'd say that." Salla nodded. "I imagine you are pretty experienced in the Fade."

"Leandra?" Gavren raised an eyebrow at her.

"No."

"You sure?"

"About not getting dragged into the Fade. Absolutely." Leandra slashed a hand downward. "In fact, I'll be over there. Wide awake. Maybe drink some tea."

"I thought you liked fighting dragons." Gavren smiled.

"I like it when the damn ground stays where it is supposed to."

"You can bring a non mage into the Fade?" Duncan looked from Leandra to Gavren and Salla.

"It's a bit tricky, but yes." Salla gestured. "And with Kieran to help, it should go smoothly." She turned back to Gavren. "I'll show you where Feynriel and I meet. That way, if I can't check in for some reason, you or Kieran can."

"I want to come." Duncan rose and joined them.

"Are you mad?" Jerath stood as well.
"You don't have to come." Duncan shook his head at Jerath. "I'll just be asleep. Five feet from you." Jerath narrowed his eyes, and for a moment Salla was pretty sure Duncan was going to get punched again. "It's the only way I'll get to talk to my father without getting shoved into a barrel."

"He'll be fine." Gavren nodded to Jerath. "Salla and I are old hands at this, and Kieran is well..." He shrugged. "Kieran."

"No." Jerath gestured with one hand.

"You do remember which one of us gives the orders, right?" Duncan folded his arms.

"You do remember which one of us can put the other in a barrel, right?" Jerath stood his ground.

"Once Salla locates Feynriel and whomever he brings, I can pull everyone into our demesne."

Kieran tilted his head. "There will be no danger of outside interference then."

"Duncan."

"We'll need you out here anyway, in case something attacks the camp." Duncan put his hand on Jerath's shoulder.

"The Fade is dangerous enough for mages." Jerath shook his head. "It is a stupid risk to take."

"It's my decision, and it is final."

Jerath growled. "Yes, your majesty." His tone made the words manage to sound both threat and insult. He stalked back to where he had been sitting. Agatha came up to stand beside him and glared daggers at Duncan.

Duncan turned around, ignoring them both. "What do I do?"

#

"What do I do?" Alistair raised an eyebrow at Hawke.

"Lenore will be performing magic on this end, enough to send us all into the proper state. Feynriel will do the rest." Hawke gestured haphazardly. "All you need to do is relax."

"Under the circumstances, that may be easier said than done." Alistair chuckled.

"I would prefer to avoid another visit to the Fade, personally." Zevran shook his head.

"It's not a demon pulling this time." Lenore smiled reassuringly. "Brehan?"

"I would rather undergo the Joining again." Brehan didn't look up from where he was writing a missive.

"Fenris?"

"Yes."

Hawke blinked, and turned towards him. "You?"

Fenris looked uncomfortable, but nodded. "Yes."

"I am coming as well." Cullen spoke up.
Lenore blinked. "Cullen..."

"If Salla brings anyone along, it will most likely be her fellow mages." Cullen looked a little bit green. "And I need to see my son."

#

"Where are we, exactly?" Duncan looked around. It was a garden of some kind, but everything appeared just slightly off kilter. Roses and strawberries decorated the same plant.

"The garden at my family's estate." Salla touched one of the roses.

Duncan shivered slightly. "Why is everything floating?"

A deep voice answered. "The Fade is not a direct representation of your world. It is not architecture or geography that matters here, but concept and symbol. It is an expression of thought."

He glanced from Urthemiel to Salla. "Um..."

Salla and Gavren exchanged a rueful look, and then Salla nodded to Duncan apologetically. "We should have thought to warn you."

"The waking me is Kieran." Urthemiel waved one hand carelessly. "This is the world of dreams." His head tilted.

"Okay." Duncan shifted awkwardly.

Gavren touched Duncan's shoulder. "Are you all right?"

"I don't know." Duncan took a deep breath. "It keeps changing, moving in the corner of my eye and the shadows aren't lining up. It's just..." He swallowed. "Wrong."

Urthemiel's eyes swirled slightly, and abruptly the area seemed to snap into focus. The edges righted themselves, and everything lined up to a single gravity. "Are you more comfortable now?"

"Yes." Duncan closed his eyes and reopened them. "Thank you." He nodded to Urthemiel.

"What is the Fade like for you?" Salla asked Urthemiel.

"Home." Urthemiel looked around. "The air of your world is empty and unchanging."

"Is it true?" Duncan turned back towards him. "About the Black City, and all of..."

"There are questions I will answer for you." Urthemiel's eyes swirled. "That is one I will not."

"Can I ask why not?" Duncan raised an eyebrow.

"The Fade responds to strong emotion, and such things draw spirits and demons alike." Urthemiel tilted his head. "And you are already frightened enough."

"Kind of regretting asking at all now." Duncan looked around. "How long do you think we'll need to wait?"

"They come." Urthemiel turned.
Gavren smiled when he saw Hawke and Fenris rush forward to throw their arms around their daughter, and then he saw who else had come with them. "Father?"

"Gavren." Cullen walked towards him and pulled him into a hug.

He returned it, holding his father tightly. "You..." His father had entered the Fade. "Came to..."

The world of dreams and spirits.

"I needed to see you were alive." Cullen loosened his hold and stepped back slightly, looking him over before hugging him again. "You're alive." His voice became fierce. "Do you have any idea how worried we've been?"

"You came to the Fade." Gavren nearly choked on the words. "I'm starting to get the idea."

Abruptly the Fade around them shifted. The graceful garden vanished, replaced by walls of stone. Carved mabari decorated pillars inside what appeared to be a fortress.

"The Vigil." He heard Alistair's startled voice. "This looks like Vigil's Keep."

"My apologies." Urthemiel's voice caused them all to turn. "There was a lot of emotion, and I thought it best to bring everyone to a safer location."

"Good idea." Feynriel started to nod, and then his eyes widened. "Oh..." He made a choking sound. "Oh my..." He stared. "You're..."

"Urthemiel, this is Feynriel, Cullen, Hawke, Fenris, and Alistair. Everyone, Urthemiel." Salla pointed to each in turn. She frowned, and pointed at Urthemiel again. "No picking on Alistair."

"Spoilsport."

"Stop pacing." Caleb glared. "You're making me tired."

Kels and Jerath both shot him annoyed looks and continued pacing. Leandra shook her head at them. "They'll be fine. Gavren has done this before. He's even dragged me along."

Caleb went back to rummaging in one of the packs. He broke into a wide smile when he finally found what he was looking for. "Aha."

"Aha?" Agatha glanced down at what he was holding, and grinned. "Aha."

"What are you two..." Kels raised an eyebrow, and then smiled.

Jerath's eyes went to the paintbrush and bottle of ink Caleb was holding, and then he turned towards Trian. "I am going to walk a patrol outside the camp, just to be safe." He glanced back at Caleb before addressing Trian again. "Let me know when I'm done."

"Did you just order an Old God around?" Gabriel stared down at his daughter.

"He was pretty mean to Brehan." Salla shrugged. She shifted awkwardly. "So, um..."
"You do understand that you are grounded for the rest of your natural life, yes?" Fenris raised an eyebrow at her.

"Father..." Salla folded her arms. "You remember the part where I am not a little girl anymore?"

Fenris put his hands on her shoulders. "No. You are eleven. You are my daughter, and you will always be eleven." He pulled her into a hug again.

"Is your brother alright?" Gabriel asked.

"He is." She smiled. "We all are safe."

"No, you are not." Gabriel shook his head. "Salla, there is a cult, an ancient elven god, a powerful demon, and who knows what else after you." He put his hand on her shoulder. "A good man already gave his life to protect your friends."

"Noamin." Salla's voice was small. "Papa, we've come too far to turn back. The Formless One is targeting Gavren and Duncan in particular, and we aren't leaving them. The only way to keep everyone safe us for us to make sure that rift never happens in the first place."

"Salla..."

"There are spies everywhere. In Kirkwall. In the Inquisition. In House Brosca. Anywhere we can turn for help. We've got the best shot at this." She squared her shoulders, and met his eyes. "At our age, the Wardens saved the world."

He stared back at her. At years of teaching her to be proud of who she was, to stand up for herself, and her friends, and what she felt was right. "I'm not ready for you to find your wings."

"Oh, Papa." She hugged him.

#

"You..." Cullen shook his head. "Your mother is worried sick."

Gavren hung his head. "I know." He sighed. "Father, I..." He closed his eyes, and took a couple deep breaths. "You had four more years."

"Four more..." Cullen raised an eyebrow.

"To prepare yourself for the possibility I'd be a mage. I..."

Cullen caught him, and pulled him into a fierce hug. "Don't you ever think you need to be ashamed of what you are." He held his son. "If I have ever given you reason to think otherwise..."

"No." Gavren's voice was raw. "You never did."

"Come back to Kirkwall. We'll come up with a plan."

"The Inquisition has spies within its ranks, and Fen'Harel has already tried to get to Kieran once. We are safer on the move." Gavren took a step back. "Father, sixteen years from now, you and Mother both trust me to handle things. I'm asking you to trust me now."

"I thought, once..." Cullen's eyes were wet. "That letting your mother go to battle was the hardest thing I would ever have to do."
"I'm not alone."

"No." Cullen nodded. "You have Leandra. I wish you had told me."

"That we were in the process of eloping when that spell caught us?" Gavren smiled sheepishly. "Surprise."

"Just..." Cullen shook his head. "No. No eloping. You will get married in Skyhold, properly, with an embarrassingly large banquet." He narrowed his eyes. "At which occasion you will be clean shaven and have your hair neatly trimmed."

"Yes ser."

"Tell Kels..." Cullen sighed. "Tell Kels I am grateful he is there to look out for my fool of a son." He managed a smile. "And tell Leandra the same."

#

"Like this." Alai drew the characters in the dirt with a stick.

Agatha duplicated the marks with the brush. "Like that?"

"Almost perfect. You made this a little too wide, but it is legible." Alai nodded.

"Can I just say it's hilarious the elves even have an actual word for that?" Loghain held out his hand. "My turn."

"You'll just draw lewd pictures."

"Well..." Loghain nodded. "Yes."

"I feel like I should be putting a stop to this." Kels shook his head, and then smiled. "Can I have a turn?"

Leandra grinned, and handed him a paintbrush. Trian rolled his eyes, and glanced at Tisallan. "Shouldn't you be putting a stop to this?"

Tisallan looked up from where he was adding more wood to the fire. "I see nothing."

#

"You arranged a marriage between Loghain and your sister?"

"It was a sensible decision at the time." Duncan sighed. "If Anora hadn't..." He swallowed. "There were agitators. Orlais was just waiting for us to start fighting among ourselves so they could move in. Half the country wanted Fergus on the throne, the other half wanted Anora. Both of them kneeling to the 'boy prince' kept us whole." He took a deep breath. "Cousland is already bound to Therin in blood. Arranging a union between Therin and Mac Tir seemed logical. Healing the wounds of the past and all that." He shook his head. "I just didn't anticipate him being an asshole and her never growing out of the stubborn pain in the neck thing."

"How did you even get her to agree to the notion?"

"That's the worst part." Duncan hung his head. "They actually like each other just fine. Wynne made it very clear I was to mind my own business." He rubbed his jaw in memory. "And she's the one that inherited your fighting skills."
Alistair smiled. "You need to come back to Kirkwall."

"No."

"Duncan." His eyes narrowed.

"Father, if I stop this Formless One..." Duncan clenched his fists. "I saw you and Mother and Uncle Rory die." He met his father's eyes. "I have a duty. To you, to Ferelden, to Wynne and Bryce and Maric, to make sure that does not happen."

"You..." Alistair took a deep breath. "Sound just like your mother. Duncan, the risk you are taking --"

"Is no different than some of the risks you've taken. I'm four years older than you were when you joined the Wardens."

"Making me think back to how young and stupid I was then and how many times I nearly got killed is not helping your case." Alistair gestured sharply. "I had a dragon stand on me."

"And the guy who killed that dragon?" Duncan drew himself to his full height. "His son is with us. And bringing an Old God along for the ride. Not to mention two more very powerful mages, five of the most talented warriors in Thedas, a woman who is well on her way to being one of the greatest spymasters of all time, two elven warriors that were kicking ass before humans started making swords, and the guy who made the entire Seeker Order look like a bunch of idiots." He shrugged. "And I'm not bad with a bow."

Alistair folded his arms. "We had a golem. And a Qunari."

"We had a bunch of golems in Nessum." Duncan gestured with one hand. "And I'll tell Salla to kidnap Iron Bull next."

"And we had a mabari."

"Kieran is a shapeshifter."

"We had no other options available."

"I..." Duncan looked away, and shook his head. "Gavren, Kieran, and I are the thing's primary targets. As long as the cult is busy hunting us, you and the Inquisition can keep stripping its resources. A joint effort."

"Duncan..."

"Father, you should go back to Ferelden. Wynne, Bryce, and Maric need you there."

"That, young man, is fighting dirty."

"If we need your forces, we can get in contact with you."

#

"Where are we, exactly?" Alistair asked as they regrouped. "This is Vigil's Keep, but it isn't."

"In the Fade, powerful spirits often have their own demesne. This one belongs to The Warden."

"Is he..." Alistair turned towards Urthemiel. "But he isn't here?"
"There are questions I will answer."
Urthemiel met his eyes steadily. "And questions I will not. Where he is, and what he is doing, are among the latter."

"Just um..." Alistair nodded, and then shrugged. "Let him..." He swallowed. "Thank him for us, please? And her, too?"

"I shall."

"Melavan filled us in on most of it." Cullen kept his hand on Gavren's shoulder. "Have you learned anything else about the staff?"

"What staff?" Urthemiel turned the glowing eyes towards Cullen.

"I'll explain later." Salla nodded to him. "And yes, we may have. When the sentinels attacked, Urthemiel created a staff out of Fade-stone."

"Given its particular properties, we think that this Tilde staff may be something like it, perhaps something Urthemiel created back then, at the height of his power. Considering what you can do with the Key..." Gavren gestured at Hawke.

"You..." Alistair gave Urthemiel a curious look. "Really don't remember the staff?"

Urthemiel raised an eyebrow at Salla. Salla nodded to him. "You hid it, warded it, then erased your own memory of it." She furrowed her brow. "Why would you do such a thing?"

"To keep it from another."

"The Formless One and its ilk?"

"Or one of my siblings."

"You mean the other Old Gods?" Feynriel shook his head.

"Why would you want to keep it from them?" Hawke asked.

"We were not always in agreement, and our goals often differed." Urthemiel shrugged. "And frankly Dumat was always something of an arsehole."

"Would..." Cullen hesitated a moment. "Would Razikale remember?"

"Her memories were badly damaged, with entire centuries erased."

"Hang on..." Alistair held up a hand. "Her?"

"Razikale was my sister."

"But..."

"And now Mythal's husband." Urthemiel shrugged. "Whatever you do, try not to think about how awkward that gets at times."

"Too late." Alistair buried his face in his hand.

"I asked you not to do that." Salla put her hands on her hips.

"You said not to 'pick on'." Urthemiel met her eyes. "That was 'messing with'."
"Back to the topic at hand, if we could?" Duncan glared. "Fen'Harel would know about the staff though?"

"It is possible that he knows only that it exists, and is powerful enough that the Formless One is going through a lot of trouble to obtain it." Gavren shrugged. "Which is reason enough for him to have an interest in obtaining it and any advantage it could give..." He frowned. "It wasn't tuned to my key."

"Gavren?" Cullen raised an eyebrow at him.

"The staff Urthemiel made recently. He gave it to Salla. She can use it easily, but I can't. He, or Kieran to be specific, said it wasn't tuned to my key. Whatever this Tilde Staff is, could Fen'Harel even use it?"

"He has strength enough now to override certain magics." Urthemiel tilted his head. "You could, if you so desired, bend the staff to your will, though not without some difficulty. Fen'Harel's knowledge of such things is far greater than yours."

"What about you?" Alistair folded his arms. "What happens if you get the staff?"

"My goals align with those of Razikale and Mythal."

"No offense, but um..." Alistair hesitated a moment. "You did kind of start a Blight."

"True." Urthemiel nodded. "But one, I am no longer tainted, and two, unlike some other gods I could mention, I've grown out of my angsty teenage phase."

Choking sounds came from Gavren and Cullen as they both tried not to laugh. Alistair sighed, and then shook his head. "No. I trust Jerath. He would not have sent you to help if you presented a danger."

"Where are you all heading next?"

"We talked about it. Given what occurred in Starkhaven, we'd like people to think we are heading into Qarinus." Salla clasped her hands behind her back.

"Which implies you are not heading to Qarinus." Hawke narrowed his eyes.

"And hopefully means you aren't heading into Tevinter at all." Fenris added.

"We'll check in with you every three days. Urthemiel and I should be able to find all of your dreams now. However, due to Fen'Harel being a factor, we are going to continue to ward ours."

"I am not happy about this." Alistair folded his arms, and glared again at his son.

"Nor am I." Fenris put a protective hand on Salla's shoulder.

"We wouldn't be having this problem at all if the rest of you were better role models." Hawke shook his head.

"I hate you." Alistair glared.
Chapter 30

She walked the halls of Skyhold, stopping in the round room. Shortly after coming back from the Exalted Council, she'd given thought to painting over the murals. She hadn't been able to bring herself to do so. Her hand touched the painted surface. "I know you are there."

"I suppose it was too much to hope the Inquisition would not involve itself in this matter." His voice came from behind her.

Ruya turned. Solas stood facing the single unfinished mural. Slowly, he turned to face her. She cupped the stump of her arm in her remaining hand. "Someday, four years from now, you come to Skyhold to save my son's life. I thank you, for that."

"Considering what he has done in recent days, I doubt my motives were entirely altruistic." Solas smiled sadly. "My agents have been instructed that under no circumstances are they to do the children any lasting or significant harm." He hesitated a moment. "Thank Brehan and Melavan for seeing to Renanin and Hanir." He straightened, and his tone became more businesslike. "The Formless One and his mage ally must not be allowed to retain the staff. Their plans present significant threat to us both."

"So tell me about this staff." She sat on the edge of the table he'd once used as a desk.

"Before I created the Veil, there was an order known as the Sulahnven. Artists, craftspeople, and musicians, serving with a particularly powerful spirit."

"Urthemiel."

"As he eventually became known, yes." Solas nodded. "I even studied for a time there myself." He gestured at the murals. "The Sulahnven was one of many things the Evanuris fought over. Mythal's intercession on their behalf is one of the events that led to the others turning on her."

"Why fight over the Sulahnven?" Ruya raised an eyebrow. "Prestige?"

"Among other things." Solas looked up at the first of the murals. "You have already seen one of their finest works."

She closed her eyes, and nodded. "They made the orbs."

"Tuned foci for the most powerful mages of my people." Solas leaned on the other side of the table from her. "The Sulahnven was a casualty of the fighting. Their works were stolen, lost, or destroyed. What few remained ended up in the hands of Tevinter. As, eventually, did the spirit. It was during this time that the staff itself was created. I believe he crafted it as a last attempt to save his disciples."

"Melavan says that the staff was used by Urthemiel's first High Priest."

"They would not have used so formal a term then, but yes. This was before Tevinter became the Imperium. Osthalias tried to work with the elves, rather than subjugate them. He failed, and the last of the Sulahnven were slaughtered. That is when, and why, the staff was hidden away."

"Until the Formless One found it." Ruya stood, and paced a circle around the room. "Urthemiel seems to think the goal of this cult is similar to that of Corypheus. Become gods. Only they actually know about you and the others, and intend to achieve that goal by killing you."
"Hence why our interests align." Solas nodded. "I will not lie and claim I do not wish to attain this staff. Yet, given the circumstances, it would be better for it to be destroyed rather than allow it to remain in the hands of the Formless One."

"And if it fell into my hand?" Ruya raised an eyebrow at him.

"My current paradox." Solas smiled. "I intend to see this through, and yet..." He looked at her. "I find myself hoping you succeed, and thus yes, I would rather it be in your hand than that of this cult. You, at least, I trust to do the right thing." He straightened. "However, the only one who can bypass the wards without it resulting in a duplication of the events at the Conclave would be Urthemiel himself."

"Which is why you sent Abelas to obtain him."

"The Formless One has the staff, but without Urthemiel, he cannot use it. Thus it made sense for me to acquire Urthemiel's host." Solas nodded.

"And if you have no other options, you'll kill him?" Ruya's eyes narrowed.

"Yes, though not for the reasons you think. Killing Urthemiel would be a temporary measure at best, given that his parents have anticipated the possibility." Solas chuckled. "I killed him seven months ago when I caught him redirecting eluvians into a public Antivan privy."

Ruya laughed. "Looks like we've got a cult to stop." She shook her head. "Again."

#

"Thoughts?"

"He's definitely hiding something, and I think it is pretty much a given at least some of what he gives us will be misdirection." Ruya looked down at the crystal in her hand. "But outright lies aren't really his thing." She frowned. "What do we know about the Sulahnven?"

There was a murmur she couldn't quite make out, and then an unfamiliar voice came over the crystal. "They were as he said, an order comprised of those of artistic bent. Being allowed to study with the Sulahnven was a mark of considerable prestige. Those who joined the order dedicated their lives to the Muse."

Brehan's voice came back over. "I think we've finally learned why Solas was always so angry at the thought of the Grey Wardens killing the Archdemons."

"I never really considered what they were before being twisted into demons." Ruya sighed.

"Melavan?"

"Yes, Inquisitor?"

"Was Tisallan one of the Sulahnven?"

"He studied there, and later taught, when he attained the rank of Mi'nehn." The voice hesitated a moment. "The approximate translation in your tongue would be bladedancer. A more esoteric school than that followed by most dirth'ena enasalin. His wife, however, was one of the disciples, as was one of his sons."

"Will you go over the information with Brehan? See if you can spot the holes?"
"Yes, Inquisitor."

"The meeting in the Fade went..." Brehan sighed. "Successfully is the wrong word, but it did go as planned and anticipated. The kids will continue coming at the problem from their angle, and check in on a schedule. They are all alive and healthy."

#

"Do I even want to know what any of this means?" Duncan stared at his reflection in the surface of one of his knives. He looked up at his bodyguard. "How could you let them do this?"

"I was patrolling outside of camp." Jerath did not meet his eyes.

"What about you two?" He glared at the sentinels. "You're supposed to be mature and dignified."

Tisallan shrugged. "I saw nothing."

Alai grinned widely. "I helped."

Kieran was peering at his own reflection. He glanced up at Salla. "What do you think of the mustache?"

"I like the curly parts, but not sure its really you." She pointed. "What about mine?"

"Slightly disturbing."

"You've got your heart set on the goatee, don't you?" Gavren raised an eyebrow at Leandra.

"Just as soon as you manage to actually grow some decent facial hair." Leandra nodded eagerly.

"Father said I am to be clean-shaven when we get married at Skyhold."

Leandra's smile trembled for a moment. And then she reached out and grabbed the front of his robes, pulling him into a kiss. Abruptly fireworks started going off around their heads, and Gavren made a rude gesture in the general direction of Kieran and Salla.

"Alright." Salla clapped her hands. "Good news and bad. Good news is, we've reluctantly been given permission to hold our course. We'll continue to check in, they'll pass information to us and vice versa." She took a deep breath. "Bad news is word has definitely gotten out. There are at least four contracts out with the Crows regarding us."

"Well, that's always fun." Duncan shook his head. "How many of those birds are you going to have to pluck?" He glanced at Jerath.

"The House of Repose isn't quite as stupid, they turned down the contract. However, the Ben'Hassrath are aware of us, have decided we are incredibly dangerous, and are apparently on the move."

"It is possible killing the Ariqun and threatening the Arishok was not one of my father's better ideas." Kieran shrugged.

"And while we are talking about ideas that turned out not to be so good, word of what happened in Nessum hit Minrathous like a flood. Though we do have an advantage with them due to the number of factions. They aren't working together or organized. But, basically..." She sighed. "Half of Thedas wants to capture or kill us."
"So what else is new?" Leandra grinned.

#

Tisallan's foot caught Kels in the stomach, sending him off the log and into the river. Gavren sighed. "Come on, Kels, you're representing the Inquisition here."

"Yeah, remember the part where he's been doing this five thousand years longer than I have?" Kels hauled himself out of the water.

Leandra walked out onto the log, and set her feet. Tisallan shifted slightly, bringing up his hands. She moved forward, throwing out a couple light jabs. He blocked both easily before returning a strike with the edge of his hand. She blocked, but stumbled a little, catching her balance before falling. Tisallan moved in to take advantage, aiming a kick at her heel. She stepped back to dodge, faltered again, and he pushed her off the log. She came out of the water sputtering.

"Trian, your turn."

"I don't swim." Trian shook his head.

Gavren turned at the sound of footsteps. Duncan and Jerath were back, and had brought a ram with them. "What's going on?" Duncan raised an eyebrow.

"Training exercise." Gavren shrugged. "Objective is to get Tisallan into the water. Shooting him or just blowing up the log was disallowed as valid tactics."

"Which I find gives him a completely unfair advantage." Caleb looked up from where he was examining the mechanism of his new crossbow.

Duncan tapped Jerath's shoulder. "Go make Ferelden proud."

"I get him in the water, you butcher the ram."

"Deal."

Jerath stepped out to the log and tested his balance before approaching Tisallan. He sent a jab in Tisallan's direction. Tisallan blocked, and then countered with one of the knife strikes. Instead of blocking, Jerath grabbed his wrist, and then jumped off the log, pulling the elf with him. They both hit the water.

"Well, that's one way to do it." Gavren shrugged.

"What was that?" Duncan raised an eyebrow. "You fell in too!"

Jerath shook water out of his hair. "Objective was to get him in the water. No one said anything about me having to stay on the log."

"Ir enaste, da'len." Tisallan gave him a small bow.

Duncan looked down at the ram, and sighed. "Dammit."

#

"Can we please stay in an inn?" Caleb looked longingly at the city ahead. "My sore spots have sore spots."
"We are running low on a couple things, but we can't stay long." Salla shook her head. "The Ben'Hassrath have agents."

"Though not quite as many as they used to." Kels shrugged. "But this close to the border, yeah, they'll have people." He looked back over his shoulder. "And this crowd kind of stands out."

"Tisallan, Alai, keep your hoods up. Hopefully everyone will just assume you are Dalish. Loghain..." Salla frowned. "We didn't recover the masks, did we?" When he shook his head. "Keep your hood up as well."

"And the inn?" Cale raised an eyebrow.

"We resupply, and move on." Salla looked at him sternly. He made a vexed noise, but nodded. "Fine."

"Trian, you know what we need?" She waited for him to nod. "Maybe it would be a better idea to just send you, Kels, and Caleb to get what we need while the rest of us wait outside town."

"How are you doing?" Lenore sat down across from Cullen.

Cullen shook his head. "Good question." He sighed. "Solas is involved."

"And Ruya?" Lenore raised an eyebrow.

"Conflicted." Cullen furrowed his brow. "Solas could make Ruya laugh, make her do that thing where she gets lost in thought and chews her bottom lip and..." He folded his arms. "They'd walk around Haven and Skyhold together, talking for hours about things I could barely understand. Sometimes he could be like a doting father, sometimes a teacher, and other times their friendship had an intimacy level that made me jealous. He was her first choice of companion when going into danger, and the one she turned to when she had doubts or questions. She adored him. And the whole time he knew his magic was killing her."

"And now, the Dread Wolf has caught wind of your son."

"Yes." Cullen rubbed the back of his neck. "And he is the one that put our children on this particular trail."

"No." She shook her head. "He put us on this trail. The kids are following Kieran." She sighed. "I wish that was a comfort. The first time I met Jerath, I thought he was a nice kid. I wasn't exactly equipped for a walk through the forest, and when he realized I didn't have boots he gave me his. And that sweet boy was a rage abomination with a higher body count than the rest of us combined, Commander of the Grey included. I wasn't lying when I told your wife I was terrified of what my friend could become." She leaned back. "Still am. And the worst part is it changes nothing. He's still my friend. He'll always be my friend. And his son is right smack in the heart of all of this."

Duncan patted the horse's neck, and offered a piece of apple. The horse accepted, then butted its head into his chest looking for another treat. He started to turn back to the camp to get another apple when he heard Agatha shout a warning. A heartbeat later, he found himself on the ground with Jerath atop him just as two arrows struck the tree near where he'd been standing.
Other arrows hit the barriers raised by the mages. Loghain got his shield up just in time to block one arrow, and another glanced off his armored leg.

He rolled back to his feet with the bow in his hand as men came out of the trees. Jerath intercepted a blade, slashing out with his own blade at the attacker, keeping Duncan clear as he fired arrows at their attackers. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Tisallan standing in front of Salla, glowing blade in each hand, keeping attackers off the mage. Alai and Loghain fought back to back on the other side of the camp. An attacker rushed at Leandra only to be thrown back with enough force to splatter against a tree by one of Gavren's spells. A giant bear flung an attacker out of the camp before lunging forward to maul another. Agatha moved in to assist Jerath, her twin blades easing some of the pressure on him.

Firing into melee was always chancy at best. He focused on those still coming. Light began to glow around the hands of an enemy mage, and he put two arrows in the man. The light vanished. Lightning crashed into their attackers, striking over and over as similar energy formed a halo around Gavren.

Jerath staggered as an arrow from an enemy archer caught him in the side, but got his shield up in time to prevent his attacker from gaining an advantage. Duncan growled as his own arrow took the archer between the eyes. Agatha flung a knife into the leg of an oncoming attacker, then slashed open his throat when he staggered. He nocked an arrow and searched for another target. None were left standing.

"Status?" Salla's voice called out.

"Jerath's hurt." Duncan immediately responded, moving to his friend's side. He saw a second arrow in Jerath's shoulder that must have come in the initial attack. An arrow that had been aimed for him. He gave Jerath a worried look and got a reassuring nod in return.

"Kieran, shift and fly in, see if you can spot the others." Salla gestured at the bear. Immediately the bear shifted into a raven and took wing, vanishing into the darkening sky. She gave Jerath a critical look, and then turned towards Duncan. "Hold him still while we remove the arrows."

Duncan all but pushed Jerath onto a nearby rock, and held him steady. Salla's hands glowed white as she put them on either side of the first arrow and nodded to Agatha. Agatha returned the nod, took a deep breath, and pulled the arrow out. Jerath grunted. They moved to the second arrow and repeated the action. Salla's hands glowed brighter as she finished the healing spell. "Try not to move around too much." She patted Jerath's shoulder before moving on to tend the much more minor wounds taken by others.

"Happy now?" Duncan looked down at his friend.

"Happy?" Jerath raised an eyebrow.

"You were complaining earlier you didn't get to take any arrows." Duncan shook his head. "You okay?"

"She's a good healer." Jerath started to test the motion of his shoulder.

Duncan caught his arm to arrest the motion. "She said don't move around too much."

Agatha plunked herself down on Jerath's lap. "There. Now he's not going anywhere." She caught Jerath's chin and pulled him to her for a kiss.
Kels drew his sword and stepped in front of Caleb as a half dozen men emerged from the shadows. Two drew back bows. "You boys are going to want to come along quietly." The leader of the men sneered.

"Yeah, that's not something we really do." Caleb shrugged.

Kels felt the urge to punch him. Even with Trian's blade to back him up, he wasn't looking forward to facing a half dozen. With archers, they would be too far from cover for fleeing to be an option.

A raven flew overhead, circling once. It dove, and then Kieran was between them and their attackers. Fire trailed up the mage's arms and legs, dancing in an aura around him as he straightened from a crouch to his full height. "Boo."

The men recoiled. Caleb laughed as he sent a crossbow bolt into one of the archers. Kels shrugged and moved in, slamming his shield into the nearest attacker.

#

It was rather unfortunate that the three survivors were local mercenaries hired just the day before. "They didn't have time to prepare, which means they didn't know we were coming this way." Agatha frowned.

"They may not have known before, but they do now." Salla chewed her bottom lip. She rose, and paced a moment before shaking her head. "We are two days out from Hasmal. I think we should stick with the original plan of continuing by the river."

"And I still disagree." Duncan shook his head. "Our chances of being spotted and noted increase with more people. Attacks like this one will continue to happen if we stay on the river path." He shot Jerath a concerned look. "Next time we might not be as lucky."

"Crossing the Silent Plains carry even more risks." Salla waved a hand. "We don't have good enough maps to be sure of finding water off the trails, and sticking to the trails won't solve the being spotted problem. You're the closest thing we have to a woodsman, and your skills are barely adequate for staying close to the road."

"What if we hired a guide?" Caleb asked.

"How would we know we could trust them?" Jerath asked him.

"What if they were Inquisition or Lucerni or House Brosca?" Caleb gestured. "We have a means of asking our folks for help now. They could send someone."

"That unfortunately does not solve the trust issue." Jerath shook his head.

"We shouldn't have let Brehan go." Caleb sighed. "What if we take a third option?"

"What third option?" Salla raised an eyebrow at her brother.

"The Deep Roads."

"No." The others answered in a chorus of shouts.

"It was just a suggestion." Caleb drew himself in.
Salla walked next to Kieran. She touched his hand, and felt his fingers curl around hers as he looked down at smiled at her. She returned the smile, and then started to chew on her lower lip. "Where are you normally?"

"I do not understand."

"I mean, were do you live? Do your folks have a house somewhere, or..."

"Yes, though it is likely not how you think of such things." Kieran shrugged.

"Yeah, I suppose you're not really what most think of as the typical family." She smiled. "Though from the few times Uncle Carver has spoken of them, they seem like nice people."

"My father would be the first to tell you he is not a nice person." Kieran shook his head. His voice became softer. "I think I am beginning to realize why he sent me."

"I thought he sent you because Alistair asked for help."

Kieran was silent for a time. "There were other options. I think though, that he wanted me to understand why..." He shook his head. "Do you know what my father is?"

"The host of an old god, like you."

"No. Not like me. Urthemiel is an Old God. Razikale is an Archdemon. My father remains a creature of the Blight even while he keeps his own mind."

Salla felt his fingers tighten around hers. "But he can cleanse the Blight now."

"He can cleanse it from others. But not from himself." Kieran shook his head. "If the Inquisitor succeeds in stopping Fen'Harel, the danger posed by the Blight and the last archdemons will remain. When the time comes, my father will end the threat of the Blight, forever." Kieran hung his head. "And it will be the last thing he does."

Her heart skipped a beat as she realized what his words meant. "The Warden is going to die."

"He accepts this. The duty cannot be forsworn." Kieran looked down at her. "But I did not. He is my father and..." He took a deep breath. "It isn't fair."

She bit her lip, and pulled him to her, wrapping her arms around him. He bent, resting his forehead against hers. "Kieran."

"It is loud, at times. The wanting. Calling out, calling us, begging and pleading and dragging, drowning us in voices until the wanting is all we hear. Offering knees to any who could grant desire, without care for the cost. Screaming into the wind for us to save you from yourselves." He shook his head. "And our names are reviled because we answered, black instead of gold."

"And..." She rubbed his back gently. "What if Fen'Harel wins?"

"Then the Evanuris will be freed, and the world will be in even greater danger. And so my father holds his course, buying time but not confronting the Wolf directly. For if they are freed, the only choice that will remain is for my father to take them with him, ripping them all from the world."

"Meaning The Warden is going to die either way."

"Yes. He did not choose his path, but he walks it willingly."
"Oh Kieran." She kissed him gently.

He brushed the hair back from her face. "I am beginning to understand what he meant though."

"What did he mean?"

"When he told me..." Kieran's smile was sad. "That this world, its people..." He kissed her, one hand on the back of her neck as he held her to him. "You are worth it."
"Once we sat  
In the light of our dreams.  
Once we were  
In our homeland  
With strength and might.  
Once we were  
Not afraid of the night."

Caleb let the song die away as they sat around the campfire. "I always liked that one," Leandra said from where she was snuggled into Gavren.

"I wish I had my lute." Caleb shrugged. "I was working on a new tune before all this started."

Kels snickered. "Is the one he, Varric, and Brehan wrote about the Inquisition still banned in Val Royeaux?"

"Not that it's ever stopped anyone from singing it." Gavren shook his head. "I particularly liked the part where they killed the Nightmare with a lullabye."

"That part always bothered me." Loghain shook his head. "Among other things, my grandfather couldn't carry a tune if his life depended upon it."

"Do not remind me." Kieran gave a small shudder. "And the Nightmare is not exactly dead."

Abruptly Caleb sat up. "Oh, I can't believe I'm missing this opportunity." He stared at Tisallan. "You wrote down a bunch of songs for Lord Hendry." He gave Tisallan a beseeching look. "Sing for us?"

Tisallan nodded. He considered a moment, and then began to sing. His voice was warm as he wove the melody, and Caleb quickly found himself envious of the man's range. He finished the tune with a repeat of the chorus, letting it die away slowly.

"What is that one about?" Duncan asked.

"The dialect was a bit hard to follow, but..." Gavren furrowed his brow. "Traveling a long road, but knowing that her smile waits at the end of it and thus your steps are light?"

"You speak elvish?" Alai raised an eyebrow.

Gavren shrugged. "I am Fen'Harel's apprentice." He shook his head. "Though he complained that I spoke it with a Fereldan accent. Which is strange, because Iron Bull complains I speak Qunlat with an Orlesian accent."

"Your translation is accurate enough." Tisallan nodded. He stirred the fire. "My son wrote it, as a gift to the woman who became his bride."
"I..." Caleb blinked. "I'm sorry. I didn't know you had a son."

"I had three sons and a daughter."

"Ir abelas." Gavren nodded to him.

"It is a strange thing." Tisallan shook his head. "Looking at the elves of the here and now, and wondering. Looking for the features of my children on their faces."

"Agatha could be your great great great great lots more great grandchild." Caleb nodded.

"I would consider it an honor, would it to be the case."

Agatha blushed slightly as she smiled.

#

"Lord Cullen..."

"My title is Commander, if you feel one is necessary." Cullen nodded to the elven man. "And no, you can't kill Magister Adralicus."

"May I at least gag him?" Melavan took a deep breath. "I don't feel I can be held responsible for my actions if he tells me about the fall of the Dales one more time."

"I sympathize." Cullen rubbed his forehead. "Maker, he spent two hours yesterday telling me about the events at Haven and I was there." He frowned, and turned towards the other elven man. "Has he figured out who you are yet?"

"No." Brehan shook his head. "As near as I can tell, he still thinks I'm your butler."

"Andraste preserve us." Cullen shook his head. "At least he'll soon be Dorian's problem again." He sighed, and turned back to Melavan. "I'd prefer not to risk taking your people into Tevinter. Carver will have some of his riders take you to Kirkwall."

"I will tell Delaon and Ionai to make ready, but I would prefer to remain." Melavan shook his head. "I can be of more use here."

"Tevinter isn't a healthy place for elves."

"The Dirthari is accompanying you." Melavan raised an eyebrow, and folded his arms. "Two of my people are still out there. Alai is all I have left of my sister."

"I..." Cullen closed his eyes, and then nodded. "Have sisters and nieces of my own. Keep working with Brehan."

#

"Hand over your valuables and nobody gets hurt." The massive man stepped in to block their path. Several more men stepped out of the trees.

"Haven't we done this already?" Caleb rubbed his forehead.

"Four times." Duncan sighed.

"Do you think they will ever learn?" Salla asked.
"Considering they've had several thousand years to try..." Alai shook her head. "I'm going to go with no."

"I am going to ask you politely to go away." Kieran nodded to the bandits. "Once."

#

"Hey, check it out." Caleb waved a thick bundle of parchment. "They had maps."

Trian and Kels began going through the maps. "Smuggler trails."

"Look." Duncan pointed at a notation. "The trail markers. This will get us through the Silent Plains, avoiding scrutiny." He glanced up at Salla. "And who knows, maybe we'll get to bust up some more slave operations on the way."

Salla looked over the maps, and frowned. "Kels, think you could plan us a safe route using these?"

"I believe so, yes." Kels nodded. "I'd be more comfortable if we had a few more waterskins though."

"Figure out what we need, and then we'll head out."

#

They found a small sheltered area, and kept the campfire low to limit visibility. Salla looked over the herbs in her pouch, then back up at her companions. "Who is coming along for tonight's check in?"

"Not me." Leandra shook her head vehemently.

"Kels?" Salla raised an eyebrow.

He sighed, and then shook his head. "I'm not sure. I should try to get a message to Minaeve." He chuckled ruefully. "Assuming she's even still willing to hear from me at this point."

"What about you Loghain?" She glanced over at him.

"Not sure it's a good idea." He shrugged.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, it's the land of dreams, yes?"

She nodded. "Well, yes."

Loghain grinned. "Do any of you really want to know the kinds of things I dream about you?"

"Oh for..."

"Maker's breath."

"You asshole."

"Why would you even go there?"

"I need to stab my brain out now."
Alai laughed before grabbing the front of Loghain's armor and pulling him towards her for a kiss. "You can show me later."

"Inquisitor." Salla almost squeaked when she saw the woman standing there.

"Mother." Gavren smiled, but shifted from foot to foot nervously.

Ruya smiled, and strode forward to hug her son. She released him and then hugged a startled Kels. "Thank the Maker, you're both alright."

"She wasn't willing to take our word for it." Hawke shrugged.

"Your definition of 'fine' is somewhat questionable." Feynriel folded his arms.

"It is somewhat skewed by perspective, I'll admit."

"We have more information for you." Ruya stepped back. "Though the source is..." She blinked at Urthemiel. "Questionable." She shook her head as she looked over the glowing being. "You are a matter of some concern."

"He's on our side." Salla smiled reassuringly. "We trust him."

"Salla..." Hawke sighed. "Some years ago, we would have said the same of Anders."

"Papa..."

"They are right to be concerned. It would be a mistake to forget what I became, and what I could become again." Urthemiel nodded to Ruya. "A spirit can be twisted and turned. But I am no longer simply a spirit, and I have found my purpose once more."

"Melavan called you the Muse." Ruya caught the stump of her arm in her good hand. "Solas did the same."

"I was called that, once. Too many notes have been played since, and that melody cannot be recaptured. This is a new world, and requires a new song." He shrugged. "Plus, circumstances being what they are in the here and now, your son is fully capable of kicking my ass."

Hawke snorted. Salla snickered. Gavren shook his head. "I think you still have the advantage of experience here in the Fade."

"But you have me outnumbered at the moment." Urthemiel gestured at the others.

"There is that." Gavren chuckled.

Ruya stared at Urthemiel for a moment before looking back at Gavren. "I hear you blew up some buildings."

"Yeah." Gavren nodded, and then squared his shoulders. "I kind of do that when folks put holes in my friends."

"You really can't blame him." Hawke shook his head. "Take it from me, it's one of those things that just sort of happens."

She sighed, and then filled them in on what Solas had told her. "Brehan managed to confirm some
of the information, enough for us to believe he is telling the truth."

"The Formless One is a threat to Solas's plans." Gavren shook his head. "He has a history of using the Inquisition to deal with those. It's annoying."

"He suggested all of you return to Kirkwall, and stay out of harm's way." She looked them over. "He said he doesn't want to see any of you hurt."

"He did kill me." Urthemiel folded his arms.

"Wait, what?" Salla looked up at him.

"It was a few months ago." Urthemiel shrugged.

"He mentioned that." Ruya stared at him. "And he pointed out that if he chose, he is capable of doing worse."

"And I am capable of doing far more then merely turning a herd of brontos loose in his sanctuary, but Mother still has hope that you can perform a much needed rectal-cranial reversion for her rabid mutt."

"You..." Feynriel blinked. "Did what?"

Ruya blinked. "He told me he killed you for redirecting eluvians into an Antivan privy-house."

"Ah." Urthemiel smiled. "That one really never gets old."

Gavren and Salla started snickering. Hawke covered his face with one hand, but his shoulders were shaking with mirth. Kels sighed. "Predates all existing calendar systems, and has a teenage boy's sense of humor."

"I think that's the part that scares me most." Ruya shook her head.

#

"That's..." Caleb frowned. "Going to be a problem."

"Well, they did mention the Ben'hassrath." Leandra sighed. "And it's just a smidgen more than a single death squad."

"I counted two hundred, and we don't have a handy temple full of golems to make up the difference." Duncan shook his head as he peered out over the hill. "The good news is, they don't appear to have spotted us."

"According to the maps, there are some caves in that ravine. The smugglers used them for caches. We could hide, wait for them to pass." Kels gestured.

"That sort of assumes the qunari aren't using the same maps we are, but unless someone has a better idea..." Salla wrinkled her nose. "Caves it is."

#

"Do you think they actually are hunting us?" Agatha asked as they led the horses into the mouth of the cave. The animals entered reluctantly, and she was fairly sure Kieran had actually used some kind of magic to get them to cooperate at all.
"Kieran did say something about his father killing the Ariqun." Leandra shrugged. "And didn't Duncan's father kind of also beat up the Arishok?"

"But our father is basilit'an." Caleb shook his head.

"So is my father." Kieran nodded. "But it is an earned title, not something that can be inherited."

"If your father killed the Ariqun, is he still basilit'an?" Salla asked.

"Yes." Kieran nodded. "Perhaps more so, now. They also call him basaaran'kata."

"What's that mean?" Caleb glanced over his shoulder at Kieran.

"Basalit'an means outsider worthy of respect." Gavren considered a moment. "Basaaran'kata would be more akin to 'outsider not to be fucked with'."

"What do they call you?" Caleb asked Kieran.

"A demon." He shrugged. "They aren't a particularly imaginative people anymore." He sighed. "The tune decayed to a single marching drum, beating a broken rhythm that tries to drown out the other song."

"Yeah, when we have some time later, I'm going to ask you to explain that." Caleb nodded to him.

#

Salla started towards the pool at the mouth of the cave, waterskin in hand. Tisallan emerged like a shadow, stepping to her side, his eyes alert for signs of movement. "I mislike the night."

"Nothing has tripped the wards." Salla glanced at him.

"And yet listen." He held one hand.

She furrowed her brow and was silent for several moments. "I don't hear anything."

"And that is the problem." He took a cautious step forward, frowning. And then he turned and grabbed her, shoving her back into the cave just as something metal clanged off a nearby rock. She saw the shimmer of energy from him as he threw up a barrier, and she reinforced it. Something exploded, and only Tisallan's momentum kept them from being struck or buried as rocks fell. From inside and outside of the cave she heard shouting. "Go." Tisallan shoved her deeper into the cave. He whirled and cut a spear out of the air with a glowing blade. He continued backing deeper in, keeping himself between her and whoever was attacking.

No figures entered the cave, but she could make out movement in the shadows beyond. She let out a low string of curses. "They found us. Tisallan, are you hurt?"

He looked down at the smear of blood on his leg. "A scratch, no more."

"Kels, you've got the maps, options?"

"There are a couple other passages."

Gavren suddenly started shaking his head. "No. Something is scratching at the wards I placed on those."

"Maker. They've got us surrounded."
"We could stampede the horses, make a run for it in the confusion." Salla raised an eyebrow.

"Not with their numbers. They are too smart not to have people on the high ground." Tisallan shook his head.

"What are the odds they don't know who we are?"

"Non-existent, once they get a good look at us." Salla shook her head at Caleb. "Not sure even you can talk your way past a karataam. I doubt even Uncle Varric could."

"We could head in deeper, head towards one of the other passages, but the tunnels may be too narrow for the horses."

Salla sighed. "Okay. Grab our gear. We'll stampede the horses, and make for the other passage." She frowned. "Suggestions on how to stampede the horses."

Kieran caught one of the horse's heads. His eyes swirled momentarily with green light, and a heartbeat later so did the eyes of the horses. He turned towards Salla. "They will do their part."

Trian tossed her a pack, and she slung it over her shoulder before picking up the green staff. It felt warm in her hand. "Let's go."

#

"Trian?" Salla glanced at the dwarf when he stopped.

"This may not have been the best option." He gestured at something on the ground ahead. Salla held her torch higher, and caught sight of the corpse laying on the ground. "Oh."

Immediately, the warriors drew their blades. Duncan nocked an arrow to his bow.

"Maybe we should turn back, try the left path and..." Caleb glanced over his shoulder.

They could hear the echo of distant voices. "Dammit, if there are spawn in these tunnels they are going to bring them down on us." Jerath shook his head.

"Move. Quietly. And fast." Salla gestured.

#

Kels glanced over his shoulder again. The voices were starting to sound closer. Or maybe it was just his nerves. Trian had the map, but if he recalled correctly, they were only halfway through. Ahead, he heard Trian's voice. "From here, up the ledge."

He gestured for Caleb to go ahead of him, then followed. Loghain and Alai brought up the rear. They were halfway up the path when the footing beneath Caleb crumbled. Kels caught the other man, and grabbing at the stone wall. He had nearly pulled Caleb to safety when his own handhold broke free. He felt Loghain's fingers brush against his own hand, but his fingers slide free before the other man could gain purchase.

The torch tumbled down as they slid. He felt a sharp pain in his ankle when they landed, and he grabbed the torch again, looking frantically for Caleb. The younger man sat up painfully. "Ow."

"Kels? Caleb?" He heard Loghain's voice.

"We're alright. I think." Kels winced when he tried to stand. "Shit. I think I might have broken
some --” He went silent as something rustled in the darkness. In the torchlight, he saw the blood drain from Caleb's face. Something clanked, metal against stone, drawing nearer.

Pain or no pain, he got to his feet, setting his shield and drawing his blade. "No." He heard Caleb murmur as they saw what was in the tavern with them. The genlock approached, its teeth bared. Duncan's arrow took it in the eye, and he glanced over his shoulder to see Loghain and Alai lowering a rope.

"Caleb, go." He slashed out with his sword at another genlock, and saw arrows starting to whisk out the darkness towards his companions still on the ledge. "Move."

Caleb grabbed the rope and starting to climb. Loghain caught him and pulled him up. Kels caught the rope and started to climb, and something grabbed him, dragging him back. "Kels!"

Fire struck the hurlock, and Kels yanked himself free, diving again for the rope. Loghain yanked him up the last couple feet, and then got his arm underneath him, supporting the injured leg. "I got him, move."

#

Salla's fingers glowed white as she wove the healing spell. "You aren't..." She looked Kels over frantically. "It didn't?"

"No. It didn't get through my armor." Kels nodded, still pale.

"We need to..."

"Teth a, bas!" A voice cried out, and they turned to see the qunari coming towards them.

"Great. Frying pan or fire." Caleb hefted his crossbow.

Alai let out a string of curses.

"Move." Salla gestured.

Loghain threw Kels' arm over his shoulder again as they headed down the only tunnel remaining to them.

#

They emerged into a larger cavern, and started making their way through the rocky outcroppings. "I think the qunari are..." Gavren stopped in his tracks. "Oh, shit."

The ogre rose, and snarled. It banged its hands against its armored chest. Several more emerged from the darkness, followed by still more darkspawn.

"That is..." Kieran shook his head. "Not good."

"Father once said The Warden had a trick for dealing with these things. Don't suppose you happen to know it?" Leandra glanced over her shoulder at Kieran.

"Dagna's grenades." Kieran gave her a hopeful look. "Do we have any?"

"No."

"Trian, if we survive this, put grenades on the shopping list." Salla swallowed.
"Right next to a clean pair of pants." Trian set his shield.

The ogres started for them, and then the lead one stopped. It roared, shaking its head violently. A strange huffing sound escaped it, and then it roared again. Something flickered in its eyes. "It's not..." Salla started to say.

A heartbeat later the ogre roared again, and charged, alongside its fellows. Straight at the incoming qunari, who started shouting in response, hurling spears.

"What just..."

"Don't ask, run." Salla pointed. "Go, now."

#

The sound of fighting died behind them as the walls of the tunnel changed. "Where are we?" Caleb asked, looking around.

"The Deep Roads." Trian shook his head. "Stone, we are in the blighted deep roads."

Kieran looked up. "Was it really to much to ask to go one full length without having to take a trip into the Deep Roads?" He kicked the wall. "No, you had to railroad us down here." He growled in frustration before looking up again. "I hope no one paid extra for this content!"

Duncan looked at him. "What?"

"What?" Kieran raised an eyebrow.

"I'd kind of like to know what happened back there." Gavren shook his head. "I thought you said you couldn't control darkspawn."

"I can't." Kieran blinked. He tilted his head, and then frowned. "Well, I can't."

A hand reached out of the darkness and grabbed Loghain by the front of the armor, yanking him forward. The warriors all immediately drew their blades again. The hand shook Loghain, nearly knocking him off his feet. And then the figure stepped out of the darkness and growled in a deep voice. "Do you have any idea how worried your mother is?"
Chapter 32

"Um..." Loghain stared at the man holding him by the front of his breastplate. "Grandfather. Fancy meeting you here."

"Grandpa Loghain." Kieran smiled. And then suddenly his face fell and his voice took on a frantic note. "I can explain!"

"And I can't wait to hear it, considering you were told, repeatedly and at great length, to stay away from anything having to do with the Blight."

"Wait..." Trian raised a hand. "Who..." He glanced at the rest of the party. "Is anyone else concerned that somebody just stepped out of the Fade?"

"A little, yes." Salla nodded.

"It's Grandpa Loghain." Kieran gave them what he probably hoped was a reassuring smile. "He does that."

The newcomer's eyes turned towards Duncan. "And I suppose it was too much to hope that at least one Therin would have the sense to stay out of the Deep Roads, let alone to not actively go looking for trouble." He released his grip on the front of Loghain's armor, and narrowed his eyes at the younger man. "Your mother is frantic with worry, and you couldn't bother to so much as send her a message?" He looked from Kieran to Loghain and back again as he continued dressing both of them down rather thoroughly.

"I..." Loghain looked down at his feet. "Should um..." He rubbed the back of his neck. "Yeah, I'm an asshole."

"Aren't you be a little concerned about the part where he's not four years old?" Caleb asked.

The elder Loghain gave him an annoyed look. "I'm a Warden. It's going to take a bit more than that to faze me."

"Oh."

"And to the surprise of absolutely no one, if you wanted to escape these tunnels, you are going the wrong way." The elder Loghain shook his head. "Follow me."

"Are you the one that stopped the darkspawn from attacking?" Gavren asked.

"I did not stop them from attacking. I merely redirected them towards a different prey. Had the qunari not been nearby as a suitable target, you would have all been eaten." He shot a pointed glance at the women in the group. "Or far worse."

"Did The Warden send you?" Caleb asked.

"Her father..." He jerked his head at Leandra. "Had a clearly justified concern that you might find yourself in over your heads, and was perturbed that you would not reveal your current location. He asked me to find you."

"I have been warding our dreams to prevent us from being found through the Fade." Gavren
"As have I."

"And I."

"And we were all awake at the time,"

"Interesting."

"How can he be a spirit?"

"True."

"He is Vigilance."

"No."

"Yeah, that's not helping with the clarification part at all."

"I'm going to go with 'he's a ghost'."

"Which means we are currently following a ghost through the Deep Roads."

"I was kidnapped by an Old God, the King of Ferelden, the King of Kal'Hirol, and my boss's kid from the future who also happens to be Fen'Harel's apprentice. We picked up two ancient elves and are on our way to confront a demon from the dawn of time."

"We'll take that into account when deciding how to deal with them."

"What, seriously?"

"Points?"

"Points?"
"Yeah." Iron Bull rolled his shoulders and grinned. "They put me down at eight. War golems and dragons only come in at seven."

"We'll be heading into Tevinter as soon as Carver and King Alistair return." Cullen shook his head. "Have you managed to learn anything regarding the Ben'Hassrath movements?"

He shook his head. "Between me being tal'Vashoth and the number The Warden's people pulled on the vanguard a couple years back, I'm not even sure where to start looking. Songbird and I have gone over the spies we know, but we've pinpointed who they are working for." He folded his arms. "It's the ones we haven't found that have me worried. Don't like the notion that there are spies out there better than us."

"Have the mercenaries recovered yet from..." Sebastian frowned. "Whatever it was occurred?"

"Recovered..." Cullen sighed. "Might be a strong word. The two that joined the Chantry have told us everything they know. Unfortunately, it just isn't much. They were hired only a few days before the attack. Paid well enough that regicide didn't exactly seem to be a concern for them."

"Though they're not all that bright." Iron Bull shook his head. "I'd have opened negotiations at around four times what those guys were paid." He looked up at the tower. "And turned the job down."

"If we had known what they were capable of, we never would have tried apprehending them." Melavan spoke up from where he was quietly observing.

"Yeah, how did they manage to get you guys working for them anyway?" Iron Bull glanced at him.

"One of them is a god."

"There is only one god." Sebastian glared.

"If you wish to debate religion and semantics, Magister Adralicus is in there." Melavan pointed.

Cullen shot them a look over his shoulder and both of them subsided, but continued glaring at each other. "Lord Hendry's estate was damaged by fire, thus Prince Vael has agreed to allow us to headquarter here in the palace for the time being. Per Divine Victoria's request, the Chargers are to aid him until the Starkhaven guard has recouped from their recent losses." He couldn't quite stop himself from smiling. "Viscount Varric and Guard Captain Aveline have agreed to provide additional forces should you feel it necessary. Hawke and Fenris are also remaining."

"Stop dawdling."

Leandra glared at their guide. "I'm not sure exactly who put you in charge."

"Your father." He returned the glare steadily. "And need I remind you that your mother is also extremely worried about your safety and wellbeing, a fact which you have completely disregarded?"

"I..." She shook her head. "You know, it's not exactly like our folks lives the most sedate, secure lives themselves. Kind of hypocritical for them to be frustrated with us."

"Unlike you, most of them had no choice. They fought and sacrificed in the hopes that you need
never face the same trials and dangers they did, and it is unconscionable for you to throw that back in their faces."

She started to square her shoulders, and then swallowed. "Yes, ser."

"We didn't choose this fight either." Gavren put a hand on Leandra's shoulder.

"We were, in fact, quite literally dragged into it by demons." Duncan glared.

"Spirits." Kieran said.

"What?"

"The demons were the things attacking. The spirits were the ones that brought you here."

"I...' Duncan shook his head. "That is somewhat beside the point." He glared at their guide. "And you were one of the trials and dangers my father faced." He gestured. "You sent assassins after him. And had my mother thrown into Fort Drakon, not to mention you unleashing Howe."

"Indeed, it is amazing the mistakes one can make when they become so convinced of the rightness of their actions that they allow their anger and hatred to blind them to the consequences." The elder Loghain shook his head. "And it would be far better, young man, if you decided to learn from my mistakes rather than repeat them."

"Are you going to spend the entire trip out of the Deep Roads yelling at us?" Caleb asked.

"Yes."

"I'm starting to think we'd have been better off with the ogres."

#

"I am several times older than the kingdom of Ferelden." Alai glared at the elder Loghain. "I do not need to be lectured."

"And you would think at some point in the past thousand years, you might have learned the importance of cleaning the blood off your blade before sheathing it." He stared back at her. "Darkspawn blood will etch into the metal and weaken its integrity." He pointed, and his eyes glowed briefly. "And I shouldn't have to tell you just how stupid it is to leave any trace of it on your armor."

She glared at him before a rag thrown by Tisallan hit her in the face. She made a vexed sound before stalking off to tend to her gear, and Jerath heard her start admonishing Kels to do the same. He frowned into the darkness as they made camp. Even knowing the camp was warded did little to assuage his nerves. The shadowy catacombs held too many potential threats. "General Mac Tir."

He pitched his voice low.

"General Gilmore." The man nodded.

"Are you sure camping here is a good idea?"

"We are still some hours from the surface, and they are exhausted." He shook his head. "There are no darkspawn within a mile of this location."

"Well, that just leaves the giant spiders, deepstalkers, dragons, and qunari survivors to worry about." Jerath rested a hand on the hilt of his sword. He frowned. "The qunari were looking for
us, but not expecting to find us where they did. Or they would have laid a far better trap." He shook his head. "They'll have sent word." He glanced at the party, and lowered his voice further. "Caleb had a theory that the cult will be holed up in the city of Solas. Kieran and Gavren think the theory is sound, and based on what information we have, I must admit they have a point."

"I will pass the word." He nodded, and then smiled. "Your king is going to be annoyed at you."

"My duty is to protect him." Jerath squared his shoulders. "Even if that means from himself."

"The latter is the more difficult task."

Duncan glanced over at where Jerath was discussing tactics with the elder Mac Tir. Tisallan joined them a moment later. Those two were the only ones he hadn't rebuked since stepping out of thin air. He wasn't entirely sure how he felt about the man's help. His father may have reconciled with Teyrna Anora, but he'd never spoken of her father without it being obvious how much anger he still had for the man. He'd betrayed a king to his death, and murdered Duncan's namesake, a man Alistair had loved as a father. He glanced at the younger Mac Tir. "How much trouble are you in?"

"It's times like these that I'm reminded he was also a rage demon for a considerable number of years." Loghain shook his head. He turned towards Kieran. "How much trouble are you in?"

"Well, if Mother doesn't kill me for meddling with the time-space continuum, Father is going to kill me for running headfirst into a darkspawn warren."

"You know, that really puts me swinging on the chandelier back home into perspective." Caleb shook his head.

"Except for the part where you also ran headfirst into a darkspawn warren." Kels elbowed him. Salla glanced at Kels. "How is your ankle?"

"I think it's healed, thank you."

"I didn't mean to frighten Mother." Loghain tightened the strap on his pack as they broke camp. "She's lost enough." His grandfather narrowed his eyes. "Losing you would cost her everything she has left."

"I'm supposed to be a four-year-old boy, not..." He shook his head. "We are trying to put everything right. It should be another eight years before she really has to start worrying about me doing something stupid."

"Eight years?"

"Ser Alec takes me on as his squire when I turn twelve. And promptly takes me on a dragon hunt. Mother..." He rubbed the back of his neck. "May have reacted poorly."

His grandfather chuckled. "I can imagine." His eyes went to the dragon on Loghain's face. "You wear the mark."

"Some things..." Loghain shook his head. "Yes. I bear the mark. You think for one moment I
would hesitate to answer that call, or flinch from that duty?"

"No." His grandfather nodded. "Not you."

He was silent a moment. "You're a hero again, in Gwaren. In most of Ferelden. They don't..." He took a breath. "It's the part where you fought against the Archdemon and died saving the Herald of Andraste that they remember. The Warden..." He nodded. "He could have let Mother fall, and instead he preserved the heritage you'd won for her. And we both know how much Father owes him." Blue eyes met blue eyes. "Some things are written in stronger than stone or blood. Tabris calls, Mac Tir will answer."

"I doubt I'll say it often enough in the future." His grandfather nodded. "I'm proud of you."

"Thank you."

"Though I cannot believe you slept with my girlfriend."

Loghain choked, and then laughed. "What can I say? You have excellent taste in women." He shrugged. "And she was half your age."

"Which still makes her twice yours." He growled and shook his head. "Of all the traits to inherit from your father."

"Could be worse." Loghain shrugged. "I could have an obsession with cats."

They were stopped by a gate. "Alright." Salla held up her torch. "It's got to be one of these mechanisms."

Caleb glanced at the man next to him. "Trian, ideas?"

"You do know that not all dwarves are engineers, yes?" Trian gave her an annoyed look.

"It's a dwarven mechanism." Caleb shrugged. "Even Uncle Varric knows about things like this."

"That is because your Uncle Varric is a trapsmith and lockpicker, not because he simply happens to be dwarven." Trian shook his head. "You know more about locks and things than I do."

"It's that one." Kieran pointed to a lever.

"How can you be sure?" Duncan asked as he walked over and began examining it.

"It's the one with the glowing outline."

"It..." Duncan blinked. "What?"

"What?" Kieran looked back at him.

"Why do I even..." Duncan pulled the lever and the gate slowly creaked open.

"Look." Leandra couldn't quite contain her glee. "Daylight."

"Where on the map is that going to put us?" Kels turned towards their guide and offered the
"Here." He tapped a spot.

"Not a shortcut then." Kels sighed.

"Kels?" Salla asked.

"We've been going west, rather than north. If anything, this detour added a few more miles to the trip."

"It does change the direction we are coming from though, so if word did get out, they won't be looking for us here."

"Hopefully, they'll assume we were eaten by the spawn." Caleb smiled.

"That would involve us having luck on our side." Agatha shook her head. "Hasn't happened yet."

"While fleeing qunari into a darkspawn warren, one of the only two beings in Thedas that could save us happened along at just that moment." Tisallan raised an eyebrow at her.

"I..." Agatha blinked. "Alright. You have a point. Our luck isn't so much bad as just..." She sighed. "Really, really weird."

"Papa says it comes from being an Amell and a Hawke." Salla shrugged.

"He is aware that with the exception of Leandra and Varric junior, the entire current generation of Hawkes and Amells were adopted, right?"

"Yeah, that part doesn't seem to matter at all." Salla shook her head.

The elder Loghain turned back towards them. "Is there any chance at all you can get to where you are going safely and in a sensible fashion?"

"Uh..." Salla considered the question a moment. "No. None whatsoever."

Duncan glared. "Outside of the army of qunari and darkspawn, we have taken care of ourselves just fine."

He stared at Duncan for almost a full minute before turning and patting Jerath on the shoulder. "Good luck."

"Thank you." Jerath nodded.

The air around him shimmered a moment, and then he vanished.

"Wait, where did..." Kels' jaw dropped.

"He stepped across the Veil." Gavren starred.

"That..." Caleb grinned. "Is awesome."

Sebastian paced the room. His guard captain was still glaring at Iron Bull. Iron Bull leaned down towards Brehan. "How'd I piss him off?"
"It's mostly the horns." Brehan shrugged. "He used to be one of Kirkwall's templars. He was there during the invasion."

"Dorian reports he'll be here this evening." Cullen nodded to Sebastian.

"And the magisters will be accompanying you to Tevinter?" Sebastian raised an eyebrow.

Cullen rested his hands on his sword hilt. "Unless you would prefer we leave Magister Adral --"

"No." Sebastian's voice was firm. He clasped his hands behind his back. "My scouts have reported sightings of qunari. At least two small bands, attempting to remain unnoticed. There may be more groups comprised solely of viddathari." He flicked his eyes towards Brehan before returning them to Cullen. "There have also been an increase in the sightings of Dalish."

"Brehan, how many of those are yours?"

"Entirely too few." Brehan sighed. "Fen'Harel's agent provided me with information on qunari movements in the area. They mentioned the same groups Prince Vael's people spotted."

"I am not comfortable with this notion." Sebastian shook his head.

"None of us are." Cullen sighed. He turned at the sound of footsteps, and the door opened to admit Carver and Alistair. "Did your riders spot anything?" He raised an eyebrow at Carver.

"They've confirmed reports we already had, but nothing new. Still no sign of the kids."

Alistair raised a hopeful eyebrow. "I don't suppose they told the Inquisitor where they were heading?"

"To no one's surprise, our children are among the most foolhardy and stubborn people in Thedas." Cullen folded his arms. "Will you be ready to head into Tevinter in the morning?"

"Yes." Alistair nodded.

He turned towards Carver. "Do you have a means of contacting..." He gritted his teeth. "I am not happy about this."

"I understand." Carver nodded. "And yes, I've set that in motion."

"You're not happy about this?" Sebastian gestured angrily.

His guard captain glared at Carver. "I cannot understand why Divine Victoria is allowing these criminals to wander free."

"Indeed." Sebastian sighed. "I truly must protest the involvement of that maleficar."

"Being that he is in Tevinter, he is somewhat beyond Divine Victoria's authority." Cullen shook his head. "And at the moment, we have a larger concern."

"You mean he's going to get away with his crime because he fathered a child on some Ferelden whore." The guard captain spat.

Alistair's eyes darkened and Carver started to take a step forward. Cullen was holding up a hand to forestall the movement when the air near the guard captain shimmered slightly. And a fist slammed into the man's jaw, sending him to the ground where he lay groaning. A form seemed to step out of thin air.
Carver grinned. "General."

"Junior." Loghain Mac Tir nodded to him.

"You found them?" He raised an eyebrow.

"And I know where they are going."

"Would someone care to explain what just happened?" Sebastian was staring at his unconscious guard captain.
Chapter 33

"Is he still there?" Leliana held the crystal in one hand.

"I'm not really sure." Brehan's voice came back over. "After he filled us in, he stepped back into the Fade. I'm not sure if he's going to keep an eye on the kids or if he's returned to whatever he was doing before Carver contacted him."

"How did Carver contact him?" Leliana fought the urge to pace. Even knowing what Morrigan and Jerath were, it still hadn't quite occurred to her they'd have an agent who could step in and out of the Fade at will, nor whom that agent might be.

"I'm..." Brehan's voice hesitated. "Honestly afraid to ask. And I doubt he'll tell me."

"Do you think the kids are right about where the cult is based?"

"They found the temple of Urthemiel. They found Baradies. They tracked down elven sentinels willing to ally with them, and in doing so located one of the cult's strongholds. Gavren was in Nevarra city less than an hour before literally running into Cassandra. The first tavern Loghain tried to enter at random in Hasmal contained me." Brehan chuckled. "Honestly, they could have pulled the location out of their asses and I'd be betting on them being right."

"How is the situation in Starkhaven?" She looked up at the map on one wall, focusing her eyes on their location.

"Oddly cordial. Hawke and Sebastian seem to have reconciled considerably in the past few days, and the prince has dropped the trade sanctions against Kirkwall and Ferelden. Lord Hendry is rather put out by the damage to his estate, but as the fire did not reach the area where he was keeping his work, he's willing to let bygones be bygones."

She heard a note of excitement in his voice. "I take it you've had the chance to see said work?"

"Ma'arlath..." She could almost see the gleam in his eye. "The history they've compiled. Ionai is an artist. Tisallan a musician. They..." He was silent a moment, and she could hear his voice thicken when he spoke again. "Leliana, there is so much here, I don't even know where to begin."

"I cannot wait to see it." She smiled. She hesitated. "Where are the sentinels now?"

"Delaon and Ionai are with the Inquisitor in Kirkwall." He chuckled. "Apparently, they were rather in awe of Merrill."

"Of Merrill?" She blinked.

"The sentinels seem to be of the notion that she is Mythal's high priestess. Merrill is apparently having some difficulty dissuading them from that line of thinking."

"And Melavan?"

"Insisted on remaining. He's worried about Alai and Lord Hendry. And since he offered the children his protection, he feels it is his duty to help us aid them." She could almost hear Brehan roll his eyes. "And I think he's used to being in charge and didn't want to be sidelined." There was a murmur she couldn't make out. "Dorian just arrived."
"Give him my best, and keep me informed."

#

"Kels?"

"My guess is without horses, it's going to take us at least a week to get to Solas." He looked over the map. "And we may have to make camp early tonight, or risk camping without anything nearby for shelter or defense."

"We'll camp early." Jerath nodded to him.

"That's a lot of flat nothing." Caleb scanned the area ahead of them.

"It's called the Silent Plains."

"Well, at least if anything is out there, we'll see it coming."

#

Dorian stared at them as they took turns filling him in on recent events. Next to him, Cole's mouth was hanging open slightly. "You lost me at..." He shook his head. "Well, him." He pointed at Melavan. "Elven sentinels have been hiding in Starkhaven, completely unknown to the Inquisition, for the past five years until your children happened to find them?"

"Welcome to our world." Cullen nodded to him.

"I need a..." He trailed off when Iron Bull handed him the drink. "Thank you, amatus."

#

"Hey Kieran?" Duncan glanced over his shoulder.

"Yes?"

"I don't suppose you have any insight as to why there is a statue of a giant nug with a cheese wheel in front of it sitting out here in the middle of nowhere."

"It's an easter egg."

"I..." Duncan sighed. "Am eventually going to learn not to ask."

#

"You've changed your mind about accompanying us then?"

"Since it's not going to involve asshead, yes." Hawke nodded. "Besides, Fenris was pouting that he wasn't going to get to kill any magisters."

Magister Arenda glanced over her shoulder at Hawke. He winked at her. Cullen rolled his eyes, but smiled. "I admit to being relieved to have you along. If there is trouble in that city, odds are you'll manage to trip over it."

"Excuse me? Whose son literally ran into Cassandra?"

"If you two don't knock it off, I'm taking my griffins and going home." Carver shook his head.
"Hear that? My little brother said for you to grow up."

"Yes." Melavan sighed. "Those were definitely your children."

#

"And we are walking. And walking. And walking." Caleb kicked a rock.

"That is generally how people get from one place to another." Kels shook his head at him.

"We should have stolen the griffins."

"Yeah, messing with the griffins is really never a good idea." Leandra shook her head.

"Your father did teach us how to ride them."

"And I know for a fact he gave you both the full spiel on the many, many ways a griffin can fold, spindle, and mutilate someone who annoys it."

"If its all the same, I would very much prefer to keep my feet on the ground." Trian shook his head.

"I will have to agree with our esteemed dwarven prince." Alai shook her head.

Caleb blinked. "Wait, they didn't have griffins in Arlathan?"

"We had them." Alai shook her head. "I just did not ride them."

"How can you not like griffins?" Duncan blinked at her.

"I do not dislike them, exactly." Alai frowned. "It is more the not having anything between me and the ground part that gives me pause."

"Exactly." Trian nodded. "And they are smelly."

"Griffins are not smelly." Leandra glared at him.

"Um..."

"That's a good smell." She narrowed her eyes as if daring anyone to disagree.

"I admit, I am rather missing Isana and Urtok at the moment." Duncan sighed.

"Wait, you have your own griffins?" Caleb looked back at him.

"Being king does have a few advantages." Duncan chuckled.

"So, when Trian becomes king, does he get a griffin?"

"Actually, Kal'Hirol has a stable of six griffins which do technically belong to House Saitada. But as far as I know, he doesn't ride them."

"Ah. Good. Nice to know I retain some sense."

"How come the Inquisition never got any griffins?" Kels glanced at Kieran.

"Father owed no debt to the Inquisition."
"Any debt he felt he owed Ferelden was paid in full when he stopped that crazy broodmother out in Amaranthine." Duncan shook his head.

"That did not count. It was his job."

"So what debt was he talking about?"

"That is a matter between him and my grandmother."

"I..." Duncan raised an eyebrow. "Is this going to be one of those conversations I regret starting?"

"Most likely, yes."

"Right."

"Hey." Caleb suddenly jumped excitedly and pointed. "Look, a city."

#

"Well?"

"As near as I can tell, those are the ruins marked on the map here." Kels indicated the location. "Which means we are going the right way."

"You really don't have to sound surprised by that." Gavren chuckled.

"We should get there a bit before sunset. What say we camp there?" Caleb glanced at Salla.

"I think we should scout the location first. With so few good sites around, it's possible we won't be the only people there."

#

Salla raised an eyebrow when Alai and Agatha returned. "Well?"

"Looks empty." Agatha nodded.

"It would appear that until sometime with the past few months, it was inhabited by a dragon. I see no sign that the beast is a current inhabitant, but its presence may have been enough to convince the smugglers to find a safer route."

"Alright. Let's head in, and find shelter, but stay under cover just in case it does return." Salla shook her head. "You know how our luck runs."

#

They found a room that was sheltered from the sky, and would conceal their fire from anyone, or anything, that might be looking. Several stone benches still dotted the room, providing comfortable seating. And best of all, some kind of magic remained in a nearby fountain, causing clear water to continue to burble and pour forth. It didn't take them long to decide to strip off armor and do some much needed bathing.

Agatha ran the damp cloth over Jerath's shoulder before seating herself in his lap. She felt his arms go around her, pulling her close to him. She kissed him. He rose, swinging effortlessly up into his arms, and carried her towards one of the shadowed alcoves.
"How come you never carry me off like that?" Leandra elbowed Gavren.

"Well, there is the part where you are usually wearing fifty pounds of armor, the part where you often have six feet of blade strapped to your back, and the part where you are stronger than I am." Gavren chuckled.

"I'm not wearing armor now." She grinned, and touched his cheek. "And my sword is over there." She gestured.

"And the part where you are stronger than I am?" He smiled playfully.

"You mean the part where if you don't sweep me off my feet right now, I'm going to hurt you?" She smiled coyly.

"That's my girl." He kissed her nose before abruptly throwing her over his shoulder and walking off towards one of the other rooms.

"Gavren Dorian Rutherford!" She started hitting him as he carted her off.

"I guess this means I'm getting stuck with first watch." Kels sighed.

"Well, if you are volunteering." Loghain shrugged and stood up, holding out a hand to Alai. Alai let him pull her to her feet.

"Asshole." Duncan chuckled. He blinked. "Wait, why are you two taking rope?" When Loghain grinned, Duncan shook his head. "No. No, I don't want to know. Do not, under any circumstances, tell me. Just go." He rubbed his forehead. "Asshole."

Caleb snickered. "You think you'd learn."

"Hey, Duncan?" Trian raised an eyebrow. When Duncan looked up, Trian shifted a bit uncomfortably. "So, um..." He sighed. "Leta?"

"Yeah." Duncan nodded. "Kieran, make a note. Two years from now, do everything in your power to stop Lady Dace from convincing Trian that the full traditional dwarven ceremony is required for the wedding. Seriously, turn into a dragon and start eating guests if you have to, just don't make me sit through all those speeches again. Lord Vollney talked for three hours. Three. Eat him first."

"I am not eating any dwarves." Kieran shook his head.

"Please?"

"Hairballs."

"Ah."

Trian sighed.

#

Salla laid her head on Kieran's shoulder, staring up into the darkness and shadows. Kieran's arm curled around her protectively, holding her close. She sighed.

"What is wrong?" His voice tickled her ear.
"If we succeed, I won't remember this moment. Here, with you." She turned towards him, draping her arm over his chest. "All of this will be undone."

"I will remember." He said the words softly.

"I suppose, in some ways I'm lucky. I know how this is going to end. How much time I have left." She drummed her fingers lightly, and felt him catch her hand.

"It does not have to end."

She lifted her head, and kissed him. "I think all of reality is conspiring against us." Her fingers trailed down his cheek. "You'll be whole again. It will all be undone. I'll forget. You'll be gone and I won't even remember you."

He pulled her to him, holding her tightly, lips barely a hair from her ear. "You are Salla. You will remember, and I will come back to you. And if reality knows what is good for it, it will stay out of my way."

Her eyes closed, and she kissed him again, letting time fall away as she lay in his arms.

They were halfway through breaking camp when there was whooshing sound followed by a dull thud. Everyone in the camp went still.

"Alai?" Tisallan shot the other sentinel a very annoyed look.

"The freshest spoor was at least three months old." Alai shook her head as she hissed in response.

"Maybe we all imagined it?" Caleb whispered hopefully.

He was answered by a loud roar, and the sound of something big moving nearby.

"May I recommend stealth?" Jerath strapped his shield to his arm. "Strongly?"

"What are you worried about? You already killed a dragon."

"A little one."

"And Loghain has hunted dragons." Caleb glanced at the other one.

"Which is why I'm seconding Jerath's 'run as fast and quietly as possible plan'." Loghain secured his breastplate as he spoke.

"Leandra likes fighting dragons."

"When I've got ballistas backing me up and know what kind of dragon it is before I get there." She hissed as she finished fastening her greaves.

"I bet Tisallan has taken on a dragon before."

"And it will be at least another five hundred years before I again do so willingly."

"And Kieran used to be a dragon." Caleb pointed.

"I vote for the running." Kieran slung a pack over his shoulder.
"You guys are lousy adventurers."

#

"Is he still pouting?" Duncan glanced at Loghain.

"I'm not sure. I asked, and I was informed he's not speaking to any of us." Loghain's lips twitched. "He even called me an asshole."

"You are an asshole."

Salla tried to hide a smile as she glanced back at her brother. The ruins had vanished in the distance, and with them, the dragon. Caleb had spent several miles attempting to convince them to go back and fight the dragon, but they had pointed out that fighting a dragon was dangerous and foolhardy, that the dragon was far enough away not to present a danger to people, that fighting a dragon was dangerous and foolhardy, that they didn't have the proper gear for doing battle against a dragon, that fighting a dragon was dangerous and foolhardy, that the dragon would serve to dissuade anyone attempting to follow them, that fighting a dragon was dangerous and foolhardy, that they had a chance for escape and should take it, and that fighting a dragon was dangerous and foolhardy.

She noted that once again Tisallan had taken a position a pace behind her and slightly to her left. The same position Jerath habitually took when accompanying Duncan. She made the mental note to ask why he was taking that position for her instead of Kieran. "Kels, how far?"

"Assuming the map is accurate, we should be in sight of it by this time tomorrow."

"Alright." She frowned. "What do we actually know about this city?"

"It's old. As in elven ruins still standing and being used old. Most of the city predates the Chant by a couple hundred years." Kels furrowed his brow. "It's Tevinter, so..." He shrugged. "Slaves, blood magic, demons, mages openly dueling in the streets, decadence, and strange fashions." He looked over the party. "My suggestion is you, Gavren, and Kieran make it clear you are mages and pretend to be snooty nobles, and the rest of us act like your entourage."

"Snooty nobles." Salla said. "Okay, I can probably manage that."

"Pretend you are a de Launcet." Agatha grinned at her.

"I think the objective is to not have people trying to kill us." Salla shook her head.

"Walk as though you own everything you see, don't actually give a shit about any of it, and will be offended if it gets on your boots." Agatha waved a hand. "It works for the deshyrs."

"Why am I asking you?" Salla glared. "Duncan, suggestions?"

"Look bored while your diplomatic attache does all the talking." Duncan shrugged. "Try not to fall asleep."

"For a king, you suck at being a noble."

"Why Salla." Duncan put a hand over his heart. "That is the nicest thing you've ever said to me." He gestured as though wiping a tear from his eye then nodded towards Agatha. "Go with Agatha's suggestion. It always works for the Warden Commander." He sighed. "Even when it's the palace I own."
Caleb quickened his pace to catch up with Tisallan. "You know, for an old guy, you're pretty light on the 'words of wisdom.'"

"I do not believe I have made any claims towards possessing wisdom."

"You've been helping us with our fighting, but not doing the wise old man guide thing. I mean, Melavan was all full of advice. 'Grandpa' Loghain yelled advice at everyone. And every noble I've ever met can't wait to shove pearls of advice at me." He glanced at Tisallan. "But not you."

"Ah." Tisallan smiled. "It is advice you want? Well then." He took a deep breath. "Always walk a mile in the other man's shoes. That way, when you fully realize just how wrong he really is, you are a mile away. And he is barefoot."

"Tisallan..." Caleb glanced down at his feet. "You don't even wear shoes."

"I used to. But people kept walking off in them and never coming back." Tisallan shrugged.

He snickered. "I'm serious."

"Wisdom is a word and a spirit. Like compassion, or justice. It means different things to different people, and can all too easily be twisted." Tisallan waved a hand. "I knew a wise woman once, and she often gave me a piece of advice that I never once regretted following." He spread his hands. "She would say, Tisallan, if you know what is good for you, you will put that down and come to bed."

"Wait, that's advice?" Caleb blinked.

"A wise woman indeed." Loghain said, trying to keep a straight face.

"That is why I married her." He glanced back at Caleb. "The sky is blue, the grass is green, and we are in good company. What more do you seek, da'len?"

"Yeah. I guess you've got me there." He chuckled.

"A cool drink, a warm bed, and someone willing to share both," Loghain said.

"You are a wiser man than most, young Mac Tir." Tisallan nodded.

"What was her name?" Caleb asked.

"I called her Mahvira."

"What was she like?"

"You are a brave man indeed, da'len, to ask an old poet to describe the love of his life." Tisallan's smile was sad. "I think you might have been better to face off against the dragon."

They stood, looking down at the city. The walls alone were imposing, and inside stood jagged towers well over a hundred feet high. Some were connected by spans of graceful bridges, high above the streets below. "Bigger than I thought it would be." Salla said.

"It's very..."
"Tevinter?" Kieran supplied.

"Yeah. Like it doesn't like anyone and doesn't care if they know it." Caleb nodded.

"And somewhere in there is a demon that needs killing." Duncan folded his arms.

"From the looks of it, maybe more than one." Trian added.

"Let's go."
Chapter 34

It felt a little odd, walking into town with his staff openly on display. And absolutely nobody stopping to look at it. He wasn't sure anyone was looking at them at all, despite the oddness of their group. Both the sentinels were wearing masks, masks that matched the one worn by Loghain. He'd complained again, but he was able to affect a rather convincing Orlesian accent. Agatha's mask matched Jerath's.

Gavren walked through the street as if he knew where he was going. Leandra fell into step a pace behind him, taking on the role of bodyguard. Kels was performing the same role for Salla, as Duncan shadowed Kieran. Salla was doing a little too much staring for his liking, but Kieran had simply adopted the mannerisms of his alter ego. It was actually just a bit creepy. All in all, he felt they were doing a fairly good imitation of merchants arrived on business.

An inn wasn't an option. They'd be watching for that. There was no Inquisition safehouse. And Kels didn't know enough of the Lucerni to know who to trust here. After some discussion, they had decided to go a different direction.

Kieran led them to their destination as though he had been there a thousand times. It was possible he had. The house wasn't large, but certainly adequate enough for their needs. The door opened at Kieran's touch, letting them inside. "And this belongs to Lord Balith?" Duncan asked skeptically.

"Actually, I believe this belongs to Uncle Nathaniel, or one of his alternate identities." Kieran gestured for them to stay back as he focused his magic to begin taking down the wards.

"He's going to know you were here?"

"There is a spirit guarding the place. I have asked it not to speak on our arrival. It will listen, I think." Kieran lowered his hands. "There."

"You think?"

"Justice and Vigilance would know if it lied, thus if asked, it will answer them truthfully." Kieran tilted his head. "And Uncle Nathaniel likely knows where we are anyway. Grandpa Loghain would have told him, if he did not already know. Uncle Nathaniel does have a tendency to know things."

Caleb ran a finger through the layer of dust on a sideboard. "I take it nobody has been here in a while?"

"Two years, I think." Kieran frowned. "I am not certain."

"I will look around, make sure." Alai nodded.

"Be sure to check for dragons." Tisallan pointedly did not look at her.

Alai said something in elven that made Gavren choke and Kieran snicker.

Salla rubbed her forehead. "Who is coming along for tonight's check in?"

#

"Any insight?"
"It wants to be the only power left standing. It is vengeance, it is desire, it is hunger. Tearing
down what it could never have, lashing out against those it feels wronged it. It wanted to make
them into weapons. It thinks it still can." Cole nodded.

"And the kids are heading right for it." Alistair paced. "Anything else?"

"It's harder to hear now." Cole shifted his weight apologetically. "I'm sorry."

Cullen put a hand on his shoulder. "We appreciate you coming at all, Cole." He sighed. "Any
insight into the kids themselves?"

"Duncan is very angry. He wants to fill it with arrows so it never happens. Hot blood on his face."
Cole shook his head. "He's loud inside."

He glanced at Alistair, who nodded and bowed his head. "And the others?" He swallowed.
"Gavren?"

"It's hard to see past the fire. It's part of him. He's scared of that part."

"And..." Cullen took a deep breath. "Any insight on Kieran?"

"The music plays, swirling with color and taste and touch and light, echoing across old born new
again. Laughing, loving, relearning what was lost. Teacher and student. He wants to make his
father proud." Cole met Cullen's eyes. "They all do."

"Of course they do." Alistair rubbed his forehead. "Because they are all too dumb to realize how
proud we were of them already."

"Loving so much it hurts." Cole nodded. "His father wants him to learn, so he understands. He
hoped you could teach him, as you once taught him. Dragons are not born knowing how to fly."

Jerath?"

"Yes. No." Cole frowned. "I don't know."

"It's never really a cut or dried sort of thing." Cullen nodded. "Cole, I'd like for you to head back
to Kirkwall."

"The Inquisitor needs me." Cole nodded to him. "I will try to help."

"Thank you."

#

"Well?" Salla raised an eyebrow at Alai.

"There is an eluvian in the basement." Alai turned towards Kieran.

"It is one of Aunt Merrill's. It is not connected to the main network."

"That doesn't mean he can't access it." Alai shook her head.

"I will check the wards." Kieran tilted his head. "Unfortunately, we may need an escape route."

Trian wrinkled his nose. "I'll see what I can do about getting this place livable. And figure out
what supplies are here that we can use."

"The king of Kal'Hirol just appointed himself our butler." Caleb snickered.

"Just for that, you're helping." Trian grabbed him by the front of his tunic and dragged him into the next room.

"Any idea where to start looking?" Salla leaned against a wall, and turned her gaze to Agatha.

Agatha frowned. "She's an elf, so she can't pretend to be a magister. I'd wager they have themselves an actual magister, either hoodwinked or actually controlled in some fashion."

"Alright." Salla nodded. "We'll settle in tonight, and start hunting tomorrow. Is there anything resembling food stores?"

Kieran tilted his head. "No."

"I'll see about getting food." Kels stood up. "We passed a market on our way in."

"Leandra and I will go with him." Gavren stood.

"There is clothing, if you wish to make yourselves look more..." Kieran shrugged. "Tevinter."

"If anyone tells Dorian I tried Tevinter fashion, I'm going to turn them into a nug." Gavren headed in the direction Kieran indicated.

Duncan frowned, and looked over at Kieran. "Can he actually do that?"

"It is highly unlikely."

"That's..." Duncan frowned. "Not exactly a no." He raised an eyebrow. "Can you turn people into a nug?"

"I do not believe I can in the here and now." Kieran tilted his head. "In the before or after, if sufficiently motivated, it is possible. I have never tried."

"Well, if you ever feel like trying..." Agatha grinned. "I have a list."

#

"Why are you shadowing me?" Salla glanced up at Tisallan. He wasn't particularly obtrusive, but she was pretty sure he was never more than twenty feet from her.

"To keep you safe."

She blinked. On some level, she supposed she'd expected him to deny he was doing anything of the sort. "I would have expected you to be worried about Kieran, being that he is the Muse."

"I am looking out for him." Tisallan nodded to her. "That is why I am shadowing you."

"That..." She shook her head. "I guess I don't quite get you. I thought you were along because you wanted to look out for Urthemiel and avenge Enara."

"The trouble with starting on a path to vengeance is that it is extraordinarily difficult to know when to stop. It is far too easy to become the monster you once set out to destroy."
"Maybe you do have a bit of wisdom, after all." She smiled up at him, and then shook her head. "I've never really asked, but..." She folded her arms atop her legs. "Why didn't you follow Fen'Harel?"

"The wolf looks at the world, and sees the way it has changed. I look, and I am struck by all the ways it has remained the same. The rich gorge, and the poor hunger. There is war, and those who strive for peace. There is anger and compassion, hatred and love, sorrow and joy, greed and selflessness, injustice and hope. He wants to recreate a world that only ever existed in dreams."

"Did you know him, before..." She chewed her lip.

"Yes. He was a good man. A hero, and I am proud of the son that died in his service." Tisallan smiled. "But then, no man sees himself as the villain of his own tale. There are undoubtedly those in this cult we face who see us as beasts come to steal away their last hope."

"Then why come with us?" She frowned. "Because Melavan offered to help?"

"Because the only one of our gods worth following was the one that remembered how to love." He gave her a small bow. "And so, my blades are here, should you have need of them."

She felt a wetness behind her eyes. "Thank you, Tisallan." She rose. "Any advice on facing an incredibly strong desire demon on its own turf?"

"Don't die." Tisallan shrugged.

"That's your advice?" She stared at him a moment before laughing.

"It's worked for me for a very long time, da'len."

#

"And where is your estate?" Cullen raised an eyebrow at Magister Arenda.

She smiled apologetically. "Estate is a very strong term. I own a house here, and three businesses, one of which has a warehouse. As the house is occupied by one of my underlings, the warehouse may actually be our best bet. It has room for the griffins if we need to bring them in for a quick exit."

Arenda led them to a stone building that had to be almost a thousand years old. It was in impressively good repair. Most of it was unused, and Hawke and Lenore immediately busied themselves setting wards while Zevran and Brehan searched the place. "I do apologize for the poor accommodations, your majesty." Magister Arenda sighed.

Alistair chuckled. "My dear woman, do remember I used to be a Warden. There were days when a semi-flat surface was a luxury."

"If it turns out there are no leads to be found here..." Dorian waved a hand. "Or if we run into trouble and must flee, I do own a villa a couple days’ journey to the east." He shrugged. "It can serve as a fall back point."

"Well, we have a plan." Cullen shook his head. "Now to find our kids before someone else does."

#

"I am going to regret starting this conversation, but..." Duncan glanced up at Loghain. "You and
"Are you looking for details?" Loghain waggled his eyebrows.

"Asshole." Duncan shook his head. "You're married to my sister, and sleeping with an ancient elf. I feel like I have a justified concern here."

Loghain raised an eyebrow. "Exactly what sort of future do you think Alai and I have?" He shrugged. "Either the timeline resets, and none of this ever occurs. Or we fail, and die horrible deaths." He frowned. "Mine quite possibly at your father's hands."

"Father knows, by the way. Melavan apparently let it slip."

"Ah." Loghain shrugged. "Do say something nice at the funeral. Lie if you have to."

"I think the best I can come up with is 'he didn't usually fart in public.'" Duncan folded his arms. "I'm serious. She's..." He sighed.

"I am fond of Alai, I will not deny that. Frankly, I think Wynne would be as well."

"Yeah, that horrible death you mentioned a moment ago?" Duncan raised an eyebrow. "It's going to involve arrows."

"You know, just because you are determined to die a virgin..."

"I'm not a..." Duncan glared at him. "Asshole." He shook his head. "How did you even manage to convince an ancient elf to sleep with you in the first place?"

"Well..." Loghain shrugged, and leaned against the wall. "Some men think they are gifts from the gods. I, on the other hand, actually am."

Duncan blinked, and rubbed his forehead. "Tell me you don't actually use that line?" He sighed. "Just be careful, alright?"

Loghain smiled flirtatiously. "Why, Duncan, darling, I never knew you cared."

#

"Why is Duncan trying to hit Loghain with the broom?" Trian asked.

"I'm guessing because Loghain asked for it." Kels looked down at him.

"Eh, probably." Trian leaned on the table and stared at what they'd found in the cache. "I'm not sure what all of this stuff is." He picked up a rune. "This is designed to be fitted to a weapon. Fire, if I'm not mistaken, but I don't know how to do the fitting."

"Dagna's work, I'm sure." Kels frowned. "Kieran would know. Maybe. What about those?" He pointed at four intricately carved copper rods.

"Not a clue. And considering just who they might belong to, I'm kind of leery about being in the same city as them." He looked up. "Tisallan?"

"Yes?"

Trian pointed to the rods. "Any idea what those are?"
"I believe they are ward-spikes." Tisallan held his hand over one, stopping just short of touching them. Set them in a square, and they will generate rather strong barriers." He frowned. "And then, some undefined time later, explode."

"Right." Kels nodded. "Maybe we'll just leave those be. What about that?" He pointed to an etched glass vial containing what looked to be ashes.

"I have no idea. It is of modern make, and the etchings do not appear to be elven."

"Well, the weapons are..." Kels picked up one of the swords, and let out a low whistle. "Maker, is this dragonbone?" He looked at the markings on the hilt. "Dagna made this."

"Not a surprise. She worked for The Warden before she worked for the Inquisition." Trian frowned. "Terra suspects she still does."

"Sera thinks the same." Kels held the sword up, and gave it a longing look. "Think anyone would mind if I..."

"Kieran did say to help ourselves." Trian tested the weight of an axe.

"Right." Kels looked over his shoulder. "Hey, Jerath. Come see what we found."

Duncan hefted the bow. "Nice."

Leandra spun a greatsword around in her hands. "You can say that again."

"Am I the only one finding this just a little strange?" Trian raised an eyebrow.

"Finding what just a little strange?" Duncan glanced down at him.

"That the cache here, in a safehouse that hasn't been used in years and belongs to his parent's team..." Trian pointed at Kieran. "Just happens to contain the correct quantity, fit, and style of weaponry and armor to meet the needs and preferences of a group comprised of..." He gestured. "Us?"

They all stopped and looked down at the items they had selected. "That is..." Alai looked again at the elven style shield she was holding.

"Huh." Duncan looked again at the bow.

"The Warden's group did contain elves and dwarves." Caleb looked down at the crossbow like contraption he was holding. "I mean, he's an elf. Sort of."

Kieran looked down at his staff. He twisted it in the center, and it came apart to form a weapon for each hand just as his previous one had. He put it back together, and tilted his head. He looked over the items again, and then pointed at the shield Jerath had chosen. "That was made by Wade, from ancestral heartwood. Justice used it in the battle for Amaranthine."

"And it ended up here?" Trian raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"And that axe." Kieran nodded to the one Trian was carrying. "Father carried it during the Blight." He blinked, and pointed to Loghain's chosen blade. "And that is the one he gave your grandfather after conscripting him."
Loghain ran a hand over the blade almost reverently. "I thought it lost in the Fade."

"That staff..." Kieran pointed at the one Gavren held. "Father found that in Amgarrak."

Gavren lifted it, and traced a finger along the intricate pattern carved upon it. "Wow." He looked up at Kieran. "How did it end up here?"

For a long moment, Kieran was silent. Then he nodded, and smiled. "Mother always was very good at providing a nudge where needed." Kieran put his staff into its harness.

"Well..." Kels shrugged and looked up. "Thank you."

"Thank you." Duncan added a small bow.

The others echoed the words.

#

Agatha glanced up at Alai. "Can I ask you something?"

"Could I stop you?" Alai smiled.

"Well, um..." Agatha sighed. "You and Loghain? I mean..." She shook her head. "I mean, you're not just an elf, you're like one of the elfiest of elves. And he's..." She shrugged. "Him."

"He's young." Alai looked down at her hands. "And he helps me remember what that was like. As do you." She chuckled. "And he is rather pretty."

"Yeah, I'll give you that one." Agatha sheathed the dagger in her boot. "Trouble is he knows it."

"And your own paramour?" Alai offered her another dagger.

She couldn't quite keep the smile off her lips. "He's um..." She blushed. "Yeah. Wow." She put the dagger into her other boot. "So, um..." She rubbed the back of her neck. "We were heading out to chase bad guys?"

"We were indeed."

#

Salla raised an eyebrow when she saw the happy expressions on the faces of Alai and Agatha. "You found something."

"We did." Agatha pointed back. "We saw one of the men who was with..." Her eyes narrowed. "That bastard that killed Noamin."

"We trailed him, but lost track of him when he went into the market district." Alai folded her arms. "But they are here."

#

Caleb followed Loghain and Alai through the market. Loghain occasionally stopped to finger wares, occasionally barking something that Alai pretended to note on the writing board she was carrying. He doubted her sharp yellow eyes were missing anything as they occasionally scanned the crowd from behind the mask. He wore Alai's sword and shield, but he knew her loose clothes concealed at least a half dozen daggers.
On the other side of the market he spotted Gavren, Kels, and Leandra doing much the same thing. Seeing Gavren dressed in the robes of a magister and wearing a cold sneer was a little disconcerting. He couldn't locate the others, and hoped that was a good thing.

Alai offered Loghain a drink from the wineskin she was carrying, and flicked her eyes to the north. Loghain drank and handed it back, and started making his way in the direction she'd indicated. Caleb hurried to keep up.

#

Salla held Kieran's hand as they walked. Two young lovers out for a stroll, accompanied by their elven serving man. Tisallan had traded the mask for a hood that hid his features, and carried a small parasol that he used to shade her from the sun. With his magic, he didn't need to openly carry weapons, and could get by with armor light enough to wear beneath clothing.

The Tevinter style dress felt odd. The neckline plunged in a way that made her more than a little self-conscious, and the tightly laced corset really wasn't helping there. Neither had Loghain openly staring when she'd come out wearing the thing. The flowing trail that formed the back of her skirt was far heavier than she was used to wearing, though the heeled boots prevented it from dragging on the ground. The envious stares a few of the other women were giving her upon noticing Kieran did nothing to set her at ease. Perhaps subterfuge was not her strong point.

"What is the purpose of having this many buckles to get in and out of clothing?" Kieran asked, causing her to giggle.

"Indolence." Tisallan answered the question. "It requires servants to make the act of dressing easy, thus such clothing makes it clear you possess people who serve no other purpose than to do the most basic of tasks for you."

"I hate it." Kieran shook his head.

"A situation I find most satisfactory." Tisallan's lips twitched slightly. His eyes suddenly narrowed. "There."

Casually, Salla glanced the way he was looking. She saw an elven woman accompanied by three men, one of whom was dressed in the style of a magister. The elven woman was carrying an unusual looking staff. It looked like a large length of copper had been looped back on itself and twisted, forming an oval shaped head. The other side ended in the length of copper having been shaped into a wickedly curved blade. The staff was otherwise rather plain, devoid of any carvings or other additions. "Kieran, thoughts on the staff?" When he did not respond, she looked up at him. "Kieran."

"Drums."

She caught his arm, and he blinked down at her, expression surprised. "Kieran?"

"Yes?"

"Thoughts on the staff?"

"What staff?"

"Oh for..." She glanced at Tisallan before looking back up at Kieran. "We should follow her, and try to signal the others if we can."
Chapter 35

Trian led Duncan, Jerath, and Agatha through the northern market. Duncan had pointed out that dwarven merchants were far more common in Tevinter than dwarven servants, and he walked next to Jerath, mirroring the role of bodyguard. Agatha walked next to him, playing the role of scribe. Trian paused a moment to admire the patina a craftsman had managed on a dagger hilt, and resolved to figure out how it had been done.

"Loghain is moving." Agatha's voice was barely a whisper.

He paid a gold for the dagger and started walking. He couldn't make out the blond knight through the crowd of humans. "Which way?"

"Northeast."

They strolled in that direction casually. He still couldn't make out Loghain, but the form currently heading up a staircase into one of the towers looked familiar. "Baradies."

"Might be wise to get word to our mages." Jerath shook his head.

"Any idea how?" Agatha asked. She frowned. "Alai is a mage. Sort of."

"Trail him and see where he goes, but keep our heads low." Duncan glanced down at Trian.

"You are one of the people he specifically targeted." Jerath narrowed his eyes.

"Which is why the keeping of the heads low." Duncan nodded. "But this is why we are here, isn't it?"

"Looks like he's heading into the upper levels." Trian continued walking. "Still plenty of people around to provide cover."

"I don't see Loghain." Jerath scanned the crowd.

"Nor do I." Agatha shook her head. "Maybe he lost Baradies."

"All the more reason for us to catch up." Duncan kept walking a pace behind Trian, though it was clear he wanted Trian to walk faster.

Hurrying would just call attention to them. He increased his pace to a more determined walk, as if he'd just remembered an appointment.

#

"Lost him." Alai made a frustrated sound.

"Why couldn't they wear signs, or have uniforms or something?" Caleb scanned the courtyard.

"Why does every color in Tevinter fashion have to be a hair shy of black?" Loghain frowned. "Looks like Trian might have spotted something. They are headed into the upper levels."

"Shall we go back them up?" Caleb asked.

"We might get lucky and spot our quarry again from that vantage point." Loghain started walking
and then stopped again. "I just spotted our quarry."

"Where?" Caleb asked.

Alai let out a string of elven curses. "Following Trian's group." Loghain growled and then started walking again at a faster pace.

"They are walking into a trap." Caleb followed after Loghain. "Again."

#

Gavren narrowed his eyes as another man deliberately stepped into his path. The man glanced at his staff before smirking. "Now where did a youngling like you get that?" He started to step around, and the man moved to block him. "I asked you a question, boy." The man folded his arms.

"It was a gift." Dorian had warned him about magisters dueling in the streets. Showing weakness was not a good option here. "Get out of my way."

"A gift." The man rolled his eyes. "From who?"

"Whom." Gavren met the man's eyes.

"What?"

"The correct phrasing is 'from whom'." Gavren held the man's gaze steadily. "You are in my way."

"Listen, you smart mouthed little pissant..." The man gestured at himself. "Do you know who I am?"

The man was dressed as a magister. It was possible he was someone important. Frankly, Gavren had his doubts. A man of genuine import would not be picking a fight with a stranger in the street. Behind him he felt more than saw Kels and Leandra assume wary stances. "I am a newly arrived to this city, and I am expected elsewhere."

For a moment, it looked like the other man was going to walk away. And then a nearby woman chuckled. "Just challenge him if you want the staff so badly." She waved a hand carelessly.

"Foreigner, eh?" The man shrugged. "Let's see what you've got, boy."

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Kels reach for his sword. He held up a warning hand. Mage duels had rules in Tevinter, but if Kels or Leandra interfered, they'd simply be killed out of hand. "Very well."

His opponent pulled his staff and started to twirl it. Gavren didn't bother with the theatrics. He simply drew upon the Fade and pushed. His opponent flew backwards and slammed into the wall behind him. Gavren waved a hand, and the man flew in that direction, landing sprawled on the ground. He waved his hand the other way, and the man slid towards him to lie in at his feet. "Are we done here?" Gavren raised an eyebrow.

The magister blinked up at him through slightly glassy eyes. He decided to take that as a yes, and stepped around the man to continue on his way. He'd made it a dozen steps before he heard Leandra's hiss of warning. The barrier sprang into place just in time to shield him and his companions from the fireball the magister hurled. Blood trailed in a line down the man's arm as he
prepared his next spell.

He pulled on the Fade once more and it bent to his will with a downward punching motion. Before the spell could leave the magister's hands, a mirror of his hand made of the Fade itself slammed into the man from above. There was a hideous crunching sound and the man started to scream as he writhed on the ground.

A few of his companions started to reach for their staffs, and Gavren narrowed his eyes. "I did not come here to fight, but I will not be threatened. I suggest you get your friend to a healer, and hope he has learned something from this experience." He whirled, and once again started walking away.

This time, they let him go.

"That estate is a fortress." Salla sighed. "Tisallan, you see any way in?"

"None I like enough to try." Tisallan frowned. "That building has held for centuries, a fact which alone gives me pause. My people knew how to build, when we put our minds to it, and ancient defenses may still be in play."

"There are many wards." Kieran's eyes narrowed. "And they have bound spirits to defend it."

"Jerks." Salla shook her head. "Now we know where they are. Possible we could attack while they are moving through town. Challenge her to a mage duel or something."

"She is not a magister, thus that option is unavailable."

"Let's regroup with the others." Salla jerked her head back the way they had come. "Maybe they've found something."

Cullen stopped his pacing when Dorian entered the room. "Any word?"

"None yet." Dorian sighed with frustration. "It is possible we beat them here by a wider margin than anticipated."

"Or they could have camped outside the city?" Alistair raised an eyebrow.

Magister Arenda shook her head. "No. The guards would have chased them off or arrested them if they camped within five miles of the city itself, and further would interfere with their reason for being here."

"And what of their quarry?" Melavan asked.

"On that, we had a bit more luck." Dorian nodded to Arenda.

"A Magister Valis is entertaining guests that match the description of Baradies, as well as Siofra and Padar."

"Padar was the..." Cullen raised an eyebrow.

"The lyrium warrior." Arenda nodded. "My contact confirmed the description. But it won't be long before our arrival in the city reaches their ears. Unfortunately, the estate of Magister Valis is well-fortified and defended."
"Maybe staying under cover is the wrong tactic." Hawke shrugged. "We could strut around like we own the place, let them come to us."

"You remember the part where we don't have an army?" Alistair glared at him.

"You did alright last time you visited Tevinter." Hawke met his eyes levelly.

"I had Isabela, Varric, Maevaris, Isabela's crew, the Arishok, and three qunari dreadnoughts."

"Well, see, you are in excellent shape." Hawke grinned and gestured at the inhabitants of the room. "This time you have us."

"As optimistic as our friend may be..." Arenda shook her head at Hawke. "He might have a point. Dorian and I could make our presence here known. That may draw out either the kids or the cult."

"I'm not particularly happy about the thought of putting the two of you in danger either." Cullen shook his head.

"Then you shouldn't have named your son Gavren Dorian." Dorian smiled at Cullen.

Duncan scanned the bridge. "He's almost to far side."

"If he looks back while we are crossing, he will spot us for certain." Agatha shook her head.

"I don't see any other way across." Trian looked at the neighboring buildings.

"We'll have to take the chance." Duncan looked down at him. "We are in disguise."

"He's a demon." Jerath gave Duncan an annoyed look.

"And he's going to get away." Duncan sighed, and shook his head. "Look, I'm not running headlong after him. He spots us, we head the other way and lose him in the crowd."

Trian sighed, and started across the bridge. If they lost Baradies now, who knew how long it might be before they spotted him again. Stone, but he wanted to get back to Kal'Hirol and the safety of stone above his head. Duncan followed quickly, and he didn't need to look to know Jerath would follow the other man. Agatha moved again to his side.

"Caleb, Alai, do you see them?" Loghain asked.

"No..." Alai frowned.

"Shit, there." Caleb gestured. "They are a level above us, on the bridge."

"Let's find a way up, fast." Loghain started down the next corridor, and stopped. "I think they know we are here."

Caleb swallowed. Nearly a dozen men in Orlesian style armor blocked their path, hands on their weapons. The one in the lead sneered. "You'll be wanting to throw down your weapons and come along quietly."

"No..." Loghain shook his head. "That really doesn't sound much like us." He glanced at Alai.
"Does that sound like us?" He drew his blade, and readied his shield.

"It does not." Alai pulled her blade from Caleb's scabbard, and smiled. She grabbed the shield as the men started towards them.

"Are you two insane?" Caleb hissed. "There are a dozen of them."

"Yes, but..." Loghain glanced back at him and waved casually. "They are Orlesian."

"Well..." Caleb stared at him in disbelief. "In that case, have fun."

"We will." Alai chuckled, and glanced at Loghain. "Winner gets to be on top."

Loghain grinned back at her, and charged. Caleb grimaced and started loading his crossbow.

#

Gavren headed up the ancient stone staircase, and looked down at the market. "I don't see any of them."

"Which means either they found trouble or trouble found them." Kels sighed. "Or both."

"Perhaps we should..." Leandra trailed off. "Warehouses to the northeast."

He glanced in that direction, and then blinked. "That man bears an incredible resemblance to Dorian. He's talking with a man that bears an incredible resemblance to my father."

Kels felt a moment of frustration as he looked back at Gavren. "My suggestion of going over and saying hello is going to get ignored, isn't it?"

"Yes." Leandra said.

"Possibly not." Gavren frowned.

"Gavren?" Leandra turned towards him.

"They found us..." Gavren folded his arms. " Everywhere we've gone, they've found us. Including in Starkhaven, a place they couldn't possibly have had reason to go." He touched the sword Leandra was carrying. "I've got a hunch we aren't the only ones that have received a bit of help."

Slowly, Leandra nodded, and then she shook her head. "But who is helping them? Kieran's parents, or..."

"A very good question." Gavren sighed. "But either way, they are soon going to know we are here. If they do not already."

"Does this mean we are going to go over and say hello?" Kels raised an eyebrow.

"It means..." Gavren sighed. "That we need to find the others."

#

"Kieran, where are they?" Salla scanned the square below.

Kieran tilted his head, and half closed his eyes. "Gavren, Leandra, and Kels are in that direction." He turned slightly. "The others are in that..." His eyes snapped open. "Loghain, Alai, and Caleb
seem to have found trouble."

"Unfortunately..." Tisallan gestured behind them. "So have we."

One of the men that has been with Siofra earlier had just emerged from an archway behind them, accompanied by seven other men. He stared at them with a dumbfounded expression, and then immediately turned around and began running, shouting something to the other men. Two men followed him, and the others started for them. "We've got to stop him before he tells them we are here." Salla growled. Next to her, Kieran shifted into a raven and took to the air. Salla made a frustrated sound. "Dammit, that's not what I meant!"

"On guard, Mirthadri." Swords appeared in Tisallan's hands as the other men started for them.

Salla drew the green staff and called her magic to her.

#

Alistair stared out at the city through the gap in the shuttered windows. Outside, the shadows were lengthening, darkening the lowest levels of the city. He hated feeling helpless and useless here while his son was out there. Somewhere.

He heard a sound behind him, and saw Magister Adralicus pouring wine into glasses. The younger man smiled at him when he saw Alistair looking, like an eager puppy hoping to please. "I brought dinner." He gestured to the box full of wrapped items he'd set on the table.

"You weren't supposed to leave the building." Brehan sighed.

Adralicus's face fell. "Oh. I didn't go far. Just to the edge of the market."

The smell coming from the box reached him, and caused his stomach to growl slightly. "We need to be careful." Alistair tried to keep his voice gentle. Despite the younger man's... exuberance... he did indeed mean well. "Thank you."

Brehan sighed, and accepted the glass of wine Adralicus handed him. Lenore accepted one as well. Adralicus seemed to take that as an invitation to start talking again as he handed out the contents of the box. Alistair found himself staring at some kind of flatbread wrapped around strips of heavily spiced unidentifiable meat. Tentatively, he took a bite, and then blinked in surprise. "I think I like this." He looked down at the item in his hand. "Which probably means you shouldn't tell me what it is."

"I've never tried much in the way of Ferelden cuisine." Adralicus went off on a tangent about some delicacy he imported from Rivain, somehow managing to drink from his wine glass without pausing his speech.

With a shake of his head, Alistair lifted his own glass to his lips. He yelped as Brehan struck it out of his hand, sending it shattering to the floor. "Brehan what the..."

Brehan met his eyes, and Alistair felt a moment of dawning horror just before one of his oldest friends started to fall. He caught Brehan, easing the man to the ground as he started convulsing. He looked up at Adralicus to find the man exchanging a terrified look with Lenore. Lenore's fingers started to glow white with healing magic that sparked out of existence again as she staggered. She fell across a bench, then rolled to the ground as she started twitching. Adralicus dropped his glass and caught the edges of the table before he started shaking, and a heartbeat later he too was on the ground.
"Hawke!" Alistair yelled. "Hawke!"

The door slammed open as the man came running.

#

"I don't see him." Agatha scanned the crowd.

"There." Trian nodded. The tail of Baradies' silvery robes was vanishing down a staircase. He kept his pace measured as he followed.

The staircase descended into another corridor, and Baradies was just barely visible going into a room at the end of it. Cautiously, Trian continued after him.

Halfway down the corridor, the floor suddenly gave way under his feet as a trapdoor opened. He heard exclamations from the others as they all tumbled down a smooth inclined stone. It dropped them into the darkness of another pit. Someone landed on him. "Ow."

"Ow." He heard Duncan's voice echo.

Agatha's voice came from near his ear, proving that she was the one who had landed on him. "Everyone alive?"

"I am." Duncan's voice answered.

"Get off me." Jerath said a moment later.

"Sorry." Duncan replied. There was a scrambling sound. "Trian?"

"I'm here." Trian winced as Agatha rolled off him. "But I took an elf to the ribs." He blinked into the inky blackness.

"I had a soft landing." Agatha said.

"So did Duncan." Jerath said.

"How bad?" Duncan's voice asked him.

"Dislocated my shoulder." There was a loud thumping sound, and then Jerath's voice continued with a pained sound. "Fixed it."

"Don't look now." Agatha said. "But I've got a sneaking suspicion we just fell into a trap."

"We are the biggest idiots in Thedas." Trian ran a hand down his face.

"Well..." Duncan sighed. "Kieran does have some kind of thing where he can find us, so --"

"So now we get to be bait." Jerath cut him off.

"Ah." Agatha said. Trian heard her stand up. "Well. Shit."

"What do we do..." Duncan started to ask. He trailed off as the room suddenly glowed with a dim light. "What the..."

Jerath looked down at the sword he'd drawn. He put it back in the sheath and the glow vanished. He drew it again, and it gave off the dim light again. "Well, that's handy."
"Hold it up." Duncan ordered. "Agatha, you see any way out?"

"Yep." Agatha gestured. "Got a door there." She headed towards it. Duncan immediately joined her.

#

Loghain felt one of his ribs crack from the blow delivered by his opponent. A split second later, he'd opened the man's throat. He smashed another of the men in the face with his shield, sending him staggering backwards. Alai ran him through almost casually.

Behind him, the crossbow twanged, and the last of the men fell. Loghain immediately turned to Alai. "What was the final score?"

"We tied." Alai wiped the blood from her blade before sheathing it.

"Against the wall it is." Loghain cleaned his own blade.

"Maker, will you two get a room?" Caleb retrieved his crossbow bolts.

"That's the plan." Loghain started walking. "As soon as we go save the kings."

#

Gavren led Leandra and Kels through the city. The others weren't in the first of the two fall back locations. Leandra made an irritated sound as they cut through the rapidly thinning crowd of the market to reach the other location. They were halfway there when something tingled lightly through the Veil. He could feel it tingling against his skin, and he froze in his tracks. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Kels open his mouth to say something, only switch to wide-eyes silent recognition as a man stepped out of the shadows.

"Solas." Gavren's voice was quiet.

"Fascinating." Solas's eyes looked Gavren over. "You have your mother's eyes."

"What do you want, hahren?" Gavren put a hand on Leandra's arm as she tried to move in front of him protectively.

"First, to satisfy my curiosity." Solas clasped his hands behind his back. "I wished to meet my apprentice." His eyes flicked first to Leandra, and then to Kels. He gave Kels a small nod of greeting. "Congratulations on your promotion, lieutenant."

Kels managed a nod. "And the second?" Gavren asked.

Solas gestured at an archway. "Through here is an eluvian. It will deliver you safely to one located in Kirkwall."

"Just like that?" Leandra asked.

"I have no wish to see any of you harmed." Solas met Gavren's eyes. "And when your mother first realized you were in danger, she asked me to help. That is not a request I will deny her."

"Your agents attacked Kieran."

"If I wished to do Kieran harm, I have had plenty of opportunity." Solas shook his head. "Abelas was ordered to apprehend, not injure, for Kieran's own safety." Solas's eyes narrowed. Gavren
could see a few other figures moving in the darkness behind him. "An order I would prefer not to have to give here."

He looked from one sentinel to the next, taking in all three of them. And then he switched to the elvish language. <The man to your left is named Laharis. He uses more spells than most arcane warriors, primarily favoring ice, and he uses the element in his barriers as well, making them particularly strong against fire. When he and I do battle, I defeat him by calling a stone from the Fade and using it to crush his armor into his ribcage.> His eyes went back to Solas. <I was ten. You have taught me much since that day.>

For a moment, Solas stared at him. His lips twitched slightly. <That sounded like a threat.>

<It was a simple statement of fact.> Gavren squared his shoulders. <We both know you will not compromise your plans by killing me. Thus the only question remaining is if you are willing to sacrifice your agents in an attempt to force the issue.>

<I...> Solas smiled. <I notice you do not appear to be concerned for the safety of your companions.>

<You know who my parents are, Solas, and you know my mentor. I think you far too intelligent than to threaten the safety of my friends.>

<I will leave the eluvian, should you change your mind.> Solas gestured to the sentinels behind him, all of whom started to melt back into the shadows. <I think you will be an interesting student.> He inclined his head.

<Until our dreams cross once more.> Gavren returned the nod, and watched the Dread Wolf vanish into the night.

"Um..." Kels' voice was almost a squeak. He coughed. "What just happened?"

"My elvish is really bad..." Leandra stared. "But I think my fiance just threatened an elven god."

"He did what?" Kels' mouth hung open.

Leandra grabbed the front of Gavren's robes and pulled him to her for a kiss.

The four men lasted only a few seconds against her self-appointed elven bodyguard. It occurred to her that Tisallan might just be one of the few men who could hold his own in a fight against her father or Uncle Carver.

Salla quickly caught up with Kieran. "Don't go flying off like that."

Kieran blinked at her, and gestured to the three bodies at his feet. "They were getting away."

She grabbed him by the front of the robes and kissed him soundly. "I said, don't go flying off like that."

"Ah. Yes." Kieran nodded to her. "It will not happen again." He smiled to her, and brushed her hair back from her face. "I apologize."

Behind them, Tisallan let out a low chuckle. "Hush you." Salla rolled her eyes at him.

A frown came to Kieran's face. "The others are in trouble, and..." He tilted his head, and
frowned. "The Dread Wolf is here."


"I am not certain." Kieran shook his head. "We need to find Gavren, and..." Kieran frowned. "I think Duncan's group may have been captured. Loghain's group is trying to rescue them. And there is a harsher tune beneath..." He rubbed the back of his neck. "There are too many melodies playing. I cannot tell the harmonies apart."

"Which way to Gavren?" Salla asked.

"That way."
"How bad?" Cullen's voice was quiet as he looked at where Hawke was tending to Lenore.

"All I can do is slow the effects of the poison down." Hawke looked up at him. "Without some sort of antidote or a better healer than myself, they are going to die."

Alistair flung an empty wine glass against the wall. "Adralicus, you little idiot."

"What did happen?" Fenris raised an eyebrow.

"Adralicus went out for food. He poured wine, drank..." Alistair shook his head. "Brehan must have felt the effects, realized what was happening. He stopped me from drinking, but Lenore and Adralicus had already had the wine."

"Hawke, what do you need?"

"I can't answer that without knowing the poison. Perhaps if..." Hawke frowned, and gently soothed the hair back from Lenore's face as she moved restlessly on the pallet. " Damn it, cousin, don't you die on me."

They looked up as Carver and Melavan entered. "What happened?" Carver immediately rushed to Lenore's side.

"Poison." Cullen turned to Melavan. " I don't suppose you can help."

Melavan moved to Brehan's side. His fingers glowed faintly white. "Healing was never one of my strong points." He shook his head. " Anything I could do, Hawke has already done."

"Poison?" Carver raised an eyebrow. " You are sure?"

"It was in the wine." Alistair gestured at the remains of the bottle.

Carver stood and started for the door. " Where are you going?" Cullen asked.

"To get something that might help."

Cullen grabbed his shield and started after Carver. "Not alone."

#

Duncan kicked the metal grating. "Maferath's balls."

Agatha sat down. "The lock is magic. There is a barrier that is preventing me from picking it." She looked up at Trian. "Without the actual key, I don't think we are getting it open."

"Stone." Trian leaned against the stone. He frowned. "So where are they?"

"It may take Kieran some time to notice we are in trouble." Duncan shook his head.

"Not him." Trian folded his arms. "Our captors. They have to know we are in their trap, so where are they?"

"After the others." Jerath gestured at the grating. "They know we aren't going anywhere."
"They have no faith in us at all." Caleb's voice came from the other side of the grate.

"I'm hurt. Maybe we should leave them there." Loghain's voice added.

Duncan shook his head affectionately. "Don't suppose you have the key?"

Caleb came to the grate and started examining it. "You couldn't pick the lock?" He raised an eyebrow at Duncan.

"It's magic." Agatha said.

"Alai?" Caleb stepped out of the woman's way.

Her fingers glowed faintly as she touched the lock, and then she shook her head. "Noamin might have been able to do something." She looked back at Caleb. "We are going to need the key."

"Yes, because that is undoubtedly just left laying around for us to find." Loghain shook his head.

"Was there a key on any of the guys we killed back there?" Caleb raised an eyebrow.

"I don't know." Loghain frowned. "I didn't look."

"Go do that." Duncan said.

"Right." Loghain nodded. He pointed at Duncan. "Don't go anywhere."

"Asshole." Duncan frowned. He noticed a bit of blood on Alai's arm, and that Loghain was moving a bit stiffly. "You're hurt."

"Minor." Loghain shook his head. "Salla will be able to fix us up in a snap, as soon as we find her."

Quickly Duncan filled them in on spotting Baradies. "Be careful."

"Yes, your majesticalness." Caleb saluted.

#

"No key." Caleb shook his head as he looked up from the last of the corpses.

"Duncan said something about Baradies heading into a room at the end of the corridor." Loghain frowned. "We might have better luck there." He sighed. "Though if Baradies is present, it might be wise to find a different plan."

"We can't leave them in there." Caleb shook his head. "And the others aren't at the fallback points."

"Our choices appear limited." Alai narrowed her eyes. "We can..." She pointed. "Our earlier quarry is over that way."

"Well, let's go ask him about the key." Loghain rose and headed in that direction.

#

Leandra shook her head. "They aren't at this fallback point either."

"Perhaps they are back at the safehouse?" Kels looked around.
"We can't go there." Gavren frowned.

Kels raised an eyebrow. "Why not?"

"Because I don't want to lead our tail to that location." Gavren kept his face expressionless. "One of the sentinels."

"North stairs, then just like in Jader?" Leandra asked.

Gavren nodded. "Exactly."

"You two realize I have no idea what you are talking about, right?" Kels gave them a frustrated look.

"Just stick close to Gavren and keep your shield ready." Leandra started towards the stairs. Gavren followed a few paces behind her. Kels shrugged and followed a pace behind Gavren. As soon as Leandra reached the top of the stairs Gavren whirled and drew his staff, sending a bolt of energy into the shadows below. The resulting magic briefly illuminated a slender figure. Immediately a barrier shimmered into existence, blocking the figure from fleeing back the opposite direction.

The figure ran in the direction of the staircase. From above, Leandra leaped, landing atop him. By the time Kels and Gavren reached her, she had the elven man's arms locked behind his back and was using her weight to keep him on the ground. He was cursing in elvish. Gavren responded in the same language, his voice tinged with amusement. The elven man immediately went silent.

"What was that?" Kels raised an eyebrow as he moved in to help Leandra secure their captive.

"He made a rude remark about my mother." Leandra shrugged. "Gavren reminded him who my mother was." She patted the captive's shoulder. "Which really should make you feel better about getting captured by us."

The elven man sighed.

#

"We are being followed." Tisallan pitched his voice not to carry.

"Three of them." Kieran replied softly.

"We dare not risk leading them back to the safehouse." Salla forced herself to continue walking at the same pace.

"Sentinels." Kieran said the word quietly.

"Tisallan, you can outrun them, yes?" Salla glanced at him. "Lose them in the shadows?"

"Easily, but you cannot."

She squeezed Kieran's hand. "Kieran and I have a different option."

He smiled at her. "You think you can?"

"It is what I am, after all." She took a deep breath, and turned to look at Tisallan. "Lose them, and then meet us at that ugly statue a block from the safehouse."
"I will need you to narrow it down." Tisallan shook his head. "This is Tevinter."

"Ah." Salla chuckled. "The dragon that was carved by someone who'd only vaguely heard of dragons."

"Ready when you are." Tisallan nodded.

Salla let go of Kieran's hand and called her magic to her. Together, they leaped off the nearby balcony.

And spread their wings.

#

He followed Carver to a small house near the under city. Carver pulled a key out of his pocket, and let them inside. They'd only taken a few steps when Carver stopped and frowned.

"Where are we?" Cullen asked.

Carver slapped himself in the side of the head. "For the love of..."

"Carver?"

"I neglected to account for just how stupid the kids can be." He gestured at a pile of familiar looking gear. "They are using the safehouse."

Cullen blinked. "You mean they are in here?"

"Or were, recently." Carver headed deeper in, and opened a closet. "And they found the cache." He started going through items.

"What are you looking for?"

"It's..." Carver growled with frustration. "Complicated. And I can't give you all the details anyway. No offense."

"Some taken." Cullen narrowed his eyes.

"You know the stories of the Blight. It's..." Carver made a triumphant sound. "Got it."

"Got what?" Cullen stared at him.

"No time to explain. We need to get back."

#

"If you don't stop pacing, I'm going to sit on you." Trian glared up at Duncan. "And I'm pretty sure Jerath isn't going to stop me."

Duncan sighed, and sat down. He immediately began fidgeting with his bow. "Sorry." He pulled at the collar of his tunic. "I've just never liked being stuck in a small room." He chuckled. "It occasionally made my visits to Kal'Hirol awkward."

Trian chuckled. "I never figured out how you humans could stand all that sky above you. Too much air."
"They'll be fine." Agatha smiled reassuringly. She leaned into Jerath, and he put his arm around her. "They may be bunch of assholes, but they are pretty good at what they do."


"I don't see any demons." Caleb glanced at Loghain. "Just some cultists. Seven or eight."

"Any that look like they might be in charge?" Loghain raised an eyebrow.

"One has facial tattoos. Pretty sure he is." Caleb nodded.

Loghain and Alai exchanged a look. "We may need that one alive then, if he doesn't have the key on him."

Alai drew her blade. "Let's go."

With a solid kick, Loghain sent the door flying open. Alai went through it, her speed enhanced by her magic. She'd gutted the first of the men before anyone in the room could react. Loghain charged, using his sword to slice open one's throat while his shield sent another flying across the room. Caleb stepped just inside the door and used the crossbow to put a bolt in the leg of the man with the tattooed face. It was over before any of the cultists could mount a defense.

The man with the tattooed face groaned, and his hands started to glow. Loghain set his blade against the man's throat. "I twitch, you die."

"Where is the key?" Caleb asked.

"What key?" The man swallowed, and Loghain moved his blade just slightly. A thin line of blood appeared on the man's neck.

"Please." Caleb hardened his voice. "You know who we are. Do you really want to make us more annoyed than we already are?"

"I..." The man flicked his eyes between Caleb and Loghain.

Caleb gestured at Alai. "Take one of his hands."

She smiled fiercely, showing a hint of fang as she moved towards the captive, blade in hand. The man immediately spoke up. "My pocket. It's in my pocket."

Alai reached into the pocket, and pulled out a strange looking key on a leather thong. She turned it over once before tossing it to Caleb. "It carries an enchantment."

Loghain started to pull the sword away from the man's neck, and then brought his other hand down against the side of the man's head. The man slid to the floor, unconscious. "Let's go let our friends out."

Caleb put the key around his neck and followed Loghain and Alai out of the room.


"Are we sure taking him back to the safehouse is a good idea?" Kels asked Gavren.

"Do you have another suggestion as to where to put him?" Gavren shook his head. "In a pinch, we
can always shove him into the eluvian."

"Do you even know how to work that thing?" Kels blinked.

"Actually, yes." Gavren nodded. "Or at least, I know how to use the normal ones. Sort of."

"Well, that is just so comforting." Kels threw up his hands. "What could possibly go wrong?"

"I can't believe you just said that." Gavren glared. "You realize now when everything goes wrong its going to be your fault."

Leandra sighed, and glanced at their captive. "If you tell us everything about Solas's plans, I promise I'll make them shut up."

"An offer more tempting than it should be," the man replied.

She rolled her eyes. Kels opened the door to the safehouse, and she dragged their captive inside. They stepped into the foyer, and she stopped in her tracks and stared. "Father."

Next to her, Gavren swallowed. "Father."

Kels went pale. "Commander."

Their captive winced. "Fenedhis."

Carver sighed. "I wish I could say this even comes as a surprise."

The city spread out below her. She pulled her wings in and dove before spreading them out once more and climbing back into the sky. How many days had she spent in darktown, watching the birds over the the water, soaring free? Wishing she had wings of her own. She wasn't sure if it was her feathers keeping her airborne, or her heart. The sky was hers.

A hawk called from next to her, and she turned her head just slightly to see Kieran matching her speed. He called again, and then sped up dashing to the right. She echoed his call, and then beat her own wings faster. Within seconds she was in the lead again, and spun off towards the tallest building in the city. He followed.

On red wings they raced, dancing in the air. His form was just slightly faster, but her lighter shape quickly proved more agile. She pulled her wings in and threaded a section under a bridge, while he was forced to go over and above.

It broke her heart to put an end to the race as she called again, and began winging her way towards their destination.

Despite the gravity of the situation, Cullen couldn't quite stop himself from smiling at the utterly dumbfounded look on Gavren's face. "How did you find us?" Gavren asked.

"Did you two forget who, exactly, I work for?" Carver tapped his foot.

Leandra and Gavren exchanged an abashed look. Leandra rubbed her forehead. "A little bit, yes."

"Commander, I..." Kels shuffled his feet.
"You were kidnapped." Cullen nodded. "I'm glad to see you are alright." He turned his eyes to his son. Admonishments could wait. "Gavren, how are your skills at healing?"

Gavren blinked. "Not bad." His eyes widened. "Is someone hurt?"

"Lenore, Brehan, and Adralicus were poisoned."

"Then we need Salla." Gavren shook his head. "She's the best healer I've ever seen."

"We don't have time to wait." Carver shook his head. "Or to explain." He held up the small glass vial. "And we already have a solution."

"I fail to see what a jar of ashes is going to..." Kels started to say. He went pale again. "Oh. Oh Maker."

Cullen felt his own shock of realization. "Ashes." He turned to Carver. "Ashes?"

"Like I said." Carver shrugged. "Complicated."

"Let's..." Cullen sighed. "You can explain later." He turned back to his son. "As can you." He barked the order. "Move." He was somewhat gratified when all three of them immediately scrambled to obey.

Kels dragged the captive sentinel with them. Cullen frowned. "Is this Tisallan?"

"Um, no." Kels shook his head. "This is the guy the Dread Wolf assigned to follow us around after Gavren threatened him."

"Gavren did what?"

"Yeah, might have been better if you hadn't mentioned that." Gavren swallowed. He continued hurriedly. "Tisallan is with Kieran and Salla."

Their captive attempted to take advantage of Kels' distraction and tripped him. He started running as soon as Kels stumbled. And he made it about four steps before Carver grabbed him and lifted him into the air by his neck. With one hand. Cullen couldn't help but be just slightly impressed. Carver narrowed his eyes. "Do I really need to explain why pissing me off further would be a very bad idea?"

"Dragonsworn." The man managed to gasp out.

Carver dropped him back to the ground. "Do not forget that again." He gestured. "Move."

The captive nodded, and fell quietly into step with them. As a moment later did Gavren, Leandra, and Kels. Cullen glanced at Carver out of the corner of his eyes. "I might want an explanation for that later."

"Complicated."

Kels tried to resist the urge to look over his shoulder. The Commander had thus far reserved most of his glaring for Gavren, but a few angry looks had been sent in his direction. At least Skyhold's latrines weren't too difficult to clean. And maybe he'd get lucky and Kieran would be right about the entire timeline resetting.
There was a shout from behind them. "Teth'a, bas."

"No." Leandra shook her head. "They can't possibly have managed to survive that and track us here."

"Survive what?" Cullen glanced at her as he drew his sword.

"The darkspawn in the Deep Roads."

Cullen immediately whirled on Kels and Gavren. "You two went into the Deep Roads?"

"Um..." Gavren swallowed. "Loghain didn't tell you that part?"

"No." Cullen narrowed his eyes. "I'm guessing he knew it would infuriate me." He shook his head. "Kels, I know my son is an idiot, but I expected a wiser head from you."

He hung his head, and heard Gavren immediately speak up in his defense. "We didn't exactly give him a choice."

"We didn't have much of a choice ourselves." Leandra added.

"There are several very large men running in our direction." Their captive glanced at them.

Carver turned to Kels and handed him the vial. "The warehouse district --"

"We know the location." Gavren winced as his father glared at him again. "We spotted Dorian earlier."

"Get your asses there, now." Carver drew his sword. "Lives depend on that vial."

"We'll deal with this." Cullen set his shield.

"Commander?" Kels shook his head.

"Move, lieutenant."

"Yes, Ser." He caught Gavren's arm and tugged. Gavren reluctantly fell into step with them. Leandra grabbed the captive and followed.

She was almost to the statue when she saw the qunari. A half dozen of them were rushing towards two men. It was the ones approaching from stealth that had her concerned. She called out, a piercing sound, and dove, buzzing past the shadowy form by the fountain. Tisallan immediately started moving. She heard Kieran's echoing call.

Loghain looked over the bridge before heading out. Something about the entire thing seemed too easy. Surely the cult had to know their trap had been sprung. Maybe it wasn't his group they were waiting for. He glanced at Alai, and saw her nod. She felt it too. He kept his hand on his sword as he walked at a brisk pace. A run could still attract unwanted attention.

They were halfway across the bridge when the section beneath their feet exploded. He slid as the stone gave way, sending them towards the city below. His foot hit one of the statues decorating the underside of the bridge, and he hooked his leg over it before lunging out to catch Alai and
Caleb as they slid past. He locked his ankles together just as their weight pulled at him. Fire surged through his previously injured ribs, and he bit back a cry of pain.

Pieces of the stone bridge struck the ground a hundred feet below them. Alai and Caleb's feet both hung out in open air. He was only grateful neither started pulling at him in panic as he searched desperately for a way out of the situation.

#

Carver caught movement out of the corner of his eye. More qunari were moving in. Holding them off without revealing things it was better the Commander of the Inquisition not know was going to be tricky. With the safety of his daughter at stake, perhaps even impossible.

"This is not good." Cullen gestured, and Carver saw another group of qunari moving in.

There was a flash of movement behind them, and suddenly there was an elf at his side, dressed in the armor of a sentinel. For a moment, he thought it was the captive, but this man appeared older. A hawk called, and there was a flurry of wings. Salla appeared next to the elf, and Kieran appeared on the other side of Cullen.

"Uncle Carver." Salla drew her staff.

Cullen blinked at them, and then looked at the elf. "Tisallan, I presume."

"The children seem to be of the belief you require assistance." Glowing blades appeared in Tisallan's hands. "I believe they may be correct."

Several spears were hurled in their direction, bouncing harmlessly off a barrier that appeared. "Get your wings back on, and get out of here." Cullen glared at them as he gave the order.

"Uncle Carver?" Kieran glanced at him.

"Yes."

"The Commander may need to know."

"Right." Carver sheathed his blade.

"Carver, what are you doing?" Cullen asked.

Carver smiled in response before drawing on what lay inside him.

#

Caleb felt himself sliding, and scrambled for a handhold. He felt Loghain's hand close around his wrist, and reached up to grab the man's hand. He looked up to see Loghain had his legs wrapped around one of the decorative statues. Alai dangled from the man's other hand. Loghain grimaced. "Can you get purchase?"

Alai reached up with her free hand, and growled. "No."

Loghain started to pull, and then cried out. He coughed, and a bit of blood speckled his lips. "Dammit."

He tried to find a foothold, but the smooth stone had nothing. "Shit, shit, shit." He shook his head. "We've got to get up, warn the others." He looked around. "Maker."
"Alai." Loghain's voice was soft.

She nodded up at him. "It was fun."

"It was."

Caleb saw them smile at each other. And then he screamed a protest as they both opened their hands.
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She didn't scream as she fell. He couldn't help but feel grateful. The nightmares were going to be bad enough already. He twisted, and used his free hand to grab the stone ledge. His ribs burned as he pulled himself up, hauling Caleb with him. Caleb was screaming Alai's name.

He levered himself onto the bridge, and yanked Caleb the rest of the way to safety. Standing hurt. So did Caleb's fist when the other man punched him. Caleb shoved him, and then shoved him again. Loghain let the other man drive him backwards a few steps. "You dropped her." Caleb stared at him, and shoved him again. "How could you drop her?" Tears fell from Caleb's eyes. "Why did you drop her?"

Loghain spat a mouthful of blood onto the stone of the bridge. He met Caleb's eyes levelly, fixing the other man with a cold stare. Caleb dropped his own eyes first, and shook his head as if he could make what had just happened go away by the motion. Loghain pushed the grief away. There would be time later to consider all that had just been lost. He heard Caleb's voice. "Alai."

"The others are in trouble." Loghain started walking towards the men that were coming in their direction, drawing his blade as he did so. "Move, Hawke."

#

Cullen felt his jaw drop open as Carver's eyes went solid black. The man turned and charged at the oncoming qunari. One flung a spear. Carver caught it without missing a step, spun, and hurled it back without breaking stride. The spear went through the qunari and the qunari behind him, pinning both to the stone wall. And Carver's fist went through the armor of the next one in line.

The elven man launched himself at the attackers coming from the south, spinning as the magical blades sliced through his opponents. He saw Salla's hands glow, and felt the tingling familiarity of a barrier on his skin. There would be time for questions later. He raised his shield and blocked an incoming spear from the qunari coming from the north, and moved in. There was a surge of something, and he felt ten years younger. He parried an incoming blow far more easily than he should have.

Several qunari came out of an alleyway, and lightning started arcing around Kieran, swirling as though he stood in the midst of a storm. He hurled spheres of lightning at the oncoming qunari, sending them flying in all directions. Cullen spun, striking another qunari with his shield. A swath of ice caught some of his incoming attackers, sending some sliding to the ground and freezing two others in place entirely. He caught a glimpse of Salla raising a glowing staff above her head as she called hailstones out of the sky.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the alley, Carver put his fist through the iron collar of a saarebas and landed atop the corpse. Another qunari charged at the man, and Carver simply grabbed him by the front of his armor and hurled him into a small group of other qunari before moving in to close. There was a sharp cracking noise as he did so, and he realized what it was a heartbeat later when Carver drove the horn through his next opponent's chest.

The elven man's magical blade seemed to ignore the armor of his opponents, and as the qunari moved in to close he simply vanished to reappear behind them, glowing blades attacking from unexpected angles. He danced in and out of the fray, faster than the eye could see. One of the qunari hurled a spear at the elf's back, but he somehow moved aside from it anyway, letting it instead hit one of the other qunari.
A battle axe came down at him with full force. Cullen caught it on his sword almost effortlessly, and wasn't sure who was more surprised by that, him or the attacker. He shoved the axe to the side and ran the qunari man through. A quick look over the battlefield showed no other attackers left standing. The fight had to have taken time, and yet he felt no more winded than a quick walk up the main staircase of Skyhold.

"Anyone hurt?" Salla asked. "Commander Rutherford?"

"I..." Cullen glanced down at his side and was almost surprised to find himself bleeding. From a wound that should have put him on the ground. "Yes?" She moved in and her fingers glowed white with healing magic. A heartbeat later the wound was gone entirely, with only the mark on his armor to show it had ever been there.

Carver walked over, his hands coated with gore from where he'd taken on half a karataam with his bare hands. The strange inky blackness faded from his eyes. The storm had vanished from Kieran, and the blades disappeared from Tisallan's hands. Kieran's eyes suddenly narrowed as he turned to the west, and Cullen heard him snarl. "Kieran?" Salla turned towards him.

"Alai's song is silent." Kieran narrowed his eyes. "Loghain is hurt. The others are in trouble." He turned to Salla. "We need to hurry."

She nodded. "Tisallan, make sure they get back safely." Abruptly two hawks were flying to the north.

Tisallan made an annoyed noise, and gave the vanishing forms a disapproving look. "That girl was slightly less trouble before she grew wings."

"Salla..." Cullen stared. "Did she just..." He turned towards Carver. "And you just..." He glanced down at his sword. "And I just..." He swallowed. "What just..."

"Yeah." Carver nodded. He accepted a cloth Tisallan handed him, and began using it to wipe his hands clean. "I suppose you're going to want an explanation, aren't you?"

"Is this the right warehouse?" Leandra asked Gavren.

"I'm pretty sure." Gavren hesitated, and then lifted his hand to knock on the door. There was silence. He lifted his hand to knock again, and then there was a scraping sound. The door opened, and an elven man with white tattoos was frowning at them. "Um..." Gavren swallowed. "Fenris. Um..." He glanced at his companions and their prisoner. "Commander Cullen said you had wounded?"

Wordlessly, Fenris stepped back to let them in and pointed at the nearby staircase. Gavren and Kels immediately started in that direction. Leandra pulled their captive inside, and looked from the bound man to Fenris. Fenris shut the door behind her. "Uh, this is..." Leandra glanced at the prisoner again. "Actually, we never got his name. Where should I put him?"

"You would think after so many years of being with Hawke I would have lost my capacity for surprise." Fenris shook his head. "Bring him this way."

Agatha turned back towards the tunnel behind them. "Shh..." She held up a hand and the others fell silent. She heard the scraping sound again. "Someone's coming."
An elven woman, flanked by two men, stepped into view. "Well, well." She smiled. "What have we here?"

Jerath and Trian immediately drew their weapons. Jerath stepped slightly in front of Duncan, raising his shield. Trian did the same for Agatha. Duncan fitted an arrow to his bow. Agatha put her hands onto daggers. The woman shook her head and gave them a disapproving look. "Such poor manners." She waved a hand. "Hand over your weapons."

"Come get them." Duncan started to draw back his bow.

"Do not be foolish, child." She shook her head. "You are behind a barrier. Nothing will pass through unless I allow it."

"Siofra, I presume?" Trian asked.

She smiled. "I am. And it appears I've caught nothing less than two kings in my little cage." She folded her arms. "I said, hand over the weapons."

"And I said, come get them." Duncan glared.

"Ah." She looked over her shoulder at the man behind her. "I think they are still waiting on their three little rescuers." The men behind her laughed. "Unfortunately, I fear they will not be coming." She shrugged. "They had a..." She smirked. "Falling out. They didn't make it."

Her blood went a little cold. Loghain, Caleb, and Alai couldn't be dead. Next to her, Jerath's eyes narrowed as he shifted his grip on the sword. Duncan shook his head. "You're lying."

"Duncan Therin, son of Alistair, son of Maric." She gave him an appraising look. "Blood of Calenhad." She snorted. "I expected something a little more..." She shrugged. "Impressive. No matter. You and the dwarven prince are of use to me." Her lips curled, revealing her teeth. "Your two companions are not."

Agatha saw Trian lift his shield slightly higher in response to the implied threat. The dwarven man shook his head. "You have to take that barrier down to get to us, and you'll die the moment that happens."

Siofra rolled her eyes. "We'll see how much more cooperative they are feeling after a day without water." She gestured to the men to follow her out of the room.

As soon as she was gone, Agatha started shaking her head. "They can't be dead, right?"

"Maferath's balls." Duncan shook his head. "His grandfather died six years ago and was still able to lead us out of the Deep Roads. I won't believe a Mac Tir is dead until I've burned the corpse." He lowered his bow and put a hand on Agatha's shoulder. "And even then I'll still have my doubts."

"The others are out there as well." Trian smiled reassuringly.

It wasn't lost on her that Jerath remained quiet and wary.

#

Loghain gutted the first of the men. One of Caleb's crossbow bolts caught another in the leg, and Loghain slammed his shield into him. He spun, and a backhanded blow from his sword sent the last man's head flying. He heard Caleb's footsteps as the other man caught up with him, and he
continued to where the others were being held.

"Get the cage open." He jerked his head at Caleb. The other man glared at him, but went into the room, pulling the key off his neck as he did so.

Alone, he spat out another mouthful of blood. He pressed his hand against his ribs, and felt a jolt of pain as they moved beneath his hand. Breathing was starting to become difficult, and sparks were dancing at the edge of his vision. *I need a little longer. We aren't safe yet.* He felt the pain fade, and some of the weariness leave his muscles. He could feel the tightness of his lungs, but the next breath came freely. The darkness receded, bringing his vision back into focus. He swallowed, and followed Caleb into the room, blade in hand.

"Thank the Maker." Despite his words to Agatha, Duncan couldn't help but feel relief at the sight of Caleb. "They told us you were dead."

Caleb roughly jammed the key into the lock. "Alai is." He turned the key and jerked the door open.

Agatha made a horrified gasp. "Alai?"

Duncan looked from Caleb to where Loghain had entered the room. The knight was bleeding, but gave him a nod. "What happened?"

Jerath spoke before Caleb could reply. "We need to get moving. Siofra was just here, and she could be back any moment." He touched Agatha's shoulder, and she nodded in response, setting her face into determined lines.

"The way out is clear." Loghain nodded.

Caleb grabbed the key out of the lock as they headed out of the room. Duncan's eyes narrowed slightly as he caught the anger-filled look Caleb shot at Loghain. He frowned. Loghain's own face bore no expression, but he kept his eyes away from Caleb. Something had happened. He started to open his mouth to ask, and thought better of it. They could ask questions once they were back at the safehouse.

They were about halfway back when they ran into trouble. A dozen men, two of which had staffs, started pointing and coming their way, drawing weapons as they did so. He aimed an arrow at one of the mages, only to have it bounce off a barrier. The mage started to twirl his staff, and then a hawk grabbed the staff and yanked it out of his hands.

"What the..." Trian started to say.

A second hawk swooped into their midst, turning into Salla. She immediately sent a blast of ice at the oncoming problem. The other hawk dove back and turned into a bear, grabbing the still armed mage and hurling him into the nearby building with a sickening crunch.

Duncan shrugged, and aimed his bow at one of the swordsmen.

#

Kels took the vial out of his tunic as he knelt next to Brehan. As carefully as possible, he opened the stop. He shook a tiny bit of the ashes into his finger, and gently spread them across Brehan's lips. Gavren knelt on the other side, his fingers starting to glow white with healing magic. "What
are you..." Hawke started to ask.

Brehan gasped, and shook his head. He rolled to one side, and started coughing. Gavren immediately touched him with the glowing hands. "Brehan?" He asked.

"Maker's breath." Brehan rubbed at his forehead.

Vial in hand, Kels moved next to Lenore and repeated the process. Hawke moved to Lenore's side, catching her gently as she started to cough. Melavan went to assist Adralicus.

"I would very much like an explanation." King Alistair folded his arms. "Where is my son, and where did you get..." His eyes widened. "That..." He shook his head. "Is slightly more than a pinch."

"Pinch?" Brehan blinked in confusion. "What's going..." He looked at the man next to him. "Gavren?"

"Commander Cullen and Lieutenant Carver are on their way. They just had to deal with some qunari." Kels looked up at King Alistair. He glanced down at the vial in his hand, and then quickly offered it to King Alistair. "I um..." He swallowed. "Lieutenant Carver told us to bring these here as fast as possible."

King Alistair took the vial from him, and held it up to the light. He shook his head, and looked down at Brehan. "You, Lenore, and Adralicus got yourselves poisoned. Fortunately, Carver managed to pull Sacred Ashes out of his ass."

"That..." Lenore winced. "May be the single most sacrilegious statement I have ever heard someone utter." She sat up. "And you are talking to Brosca's wife."

"Sacred..." Brehan looked up at the vial Alistair was holding. He uttered several elven phrases that had Gavren choking and Melavan looking at him in shock.

"What now?" Adralicus started looking around him. "The..." He stared at the vial. "That's...?"

The king went to his pack, and carefully tucked the vial away. "I am not going to be the one to break that piece of news to Leliana."

"Nor am I." Brehan shook his head.

"Bastards." Lenore sighed. She looked around here again. "That's Kels. Who..." She turned her eyes to Gavren.

"Gavren, the Inquisitor's son." King Alistair turned towards where Leandra and Fenris were coming up the stairs, accompanied by the elven captive. "And that's Leandra Hawke and Tisallan."

"That is not Tisallan." Melavan stood. "Bahalan."

"Melavan." The man narrowed his eyes.

"Explain?" King Alistair turned to look at Kels.

"We..." Kels took a deep breath. "We kind of ran into the Dread Wolf while attempting to regroup with the others. He apparently told Bahalan there to follow us, but Gavren and Leandra got the drop on him. We were taking him back to our base when we ran into Commander Cullen and Lieutenant Hawke. And then qunari attacked. They sent us on ahead while they took care of it."
"My little brother is fighting qunari without me?" Hawke sighed. "He's going to pay for that."

"They may need help." King Alistair shook his head.

"We should go try to help them." Gavren stood up.

King Alistair put a hand on his shoulder and pushed him into a nearby chair. "You three are not going anywhere. Hawke, Fenris?" The two men immediately headed for the stairs. The King raised an eyebrow. "And my boys are where?"

"We, um..." Kels winced. "Don't actually know at the moment."

Cullen wiped the blood from his blade and sheathed it before he began walking back towards the warehouse. "An explanation would be welcome."

"Right." Carver nodded and fell into step behind him. "Just kind of hard to know where to start." He shook his head. "You know more than most. You know what Jerath is, and that I work for him."

"I admit to being somewhat surprised you didn't phrase that in the past tense."

Carver chuckled. "Kirkwall is a bit of a trouble spot. Since we have people there, it made sense for Merrill and I to be the ones keeping an eye on things."

"Several of your former companions are still part of the Inquisition." Cullen narrowed his eyes.

"Of course they are. The Inquisitor and the Inquisition are at the heart of things, and you need all the help we can give you." Carver sighed. "Cullen, you knew who we were. Jerath is the one that asked you if they could stay with the Inquisition."

"I..." Cullen made a frustrated sound. "You..." He shook his head. "Are you an abomination?"

"No."

"I'm supposed to believe you? After seeing that?" Cullen gestured back behind him. "You put your fist through two inch thick steel."

"I'm not an abomination." Carver growled. "This is one of the reasons we don't..." He sighed. "It's too easy to be misunderstood. I'm not an abomination, at least not in the way you mean the term. I'm not possessed. I just..." He spread his hands. "I carry a piece."

"A piece?" Cullen raised an eyebrow.

"A tiny fraction of the whole, but enough." He sighed. "Cullen, I serve a living god. We have a duty to him. And he has given us what we need to fulfill that duty."

Cullen caught Carver's arm, and stopped. "Vague comments aren't good enough."

Carver turned back towards Cullen. "I..." He took a deep breath. "Jerath is a creature of the Blight, and we have to account for that. That means..." His face became pained. "Being a Warden isn't enough, not for what he is, not anymore. So he gave those he trusted most just enough, in case..." He met Cullen's eyes. "In case we need to kill a god."
"In case..." Cullen closed his eyes for a long moment. "In case The Warden falls."

"We are bound to him. Perhaps that alone will be enough to stop it from happening, but in case it's not..." Carver shook his head. "Then it is our duty to kill the best friend most of us ever had, the finest man I have ever known. Because that is what he has asked of us." He shook his head. "It is a duty and a burden we took willingly, knowing full well what it meant. And we keep it secret because..." His lips twisted into a bitter smiled. "Because the alternative is for the world to look at us the way you are looking at me right now."

"I..." Cullen tore his eyes away. "Maker."

"He gave us our abilities." Carver lifted his head proudly. "We serve him, trying to save the world as best we can, and we will die when he does."

"I..." Cullen took a deep breath. "Alright. I..." He blinked. "When?"

"What?"

"You said..." Cullen frowned, and met Carver's eyes. "You said you will die when he does."

"A small price." Carver smiled. "Paid gladly."

"But he's..." Cullen shook his head. "He can't die."

"He can." Carver nodded. "And he will. Whatever else we have become..." Carver squared his shoulders. "The duty cannot be forsworn."

"The Inquisitor needs to know this." Cullen nodded slowly. "Beyond that, I will keep this secret." He blinked, and turned towards the man who had been watching them both silently.

Tisallan shrugged. "I am fairly confident the god I am sworn to knows all this already." He gestured. "We should get a move on, before one of your children trips over a fachan."

"Do I even want to know what a fachan is?" Cullen started walking towards the warehouse again.

"No."

#

Salla focused her energy into healing magic. She faded the abrasions on her brother before moving to Trian. His ribs were bruised. Jerath gestured to Loghain, and she headed for him next. Her eyes widened when she delved the spell into him. She counted four broken ribs and a punctured lung, as well as damage to the muscles in both his shoulders, a fractured leg, several bones broken in his hand, and a lot of internal bleeding. Men had died from far less. "How are you still upright?"

"Hate, mostly." Loghain's voice was hard.

"Alai..." She sighed. "I'm sorry." She let the healing magic flow into him.

Duncan turned towards Kieran. "Any sign of Gavren and his team?"

"He is with your folks. We need to get there as well."

"Um..." Agatha raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"Brehan, Lenore, and Adralicus were poisoned." Salla turned towards them. "Cullen and Uncle
Carver were attacked by qunari. We left Tisallan with them to get them back to the warehouse safely." She shook her head. "Not that Uncle Carver really needs the help."

"Mama was poisoned?" Agatha stared.

"That's why we need to get to them." Salla nodded. "They could be in trouble."

"We..." Trian slowly shook his head. "Need to go rescue them?"

"Oh for..." Duncan rubbed his forehead, then frowned. "Alai, can we..." He turned to Loghain. "What happened?"

"He killed her." Caleb's voice was harsh.

"Caleb..." Loghain sighed.

"What?" Caleb shook his head. "That's what happened, isn't it? You had her, and you let her go." He gestured back towards the bridge. "He had her, and he let her fall to her death. That fucking bastard dropped her."

"Loghain..." Duncan turned towards the knight. "What is he talking about?"

"The bridge exploded. I managed to..." Loghain closed his eyes, and then opened them before meeting Duncan's eyes. "I let Alai go."

"He killed her." Caleb clenched his fists.

"Fuck, Loghain." Agatha glared. "She was one of us. How could you..."

"You think I wanted to?" Loghain drew himself up. "You think I'm happy about this? That I'm not going to see her face every night for the rest of my life?"

"Why did you drop her?" Caleb shouted, stepping forward.

"Because you had the fucking key." Loghain stepped forward as he shouted back.

"Because..." Caleb touched the key that was again hanging around his neck. "The key?"

"I couldn't pull you both up." Loghain looked down and shook his head. He waved a hand before looking back up at Caleb. His voice was tired as he continued. "The enemy was moving in to finish us off, the others were in trouble, and you had the key. What was I supposed to do, Caleb? Tell me."

"You were supposed to..." Caleb choked on the words.

Kieran exchanged a look with Salla, and she nodded. She moved to her brother as Kieran moved to Loghain, pulling the two men apart gently. "We need to get to our folks." She glanced back at Duncan.

"Right." He nodded, and gestured. "The warehouses are this way."

Back so soon?" Alistair looked down the stairs when he heard the door open. Hawke and Fenris entered, followed by Cullen, Carver, and an elven man he didn't recognize.
Hawke shrugged. "They apparently took care of the qunari..." He shot a glare at his brother. "Without leaving any for us, and were most of the way back already."

"Everyone alright?" Alistair frowned. Both Carver and Cullen had blood on their armor.

"We are fine." Cullen nodded. "We got some healing from Salla."

Fenris blinked. "Salla?" He turned towards Cullen. "She's not with you?"

"You..." Cullen sighed. "Might want to sit down." He glanced up at Alistair, then gestured to the elven man. "This is Tisallan."

"Nice to finally meet you." Alistair gestured for them to come up the stairs.

"Likewise." Tisallan gave him a polite nod.

As soon as they were up the stairs, Hawke turned towards his brother. "Now, why isn't your niece with you?"

"Because she turned into a bird and flew away." Carver spread his hands.

For a moment, Hawke stared at him. Then he rubbed his forehead. "Let's try this again. Where is my daughter?"

"He is unfortunately telling the truth." Cullen shook his head. "She and Kieran swooped in to help us against the qunari. Then she told Tisallan here to get us back to the warehouse safely..." Cullen rolled his eyes. "Before turning into a hawk and flying off with Kieran."

"She finally managed it?" Gavren asked excitedly. He swallowed and looked down at his feet when they all turned to stare at him.

"What part of 'grounded for the rest of your natural life' are any of you failing to understand?" Hawke shook his head.

"We did alright." Leandra folded her arms defiantly. "We even captured an agent of the Dread Wolf. You guys didn't manage that." She smirked. "You guys barely managed to learn of the cult's existence, and we found their secret bases. You didn't know about the sentinels. We found them."

"We've managed to keep ahead of the cult, the Dread Wolf, the qunari, and you." Gavren nodded. "Discovered who was behind the cult, what they wanted, and how they managed the entire time warping thing in the first place."

They both glanced at Kels, who started shaking his head. "You kidnapped me."

"And we also kidnapped the spymaster of the Inquisition." Leandra nodded. Tisallan coughed lightly into his hand. Leandra shot a glance his way before moving to stand shoulder to shoulder with Gavren. "We rescued the Prince of Starkhaven, stole a ship out from under the Queen of the Eastern Seas, and ran circles around the Seekers."

"We are not children." Gavren folded his arms, matching Leandra's stance.

"Father." Leandra stared at Carver. "You know what was in that safehouse. Look me in the eye and tell me we weren't meant to do this."

Alistair turned towards him. "Carver, you have something to add?"
Carver sighed. "We..." Slowly a smile came to his face. "Are awesome parents."
"Before we go any further..." Alistair held up his hand, and looked at Tisallan. "Do you happen to know where my son is?"

"Your son is Duncan?" Tisallan raised an eyebrow.

"Yes."

"Kieran and Salla have gone to retrieve them and the others." Tisallan took a deep breath, and turned to Melavan. "Ir abelas, lethallin. Alai din'naden."

Melavan sank into the chair behind him. He hung his head, and sighed. "Mythal'ghilan, vir enaste."

"Alai's dead?" Leandra put a hand over her mouth.

"How?" Gavren's voice was hollow.

"I do not know." Tisallan shook his head. "Kieran knew when it happened."

"I am sorry for your loss." Alistair swallowed. If an elven sentinel had fallen, what did that mean for what his boys were facing out there? "We need..." He shook his head. "We need to end this before more people get hurt."

"There is an eluvian." Kels spoke up.

"Kels..." Leandra hissed at him.

"It could be a trap." Gavren shook his head.

"It is not." Bahalan spoke from where he had been tied to a chair. "Step through the eluvian, and it will take you safely to Kirkwall. He has given his word."

"Yes, because he's never broken that before." Tisallan rolled his eyes.

"Penshra, harellan." Bahalan spat several more phrases in elvish.

"Any of that we need to worry about?" Alistair glanced at Brehan.

It was Gavren who replied. "He called Tisallan and Melavan traitors and a few other nasty names, accused them of being slaves to humans, said they were turning their back on all the elven people truly are, and that they deserved nothing more or less than to die forgotten."

"You speak elvish?" Brehan raised an eyebrow at him.

"Why is everyone surprised that the Dread Wolf's apprentice speaks elvish?" Leandra glanced at Gavren. She gestured at Bahalan. "Can I punch him? I want to punch someone, and he's begging to be punched."

"No punching." Alistair shook his head.
Once they got to the warehouse district, Kieran took the lead. He reached an alley, and started to go down it. "Wait." Duncan shook his head. "Are we..."

Jerath sighed, and then put him into a headlock and started dragging him towards the building. He heard Agatha's amused laughter as Duncan started struggling to free himself, or at least put a halt to the forward motion. Jerath ignored his king's orders to release him that instant. When they reached the door, he nodded to Salla. "Mind knocking?"

Salla took a deep breath, and started to knock on the door. She'd managed to tap it once before it opened and Hawke stepped out. He grabbed her, and picked her up in a massive hug. "Salla." He put her down before moving to Caleb and repeating the gesture, just as Fenris grabbed Salla and pulled her into the building. He didn't release Duncan until they were all in the building and the door was closed behind them. Duncan promptly tried to punch him.

"Duncan." King Alistair's voice rang out. A moment later the man had pulled Duncan into a tight embrace. "Thank the Maker you're alright." He held Duncan for a long moment. Then he let him go and to Jerath's surprise, grabbed him, hugging him just as tightly. "You're both alright." He stepped back, then grabbed both of them and started dragging them up the stairs. "I am going to strangle both of you."

He saw Lenore holding Agatha, and was pretty sure both women were crying. Hawke was holding onto his son as though he never intended to let him go again. "Gavren and..."

"Over here." He heard Gavren's voice and him and Leandra sitting at a table with Cullen and Carver.

"Are you alright?" The King started to let them go, and then apparently reconsidered and dragged them both to chairs first. "You've been wounded. Lenore?"

"Salla already fixed us up." Duncan shook his head.

Salla pulled free of her father, and caught Loghain's arm. She half dragged the man to a chair. "Sit." She poked him. "Stay." She looked up at Lenore. "He took a lot of damage earlier, and he's not to do much moving around for the next few hours."

Lenore's fingers glowed white as she touched Loghain. Immediately she started shaking her head. "Maker, Salla, you let him walk here in that condition?"

Jerath frowned. "How hurt is he?"

"I've buried men in better shape." Lenore shook her head, and continued working her magic. "Salla has already dealt with most of it, but he's out of action for the next few days at least."

"What the hell happened?" Alistair started looking at them. He growled. "No, explanations can wait. All of you, sit down, get your wounds tended, get something to eat, get cleaned up, and..." He took a deep breath. "Do not leave our sight."

#

Dorian entered, followed by Arenda. "You found them?"

Cullen shook his head. "They found us." He gestured to where the kids were sitting in the other half of the room, looking somewhat subdued. Alai's death had clearly shaken them. Melavan had withdrawn since hearing the news. Caleb had found the supplies, and was busying himself making food. Hawke kept moving from room to room trying to keep an eye on both his children. Cullen
might have felt the need to tease the man, if he'd been willing to let Gavren out of his sight for more than a few seconds.

On the other side of the room, Adralicus had been staring at Kieran for the last half hour, eyes wide. Kieran had slowly been moving away from him. At one point, Adralicus had tried to close the distance, but a glare from Tisallan had sent the magister scurrying back to his chair. Arenda glanced at Adralicus, then her eyes flicked to Kieran. "That's..." She took a deep breath and collected herself. "What happens now?"

Duncan must have heard the question, because he turned towards her. "Now we go finish off this cult and its pet demon."

"Now, you and the rest of the children get on the griffins and get back to Kirkwall. Or Denerim. I think I prefer Denerim." Alistair glared at his son.

"We've come to far for that." Duncan stood. "If we leave now, the cult will fade back into the shadows and come hunting us again, and we'll lose our best chance to take them down."

"He's right." Salla squared her shoulders. "We know where they are, and have the best chance of dealing with them."

"Perhaps you missed the part where the Dread Wolf is in town?" Hawke shook his head.

"All the more reason why you should let Gavren and Kieran stay and help. They've proved to be the best options for dealing with his agents."

"Carver does fairly well." Cullen glanced at where the man was sitting.

"Carver..." Carver sighed. "Thinks she has a point."

Hawke turned towards his brother. "You cannot be serious."

Alistair shook his head. "No. Get your griffins, and get the kids out of here. We'll call out for reinforcements, and deal with the situation."

"I'm not going back to Kirkwall." Duncan shook his head. "We are going to see this through."

Alistair stepped towards his son. "You are getting on that griffin if I have to tie you to the saddle." He turned his eyes towards Jerath. "You are supposed to be keeping him out of trouble." He shook his head at both of them. "And you are both going to explain things to your mothers."

"I am thirty," Jerath said calmly.

"What?"

"I am thirty." He met Alistair's gaze levelly. "I haven't explained anything to my mother in well over a decade."

"We aren't children." Duncan folded his arms. "Jerath is a general. I have been King of Ferelden, king in a time of war, for six years. I do not take orders. I give them. I have faced demons and dragons, assassins and ambassadors. Gavren and Leandra have been handling situations like this one for years. Loghain hunts demons for sport." He stared at his father. "And Father, you are absolutely the last person in the world with a right to lecture anyone on running off to Tevinter to deal with a threat against family."
"That was..." Alistair gestured in frustration. "Different."

"How?" Salla asked, her voice blunt.

"There were..." Alistair sighed weakly. "Dragons."

"Jerath killed one of those back in Nessum." Leandra raised an eyebrow pointedly.

"And there were Crows."

"Such as the ones that recently poisoned several of the people in this room?" Agatha gestured.

"It just was!"

"My father instructed me to deal with this situation." Kieran clasped his hands behind his back. "I will not be leaving until I have accomplished that task."

"Now listen..." Alistair turned towards him.

Light gleamed behind Kieran's eyes. "King Alistair, my father holds you in high regard, and I share his opinion." His voice deepened slightly. "But do not forget to whom you are speaking."

The room went silent. Salla moved to stand next to Kieran. "We are your children, and you taught us well." She smiled. "So how, exactly, do you think you are going to be able to stop us?"

"What would you do, if you were us?" Gavren stared at his father.

"Would you run?" Duncan folded his arms.

"Would you?" Agatha turned to her mother.

"Would you?" Caleb looked at Brehan.

"They mean in the opposite direction." Salla turned back to her fathers.

"A curious feeling." Fenris rubbed his forehead.

"Being so proud of your daughter you want to lock her in a closet for the rest of her life?" Hawke put an arm around his husband's shoulders.

"That would be the one."

#

Cathiel stared down at the message crystal in her hand. Brosca's eyes were slightly wide, and he looked prepared to dive under cover. "Our eldest son said what, exactly?"

"One moment." Her husband's voice replied.

There was a murmur of voices, and then a voice that sounded very similar to her husband's came over the crystal. "Mother."

"Duncan." She narrowed her eyes. "You are knowingly and willfully putting yourself into danger."

"A hazard of being both Therin and Cousland."
"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't get on the back of a griffin and drag you home to Ferelden by your ear."

"Wynne, Bryce, and Maric need their mother." Duncan's voice softened. "I am trying to ensure they have her for as long as possible."

She clutched the crystal tightly in her hand, and felt tears well in her eyes. "Don't you dare get yourself killed trying to protect your father and I. Don't you dare." She felt Nesiara's hand on her shoulder. "Don't you..."

"Mother, I..." She heard him swallow. "I will do what I have to do, as you taught me. For my family, and for Ferelden."

Nesiara's voice was slightly raw. "Is Jerath there with you?"

A different voice came over the crystal. "I am here."

"Don't..." Nesiara's shoulders shook slightly. "I want, very much, to get the chance to meet you. Please, be safe."

"I will try."

She felt a tug, and looked down. Slowly she knelt, and held the crystal to Wynne. "Say hi to your brothers."

"Dunk!" Wynne yelled into the crystal.

"Wynne."

"Papa?" Wynne looked at the crystal in confusion. "I want Dunk and Chair."

"Maker, I forgot you used to call Jerath that." Duncan's voice shook with laughter.

"Papa, where's Dunk?"

"Dunk will be home soon, Wynne. Everything is going to be fine. You'll see." He was quiet for a moment. "And I promise, this time around, I'll find you a sane husband."

"No husband. Ick." Wynne glared at the crystal.

"Don't change, Wynne."

#

"So the Dread Wolf has put in a personal appearance." Leliana held the crystal as she paced back and forth.

"He spoke with Gavren, offered the kids a ride back to Kirkwall. Melaven, Tisallan, and Kieran all seem to be of the belief that the offer was genuine and that Fen'Harel does not want to see any of the kids harmed." Brehan's voice replied. "However, he did attempt to put a tail on Gavren, Leandra, and Kels. Gavren noticed, and they were able to capture the agent."

"Have you questioned him?"

"Not far. He's been willing to give us information on the cult, though we already have most of what he has given us. He has refused to answer any questions regarding Fen'Harel or his
activities."

"And the qunari?"

"As near as we can tell, there were a couple survivors from the group that the kids encountered on the plains. They got in touch with some of their agents, and reinforcements were sent." Brehan sighed. "No doubt more will be incoming, and as near as we can tell, the individual that sold the wine to Adralicus was a Crow."

"I'm glad there were healers present." Leliana looked down at the crystal. The thought of losing him again tore at her. When he did not respond, she frowned at the crystal. "Brehan?"

"Our recovery was slightly more complicated than that." He sounded as though every word was being dragged out of him.

"Brehan." She narrowed her eyes.

"The Warden's people had a safehouse here, one that Carver claims they last used just before you called the Exalted Council." Brehan took a deep breath. "One stocked with the right gear for the kids and a vial containing a small amount of ashes."

"Ashes." She blinked. "Ashes?"

"Ashes."

"I am guessing by small amount, you are not talking about a pinch?"

"Thimbleful or so."

"We were with him. He took a pinch." She glared.

"I was there. I recall."

"He..." She forced herself to breath, in and out. "And has Carver told you what he has done with the urn?"

"No."

"Has he given any explanation?"

"No."

"Did you ask Kieran?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"I was told he hadn't checked that part of the codex but it had been fully unlocked and I was more than welcome to do so if I desired. I attempted to ask him about this 'codex'." Brehan's voice became slightly confused. "Which seemed to frustrate him, as he claimed I had written several of the codex entries. Then he told me I needed to fix my spelling errors and amend several of the entries because they didn't match the information in the compilations even after accounting for the differing canon."

"I..." Leliana stared at the crystal. "Am unable to make any sense of that."
"Glad I'm not the only one."

"He set up a safehouse for the kids that contained exactly what was needed to save you..." Leliana rubbed her forehead. "Years ago?" She sat on the edge of her desk. "How could they possibly have..."

"I tried asking Kieran that as well."

"And?"

"I gave up somewhere around 'elision of the contrapuntal harmonies with the ambient theme'. I understand every single word he used and I have absolutely no idea what he was talking about." Brehan made a vexed noise. "So I went with 'Mythal did it' and he said that was close enough." He sighed. "Duncan tried to warn me."

Kels looked up when he saw the Commander enter. He'd been dreading this moment. The thought of facing the Commander's disappointment almost made him wish he'd let the dragon eat him. "Ser, I..." He took a deep breath. "I know you are angry, and I..."

"Kels..." Cullen shook his head. "I have spent the past couple months worried sick about you and Gavren. Yes, I'm furious."

"I understand. Gavren is your son, and I let..."

"Kels." Cullen's voice was sharp. When Kels flinched, Cullen sighed. "Yes. Gavren is my son." He smiled. "And you are my brother." He took a deep breath. "So yes, I am furious. Two people I love dearly were in trouble, and I too far away to protect them."

"Ser, I..."

"If either of you ever do anything like this again, I will..." Cullen put both hands on Kels's shoulders and met his eyes levelly. "Personally make you both run drills until you drop before sticking you on latrine duty for the rest of your natural lives. Do you understand me?"

He felt tears in his eyes. "Yes ser."

Cullen pulled him into a hug.

Saitada looked down at the crystal. "I have been worried sick about you." She shook her head. "Do you realize how much more gray hair the last few weeks have given me?"

"I am sorry." Trian's voice responded. She wanted to reach through the crystal and hug him. Or strangle him. Or both. "Your mother is frantic. If it wasn't for your siblings, she'd be on a griffin and there right now. You do realize just how much she sacrificed for you?"

"I do. That's..." Trian sighed. "That is why I am here. What we owe to The Warden..."

All those years, back in Orzammar. Zerlinda practically fussing over Jerath every time he got within fifty feet of her. The look on her face when she'd learned Jerath had suggested Saitada adopt Trian in the first place. She should have considered how Trian would feel about the
appearance of Jerath's son. Considering the tattoo on his face, young Loghain likely felt the same way. "I understand." She sighed. "I'm furious, but I understand."

"I have to see this through."

Her eyes closed. She bowed her head, and then reopened them. "I know. And..." The corner of her mouth lifted. "I am proud of you."

"You were told to lay down."

Loghain glanced over his shoulder at the sound of Carver's voice. He shook his head. "I did that already."

"I think they meant for you to stay laying down." Carver stepped into the small office that was serving as a bedroom, and closed the door behind him. "Are you alright?"

"Define 'alright.'" He flung the towel back down on the wash stand. "I'll live. Should be good for combat again by morning."

"Lenore says you're to remain in the bed for the next few days." Carver glanced back at the door. "We're going to need to come up with an explanation for why you heal so fast."

"I was going to resort to my usual standby of 'it's complicated' and then making a pass." Loghain sat heavily on the edge of the bed.

"Yeah, that last part..." He shrugged. "It's Lenore, she might call your bluff."

"Who is bluffing?" Loghain looked down at his hands. He rubbed his palm with the other hand, and then clenched his fists. "I wasn't strong enough to pull them both up."

"You had busted ribs." Carver sighed. "It's nothing short of miraculous you caught either of them in the first place." He grabbed a chair, and sat down, folding his arms and setting them on the chair back as he looked at Loghain. "I can sit here and tell you I would have done the same thing, but given that Caleb is my nephew that comes off a little hollow."

"Going to be a while before he stops hating me."

"He's smarter than that." Carver shook his head. "Give him some credit."

"She was special." Loghain sighed. "Stupid of me, right? But she was." He set his hands next to him. "She deserved better."

"That's the way it works, isn't it?" Carver shook his head. "And that's why we fight. But it's never easy." He leaned back, folding his hands on the chair back. "How'd your father take you joining up?"

"I told him I'd decided to join the Templar Order." Loghain managed a smile. "Then, after he stopped glowing, I told him the truth."

"Yeah." Carver shook his head and smiled. "Something tells me you fit in just fine." He stood. "Let me know if you need anything." He started towards the door.

"Carver." He turned back to Loghain. Loghain looked up at him. "Four days before we ended up sixteen years into the past, The Warden paid me a visit."
"He knew this was going to happen." Carver slowly nodded. "And he needed to let it."

"He said it was a chance he was going to have to take. Let it happen, and hope that the Kieran of the here and now could fix things." He took a deep breath. "And he told me the first thing I needed to do when I got here was send a message to him telling him not to get involved. To let things play out. So that's why he hasn't answered you."

"Good to know." Carver shrugged. "Stupid to worry, but I was starting to. Did he tell you what all Kieran needed to fix?"

"No." Loghain shook his head. "And I did ask. He said he trusted Kieran to figure it out."

"Then we back Kieran's play." Carver put his hand on the doorknob. "Not that we ever had any other option."

"How exactly are we going to do anything about this staff if he can't even remember it exists?"

Lenore folded her arms.

"We..." Gavren sighed. "Are still working on a solution to that particular problem."

"But we now know what the staff looks like and who has it." Salla waved a hand. "And Kieran reacted enough to its presence to make it clear that's the one we are looking for."

"I did?" Kieran glanced at her.

"You did."

He shrugged.

"So all we need to do is get it into his hands, and he can take it from there." Gavren nodded.

"Except its in the hands of this Siofra."

"I would be a lot more confident if this in any way resembled a real plan." Cullen leaned back in his chair.

Carver turned towards him. "Cullen, have you ever seen what happens to a plan when my brother gets within a hundred feet of it?"

"We took Adamant with him present."

"A pseudo-archdemon appeared, the Inquisitor ended up physically in the Fade, and Loghain became a spirit."

"I..." Cullen sighed. "Concede the point."

"Hey!" Hawke shook his head. "I resemble that remark."

"It is not only Hawke." Kieran shook his head.

"Right. Your son is the one who was in Nevarra for half an hour and physically ran into Cassandra." Hawke folded his arms.

"I'm never going to live that down, am I?" Gavren glanced at Leandra, who shook her head and
"In all fairness, it was Agatha and Loghain who managed to find the tavern in Hasmal that contained me." Brehan shrugged.

"You are the protagonists. You warp the nature of causality by your very presence. Probability bends, rendering the improbable not only possible but likely, swirling in reaction to your natures as the plot ebbs and flows around you. Your actions affect the outcome just as your choices affect the narrative, but you are drawn inexorably to the inevitable. Once the game begins, you are the only ones that can win." Kieran spread his hands.

"Did that make sense to anyone else?" Alistair raised an eyebrow.

"Can you explain your explanation?" Brehan asked Kieran, his voice somewhat hesitant.

Kieran nodded. "Yes. You affect the odds, making the improbable plausible through the willing suspension of disbelief."

"Can you explain your explanation of your explanation?"

"I will try." Kieran tilted his head, and then smiled. "There are, in this world, hundreds of thousands of Dalish." He pointed to Brehan. "And then there is you, the Dalish elf that has risen to become Spymaster of the Inquisition, in service to the Andrastian Chantry. There are, in this world a few hundred surviving elves from the time of Arlathan. Consider, if you would, the sheer implausibility of the simple truth of what has occurred here." He smiled, and gestured at Tisallan. "That the most unlikely of Dalish elves would be the direct male line descendant of an ancient elf that has chosen to join our cause."

There was silence. Tisallan and Brehan stared at each other. "Okay." Lenore rubbed her forehead. "Maker, I can't even begin to do the math involved there."

"It sounds like one of Varric’s stories.” Hawke shook his head.

“Precisely.” Kieran nodded to Hawke.

"That is just a little bit awesome." Caleb smiled.

Brehan shook his head. "I need a drink."

"And a haircut." Tisallan's lips twitched slightly.
Brehan started towards the room that held the prisoner. He was halfway down the hall before he turned to find Salla a couple paces behind him, and Tisallan a pace behind her. He shook his head, and looked at Salla. "Where do you think you are going?"

"To question the prisoner."

He stared at her. "Exactly why do you think you get to come do that?"

"My team caught him." She folded her arms.

"You do realize I'm the professional here."

"My team caught you too." She smiled.

"I am not going to argue with you."

"Good." She walked past him and continued down the hall, Tisallan at her heels.

A low growl escaped him as he started after them. He quickened his pace to reach the door before Salla, and blocked her path. "Have you ever handled an interrogation before?"

"I interrogated Melavan."

"That..." Brehan shook his head. "Was not an interrogation." He glanced at Tisallan.

Tisallan shrugged. "I could make a case in either direction."

"It starts to be a problem, you leave." Brehan narrowed his eyes at Salla. He opened the door and stepped inside, followed by the other two. Tisallan took a position leaning beside the door. The prisoner immediately sent a glare at him before looking back to Brehan and sneering. Brehan folded his arms. "Bahalan."

"Is it time for yet another round of you asking me questions I have no intention of answering?" Bahalan leaned back in the chair he had been tied to. "You do realize you won't be permitted to keep me much longer."

"We have one of The Warden's eluvians." Salla smiled. "I admit to being slightly curious as to where exactly Urthemiel can send you."

If he wasn't mistaken, the prisoner actually flinched slightly at the threat. Maybe letting her in hadn't been a terrible idea. Bahalan glared at her. "I'm supposed to fear a little shemlen pretending to be a..." There was a slight hesitation when his eyes caught the staff Salla wore on her back. "Mage? I know what real magic looks like."

"Where is Fen'Harel now?" Brehan moved to stand just out of the prisoner's line of sight, forcing the man to be able to look at only one of them at a time.

"It is not as if you would even be able to comprehend the answer to that question." Bahalan smirked.

"Which probably means he is in Revasylan." Tisallan twitched a shoulder. "I believe that area is within the forest you call the Donarks on your maps."
Bahalan twisted towards him and spat a curse. "You side with these banal'vhen over your own people?"

"Be more polite when speaking of my great great grandson." The corner of Tisallan's mouth lifted slightly.

He fought the urge to snicker at the confused look on Bahalan's face. "Can you get us to Revasylan?" Brehan raised an eyebrow at Tisallan.

"He would not leave those eluvians undefended, and I doubt the path have grown less dangerous with time." Tisallan shook his head.

Brehan leaned on the wall, and looked over Bahalan's head at Tisallan. "What do you think the Dread Wolf will do?"

"Some things must be preserved if he is to accomplish his goal. No doubt, he seeks to bring those things into his power and ensure they survive the chaos that will ensue with the destruction of the Veil." Tisallan furrowed his brow. "There will also need to be places of safety for his people, where he can be reasonably assured of their survival. Though he will sacrifice them if he must."

"He will not turn on us."

"And how is Felassan these days?" Tisallan raised an eyebrow at Bahalan before turning his eyes back to Brehan. "He seeks out the old places, searching for what will give him the best chance of success, both in the destruction of the Veil and the battle that will come after." Tisallan frowned. "Which is undoubtedly why he does not challenge The Warden."

"Explain that?" Brehan raised an eyebrow.

"The destruction of the Veil will free the Evanuris. I doubt long years of captivity have improved their disposition. Fen'Harel will need his help to defeat them, and The Warden will have little choice but to give it, if he wishes to protect any part of the world."

"Why oppose him?" Bahalan glanced at Tisallan before turning back to Brehan. "You Dalish claim you wish to preserve the past. What is that oath of yours? Never submit. And here you are, bending knee to shemlen. Why would you side with them? How can you oppose him? Don't you understand what he is trying to do? He would restore Arlathan."

"Fuck Arlathan." Tisallan's voice was angry. Brehan and Salla both blinked as they turned their eyes towards him. "I almost understand why some of the Dalish have chosen to follow. They cling to the faded memory of a dream that never was, but you and I, Bahalan. We were there. We know better." He shook his head, and laughed bitterly. "Fuck Arlathan. I want a better world."

Silence descended on the room. For just a moment, Brehan dared to hope. And then Bahalan shook his head. "I will not turn on him."

"I believe you." Tisallan shook his head. He looked up at Brehan. "And he wouldn't trust a fool like this with anything useful anyway."

#

Gavren lay back on the pallet, staring up at the ceiling. He took a few deep breaths, and then willed himself asleep and across the Veil. The city spread out before him, shifting and changing as it reflected different periods of time. Shadows and images danced across the ages as memories echoed.
"Calling spirits here can be dangerous." A voice spoke from behind him.

"Too many here have been abused." Gavren turned towards the speaker.

Solas nodded. "I thought I might find you here. You have acquired one of my agents."

"He is unharmed." Gavren shrugged. "A bit annoyed, but unharmed."

"I would like him released."

"I would like not to be followed." Gavren smiled.

"A reasonable request, though one I cannot grant." Solas spread his hands. Then he sighed. "My agents recovered Alai's body."

"Thank you." Gavren nodded, and blinked tears away from his eyes. "We were concerned when we did not find her. Kieran had been certain she was dead, but part of him felt like that last little hope had been crushed. "Melavan will be relieved."

"I can only hope you have learned from this, and reconsidered my offer to return you to Kirkwall."

Solas shook his head. "Da'len, whatever is to come your mother is important to me and I will not have her grieve your loss. If I must use force to see you safely from this place that is exactly what I will do."

"And there it is, hahren." Gavren smiled. "That part of you that lets us still have hope." He shook his head. "What does the Formless One want with Duncan and I?"

"As formidable as high dragons are, the great dragons are another manner of beast altogether. And we are in a land that once worshiped dragons as gods." Solas gestured at the city. "He would covet such a creature, as either weapon or host."

"Some have woken, or will, years yet from now. One kills Rainier. He killed it back."

A small smile came to Solas's face as he acknowledged Gavren's words. "It would take a great dragon." He nodded. "Calenhad's bloodline carries the blood of the dragons. Any of the bloodline can wake them."

"Then why specifically Duncan?" Gavren frowned. "I've met his sister. He is not the most dangerous Therin, and one of the twins is a mage."

"But Duncan is the one completely immune to the Blight."

"Well..." Gavren blinked. "That's something. Why?"

"I do not know. I suspect it has something to do with the magic that was used to ensure his birth."

"The Formless One's interest in Kieran is obvious." He met Solas's eyes. "Why me?"

"I imagine his interest bears some similarity to mine." Solas gave him an appraising look. "Your mother said I come to Skyhold to save you, but you have made it clear I put considerable effort into educating you. Your potential is..." He shrugged. "Astonishing." He clasped his hands behind his back. "It is conjecture only, but I believe he would desire you as his host."

"Not a comforting thought."

"And all the more reason you should be safely away from him. Go back to Kirkwall, da'len."
"Are you forgetting they already got to us in Kirkwall?" Gavren shook his head. "That's what started this in motion."

Solas sighed, and then nodded. "Then I will make you an offer. You and Duncan come with me. I will protect the two of you until our allies have dealt with the Formless One. Once that is done, I will return you both safely to your respective families."

"I will take your offer to Duncan." Gavren sighed. As much as he hated to admit it, the others would have a better chance of acquiring the staff if they were able to draw Solas away from the field. "Thank you, Solas."

"Tell..." Solas sighed. "It does not matter. He would not listen. I expect my agent to be released by morning. Wake, da'len."

#

"I'm immune to the Blight?" Duncan raised an eyebrow.

"He's immune to the Blight?" Alistair turned to Lenore.

"As unintended side effects of experimental magic go, that's a pretty good one." Lenore smiled. "I'm awesome."

"Why is no one else concerned that the Dread Wolf keeps dropping in on Gavren?" Trian asked.

"Gavren's kind of used to it." Leandra shrugged, and seated herself in Gavren's lap.

"I can't deny it's a good trait to have, but why would the Formless One care?" Duncan raised an eyebrow, then frowned when he saw Carver and Kieran exchange a look with each other. "Kieran?"

"Many of my father's abilities are drawn from his connection to the Blight." Kieran's eyes narrowed. "And Father would do everything he could to avoid having to harm the son of two of his friends."

"He wants Duncan so he can make a run on The Warden." Cullen leaned back in his chair. His eyes were stone. "And he intends to use my son as his host when he does so."

"I wish to set him on fire." Lenore folded her arms.

"There was something else." Gavren sighed, and ran a hand through his hair. He shifted a little, and looked down.

"And..." Duncan looked at him.

Gavren met his eyes. "He offered to take the two of us to a place of safety, giving us his personal protection."

"No," Duncan shook his head. "Not a chance." He blinked. "Maferath's balls, you're not actually considering it, are you?"

"A chance to pull Fen'Harel out of this fight?" Gavren nodded. "Yes, I'm considering it. As long as Fen'Harel is dealing with you and I, he's not here trying to get to the staff first."

"I..." Duncan shook his head. "But that pulls us out of the fight as well."
"And what if he decides to keep you?" Alistair shook his head.

"Father and I would go retrieve them." Kieran shrugged. "They are my friends. I can find them anywhere."

"That's..." Alistair nodded. "Good to know, actually."

"I'm not going anywhere with the Dread Wolf." Duncan narrowed his eyes. He turned towards the group. "But this does give us more options. We know who Baradies wants and why, so --"

"If a suggestion that we use the two of you as bait comes out of your mouth, I will personally drag you to that eluvian and shove you in." Alistair's voice rang out sharply.

"It's not a bad --" Gavren started to say.

"Gavren. Dorian. Rutherford." Cullen stared at his son, cutting off whatever Gavren had been going to suggest.

"Well, then." Kieran shrugged. "I guess that means we will be using me."

"And what if he does kill you?" Lenore turned towards him.

Kieran got a pained expression on his face. "Then I have to sit through another of my parents' lectures on being more careful. For hours."

"Oh those are the worst." Gavren gave him a sympathetic look.

#

"Is letting him go really such a good idea?" Alistair glanced at Brehan, and then back at Tisallan.

"Do you really want Fen'Harel showing up personally to retrieve him?" Brehan sighed, and went to the door of the room that contained the prisoner. "It's not like we were getting anything useful out of him."

"How far in over our heads do you think we are at the moment?"

"Remember the moment we realized darkspawn had taken the Tower of Ishal?" Brehan sighed. "Feels a lot like that."

"Brehan?"

"Yes?"

"Remember..." He shook his head. "Duncan and Eamon and..." He sighed. "Remember when we used to think the old guard had the answers?"

"And now we are the old guard." Brehan nodded.

Alistair turned to Tisallan. "At what point do we actually get to know the answers?"

"When I find out..." Tisallan shrugged. "I will tell you."

#

Lenore blinked when Agatha seated herself in Jerath's lap, and kissed the man. When exactly had
that happened? How had that happened? To keep herself from commenting or giving looks of disapproval, she walked over to the stairs, where she found her cousin staring, his jaw hanging slightly open. She started to ask, and followed his gaze. Salla was laying on a pallet, snuggled tightly into Kieran. An old god, a former archdemon, had his arms wrapped around her niece as they both slept.

"I'm not imagining that, am I?" Hawke glanced at her.

"My daughter is kissing a man who is both thirteen and thirty."

"Was it really too much to hope they'd be..."

"Normal?"

"Exactly."

She leaned into him, and felt his arm go around her shoulders. "If it was normal, it wouldn't be our family."

#

"Brehan." Caleb waved at him from where he was sitting with Tisallan.

He walked over to join them. "Yes?"

"So, I was going to ask Tisallan which of his sons he thinks you are descended from." He smiled at the elven man. "Which would you guess?"

"Nelaris died childless. My other sons were Halavin and Venisal. Halavin had two daughters. Thus you are the descendant of Venisal."

Brehan leaned back in his chair, and then shrugged. "What was Venisal like?"

"A good man." Tisallan lifted a shoulder. "Though I admit to bias. He was a woodworker, specializing in the craft of musical instruments." Tisallan looked down at his hands. "He had four sons of his own. With luck, you are descended from his youngest, Tirien."

"What do you say with luck?" Caleb leaned forward. "Was Tirien special?"

"He was the smart one."

"So a great scholar?"

"No." Tisallan shook his head. "He raised sheep, on a small farm. He stayed out of the war, out of the politics, away from the cities, away from causes and creeds, far from both adventure and hard questions."

"Ah." Brehan smiled. "The smart one."

"Only one intelligent enough not to pick up a sword in the first place." Tisallan rubbed his thumb into the palm of his hand. "Enara would have been amused by this. A piece of her uncles, met across these long years." He took a deep breath. "The universe has a very odd sense of humor."

"It does." Brehan leaned back in his chair. "My father died before I was born. By the time the opportunity arose to meet any of his family, they were a decade in their graves. I didn't think there were any Mahariels left in the world."
"Mahariel." Tisallan smiled. "Then you are likely not of Tirien." He folded his hands, setting his arms on his knees as he leaned forward. "Durlathen had only two children, both sons, the younger of whom he called Mahariel. Odd, what survives the years."

"Tell me of Mahariel."

"He and his brother both studied at the Sulahnven. Mahariel was a gentle lad. He could sing, but his preference was the harp. I remember..." Tisallan chuckled. "I remember he had a great fear of Enara's wolf. The beast was convinced there was no food in the world tastier than that poor boy."

"Yeah." Brehan nodded. "He'd be the one then." He shook his head. "I have the scars to prove it."

#

"So we have a plan?" Lenore looked around.

Cullen gave her a frustrated look. "Yes."

"Not a good plan then?"

"A good plan really wasn't one of the options."

#

Agatha moved lightly across the rooftops. A moment later, Brehan landed beside her. "Tisallan is in position."

"The white bridge, up by that reflective spire." Agatha nodded.

Brehan turned in that direction, and narrowed his eyes. "A sentinel?"

"Definitely an elf, anyway, but it's not Melavan." She glanced back at him. "How often do you run into other people when roof-running?"

"Far more often than you might think." He smiled.

"Once, in Denerim, I ran into eight people in one night. One of them was King Alistair's nephew."

"Remind me to tell you about the night I ended up in a turf war between four different thieves' guilds." He pointed. "There is our signal."

She saw the hawk, and nodded.

#

"I feel useless." Caleb sighed.

Adralicus nodded. "Why do they need two of us to guard one wounded man?"

"I'm fairly confident you have who is guarding who confused." Loghain shook his head.

#

Kels stood a couple paces from the Commander, hand on his sword, ready to move at the signal. He could see Kieran, Dorian, and Arenda talking in the foyer. The cult had to know by now which
properties Magister Arenda owned by now. It had been decided that leaving Kieran unguarded was entirely too obvious, and so Hawke and Fenris were nearby, apparently engrossed in a board game.

There was little left to do but wait.

#

"I hate waiting." Duncan sighed, and fingered his bow. "I should have joined the folks on the roofs."

"No."

He glared at Jerath. "You remember the part where I'm the one who gives the orders?" He sighed. "I'd be better with a higher vantage point anyway."

"With all due respect..."

"Jerath, why is it whenever you say 'with all due respect' what I hear is 'kiss my arse'?"

"You are capable of understanding subtext?"

"Agatha is a bad influence on you."

His father chuckled.

#

"I couldn't have done what you did." Caleb didn't look at the man sitting next to the stairs. "And I can't decide if that's a good thing or a bad thing."

"Caleb..." Loghain started to shake his head.

"Shut up." Caleb took a deep breath. "But I know if you hadn't done it, we'd all be dead or worse. Salla and Kieran wouldn't have arrived in time to help us, and as soon as the cult discovered the key missing they'd have done something to the others. So maybe it was a good thing, that you were there, and you could make that choice." He swallowed. "I guess, in my own stupid way, I'm trying to tell you I'm sorry."

"Thank you."

"She opened her hand." Caleb nodded. "Remember that part, okay. It wasn't all on you. She made her choice too."

"I know." Loghain sighed. "Maybe in time, that will --" His head came up sharply, and then he stood.

"Loghain?"

"Get your crossbow, and get ready." Loghain drew his sword as Caleb grabbed the crossbow and ducked behind some barrels. "Adralicus?"

The magister grabbed his staff and stood, looking around. "I don't hear any..."

Shrapnel flew through the room as part of the wall exploded.
The call of the hawk pierced the air, and Agatha saw people moving towards the building. On the roof across from her she saw Melavan, waiting at the edge of the roof like a cat waiting to pounce. She tensed, waiting, dagger in each hand.

Leandra saw the mage start to summon his magic. A heartbeat later, she felt a surge of energy from her father as he shut the spell down. Immediately, Gavren was drawing on magic of his own and the group of enemy cultists were abruptly all pulled together into a tight grouping. A few of them managed to stab each other in the process. A shout went up.

Kels heard the window shatter. He saw the astonished look on Dorian's face when Kieran caught the arrow just a few inches from the magister's throat. More arrows struck a barrier. There was shouting from the alley, and then the Commander was moving. Kels drew his own blade and followed.

Salla switched forms as she landed next to Agatha, and immediately called up a barrier around Agatha and Brehan. No sooner had she finished than Tisallan and Melavan had leapt from their hiding places and were upon the cultists attempting to sneak up on the building. Agatha and Brehan landed a heartbeat later, putting their own weapons to good use. She remained where she was, calling up ice to aid the combatants.

Loghain saw Adralicus call up a barrier, but the onslaught still took the mage off his feet. He barely got his own shield up in time to block the debris. Caleb got his own head down, dodging the shrapnel before coming back up and firing his crossbow into the oncoming trouble. The woman leading the attack was elven, and carried a coppery staff. "Shit." Loghain saw her gathering the spell. With little other option, he called the Fade to him and dove into the fray.

Cullen got his shield between Dorian and a cultist just in time to block the blow from an axe. He felt the same curious energy he'd felt during the battle against the qunari, and realized belatedly that it must be Kieran's magic. Next to him, Kels had moved into a defensive position in front of Kieran.

Hawke and Fenris were doing what they did best. Kirkwall's most famous battle couple were making short work of the cultists pouring in from the rear of the building. He gestured at Kels, and they began to push back against those coming in from the front, giving the mages space to work.

To the left he saw fire raining down on the cultists, along with arrows. Alistair, Jerath, and Trian were in the thick of things. On the right, the elves backed by Salla were sowing chaos. He saw Leandra pull her father to the side, and had a moment to wonder where his son was before most of a city block suddenly picked itself up and flung a group of cultists into the air, screaming. Gavren strode through the wreckage, green flames trailing up around him as he flung spells. Leandra gave a triumphant laugh before diving back in, using a roundhouse kick to send a man twice her size flying hard enough to go through a before putting her giant blade to work.
For a single horrified moment he couldn't help but wonder just what his grandkids were going to be like.

#

Duncan was taking aim when his eyes fell on one of the mages. Fire raced through his veins as he adjusted his aim. The blood mage started moving just as he fired, and the arrow missed him by half an inch. Immediately, the man started running back the other way. Duncan leaped from the balcony and followed.
Out of the corner of his eye, Jerath saw Duncan moving. He glanced back at the fight. Alistair and Trian pushed forward, fighting back to back as if they had done it for years. He snarled, and then turned to go chasing after his idiot of a king.

"Well, that went well." Hawke smiled.

Kieran frowned. "No." He shook his head. "This is wrong."

"We won..." Trian shook his head. "What's wrong with that?"


Alistair suddenly growled. "No Duncan or Jerath."

"They went that --" Kieran’s head came up sharply. "Loghain and Caleb are under attack."

"Carver, Hawke, Fenris, get back to the warehouse." Cullen barked the order and saw all three men immediately start running. "Kieran, which way are..."

Green energy flowed from Kieran as he raised his hands. Lightning hit the barrier less than a heartbeat later, striking with enough force that the energy reflected back into nearby buildings, sending stone and stray magic flying. At the edges of the barrier, Leandra, Dorian, and Melavan were knocked off their feet. Kieran fell to one knee as the barrier faded. Salla rushed to the wounded.

"Leandra!" Magic wreathed itself around Gavren as he turned in the direction of the attack. His feet left the ground as the energy of the Fade flowed around him. The massive stone bridge the enemy mages were standing on suddenly ripped free of the building to which it was attached. It went hurtling through the night sky as some unseen force flung it away.

The spell slid off him as he slashed the blade through the first attacker. He saw Siofra's eyes widen slightly. Caleb popped up from behind his cover and sent a crossbow bolt into the face of the other mage.

A warrior got his shield up in time to block Loghain's blow. Loghain spun away, then used his own shield to push back. The warrior staggered backwards, and Loghain send his next blow low, taking the man's leg off at the knee, sending his enemy to the ground screaming. A blade opened a gash in his shoulder, and he used the edge of his shield to return the favor before running the man through.

Caleb's bolt bounced off Siofra's barrier as she ducked behind the remaining warriors, putting them between herself and Loghain. The staff glowed with power as she summoned her magic, crackling with lightning.

And Adralicus hit her with a tackle, knocking the staff out of her hand as both mages fell over the railing.
The mage was full on running. Duncan was only vaguely aware that a few other cultists had escaped the fray. If they saw him, they clearly decided to let him be. He growled with frustration as the city's architecture again prevented him from getting a clear shot of the moving man.

His mother's killer headed towards one of the towers, vanishing inside. Duncan hurried after him.

Salla saw Melavan's eyes stare openly up at the sky. There was nothing to be done for the man. She moved to Leandra's side, hands glowing white. Leandra's chest still rose and fell, though her breath rattled.

"Magister Pavus?" Arenda's voice shook as she knelt next to Dorian. "Dorian?" The woman's hands trembled as she tried the healing spell.

"I'm sorry." Kieran said as Alistair helped him back to his feet. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

The magic faded from Gavren as his feet touched the ground once more. Wordlessly, he went to Leandra, kneeling on the opposite side. "Is she...?"

"She lives." Salla nodded. "Melavan..." She turned to Arenda. "Dorian?"

Arenda covered her mouth with one hand as she shook her head.

"Maker, no." Cullen went to Dorian's side. He knelt, and bowed his head. "No."

She saw Tisallan do the same for Melavan, gently closing the man's eyes. "Mythal'enaste, lethallin."

Jerath saw Duncan leap, grabbing the edge of a balcony and pulling himself up before entering one of the towers. He shook his head in frustration. He'd never manage that in full armor, even with Kieran's spell serving to bolster him. Without breaking stride, he went for the stairs.

A man in servant's robes held up a hand. "Excuse me, you can't..."

"I have a sword." Jerath fixed him with steely eyes. "You don't. I am in a hurry. Be elsewhere."

The man swallowed and got out of his way.

Caleb saw the staff hit the ground. He dove out of cover and scooped it up before the enemy warriors could react. From the warehouse floor below, he heard an agonized scream from Adralicus before it abruptly cut off. "Loghain."

"Run." Loghain replied, hamstringing a warrior that had turned towards Caleb. "The safehouse, go."

He ran, clutching the staff to him.
Kels helped Cullen carry Dorian's body back into the house. They laid him on a table. Tisallan and Brehan entered a moment later, carrying Melavan, and laid the elf down next to him. Outside, Salla still knelt next to Leandra, eyes closed in concentration as she worked her magic. Kieran knelt next to her, his own hands glowing as he amplified her magic. Gavren was pacing back and forth as he watched them.

Lenore moved through, healing the minor wounds taken by the others. She touched Kels, fading the minor bruises he'd taken during the fight, before turning to Cullen. "Cullen?"

He nodded, and she stepped forward to work the healing magic. "Thank you." Cullen sighed as he looked back at the two bodies laying silently. "Maker." He looked towards where his son was pacing. "Leandra?"

Before Lenore could reply, there was a gasping sound from where Leandra lay, and the young woman opened her eyes. Gavren immediately rushed forward, pulling her into his arms and holding her close. Salla started to rise, and staggered. Kieran swung her up into his arms and carried her into the house, ignoring her weak protest of the action. Gavren kissed Leandra, and then picked her up and followed.

Kels saw the look on Alistair's face, and turned towards Kieran. "Kieran, you said you know where Duncan is?"

"He hunts. Jerath hunts him." Kieran set Salla down gently before looking up at Kels. "I can't focus. It's broken and bleeding, pain leaking across the echos, drowning out the other tunes. I..." He stood, looking at the table. "I wasn't strong enough. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Alistair walked forward and put his arms around the young man, holding him gently. "Kieran, at his best, even your father couldn't save everyone. None of us blame you."

#

Duncan waited patiently for his quarry to appear. It didn't take long. The mage came around the corner, and his eyes widened. "What the --"

The arrow took him between the eyes. Blood trickled from the wound, and he crumpled into a heap. "That was for my mother." He slung his bow onto his back, and started back to the others.

#

Gavren caressed Leandra's face as she looked around her in confusion. "What happened?" She asked, blinking up at him.

"The mages tried for a decisive strike. Kieran blocked most of it, but..." He looked at the table, hardly able to believe his eyes. "Dorian and Melavan are dead." She sat up, putting her arms around him. He held her close, and felt himself shaking. "I almost lost you."

He felt his father's hand on his shoulder, gentle and comforting. Guilt filled him as he realized just how much worry he'd put his father through in the past few weeks. And it wasn't over yet. He looked up. "They sprang our trap with one of their own." He stood. "Kieran?"

Kieran looked up at him. "Yes?"

Gavren stared at Dorian's body. At where the best of Tevinter lay, broken and lost. His eyes flicked to Melavan, a man that had been dragged into one war too many across the centuries. A curious calm filled him. "We kill Baradies, none of this ever happens?"
"Yes."

"Then we've got a long night ahead of us." He bent, and picked up his staff.

A fierce smile came to Kieran's face as he stood. He clenched his fists, and there was a flash of energy. Gavren felt as if he'd just had several days of rest. Kieran nodded. "I believe you are correct."

"Are you two insane?" Arenda stood. "Simple as that, you're off to kill a demon like that's something easy."

"If it were easy..." Kieran held out his hand, and his staff flew into it from across the room. His eyes began to glow. "Someone else would do it."

He was really starting to hate Tevinter architecture. After a couple thousand years, the building had been re-purposed so many times the layouts made no sense what so ever. Jerath caught a glimpse of movement, and headed in that direction. Regicide might be taking matters a little bit far, but a certain king was in desperate need of an ass-kicking.

Salla rose as though she hadn't just a few minutes ago worked magic that would have driven half a dozen mages into exhaustion. Lenore couldn't help but feel just slightly impressed. The girl picked up the green staff, which glowed faintly in response to her touch. A moment later, Lenore's mouth dropped open as Leandra stood up just as smoothly and moved to Gavren's side. "There is a demon that really needs to learn who he's fucking with."

"And what exactly are the lot of you intending to do?" Lenore folded her arms.

"I think the general idea is to splatter the Formless One across the Veil." Gavren nodded to her.

"They are going to try to cut off our refuges." Kieran tilted his head. "They will think we are more vulnerable on the move."

"Is that why they struck at the warehouse?" Kels asked.

"It was vulnerable, and contained potential hostages." Kieran smiled. "I do not think it worked out well for them, being that Loghain and Caleb are on the move again. They are being chased, and will need our assistance."

"My boys are still out there." Alistair shook his head.

Kieran tilted his head, and then nodded. "They are at the tower with the silver spire. Duncan is very pleased with himself."

"I'm going to change that." Alistair folded his arms. "Rapidly." He turned towards Brehan. "I'm going after them."

"I'll come with you." Brehan nodded.

"Me too." Lenore rose.

Arenda glanced again at the bodies on the table. "I'll remain here."
"This position is vulnerable..." Cullen sighed, and nodded to Alistair. "I'll stay with Arenda until Hawke returns." He glanced at Kels. "Keep an eye on my idiot son, please."

Kels closed a fist over his heart. "Yes, ser."

"Time is rusting." Trian gestured at the door.

Lenore saw Tisallan move into a bodyguard position behind Salla as the girl... woman... led her small army out into the world. She glanced at Alistair. "Well, let's go save your boy from his bodyguard."

"Maker's breath." Hawke said as they approached the warehouse.

Carver stared. Part of the wall was missing, and he could see flames flickering within. "Shit." He started running again, Fenris and Hawke at his heels.

Bodies littered the top of the stairs, but he saw no signs of his nephew or Loghain. "Caleb?"

Hawke called, his voice sounding frantic.

Fenris started moving through the rooms. "Caleb?"

"Loghain?" Carver headed back down the stairs, and caught a whiff of an unpleasantly familiar smell. He turned, and then rushed to the corpse. The left side of Adralicus's body was burned meet and char. "You poor bastard."

"Caleb?" He heard his brother's voice. "Carver, do you see him?"

"I found Adralicus." He walked back to the stairs and looked up at his brother's panic striken face. "He's dead. There's no sign of Caleb or Loghain."

"There are two more bodies near the other exit." Fenris joined Hawke. "Both dead to a sword blade. There are no signs anyone was dragged from the building." He put a hand on Hawke's shoulder.

Hawke wrapped his arms around his husband, and the two stood locked in a worried embrace. "They made it out. Maker keep them safe."

"We'll never find them without Kieran." Carver picked up a blanket, and went to wrap Adralicus's body. "We need to head back."

Duncan walked through the door to see three elven men in sentinel armor. He shook his head. "You guys really can't take a hint, can you?"

One stepped forward. "I am Abelas. You will come with us." Magic glowed around the man's hands. "It would be best if you did not make us hurt you."

He reached for his bow, and Abelas waved a hand. The magic jerked him off his feet, and his bow went skittering across the marble floor. Abelas started walking towards him when another voice rang through the corridor. "Let's get one thing straight." Jerath came around the corner, sword and shield at the ready. "The only person that gets to hurt him is me."

The nearest sentinel turned towards him, and Jerath flung his sword. It caught the elven man in
the chest, sending him to the ground. Jerath charged, grabbing the hilt of his sword as he did so and slamming his shield into the next sentinel, sending the man flying backwards. Abelas threw a spell, and Jerath rolled to dodge it, coming up to run his blade through the staggered sentinel's midsection. He pulled it free and spun to remove the elven man's head from his shoulders. Abelas drew a blade of his own just in time to parry Jerath's swing.

Duncan rolled towards his bow. He came up with an arrow notched just in time to see Jerath pull his sword free of Abelas's chest. The sentinel collapsed. Duncan got all the way back to his feet and let out a low whistle. "I don't pay you enough."

"You ran off without me." Jerath sheathed his sword and started for Duncan, fists clenched.

"Before you kick my ass..." Duncan held up his hands. "I got him."

"Got him?"

"The blood mage." Duncan smiled. "Put an arrow between his eyes."

"As pleased as I am to hear that..." Jerath shook his head. "As soon as I get you to a safe location I am going to beat the everloving shit out of you." He shook his head. "Let's get out of here."

"You do recall the part where beating up your king is treason, right?" Duncan started for the exit as Jerath fell into step behind him.

#

Caleb stopped in his tracks when he saw the sentinel step out of the shadows to block his path. The man drew his blade and took a step towards Caleb. "You have something we need."

He took a step backwards, and then Loghain was there. The knight's shield hit the sentinel with enough force to send him staggering backward. The sentinel parried the sword blow, and hurled ice with his free hand. For a moment, it looked as if he could see through Loghain, and the spell slid away harmlessly. The knight's blade tore the sentinel's head from his shoulders a moment later.

"Are you..." Caleb stared at Loghain in shock. The other man's eyes were glowing. "Loghain, you..."

Loghain shrugged as the glow faded. "Like father like son, as the saying goes." He looked down at the corpse. "If they were waiting here, then they know about the safehouse." He half closed his eyes, and a moment later a wisp started to glow in front of him. "Take us to Salla."

The wisp glowed brighter for a moment before it started to lead them westward.

#

Cullen rose when he saw Hawke. He felt his blood go cold when he saw the bundled form Carver was carrying. "Oh, Maker no."

"Adralicus." Carver looked down at his burden. "He..." Carver trailed off when he saw the bodies laid on the table.

"What happened?"

"Right after you left, there was another attack." Cullen shook his head. "Mages on the heights."
Kieran senses it, got a barrier up, but Dorian, Melavan, and Leandra were too close to its edge."

"Leandra." Carver's eyes widened, and there was panic in his voice.

"She's alright. Salla and Kieran managed to heal her, but it was too late for the others. Alistair has
gone to retrieve Duncan and Jerath, and the others are looking for Loghain and Caleb."

Carver carried Adralicus's body to Arenda. Her face was tired when she gestured for him to lay it
next to Dorian's. She shook her head. "He wasn't much more than a kid himself." Tears started to
fall from her eyes.

"What's the plan now?" Hawke raised an eyebrow at Cullen.

"Now?" Cullen sighed. He spread his hands. "I once saw you throw a rock the same size as
yourself half a city block. I remember thinking it was pretty impressive." Cullen met Hawke's
eyes. "That was before I saw my son rip apart a building and fling it a few miles."

"He is impressive."

They all turned at the sound of the new voice. Cullen hesitated, and then nodded. "Solas."

The elven man walked towards the table, and looked down at where Dorian lay. He touched the
man's head gently before shaking his head and sighing. "A light has gone out in the world." He
looked down at Melavan. "I would take Melavan to lay with his niece, and the rest of his family."

"I..." Cullen nodded. "I'm sure he would appreciate that."

Solas turned to look behind him, and two men entered. They picked up the body, and left again as
quietly as they had come. Solas stood there silently for a time before looking again at Dorian's
body. "Iron Bull is not going to take this well. I..." He nodded. "Please convey my sympathy, to
him and the Inquisitor."

"Thank you, Solas." Cullen nodded to him.

He stood there a moment longer before turning and vanishing into the night.

He stepped through the archway and found himself on landing overlooking a small garden. "I
would have sworn --"

Jerath shoved him off the landing. He landed sprawled on the ground below. "What the hell, Jer--
" He turned and stared up in horror.

A man stood on the ledge with Jerath. Esoteric white tattoos decorated the man's skin, glowing
with an eerie pale light. And his hand was buried in Jerath's chest. He twisted his wrist slightly,
and Jerath responded with a ragged cry of pain. The man smiled. "Your friend here has a strong
heart." He looked down at Duncan. "I can feel it beating in my hand."

"Don't." Duncan shook his head frantically. "Don't. Please." He reached for his bow, only to stop
as the man moved his hand again. "Please."

"Please." The man's lips curled back, showing his teeth. "Are you begging? For this life?"

"Just let him go. Please." Duncan stood, and held his hands out to his side.
The man looked back at Jerath. Blood trickled from the corner of Jerath's mouth as he gasped for breath. He turned his eyes back to Duncan. "I believe we can come to a suitable arrangement, your majesty."

Jerath coughed weakly, and his hand closed around the other man's wrist. He took a ragged breath. "Run."

Time stood still. The edges of his vision blurred. And then he kept his promise. Hating himself with every step, he ran.
Kieran's head came up sharply. "Kieran?" Salla turned towards him.

"Your brother and Loghain are that way." He pointed. "I need to go to Duncan." He kissed her. "I will find you."

"Be careful." She nodded.

He turned into a hawk and flew east.

She gestured to the others and they continued the way he had pointed.

#

Caleb kept close to Loghain as they moved through the alleys, twisting and winding through the city. Hundreds of questions ran through his mind, and he kept his mouth shut. His knuckles were white on the staff as he held it to him.

There was no doubt in his mind Adralicus was dead. The man's scream still rang in his ears. He'd saved them. Guilt wracked him as he thought of how they'd treated the man back in Nessum. A hero in the end, when it mattered. Two now. Adralicus and Alai. Two people who'd died so he could live.

If he ever made it back to Kirkwall, he was never going to go adventuring again.

#

Tears blinded him as he ran. He stumbled, nearly tripping on an uneven part of the street. He caught himself on a wall, and then punched it viciously. "Fuck." Duncan yanked the bow off his shoulder and turned to go back the way he had come, praying it wasn't too late.

Black wings flew past his head, and then Kieran stood there, blocking his path. "Duncan."

"Jerath needs our help. We've got to..."

Kieran caught him by the shoulders, stopping his forward momentum. "Duncan."

"I..." Duncan choked on his breath. He looked up at Kieran. "He..."

"His music has ended."

"No." Duncan shook his head. "No. He can't..." A ragged sob escaped him. "Oh fuck. I..." He jerked backwards and started slamming his fists into the stone wall. "I got him killed. I didn't think. I ran off, and..." His knuckles tore, leaving blood on the wall. "I got him killed. I didn't listen and I got him killed."

Gently, Kieran pulled him away from the wall, and put his arms around him. Duncan clung to the other man as if he was drowning. He buried his face in Kieran's chest and wept like a child.

#

Brehan came out of the doorway and saw Lenore talking to a man in servant's robes. "Are we sure we are in the right building?"
"He..." She indicated the man. "Says he was threatened by a man who matches Jerath's description." She gestured to the man to go about his business, and started down the corridor. "Perhaps they are already --"

"Lenore!" Terror filled Alistair's voice.

Immediately they started running towards the sound. They found Alistair kneeling next to the still form of a red-haired man. "Oh, Maker, no." Lenore flung herself down next to him, hands glowing white. "No, no, no."

Brehan walked forward. Jerath's eyes were open, staring sightlessly up at the night sky. Blood glistened from where he'd bitten through his lip, and the front of his armor was stained with red. "Jerath?" Alistair touched the young man's cheek. "Jerath?"

"I'm sorry, Alistair." Brehan put his hand on Alistair's shoulder. He looked around at the garden, but saw no sign of Duncan. There was also no sign of further struggle. There is no way Duncan would have been taken quietly, not with his oldest friend laying dead on the cold stone.

"I was there. The first time he saw the sky. Cathiel sat with Nesiara, and Rory brought him out to the balcony. He was..." Alistair swallowed. "I gave him his first sword. Cathiel and I didn't think we'd ever have children, and..." Tears rolled down his cheeks.

He knelt, putting an arm around Alistair's shoulders. "I'm so sorry."

"I woke one evening, after we got back from Redcliffe. Went to the nursery, just to check. Duncan's crib was gone. I started to..." He swallowed again. "Panic, and then I saw it. Jerath had moved it to over behind his bed. I came over and..." He brushed the red hair back from the dead man's face. "Asked him why he'd moved it. And this brave little boy clutched the little toy sword I'd given him and looked up at me with huge eyes and said..." Alistair's shoulders shook. "So the monsters have to come through me first." He brushed a hand over the face, shutting Jerath's eyes. "They killed one of my boys. I need..." He let out a ragged breath. "I have to find Duncan."

"We will." Lenore put her hand on Alistair's arm.

Salla lead them to yet another flight of stairs. "This city is actually more confusing than Kirkwall."

"There." From beside her, Tisallan pointed, and she saw a glimpse of movement below. Two familiar shaped figures were running into an alley, and a moment later armed figures moved into the alley after him.

"Tisallan, get down there and help them. We'll come around and back you up." She gestured, using her magic to put a barrier around the elven man. He leaped down, bouncing from ledge to ledge before hitting the ground at a dead run and moving after the vanishing figures. She turned and gestured for Gavren to head down one flight of stairs while she took the other half of the group down the other. Anyone after her brother was going to be caught in the middle.

Loghain gritted his teeth in frustration. "For the love of..." He shook his head. "How many of you am I going to have to kill?"

The leader of the group took a step towards him. "Where are the rest of you?" He spoke with an Antivan accent.
Next to him, Caleb's mouth opened. "Crows? Seriously?"

"One day, I am going to learn not to walk through a town with Amells." Loghain winced.

Two of the men aimed bows at them. The one who'd spoken earlier showed his teeth. "Throw down your weapons, and we will show mercy."

A foot of glowing blade suddenly protruded from the chest of the first archer. A heartbeat later, a second blade removed the head of the second. "If the gods intended mercy..." Tisallan stepped into their midst, hands glowing where he held the magic swords. "They would not have sent me."

"I am going to steal that line." Loghain hefted his shield and charged.

Leandra brought her blade down on the man who'd just ordered her to surrender, bisecting him vertically. She looked at the four men that had been behind him. "Allow us to make a counter offer..." Next to her, green fire lit around Gavren. Leandra smiled. "Run."

She'd barely finished getting the word out when they did exactly that. Agatha rolled her eyes. "Seriously, that's what passes for Crows these days?"

Kels stared at the man as though he were speaking a completely incomprehensible language. "Are you saying you are surrendering to us?"

Trian shook his head. "No, I think he actually expects us to surrender."

"There are five of them." Kels looked down at the dwarf. "Five."

"There was a team of three once that though they were going to take on my fathers." Salla shrugged.

The Crows started looking at each other in confusion. The one in the lead shook his head. "I will be honest. This is not the reaction we usually get."

"You do know who we are, yes?"

"Well, actually..." The man frowned. "Other than descriptions of your appearances and a couple first names..." He shook his head. "No."

"Salla Hawke."

"Trian Saitada."

"Kels Marland."

"Our friends over there are Loghain Mac Tir, Caleb Hawke, Gavren Rutherford, Leandra Hawke, and Agatha Amell." Salla gestured at where the sounds of combat could be heard. "Jerath Gilmore, Duncan Therin, and Kieran Tabris are on their way and will be here any moment."

"Ah." The man paled, and then gave her a small bow. "We apologize for disturbing you. Please have a pleasant evening."

The rest of the men also bowed before following him out of the area. Salla shrugged, and headed
Caleb looked to his left to see Leandra leading Gavren and Agatha towards them. A glance to his right showed Salla followed by Trian and Kels. "You might want to rethink this." He looked at the men who had just stepped out of the nearby building, and gestured at the men Loghain and Tisallan had cut down like weeds. "It doesn't look like this night is going well for you guys."

"Ferelden dogs. I'm going to --"

Tisallan kicked the severed head of the man he'd killed earlier. It hit the speaker in the face, sending him staggering backwards and shattering his nose. One of the other men took another look at the alley, grabbed the speaker, and hauled him back into the building. The rest of the men followed, shutting the door behind them.

He turned towards Tisallan. "Can you be my grandfather too?"

"It really wouldn't come as much of a surprise." Tisallan shrugged.

"Caleb?" Salla took a step towards him, her eyes wide. "That's..."

Slowly, he lifted the staff up. "Adralicus. He got it away from her, and she killed him for it."

"Shit." Leandra shook her head. "Now I feel really bad about the rabbit ear thing."

"Where is Kieran?" Loghain looked around.

"He went to get Duncan and Jerath." Salla waved a hand. "Let's get to out of the open. He'll find us."

Alistair stared down at the crystal in his hand. Brehan started to offer, and he shook his head. The boys had been his responsibility. He looked towards where Jerath's wrapped body lay next to the still forms of Adralicus and Dorian. Then he turned his eyes to Fenris. "When you..." He swallowed. "I mean, your ability..." He hung his head before looking back up at Fenris. "Did he suffer?"

"No." Fenris shook his head.

"Maker, I wish you were a better liar." He stood, and took the crystal into the next room.

Nesiara fell to her knees, shoulders shaking. Cathiel knelt next to her, putting her arms around the other woman as tears of her own began to fall. Rory sank into a chair, his eyes starring off into the distance as he shook his head in disbelief.

"Chief?"

Iron Bull took a deep breath, and then put his fist through the wall.
Agatha looked up when she saw Kieran walking towards them, followed by Duncan. She looked for Jerath, and then frowned. Her eyes went to Duncan's face, and she felt her heart lurch. She took a halting step forward. "Jerath?"

Duncan turned away, clenching his fists. She closed her eyes. Salla put a hand on her shoulder and pulled her in close as she started to cry.

#

Hesitantly, Caleb handed the staff to Kieran. Kieran looked down at it, frowning slightly as he did so. He tilted his head, and closed his eyes.

Gavren glanced at Salla before looking back at Kieran. "So..."

"It was raining. Drops beating a pattern on a stone roof. They piled what they had. Armbands. Knives. A flute. Harp strings. Sand through the hourglass, knowing what was to come. Our last working, secret and sacred, and they were gone." A tear rolled down his cheek. "And then so was I."

"You remember." Salla laid her hand on his arm.

"I remember." He opened his eyes again.

"So..." Caleb glanced around. "Is it a key, or..."

"It is not a key." Kieran shook his head. Green fire lit his eyes, and magical energy suddenly criss-crossed his entire body. Urthemiel's voice reverberated through the room. "It is a door."

"A door?" Salla blinked.

Slowly, he put his hand into the loop on the top of the staff. It vanished from view rather than coming out of the other side. Urthemiel smiled, and pulled his hand back out, holding an item.

"Maker's breath..." Kels breathed the words.

"Stone." Trian echoed him.

Salla stared as the orb in the Old God's hand began to glow. "Alright." She nodded. "So, we need to kill Baradies. And keep that thing the hell away from Solas." She looked around. "Ideas?"

Urthemiel smiled. "Yes."
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Gavren put his arm around Leandra as they listened to Tisallan sing. It wasn't the same song Brehan had sung at Rainier's funeral, or on any of the other occasions the Inquisition had mourned its own. The Dalish eulogy was of letting sorrow go and moving on, a song of grief and healing. The song Tisallan sang was of facing death on one's own terms, fighting side by side to the very last, accepting the end without fear, with the only hope remaining being that they would be remembered. Not a eulogy, but a warrior's dirge.

Tonight, a far more fitting tune.

#

"Any sign of them?" Alistair paced. "They should have been back by now."

"At any point did they actually say they were coming back?" Brehan raised an eyebrow.

"No." Alistair sighed. "No they did not." He picked up his shield. "I'm going after them."

Hawke and Fenris both stood. "We can split up, cover more ground."

Arenda gestured at the guards that had gathered. "Some of my people should stay here, but the rest can accompany you."

"We'll find them, drag them back here, and sit on them until reinforcements arrive." Lenore grabbed her staff. She shoved her finger into Carver's chest. "And then you are contacting your wife so we can shove them through her eluvian and back to Kirkwall."

"Where my wife and guard-captain Aveline can sit on them." Cullen strapped his own shield to his arm.

"I don't recall confining them working out all that well for Sebastian." Carver stood, and then his eyes went to the bodies on the table. "If nothing else, they could likely use backup."

#

Salla moved to stand next to the glowing being as he looked out over the city. "What is it you hear now?"

"A thousand melodies racing to the sunrise, only to begin anew." Urthemiel shook his head. "The song did not end. It simply changed." He folded his arms. "Thank you."

"For what?" She raised an eyebrow.

"Being."

"I don't --"

He caught her arm and pulled her to him before kissing her. It felt like Kieran's kiss, and yet there some something else. She felt lightning race through her bones, bordering for a heartbeat on the cusp of pain before he released her. "A very old song. And by far the greatest." Urthemiel smiled, and turned back into the building.

She touched her lips, and then followed.
Cullen took two of the guards, and headed in the direction he'd last seen the children go. After a bit of hesitation, Arenda accompanied him. Alistair and two others of the guard headed back towards the last known location of Duncan. Brehan headed back up to the rooftops with the one guard that thought she stood a chance of keeping up. Carver and Lenore headed towards the safehouse. Hawke and Fenris went to see if they could pick up the trail from the warehouse.

"What's going through your head right now?"

Kels glanced over at Loghain, and turned back to watch the others make their preparations. Leandra refastened her vambrace, then helped Caleb adjust his armor. Trian strapped a shield to his arm. Duncan added a second quiver to what he was carrying. "Skyhold when the breach reopened, knowing that darkspawn were on their way and we didn't have enough forces to hold." He folded his arms. "The red templars bearing down on Haven, with an archdemon in the sky." He shook his head. "Demons falling out of rifts while we tried to open a path to get the Herald to that first breach. Standing with the templars when Meredith went insane and turned the Gallows into a charnel house." He leaned back. "Running after Evelina, dragging two other kids with me as we tried to stay ahead of the Blight."

"You've had an interesting life." Loghain put a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm just wondering how many last stands one man gets in his life." He glanced at Tisallan. "How many are you up to?"

Tisallan frowned thoughtfully before answering. "One hundred and forty-two."

"You've tried to get yourself killed a hundred and forty-two times?" Kels raised an eyebrow at him.

"Yes." Tisallan adjusted his gauntlet, and shrugged. "Turns out I am sort of bad at it."

"Well, Grandpa, you know what they say." Loghain put his helmet on. "The hundred and forty third time is the charm."

He started to ask something else, and heard Salla's voice ring out. "We all know what we have to do." She looked around. "And I think we are ready." A determined smile came to her face. "We know our timetable. The music is playing." She unlimbered her staff. "Let's dance."

They strode out into the night.

Alistair moved through the building, looking for any sign of his son. One of the guards found signs of a fight. Blood on the ground, looking as though it had come from three different sources. And a single arrow by the wall. "Tracks?"

"Two sets, from what little I can see." The guard pointed. "Someone stepped in blood and walked off that way. And then someone else took the bodies off that way." He gestured in another direction." He frowned. "The ones that took the bodies, at least one of those was barefoot, your majesty."

The running tracks led towards where he had found Jerath's body. He looked down at the smears of blood on the stone. A fight, and then his boys had walked away to where one of them died.
Had Jerath even seen the attack coming? There was nothing else to be found there. And he wasn't sure he could bear to step into that garden again. He waved at the second set of tracks, and the men with him started in that direction.

Now and then he saw servants. Slaves. They barely looked up enough to acknowledge him, but he watched them with a wary eye anyway. The trail led them into a courtyard. One of the guards turned towards him to say something, and cut off with an agonizing cry as a glowing hand suddenly came through his chest. The second guard went for his sword as the tattooed man turned on him.

He drew his own blade as the lyrium warrior's sword took the guard's hand off at the wrist. The gauntleted hand sank into the guard's chest, and the lyrium warrior smiled at Alistair. "Hello, your majesty."

"You." Alistair's eyes settled on the blade the man held, and he felt a chill of recognition. He'd given that sword to Warden-Commander Jerath when awarding him the title of Arl. And the last time he'd seen it, it had been in the hands of his namesake. "You killed Jerath."

"Was that his name?" The man raised an eyebrow. He smirked. "It really wasn't my intention, but your coward of a son decided to save his own skin. Ran like a mouse. Even when I did this." He twisted his hand, and the guard screamed.

Fury filled him. "You son of a bitch."

The lyrium warrior twisted his hand again, and the guard cried out. Then he ripped his hand free with a sickening tearing sound. The guard fell to the ground and convulsed once before going still. "He begged for mercy before I crushed his heart. Your son kind of annoyed me, scampering like that, abandoning his friend." The man's smile was cruel. "So I took my time." He raised the blade as he started towards Alistair. "Perhaps he will care a little more when it's your heart I hold in my hand."

Several large figures moved out of the darkness. "Bas."

Cullen drew his sword, as did the guards with him. The qunari were accompanied by a mixed group of humans and elves. Viddathari, likely their agents in the city. The qunari men held spears, but the humans and elves held bows. The guards shifted nervously when they realized the bows were pointed at them. One of the qunari wore different markings than the other. "Surrender, bas."

He felt a stab of irritation. "For what purpose?" He hefted his shield.

"You are the father of the saarebas. He must be contained."

A laugh escaped him. "If he could be contained, I wouldn't be out here at this time of night."

"Lay down your weapons, and you will be taken to the Viddathlok." The man hefted a spear. "Anan esaam Qun."

"Let me see if I recall the correct response." Cullen took a deep breath. "Mashev defransdim, venak hol."

The qunari started hefting their weapons. "Um..." Arenda gave him a wide eyed look. "Did you just say what I think you said?"
"Vinek kathas!" The qunari in the lead started to hurl his spear, only to suddenly freeze into a statue of white stone.

"Ebasit kata. Ebadim maraas issala toh." Solas stepped out of the shadows. Two of the qunari turned towards him, and his eyes flashed briefly. Two more horned statues decorated the street.

The rest of the qunari turned and fled. The two guards with Cullen looked like they wanted to do the same. "Solas."

"Commander." Solas gave him a disapproving look. "You and your son are forcing my hand." He shook his head. "Perhaps he will be more inclined to seek sanctuary if he must go there to recover you."

Brehan moved across the roof, slowing his pace just slightly so the guard could keep up. Few stirred at all in the streets below. None of them looked to be the kids. He leaped to the next ledge, then caught the edge of the roof and pulled himself up. The guard faltered slightly, and he pulled her up by the wrist.

They continued, spiraling in towards the center of the city. He looked up, and considered moving to the bridges that spanned between the towers. Except for where two of the towers sported damage where a bridge had been ripped away. To think, he'd once found Lenore's abilities terrifying.

Together, they headed through what appeared to be a factory district. He could hear grinding from the foundry below. He was considering which building to move too next when the tiles beneath his feet exploded. They slid, both desperately seeking purchase amid the sharp and jagged pieces of broken tile.

Landing hurt. He felt something in his leg snap, and was unsuccessful in biting back the cry. The guard struck her head on the edge of a table, and stopped moving. Footsteps rang on the stone as something moved towards him. "Well well." He looked up to see a man in magister's robes, holding a staff. Magister Valis, if he was not mistaken, accompanied by a dozen others. "The White Divine's pet elf, if I'm not mistaken."

He tried to get to his feet, but the attempt to move sent a wave of pain that nearly made him black out. A glance down revealed the bone was actually sticking out of his leg. "Fenedhis."

"Collect him." The magister waved at the men accompanying him, and three of them started forward. "And search him thoroughly. He's the one they call The Raven."

Gabriel paced the landing of the warehouse before running a hand through his hair. "Of all the family, I thought Caleb had the closest thing to a self-preservation instinct." He flung a handful of magic at the remains of a bottle, shattering it.

Fenris stepped to him and caught him by the back of the neck. "They will be fine."

He leaned down slightly and kissed his husband, drawing what comfort he could. "Alistair was right. I wish you were a better liar."

"Kieran said he could find the others, and they all certainly seemed to agree." Fenris let him go reluctantly. "Which means wherever they are, they are likely all together."
"I'm not sure that makes me feel better or --" He felt a tingling on the edge of his senses, and suddenly what little magic he was still holding vanished from him. "Templars."

"Well, well." A tall man with glowing eyes entered the room, accompanied by a dozen armored men. "If it isn't the Champion of Kirkwall, and his pet dog."

"Baradies." Fenris drew his blade.

"You killed my favorite sister." Baradies showed his teeth, lips curled back slightly. "Given our respective histories, I'm sure you understand what I mean when I say this is a little bit..." Fire appeared around his hands. "Personal."

"So personal you brought a dozen templars to the party." Gabriel drew his staff, preparing to provide Fenris with what backup he could.

"Oh, they aren't templars." Baradies laughed. "We simply do not..." He waved a hand casually. "Desire your magic to be a factor." He gestured at the men. "I want him to watch the elf die."

The men started forward, and Gabriel felt a chill as he saw their eyes begin to glow.

#

Lenore felt the tingling of magical energy and gestured a warning to Carver. He immediately drew his sword. She called her magic to her.

"Dragonsworn."

They looked up to the balcony above and saw an elven woman. Lenore narrowed her eyes. "Siofra."

"And the Lady Brosca." Siofra smiled. "This is somewhat bittersweet for me, I admit." She nodded to Lenore. "You are something of an inspiration. Almost a personal hero of mine. The first mage to not only gain her freedom, but to actually fight back to gain that freedom for others." She shook her head. "Under any other circumstances, I'd be trying to convince you to join us."

"Oh, go ahead." Lenore smiled. "I have a perverse fondness for the crazy cult recruitment speeches. I might even be able to give you a few pointers."

"I would love to oblige, but I fear I would just be wasting both of our times." Siofra side. "You see, I'm about to rip out your cousin's soul, and I just don't think you are going to take that well."

#

He blocked the blow with Starfang. The lyrium warrior grinned. "Nice sword." He spun away, dodging the blow from Alistair's shield. "I look forward to adding it to my collection."

Alistair lunged, aiming a low sweep at the man's leg. The man leaped his blade, and then brought his own down on Alistair's shield arm, slicing both strap and flesh. Alistair jerked backward before the lyrium warrior could capitalize on his advantage. "The only place its going is through your guts."

"It's clear your son really wasn't suited for the roll we planned for him anyway." The lyrium warrior came in with an overhand blow that Alistair parried. "We do have standards, after all." He smiled as he sent another blow at Alistair. "Fortunately, you do have other children. Perhaps your daughter will be more suited."
He roared as he lashed out with his shield again. The lyrium warrior met it with his blade, knocking it free of his arm. Alistair rolled to dodge the next blow. He came up holding his broken arm to his chest.

The shield slid across the ground. A foot stopped its motion. "Really not a good idea to threaten my wife." Loghain Mac Tir drew his blade.

#

For the first time in many years, Cullen found himself wishing for a vial of lyrium. Not that he expected it to do a lot of good against the likes of Solas.

"Really?" Another voice said, and they turned to see Tisallan leaning on a nearby wall. "The old 'I have your father' play?" He shook his head. "How disappointing. What next, indulging in diabolical laughter?"

Solas slowly turned. "Tisallan. You would think given the sheer number of years I have spent ignoring you that you would have the common courtesy to go away."

Tisallan raised an eyebrow. "Name one person who would call me courteous."

A chuckle escaped Solas. "I know what you told Bahalan. It is not too late to reconsider. There are many who could learn from the wisdom of the last Mi'nehn."

"Name one person who would call me wise." Tisallan straightened, and took a couple steps towards them. "Here we are again, still making the same mistakes."

"Some things never do change." Solas nodded.

"True. I am still on the side with the most lunatics..." Tisallan shook his head. "And you still desperately need to get laid."

Cullen stared at the sentinel in utter disbelief. Next to him, Arenda's jaw landed in the Deep Roads, and both of the guards were wide-eyed. "Oh for..." Solas cleared his throat, and shook his head before spreading his hands. "Really? Thousands of years later, you are going to start up with that again?"

"It is not like the criticism has become less valid over the years." Tisallan shrugged, and smiled innocently.

"Odd, little brother. I recall you being much better with words."

"That is only fair, I suppose." Tisallan nodded. "After all, I recall you being much more difficult to distract."

#

He buried a knife in the first one to approach him, and flung a pouch of powder at the next. The man went down, choking and gagging. The third man removed a whip that was coiled at his waist, and sneered. "You'll learn your place, rabbit."

"Indeed." The magister drew his staff, and the crystal on the tip began to glow. "Perhaps a lesson is --"
Metal, molten and otherwise, burst into the room as the nearby machinery exploded with enough force to send the men standing near it across the room. Those not killed by the force of the landing screamed in agony from the molten steel. A glowing figure stepped through the opening he'd just created.

"What the --” Brehan stared.

"The term you are looking for..." Urtheimiel smiled. "Is deux ex machina."

#

Fenris was thrown backwards by the force of a spell. Gabriel whipped the blade of his staff across a man's face, opening a jagged gash. The man kept coming as though he hadn't been touched at all, and Gabriel found himself being forced back. He tried to keep himself between the attackers and his husband.

A man lifted an axe, and then was sent spinning away in two different directions as a massive blade cut him in half. A crossbow bolt took another of the men in the face. "I'm not sure anybody has explained this to you..." Leandra Hawke stepped between the attackers and the injured Fenris.

Caleb stepped out of the shadows. "But fucking with Hawkes is a really bad idea."

Baradies laughed. "You think the two of you are any threat to me?"

Leandra and Caleb exchanged a look. Leandra smiled and shrugged. "Well, no."

"But then..." Caleb pulled back the winch on his crossbow. "We're not the dangerous ones."

"Have you met my boyfriend?" Leandra set her blade on her shoulder.

#

Lenore glanced at Carver, who shrugged in response. "Yeah..." Lenore shook her head. "Not really going to let you do that. Not that he isn't capable of taking care of himself."

"I know." Siofra leaned on the railing. "Being that he carries a shard of a god inside himself."

Carver blinked. Lenore stared at him. "Um..." She raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"Oh." Siofra smiled down at her. "You didn't know?" She made a tsking sound. "So many secrets and lies." She waved a hand. "Just a piece. A tiny piece. But..." She shrugged. "I need it. And unfortunately, he is not going to survive its removal."

"You really are on the insane side, aren't you?" Carver shook his head. "You've got to know what a bad idea taking me on is going to be."

She smiled. "Fortunately, I prepared." A hint of teeth showed. She flung something as cultists moved in from the sides. A rune landed at Carver's feet and exploded. Lenore felt a surge of power from it, and Carver cried out before falling.

"Carver!" Lenore rushed towards him. "What did you do?"

"A mortal can take only so much power before their bodies overload." Siofra shook his head. "By the time he recovers, I'll have what I need. I do regret this." She nodded to the oncoming cultists. "Kill her."
Lenore reached for her magic, and felt a surge from one of the men. Her magic slipped out of her grasp. "Templars."

"Oh no." Another voice said. "Templars."

"Whatever are we to do?" A deeper voice added.

Kels Marland and Trian Saitada came to either side of her, swords in hand. "How many of these cultist guys have we killed this week?" Kels asked Trian.

"I lost count somewhere around the second hundred." Trian smirked.
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The lyrium warrior chuckled. "Well, your majesty, I have good news." He turned towards Loghain. "It looks like you are going to get to see the Mac Tir line wiped out."

Alistair scrambled backwards, trying to get back to his feet. "Dammit, Loghain, get out of here. That's an order."

"Yeah, I've never been all that good at those." Loghain moved in. "Ask anyone." He twirled his blade and tapped it against the edge of his shield.

"So the little king is too frightened to face me himself." The lyrium warrior started to circle Loghain. "Sticking me with the child playing at being a knight? How disappointing."

"I know, right?" Loghain grinned. "You know, I only accepted the knighthood because they promised me cake." He flicked his blade at the lyrium warrior's face. "They lied to me."

He twisting, trying to strike at the shoulder of Loghain's shield arm. "I'm going to crush your heart, like I did to your friend."

"Why the heart?" Loghain blocked the blow and aimed a kick at the lyrium warrior's knee. "I mean, why not vary it up a bit? Lungs, kidneys..." He parried a blow. "Is it just the symbolism, or do you have some kind of fetish?"

The lyrium warrior leaped back to avoid Loghain's counterstrike. "What?"

"I'm not trying to be judgmental here." Loghain set his shield. "After the thing with the two dwarves in drag and Isabela, I'm really the last person who should be judging."

Irritation swept over the lyrium warrior's face. Loghain lifted his blade for a strike, and the lyrium warrior moved into the opening, tattoos glowing. Alistair shouted a protest as the lyrium warrior buried his hand in Loghain's chest.

#

Agatha grinned as she stabbed the last of the stakes into the ground. Blue light arced between the coppery rods before forming into a square barrier, caging Solas. She shook her head at Tisallan. "Are we a bad influence on you, or are you a bad influence on us?"

"Six of one..." Tisallan shrugged. "And a half dozen of the other."

"Were, exactly, did you find ward spikes?" Solas looked around him.

"What are ward-spikes?" Arenda stared.

"Agatha..." Cullen looked at the young elven woman. He felt a chill as he realized her eyes were glowing the same was Tisallan's were.

"Commander, you and your companions should start moving." Tisallan frowned as if calculating something. He looked up from the copper spikes to Solas. "What do you think, four blocks?"

Solas turned to look at each ward spike, and shook his head. "Unless they take shelter in a building, I think about half a mile would be best."
"Would someone please explain what is going on?"

Agatha walked over to stand next to Tisallan before nodding to Cullen. "The ward spikes prevent any magic from going in or out. For about five minutes or so." She smiled. "Then they explode."

"You're going to blow up the Dread Wolf?" Arenda's recently reattached jaw again hit the pavement.

"Don't worry." Tisallan shrugged. "He'll be fine."

"No hard feelings?" Agatha raised an eyebrow at Solas.

A smile came to Solas's face as he shook his head. "I do not think that is the part concerning them."

"Oh. Right." Agatha glanced back at the dumbfounded people watching. "Well, nice meeting you and all." She waved at Solas before she and Tisallan turned around and leaped down over the railing. A moment later a griffin took to the air, both of them clinging to its back.

"You really should be running now, Commander." Solas shook his head and sighed. "Five minutes may be an overly optimistic estimate."

Cullen and Arenda exchanged a look before turning to run. The guards were already moving.

#

"Urthemiel!" Magister Valis fell to his knees. "My lord, I am not worthy!"

The glowing being stared at the magister for a moment before turning to look at Brehan. "Is he serious?"

"Why are you asking me?" Brehan stared back at him.

Magister Valis pressed his forehead to the ground. The survivors of the initial blast also started falling to their knees. "Are you..." Urthemiel tilted his head. "Praying?" He laughed. "Oh, that is just..." He stepped further into the room. "Adorable."

"Forgive me, mighty one." The magister actually crawled a few steps closer to Urthemiel. "I did not think the elf spoke truly. I crave only your blessing."

"My blessing?" Urthemiel leaned thoughtfully on his staff. "You wish to hear the music?"

"I wish only to serve your magnificence." The magister looked up at him, nodding eagerly.

Urthemiel walked towards him. "Perhaps we shall start with the exquisite symphony a mind makes..." He set his hand on the magister's head, and then smiled, narrowing his eyes. "When it shatters."

The magister screamed and convulsed before falling to the ground and tearing at his face and eyes. Urthemiel turned towards the others standing in the room. "Slaves, to Tevinter and yourselves." He lifted his staff, and raised his voice. "I give you freedom." He shook his head as they all started to run, and set his staff on the ground. "Try to be less stupid with it," he said in a quieter voice.

#
Fenris got back to his feet, holding his blade as he prepared to defend his husband and son. Baradies raised an eyebrow at Leandra. "Your --"

The entire section of the warehouse Baradies was standing in suddenly lifted into the air, taking the abomination with it. Lightning swirled in the sky above them as the other parts of the city began to rise, taking most of the enemy forces with them.

Leaving the four of them facing... Fenris looked around. Four.

"Leandra?"

"Yes Caleb?"

"Don't you and Gavren ever ask me to babysit for your kids."

Siofra laughed. "You think the two of you are going to make that much of a difference?"

"Two?" Kels smirked. His eyes glowed faintly.

Arrows rained down from above, each one taking a cultist. Four were dead before Siofra raised her staff to expand her barrier over them, causing the next arrow to bounce off it harmlessly. Duncan landed in their midst a moment later, stabbing a cultist in the eye with an arrow before ranking it back and firing it into the chest of the next one in line. Kels and Trian charged.

Lenore stood over her unconscious cousin and lifted her staff above her head as she stared up at Siofra. The elven woman turned around and ran. Lenore shrugged, and used the butt end of her staff to smack a nearby cultist in the face.

Loghain looked down at the hand sticking into of his chest. He smiled, and the lyrium warrior gave him a confused look. "Nice trick." He stepped casually to the side, phasing the other man's hand through him harmlessly. "What else you got?" When the man's eyes widened, he called the Fade to him and sent it outwards as a burst of energy, sending the lyrium warrior flying.

"How the hell did you do that?" The lyrium warrior rolled back to his feet, his hand around the hilt of Jerath's sword.

He smiled, and reached again. "In war..." His eyes lit as his companion joined its strength to his. "Victory."

The lyrium warrior swung his blade and Loghain batted it away effortlessly. The Keening Blade screamed in his hand as he drove it through the lyrium warrior's shield, armor, and heart. "That's for Jerath, you piece of shit." He yanked the blade free. The lyrium warrior crumpled to the ground.

He picked up the fallen sword and looked down at it for a moment before carrying it over to the stunned Alistair, offering it to him. "Your majesty."

"You..." Alistair met his eyes. Then he shook his head and took the blade. "Well done, and thank you."

"I would accompany you back, but the night is just getting started." He pointed to where part of
the city had risen into the sky, and saw Alistair's eyes widen. He started to walk away, then turned back to Alistair. "So, the son-in-law issue thing, um..."

"No." Alistair nodded. "We're good." He shrugged. "I mean, as long as Wynne is happy."

"Thank you." Loghain saluted, and headed out of the garden.

#

Salla landed, letting her companions disembark before returning to her human form. "That went well."

"That isn't going to slow him down long, so let's get moving." Agatha grinned. Somewhere back in the direction they had come, something exploded. She looked back in that direction. "So, how mad is he going to be now?"

"I always found him to be a fairly good sport about such things." Tisallan shrugged. "Which is not to say he is not going to be coming after us now."

"Well, let's let folks know where we are then." Salla twirled the coppery staff in her hand, calling up some of the power it had absorbed over the years to enhance her spell. Then she whirled and sent a blast of that power into the sky, where it lit the city as bright as day for the space of a heartbeat.

"Yes." Tisallan nodded. "That should definitely get some attention."

#

The glowing form bent, his fingers glowing white as he touched Brehan's leg. Brehan felt nothing as Urthemiel rather casually shoved the bone back into place. "I trust you can manage to get back safely." Urthemiel straightened. "I have far better things to do tonight than rescue you from your clumsiness." He headed back out through the massive hole he had made in the wall.

Carefully, Brehan stood, slowly putting weight on the previously injured leg. It felt good as new. He shrugged, and looked up at the sky. "For the record, this shit here?" He shook his head, and picked up his hammer. "This is why I'm an Andristian." He headed back to Arenda's house.

For just a moment, he thought he heard someone laugh in response.

#

The four men remaining didn't even last four seconds. "You guys can get back okay, right?" Caleb glanced back at his fathers, who were both again staring at the sky above them.

Hawke blinked, and turned to him. "You two are coming with us."

Leandra shook her head. "Nope, we've got an appointment elsewhere." She started walking.

"Yeah, by now Agatha, Salla, and Tisallan have yanked Fen'Harel's tail." Caleb returned the crossbow to the sling before starting to walk after Leandra.

"You two aren't going..." Fenris cut off as a dragon with glowing green eyes landed in front of his son and niece. The massive beast lowered his neck, and both kids leaped aboard. With a beat of mighty wings, an Old God took once more to the sky.

"Fenris?"
"Yes Hawke?"
"I am starting to question our parenting skills."
"Starting to?"
"Is it just me, or were they glowing?"

#

"So..." Kels turned towards Lenore. "You're good, you can get him back safely?"

Lenore felt the tingling that signaled the return of her magic. "Yes." She looked at their faces. "I take it that means you aren't coming back with me?"

Duncan yanked one of his arrows free of a corpse. "We've still got work to do." His eyes were cold and hard.

"Where are you..." Lenore started to ask.

Somewhere else in the city, a spell shot up into the sky, turning everything as bright as day. Sparks rained down in a shimmering shower, lighting up the top of one of the towers.

"Well, there's our signal." Trian hefted his shield.

"Let's move." Kels headed in that direction.

Lenore watched them go before she sat down next to Carver. She ruffled his hair as he started to stir. "Oh cousin..." She sighed. "You have so much explaining to do." She drew her legs to her. "Starting with why the crown prince of Ferelden was glowing."

#

The dragon landed, and Leandra and Caleb slid off the neck. Magic swirled as the beast shifted back into the glowing Urthemiel. The glow faded from everywhere but the eyes, leaving Kieran standing there. Caleb couldn't help but wonder if his own eyes looked that cool at the moment. Kieran turned. "It is done?"

Loghain stepped out of the shadows, light shimmering in his eyes. "It's done." He nodded to Leandra. "I think your boy toy is showing off a bit."

"You're just jealous." She grinned.

"Damn right." Loghain shook his head. "He's got a great butt."

"Asshole." She shook her head affectionately before gesturing at Caleb. "We're off. You boys have fun now." Caleb followed, readying his crossbow as he moved.

They hadn't gone far when they saw the first group heading towards the tower. The four in the lead had horns. She grinned. "Hey, hornheads." They stopped at the sound of her voice and began to turn towards her. "Kadanshok defransdim vashedan. Ebra dathrasi vashetoh saar-qalaba kata! Itwa-ost."

Caleb aimed his crossbow. "Well, you got their attention."

Leandra grinned before leaping down into the fray.
Duncan nocked an arrow as they came upon a group rushing towards the tower. The group saw them, and the leader started to twirl a staff in their direction. A pulse of energy from Kels shut the spell down before it had firmly formed. Trian and Kels both charged.

He narrowed his eyes. Loghain hadn't been sure which mage it was, but he'd given the man his word. The arrow took the spellcaster between the eyes. If he had to get them all to be sure of killing the one responsible, then that was exactly what he was going to do. He sighted down the arrow at the next staff-wielder, and fired. "For Alai, maleficar."

Loghain followed Kieran into the building. Siofra stopped dead in her tracks when she saw them. The five men with her glanced at her nervously. "Kill them..." She ordered as she started moving back the direction she'd come.

"Loghain?"

He drew his blade in response, and called the Fade to him. His eyes glowed brighter. "Get her." He headed towards the men, who started looking as if they wanted to be anywhere else.

Kieran started after the fleeing mage.

It had all gone wrong. She'd been so close, and it all had gone wrong. Siofra sliced her arm as she frantically called for her magic.

He entered the room behind her. She shook her head. "You don't understand!" She reached for the strength in her blood. "All I wanted..."

"Was power." Green fire trailed from his eyes. "An answer, as you called out. Begging and pleading and letting the anger fester when no one came to save you. As it has been since the dawn of time." He moved towards her. "Calling and calling, wanting to be saved until nothing is left inside you but rage, desire, envy, fear, and despair." He tilted his head. "And yet here you stand, living proof."

"Proof?"

"That it has always been within your power to save yourselves." His eyes narrowed. "You called for me." He spread his hands. "I have answered. Here I am. Is this not what you desired?"

"This isn't what I wanted!" She flung a spell at him.

The magic washed over him as harmlessly as if she'd thrown feathers. "Finally, you understand the reason for the silence."

"All the sacrifices I have made, and you..."

"I remember." He was only a few feet from her, and there was nowhere left to flee. "Your own baby sister, weeping as the life drained from her veins. Onesah."

"Onesa..." She repeated the name.

"Malinda. Davis. Labean. So many more whose names you did not know. Others who died from
the poison of your words."

He caught her by the throat. "For their sake, I promise you this, da'len." The glowing eyes whirled. "For the rest of your life, you will have my undivided attention."
"Alistair." Hawke walked towards him and immediately began to set his arm. "What happened?"

"I am still attempting to figure that out." Alistair shook his head. "The lyrium warrior is dead. My son-in-law killed him."

"Loghain?" Fenris raised an eyebrow.

"Considering what has been said of the woman my daughter grows up to be..." Alistair flexed the newly healed arm. "I am starting to grow very concerned about the possibility of grandchildren."

He nodded to Hawke. "Did you find your kids?"

"We found Leandra and Caleb." Fenris rubbed the back of his neck.

"Then they rode off on the back of a dragon that we are pretty sure was Urthemiel." Hawke waved a hand.

"After Cullen's son pulled apart yet another building." Fenris shook his head.

"Maker's breath." Alistair shook his head. "What is --"

He cut off as a half dozen qunari ran past their location. A heartbeat later a glowing young woman waving a massive long sword ran after them, yelling. "Women don't fight my ass! Why don't you qalaba-raas get over here and say that to my face?"

They all stood there silently for several moments. "We all saw that, yes?" Fenris asked.

"Of course, when it comes to having to be concerned about grandchildren..." Alistair shook his head. "I really have nothing on Cullen and Carver."

"Alistair..." Hawke glanced at him before turning to his husband. "Fenris..." He gestured out at where the city was starting to explode into chaos. "Our children are having fun without us."

Fenris chuckled, and drew his blade. Alistair nodded and strapped the shield he'd taken off one of his dead guards to his arm. His smile was grim. Hawke twirled his staff, and grinned. "Let's go show them how its done."

Brehan saw the newly summoned shade fall to the arrow before it had even finished forming. The magister who had summoned it took the next arrow through the eye. The mage behind him barely managed to turn in the direction of the archer before she too was impaled. Another mage hurled fire in the direction the arrows had come from and he saw Duncan leap into the air a heartbeat before the spell destroyed the ledge he'd been standing on. He landed on the railing of a staircase and slid down, firing arrows at the enemy mages before leaping again as he landed. The few surviving mages sent spells at Alistair's son, missing as Duncan ran across the railing of the bridge, firing arrows at them.

The three remaining mages got a barrier up, and started calling up fire in their hands. Duncan ran to the edge of the bridge and leaped off into the empty air. Brehan started to shout, and then the dragon rose up from below, Duncan on his neck. A gout of fire caught the mages. From the back of an Old God, soaring through the air, the crown prince of Ferelden fired one last arrow. It went past Brehan's head and he turned to follow it, only to see it take a man who'd been trying to sneak
up on him right between the eyes.

"Alright." Brehan nodded to himself. "I'm just going to add that to the list of things about this whole mess that I am never telling Cathiel." He shrugged. "I'm so glad I don't have any children."

#

"My daughter did what?" Lenore stared at Cullen. Carver covered his mouth with a hand as he tried not to laugh.

"Blew up the Dread Wolf before riding off on the back of a griffin with an ancient elven warrior."

Arenda threw her hands up in the air. "I have come to the conclusion that there is something deeply wrong with your children."

"At least we know where they are now." Carver pointed at the three towers that made up the highest point of the city. Lights in a variety of colors kept exploding at the top.

Lenore waved at where torches, lights, and spells could be seen throughout the entire city. "Everyone knows where they are now."

"It concerns me that might have been the point." Cullen frowned. "We should --" He sighed. "I have absolutely no strategies for this particular situation."

"I got one." Carver laid his blade across his shoulders. "Let's go show Tevinter just where these kids get it from." He grinned before walking out of the building. Lenore laughed and followed.

Cullen exchanged a look with Arenda before shrugging and heading out after them.

#

Salla stood, focusing her magic on the barriers around her companions. She felt a tingling in the barrier around Caleb, and sent healing magic in response. On the other edge of the roof, the dragon landed. Duncan leapt lightly to the ground. Agatha and Tisallan immediately leapt onto the dragon's back and it took off again.

Duncan refreshed his quiver before heading to the edge of the roof and looking down at the people starting to cross the bridge. He nocked an arrow and fired, pinning a magister's head to a nearby statue. The people on the bridge started to scatter and run. Near a fountain on the streets below he saw enemy forces trying to regroup. He concentrated, forming the map in his head. The dragon roared, and down below he saw the forms of Kels and Trian adjust their trajectory. "Status?"

"Everyone up, everyone moving." Salla reported back. Instinctively she strengthened the barrier on Leandra before directing healing energy into Loghain.

"Your fathers and mine have joined the fight." He nodded at where fire suddenly appeared on one of the streets below. "They seem to be doing some damage."

"I'll bet." She grinned fiercely. Her eyes closed as she drew upon the energy of the staff again. The workings were starting to make a notable dent in the power it had built up, and its ambient glow was starting to darken. With her eyes closed, she could almost see the map Duncan was creating for her companions, and wondered for a moment if this was what it was like for her Uncle Carver. Part of the map glowed for a moment, and she felt Kieran, Agatha, and Tisallan diving in that direction.
They made the short work of the first group of enemy combatants they'd encountered. Cullen was leading Lenore and Carver towards part of a fray when they heard a sharp whistle and looked up to see Trian. He was waving at a group running up the street. "Hey, Vints, yer mothers are all rock-lickers." The dwarf added a rude gesture before ducking under cover. The group started towards him.

"Shit." Lenore started heading in to rescue the dwarf.

The enemy forces came around the corner, fire starting to appear the hands of the mages. Kels and Loghain leapt down from the roof above, landing in their midst. The fire vanished in a pulse of energy a heartbeat before Kels took the head off one of the mages. Loghain cut the other in half. Trian came out of his hiding place and charged, bowling two others over. Loghain and Kels stood back to back, and the Tevinter were down mere moments later.

"Lieutenant." Cullen stared. The eyes of his attache were glowing. And so, for that matter, were Trian and Loghain’s. Just as Agatha and Tisallan's had been earlier.

Kels saluted. "Commander."

"When did you become a templar?"

Trian and Kels exchanged a look, and Kels shrugged. "About an hour ago, give or take a few minutes."

"What are you kids..." Lenore started to ask.

The three young men turned westward at the same time. Loghain shook his head. "Can't talk now, Leandra found a party." They all jumped down what had to be a thirty-foot drop, landing easily before running off.

Lenore and Cullen both turned towards Carver. Carver chuckled. "Remember when you asked how a dozen Wardens could take on the entire Qunari vanguard in a single evening?"

"But..." Lenore shook her head. "But you had..." Her eyes widened. "Kieran is at a fraction of his power."

"Maker's breath..." Cullen shook his head. "The kids have the staff."

"And if we've figured that out, safe bet the Dread Wolf has too." Lenore growled.

"Well, hopefully they draw Baradies out before the Wolf catches them." Carver started towards the tower again. "Or this is going to get really messy."

"For Tevinter!" A group started to charge at Hawke's party.

"For mabari!" Another voice yelled, and Agatha Amell leapfrogged over one of the group, twisting his helmet to blind him, before heading down an alley. The entire group immediately switched directions to pursue her.

Hawke immediately raced after them, follow by Alistair and Fenris. Agatha came to a stop in the blind alley, turned, and grinned at her pursuers. One sneered. "Bad move, little --"
Enchanted swords came to life as another elf appeared in the midst of the Tevinter forces. Agatha drew her own knives and leapt into the fray as Tisallan's blades began to dance, whirling faster than the eyes could follow. Agatha moved as if she knew exactly where his blades were going to be, darting in and out to slice open the few that managed to dodge the ancient's warrior's attacks.

The last of the Tevinter forces fell before Hawke could even get a spell off. "What the..." Fenris said.

"Imagine." Tisallan looked towards Agatha. "These people actually believe they defeated the elven empire." He made a tsking sound under his breath.

"Boggles the mind, really." Agatha shrugged.

The two of them leaped into the air, grabbed ledges, and were running across the rooftops again a few heartbeats later.

Alistair turned to look at Hawke. "They did say in the future, she works for my son, right?"

"Yep."

"Good to know." He frowned.

"I am not sure which possibility concerns me more." Fenris frowned thoughtfully.

"Possibility?" Hawke turned towards his husband.

"I am attempting to decide whether or not the children actually have anything resembling a plan."

Hawke casually flung a fireball at a small group starting to draw weapons and come towards them. "I see your point."

#

"Brehan."

"Bahalan."

The sentinel glanced at him before gestured at the city below. "The children have apparently declared war on Tevinter."

They stood for a few minutes, watching Leandra taunt a group into coming after her, only for a shot from Caleb's crossbow to strike a rune someone had stuck on the nearby wall, causing it to explode. Leandra went through the few survivors like Shale in a pigeon coop. Brehan turned to look at Bahalan. "A war they appear to be winning."

"I no longer feel quite so bad about having been captured by them." Bahalan gave a small chuckle.

"Yeah." Brehan nodded. "Same here." He shrugged. "You know, I passed what I'm thinking may have been a bar on the way up here."

"Such a thing would certainly seem to warrant further investigation." Bahalan nodded.

They turned and headed back down the stairs.

#
Beneath them, the entire city was awake. Those who were neutral or innocent were trying to get as far away from the chaos as possible. The enemy forces, drawn or herded by the actions of their companions, were converging on the tower. Duncan saw a small band of sentinels crossing the bridge, and sent an arrow. It pierced the head of one and continued into the stomach of the man behind him.

"I think we have everyone's attention now." He tugged slightly, and felt the dragon move in response, diving to collect some of the others. A few of the enemy forces had tried to take their own positions atop towers. Towers which were currently in flames. He smiled fiercely. A high dragon was dangerous enough on its own. Add a mind that had been tutored by a couple of the greatest generals Ferelden had ever produced, and one had an unstoppable force even without throwing in the Old God bit. His general should be here.

"You're doing fine." Salla smiled at him reassuringly.

It took him a couple seconds to realize he hadn't said the words out loud.

#

Lenore caught sight of Alistair's group, and gestured to her companions. "I don't suppose any of you know what is going on?" She sent a wave of ice over a group attempting to charge in their direction. "Such as where all these people are coming from?"

"Qunari. Crows. Cultists. Various Tevinter factions. Spotted some Carta." Cullen frowned. "Actually, the only group I haven't seen..." He shook his head. "No, there they are," He pointed at a group charging up a nearby staircase. They wore Orlesian style armor.

"Well, at least there are no --" Carver cut off as a pride demon came around the corner. "Oh come on, I hadn't even said it yet."

Hawke whacked him on the back of the head. "You should have known better than to even think it."

"Has anyone seen Brehan?" Alistair asked as he drew his blade.
Chapter 45

Alistair reached the top of the tower only a half pace ahead of Cullen. He saw Duncan put a flame covered arrow into a despair demon, and a moment later saw Kels almost casually fling a man in Orlesian armor off the roof. A terror demon started towards them, and he and Alistair exchanged only the barest glance before moving forward to meet it.

On the other side of the roof, a pride demon appeared in response to a mage's summons. Hawke and Fenris started in that direction only for the dragon to grab both demon and mage and hurl both into the city below. The dragon turned on a wing and started back in their direction.

"The dragon is on our side right?" Alistair asked.

"Maker, I certainly hope so." Cullen yanked his blade out of the terror demon as it started to disintegrate.

Men with sword started towards where Salla was standing, and the dragon landed, shifting into the form of a tall young man. Lightning crackled around Kieran like a miniature storm as he began hurling spells.

And then the remaining attackers atop the roof abruptly turned to statues of white stone.

#

Cullen turned to see Solas, with twenty sentinels and twice again as many Dalish warriors accompanying him. The Dread Wolf looked around the rooftop.

The children were starting to turn in his direction. Leandra set her blade point down in front of her. Kels and Trian both set folded arms atop their shields. Weapons of steel and light vanished from the hands of Tisallan and Agatha. Duncan slung his bow back over his shoulder as Caleb did the same with the crossbow. Loghain leaned on the remains of what had been some kind of statue. Kieran and Salla laid their staffs on their shoulders. "Fen'Harel." Kieran nodded politely.

"I think this has gone on quite long enough." Solas shook his head as he walked towards them, flanked by his agents. He turned towards Salla. "I will be taking the staff."

Salla smiled. "What staff?"

"I believe I have shown considerable patience thus far, da'len." Solas narrowed his eyes. "Do not try me further."

"I believe that is a threat." Kieran glanced at Salla. "Was that a threat?"

"It sounded like a threat." Salla nodded. "I mean, I am definitely feeling a bit threatened."

"He does have us outnumbered." Duncan called from where he was standing.

"With elves even." Agatha added.

"Maybe we should hand it over." Loghain wiped blood from his sword.

"I mean, they do have a god on their side and everything." Caleb waved a hand.

His jaw dropped when Salla nodded, and casually threw the staff to Solas. The Dread Wolf caught
it easily, and Salla smiled. "No hard feelings, right?"

Solas stared down at the staff in his hand. He turned it this way and that, eyes narrowing. "This..." He shook his head, and looked up at Kieran. "You sacrificed the last of the Sulahnven for this?"

"It is a very good staff." Kieran nodded.

"I can attest to that." Salla smiled. "Best I've ever used."

"But the answer to your question is no." Kieran shrugged.

"This is ridiculous." Solas shook his head. "Baradies is still loose in the city. Did you even have a pla --" He cut himself off as he looked around the rooftop. With a start, Cullen realized just who was missing.

"Copper in the air..." Tisallan's lips twitched.

"Where is Gavren?" Solas and Cullen asked simultaneously.

"Copper drops." Agatha grinned.

#

Salla leaned into Kieran, and felt his arm go around her. Across the roof, her fathers and the others were staring. The Dread Wolf handed the staff to the sentinel next to him. "What game are you playing?"

"Well..." Duncan spoke from where he was standing. "We started trying to come up with a plan, and Caleb made a pretty good point."

"Having a plan would give you the opportunity to disrupt it." Caleb nodded.

"So we decided to just do what we do best." Leandra chuckled.

"Go with our strengths and all." Agatha nodded.

"And then Kels made a very good point." Kieran gestured at the man. "The Inquisition's strength lies in finding the right people and giving them the right tools."

"Delegation and all." Kels nodded.

Loghain spoke up. "So we asked ourselves, what happens when you take the most powerful mage in Thedas..."

"Let the God of Inspiration boost him further..." Tisallan folded his arms.

Kieran smiled. "And then hand him an ancient elven foci?"

#

The orb hovered above his hand, responding to his will. The Formless One had abandoned the host body that had served it. The vibrations of the Veil shrieked as Gavren strengthened it, preventing the demon from fleeing back across.

It shifted as it ran, and dove down a grate into the cities under levels. Hunting through the
labyrinthine catacombs would take more time than remained. Gavren focused his magic.

Nearby a tower suddenly tore free of the ground as an unseen force picked it up and moved it outside the city walls, leaving a jagged opening in the heart of the city. The sky broke open as boulders started to rain down in that area.

"Looks like the answer is 'rocks fall, everything dies.'" Trian shrugged. Seconds passed while everyone just stared. "All of this was purely a distraction." Solas shook his head. "Creating enough chaos that I would not be able to track Gavren."

"Hey, a lot of those folks were legitimately trying to kill us." Leandra glared. "Or capture us." Trian glanced at her. "Or make us go to bed without dinner." Loghain shrugged. "You..." Alistair gave them a disbelieving look. "Your plan was not to have a plan so you could trick the Dread Wolf?"

"Ah, audacity." Kieran smiled. "There truly is no greater refuge." Solas actually laughed. "Incredible. He is manipulating the Veil across the entire city."

"You always were an excellent teacher." Tisallan leaned back against the remains of a pillar to watch the chaos below.

"Want to know the best part?" Kieran waited until Solas turned towards him before continuing. "You will not remember this." His smile showed teeth. "But I will."

The part of the tower Solas was standing on suddenly broke free of the building and went hurtling through the air. The forces that had come with Solas stared in shook.

Kieran twisted his staff, dividing it into a sword and axe combination. Duncan notched an arrow to his bowstring. Loghain and Leandra both laid their blades on their shoulders. Caleb just shrugged, and grinned at the group of elves. "So, who'd like their asses kicked first?"

Gavren felt someone trying to wrest control of the wreckage from him. He brought it level with the piece upon which he stood, and stared across at his teacher. "Hahren."

"Dā'len." Solas looked back at him, and his eyes went to the orb Gavren held. "I am beginning to get an inkling of why I put so much effort into training you."

"The future..." Gavren smiled. "Is going to be an interesting place."

"Agreed." Solas’s eyes flashed.

Power hit the barrier Gavren had formed around himself, and lightning splattered across the sky. He drew upon the orb, on the power Urthemiel had loaned him. And then he threw the Dread Wolf clear of the city that bore his name.
The Formless One shifted desperately, shifting from desire to envy to pride to despair as it continued trying to hide. It ripped and tore at the Veil as it fled, and he healed the damage before it could create an opening big enough to pass or pull other demons through.

Then there it was, right before his eyes. He closed the barrier as it frantically tried to escape. Gavren smiled as he called forth the magic, drawing deep from the wellspring in his hand.

The Formless One ceased to exist.
Chapter 46

Siofra was examining the scroll the abomination had given her when she heard the front door open. Immediately, she gestured to Padar. His tattoos glowed lightly as he started across the room to investigate.

He'd made it halfway when the door to their room opened and a tall, handsome young man entered. Siofra narrowed her eyes. "Who are you and what are you doing in here?"

"You hurt my friends." He tilted his head at her. "That is unacceptable."

The face of her spirit companion's host twisted into a smirk. Siofra rolled her eyes. "Padar, get his name before you kill him."

Padar took two steps forward before the young man waved a hand and Padar flew backwards across the room. His smoking corpse came to a stop at her feet. Her mouth opened as she stared. Next to her, Baradies started to flee and ran into a barrier. His form began shifting and trying to move in all directions at once, making a panicked noise.

"My name..." The young man's eyes started to glow. "Is Urthemiel."

#

"...Kirkwall is honored by your presence."

Salla blinked, and rubbed at her eyes. She was standing in the Chantry, and her father was up on the dais, giving a speech to the Divine.

"Salla?" Agatha put a hand on her shoulder. "Are you alright?"

"I..." Salla turned, and rushed down the hall, only dimly aware Agatha was following her. She stopped a few paces from the room that contained the kids, and heard laughter within.

"Salla, what's wrong?" Agatha caught her arm.

"I just..." Salla took a deep breath. "I need to be sure." She nodded politely to the templars at the door, and they nodded in recognition before letting her pass. She stepped into the room, and saw Leandra dragging the slightly smaller Gavren into the garden. The faces of both children were smeared with something, and they were laughing madly. Loghain had found himself a quiet corner, and had his nose stuck in a book. Duncan was sitting at a table, apparently being annoyed by a girl a year or two younger who was trying to get him to play some kind of dice game.

And then her eyes fell on the older boy, red hair just a shade or two darker than orange, standing by the bookshelf, watching them play. She smiled, and walked over to him. He looked up, and gave her a small bow, stumbling slightly when he noticed Agatha behind her. "Lady Hawke." He swallowed. "Lady Amell."

"General Gilmore." She smiled. "Keeping an eye on everyone for us?"

He turned slightly red at the title. "Yes, ma'am."

Impulsively, she reached out and tousled his hair. "You and Duncan have to be bored sitting in here." She glanced at Agatha. "Why don't you come with Agatha and I and we'll go see if Varric
Duncan nearly knocked the chair over in his haste to get away from the table. "Really?"

Fenris found his daughter sitting in the balcony, as she had done every evening since the Chantry Dedication. "Salla?" He sat next to her. "What's wrong?"

She leaned into him. "I don't know if I can even explain it."

He put an arm around her. "Try?"

"I'm..." She sighed. "Waiting. I thought..." She shook her head. "What if...?"

"Salla?"

She hugged her arms around herself. "Or maybe it was just a dream, I don't know."

"Has Papa ever considered writing Sebastian back?"

"What..." He blinked. "What brought that question?"

"It's been a lot of years. They used to be good friends and..." She looked up at the newly rebuilt Chantry. "Sometimes the past needs to be let go."

"Is this about your guardsman?"

"What guards..." She laughed. "Oh, I haven't given Veluc a thought in months."

"Well, that's..." He raised an eyebrow. "Good?" He shifted to look at her. "Did you meet someone at the Dedication?"

"Yes. And no. And yes."

"That clarifies everything."

"I expected him to be here by now." She sighed wistfully. "Maybe I should carve snowflakes."

He followed her gaze up to the stars as he tried to figure how just how and when the conversation had turned strange. "Salla..."

"I'm alright." She snuggled into him. "I'm just watching the stars, if you want to help."

"I can do that."

Kels fastened the collar and wrinkled his nose. He saw the Commander shake his head slightly. "You do not have to attend."

"Minaeve has been dropping hints about dancing."

"Rather large ones."

Cullen nodded. "Well, Lieutenant, I will leave the dancing to you then. Represent the Inquisition well."

"Wait. What?" He started to turn towards the Commander, and caught sight of Minaeve coming
down the stairs dressed in flowing robes of yellow.

She smiled before greeting him with a kiss. "Are you ready?"

He managed a noise that vaguely resembled an affirmative before offering her his arm.

#

Leliana handed Brehan a small stack of papers before turning to the Inquisitor. "Are you going to be staying in Kirkwall much longer?"

Ruya shook her head. "Just another week. I'm leaving Iron Bull a while longer."

"Dorian is still conducting negotiations?" Leliana shook her head and smiled.

"Speaking of which, I thought perhaps I would drop by for some additional negotiations after the feast." Brehan tucked the papers away.

"Oh for..." Ruya buried her face in her hand as they laughed. "You realize I'm never going to be able to use that word again now?"

"Speaking of the feast, we should be getting back." Leliana turned towards the door.

The door opened, and four men in the robes of Chantry brothers entered. Leliana was starting to run towards them when she heard Ruya call her name. Brehan was reacting immediately, going for his weapon as magic appeared around the hands of the newcomers.

And then abruptly there were four neat piles of ash on the ground. A tall, handsome young man stepped in the door. "Ah. Inquisitor, Divine Victoria, Spymaster Brehan." He frowned, and looked around him in confusion. "Could you tell me what day today is?"

"Um..." Brehan glanced at Leliana before answering. "Thursday." When the young man continued looking at him blankly, he added, "the 12th of Kingsway?"

"The 12th?" The young man blinked. "Bother. And now I'm late." He abruptly turned into a hawk and flew out the window.

They stood there for a minute. "What just happened?" Ruya asked.

From the direction of the feast, they heard the sound of shouting, and all three of them headed that way at a dead run.

#

Gabriel sent a blast of fire into the newly summoned demon. "Varric, this is the last time I let you make the guest list."

Next to him, Fenris's sword of mercy opened a whoever these people were from throat to navel. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw his daughter put up a barrier, keeping a shade from getting to the children she'd gathered to her. "Who are these guys?" Varric asked.

A pride demon appeared, and started for the guests cowering behind a table. A mage started to call up another spell. A hawk came in through the open window and landed in the center of the room, turning into a tall young man as it did so. The young man, surrounded be an aura of green fire, lifted a coppery staff above his head and slammed it into the ground, sending a wave of energy washing through the room. The demons and blood mages turned abruptly to dust.
Silence descended. The fire vanished from around the mage. The Divine entered, followed by the Inquisitor and Spymaster. They looked at the scene before them. "What..." The Divine started to speak.

And then his daughter was striding across the room. She shoved the newly arrived mage. "You're late."

"No." He shook his head. "I checked. This was definitely the nick of time."

Gabriel felt his jaw unhinge as his daughter threw her arms around the man's neck, kissing him soundly. The mage put his own arms around her and swung her around in a circle as he returned the kiss.

#

Salla released Kieran, and shook her head. "What took you so long?"

"It is very difficult to enter an unknown symphony at exactly the right moment." Kieran caressed her cheek. "I had to go back several days in order to stop the cult from getting to the ruins while Melavan's group was there."

Her eyes widened. "You saved Enara!" She stood on her tiptoes to kiss him again.

"Of course I saved Enara." He blinked at her. "And then I was too early, so I went to Nessum, and then I was still too early, so I tried hopping forwards, but I went a measure too far."

"Making you late." She nodded.

"I could try going back part of a verse and..."

"Kieran?" She shook her head at him. "Stop messing with the time-space continuum." She kissed him again.

"Yes." He smiled. "Would you like to go have dinner with me?"

She smiled. "Where?"

"Starkhaven." He took her hand. "There are some people there we need to meet again."

#

Leliana stared as Hawke's daughter and the young man abruptly turned into hawks and flew away. "Um..." She turned towards where Hawke was standing, and saw similar confusion on the faces of both him and Fenris. "Does anyone know who that was?"

"Yes." Carver Hawke nodded.

"Well..."

"I'm not entirely sure what just happened..." Carver rubbed the back of his neck. "But that was Kieran."

"Wait..." Alistair turned towards him. "That was The Warden's kid?"

"Why was my daughter kissing him?" Fenris raised an eyebrow at Carver.
"Yeah, I have absolutely no idea."

Hawke budged one of the corpses with his foot. "Do we even know who these guys were?"

Duncan's voice piped up. "Hey, that was the crazy mage from Darktown!"

#

Ruya sat in her husband's lap, and looked across the bar at Carver. "Let me see if I have this straight." She took a deep breath. "Your niece just flew off with an Old God."

"Yes."

Next to him, Hawke shook his head. "So you are saying my daughter just turned into a bird and flew off with an Old God."

"Yes."

The Divine pinched the bridge of her nose. "How many times are we going to have to repeat it before it starts making sense?"

Brehan sighed. "I need a drink." A bottle slid down the bar, and he caught it. "Thank --" He turned in the direction it had come from and cut off abruptly. "Um..."

Jerath Tabris leaned on the other end of the bar. "I was just informed I've acquired a daughter-in-law." He looked at all of them. "Anyone care to explain?"

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