The Howling Rift

by Precursor

Summary

"Have you ever wanted the truth? Not the story the Chantry spins, not the warped articles posted by journalists, not the screened publications of scholars...the real truth. If you have, allow Kirkwall’s own Varric Tethras to retell the journey of the Inquisition. Sex, scandal, and mysteries unknown to Thedas, including the arrival of our dear Inquisitor herself- all will be revealed in Tethras’s upcoming novel, 'The Howling Rift,' coming to bookstores near you in 9:45 Dragon."

[Follows an Assassin/Pirate Captain as she discovers an Apple of Eden, which forcefully sends her to Thedas.]

This fic ships Cullen with the main character.
Thank you for reading!

A collection of entries on various topics discussed in "The Howling Rift" can be found in *The Codex.*
The dining hall of Skyhold was lively as plates, goblets and utensils created a chiming rhythm. The golden statues sent from Orlais shimmered in the colorful light casting down upon them from the stained-glass windows. The twenty-foot carvings depicted two blind-folded women that held a scale in their right hands, with an eagle on their arms.

Naomi’s focus drifted to the metal flames of the Andrastian throne that sat in between them - a gift from a noble.

“Inquisitor, this is going to take twice as long if you don’t pay attention.” Varric grumbled, “Kirkwall isn’t going to run itself and I do have a due date. All of Thedas is waiting on this book.”

She snapped her attention back to the dwarf across the table.

“Apologies.” She cleared her throat, “You’ll understand why I’m hesitant. ‘Sides, I’m no lass for poetry. There’re a hundred words yeh may use to call the sky blue, but to me, it’s just blue.”

“It’s only blue thanks to you, Spitfire.” He took a sip of his wine, “That’s the story we need to tell, don’t you think?”

“Ah, that the only part you want to write about? Why didn’t yeh say so, mate? I’d gladly tell the tale of the Breach.” She gave him a fake, overenthusiastic smile.

It earned her a blank stare. Naomi rolled her eyes, leaning her chin into her palm.

“You signed a contract without reading it-“

“While drunk!” She interrupted to defend herself.

“-and that’s not my problem. Also, I have a feeling you want to get some of this off your chest.”

Varric’s quill impatiently tapped against the table.

“A’right, a’right. One question, if you’ll hear it.” She took a sip of her flagon.

“Go on…”

“What if there’re some truths that some would find rather…heretical?”

“Heretical’…Are we talking about Thedas-shattering, scholar-flocking, would-earn-you-a-stern-lecture-from-Cassandra-for-publishing, kind of ‘heretical?” His eyes were lit with excitement.

“Aye, that’d be the sort.”

“Perfect.”

Naomi rubbed the back of her neck.

“Hah, that’s cute. Curly does that, too. See you’ve picked it up from him.” Varric winked at her.

“What?”

“Cullen. He rubs the back of his neck when he’s nervous.”

Her hand immediately returned to her drink, as if caught doing something wrong.

“Hop off it…” She slid the rest of her flagon’s contents down her throat, “You’re so pressed to publish this mess and yeh haven’t even decided on a title, last I heard.”

“Last you heard.” He lifted a page in his hand, “Some ‘Assassin’ you are.”
It was decorated with intricate flowers, framing detailed letters sprawled through the middle. He put it back down on the table.
“So, let’s get started. I’ve already got the other side of the story from you-know-who…and the others.”
“Ugh…” Naomi moaned, “I’ll do it…But I’ll need more of…whatever this is.” She shook her empty drinking vessel at him.
Varric snatched it from her hands, “Fine.”
She watched him depart towards the door that led to the cellar, and a thought crossed her mind.
“Varric?”
He turned to her, “What?”
“Maybe two?”
He didn’t answer as he slammed the wooden door behind him.
“Outta’ bring the whole damned keg up.” She took a deep breath, twisting the ring on her finger, “Would certainly save us a few trips.”
She eyed the face-down page on Varric’s side of the table. Looking around to see if anyone was watching, she gently picked it up, turning it towards her so she could read it:

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes:

1. The chapters get longer as the story progresses.

2. My style in writing has changed over the last year. Newer chapters will be significantly more refined than the older ones.
Under the Black Flag

Chapter Summary

“We’re a band of Irish fugitives and former slaves. Your ranks hold women, your Captain being one of ‘em. We are those who have been robbed of our fortune. We are those who’d our ‘masters,’ and ‘wage-payers’ would cast aside. Aye, I believe late Captain Abbey was correct. We are The Dishonored!”

-Captain Naomi McNamara

Chapter Notes

"Randy Dandy-O" linked to first line of lyrics.

Starts in Adibas's point of view, and switches at the end.

Codex Quick Reference Guide

Shroud of Eden: Consus, also known as the "Erudite God," "Prometheus," and "the Voices," was a famed Isu scientist and a creator of Pieces of Eden. The Shrouds of Eden were Pieces of Eden shaped like cloths capable of restoration and healing.

Sword of Eden: The Swords of Eden were sword-like artifacts created by the Isu. The abilities this weapon possesses includes: Granting the wielder charisma and leadership properties, translocation, echolocation, sending blasts of energy at different levels, and negating the effects of the Apple of Eden.

Staff of Eden: Designed to control minds and bodies, the Staff holds a cradle in its headpiece where an Apple of Eden can be placed, in order to enhance its mind control effects. The Staves' bottom ends were usually sharpened, and could be wielded as a spear in combat. The artifact also granted the possessor the ability to conceal their presence entirely, and the ability of levitation; though whether these were physical effects or simply manipulations of the viewers' perceptions remains unknown.

Isu: Also known as, "The First Civilization," "Those Who Came Before," and the "Precursors," the Isu were an ancient and advanced species of humanoids that were perhaps the first known to call Earth their home. Unlike most other species on Earth, the Isu possessed a triple-helix DNA structure along with six senses rather than five. They were an inhumanly intelligent, extremely long-lived and advanced species, being responsible for the creation of the Pieces of Eden, as well as the human race itself and many other species of the Homo genus.

The masts ached as the fiendish winds bellowed in the sails. It was an unforgiving time to be at sea as the Brig rolled underneath the sailors’ feet, being tossed wildly on the hurricane’s waves. Naomi counter-steered against a squall, her hands cramping from their steely grasp on the wheel of The Dishonored.

“Douse the gallants and the royals!” She shouted.
Adibas, the ship’s Quartermaster, pulled himself up the stairs leading to the Captain’s Deck. He shielded his water-flogged face from peril, and took to the Captain’s side. “Pay a visit to Navigation?” Naomi’s Irish tongue flared. “Aye! They suspect if we keep at the wind’s eye, we be but a league from where Mentor Ah Tabai suggested we anchor!”

Lanterns swung on their hooks, reflecting glimpses of the many men and women attempting to secure themselves. Water splashed against the ships railing, foaming and spraying over the edge from whence it came.

A rumble from below sent the crew in a flurry as the ocean pulled away from the ship. “Rogue wave larboard, ser!” A sailor shouted, tying knots faster than before.

Naomi struggled to keep the ship facing the oncoming giant, Her stern falling in its’ rapidly approaching shadow. “I know She’s a good sailor! Now prove it, me Trumps!” Adibas hollered.

A wet sheet swept over the deck as The Dishonored’s ice ram caught the bottom of the wave, piercing its heart. Naomi’s arms shook, struggling to keep her feet anchored. A vigilant growl pushed through her teeth as she fought to keep the ship aligned, for allowing the rudder to move would prove grave.

A unified breath escaped the crew as it leveled at the top of the rogue wave. Still, just as quickly as She scaled the beast, She rocked forward in descent. The Dishonored broke the storm line, and glided into calmer waters.

The hurricane quieted to a drizzle, and the lightning became nothing more than booming thunder in the distance. Naomi exhaled with relief, letting a small giggle escape her. She nodded to the Helm, signaling Adibas to take over. He willingly grasped the gem-gilded wheel into his glistening, mahogany hands.

Naomi took her tied-back hair in a tight fist to wring it thoroughly, whipping the water to the deck. “What’s the status of the crew?” She yelled down to her First Mate, Christopher. “A few injured. No sailor met their end today, thanks ta’ you!” He replied, earning her an encouraging salute. “Back to it, then, if you value your hide! We not be clear of danger yet, mates.” She shook her fingers loose of the grasping position they seemed to be stuck in.

“Now we are ready to sail for the Horn.” Thaddeus, the Shantyman, began to sing. “Weigh hey, roll an’ go!” The sailors answered him. “Our boots an’ our clothes, boys, are all in the pawn,” “To be rollickin,’ randy dandy-O!”

“I don’t know what’s shining more- the cleaned gold and gems on this ludicrous wheel or the eyes of my maddened Captain.” Adibas laughed. “Oh, hop off it, mate. You love sailing through mucked luck weather just as I…And Her wheel is not ludicrous.” “Aye, what says, ‘Nothing valuable here, lads!’ louder than a wheel that could buy a bandit a fleet? Not much, I say. Ludicrous.” “It’s an exceptional wheel for an exceptional ship.” Naomi argued. “And was that the reasonin’ behind all the other fancy trim She has?” “I suppose the gold plating on the cannons and mortars were a tad impulsive.” She sighed, “McGrath always did have a taste for the finer things.” It’d been more than five years since her Mentor died and she commandeered his ship’s armory. It never got easier for any of them.
“Heave a pawl, O heave away,
Weigh hey, roll an’ go!
The anchor’s on board an’ the cable’s all stored,
To be rollickin’, randy dandy-O!”

Tad and the crew sang the chorus amidst the background of their conversation.
“Our Templar friends’ll be sour we’ve bested them. I can hardly accept I’ll be missin’ their faces when they come to.” Naomi released her mane to the wind.
“Perhaps we should save the taunt ‘till after we’ve secured the Apple, Captain.”
“Aye…” She tussled her curly red locks, "But where’s the humor in such’a way, Adie?"

The waves quieted as *The Dishonored* sailed through the deep blue, sending playful ocean sprays onto the Captain’s Deck.
A thin mist kissed the sea as if the heavens themselves descended upon them. They proceeded with caution as stone pillars made themselves known in only a moment’s notice.

“Soon we’ll be warping her out through the locks,”
“Weigh hey, roll an’ go!”
“Where the pretty young gals all come down in their flocks,”
To be rollickin’ randy dandy-O!”

“Can ya’ believe it’s been eleven years since I saved you sorry sods?” Naomi overshadowed the crew as they worked.
“Hardly. Haven’t given it much thought, in truth.”
“Oh?” She lifted her chin to look at him.
“Aside from the treacherous storm that almost gutted us, this expedition has an air about it unlike any other...and-“ He caught himself.
“And what?”
“Nothing.”
“Spit it out, mate.”

Adibas shifted, “I was going to mention that it’s the first expedition in a long while that we weren’t accompanied by Captain Kenway and his *Jackdaw*.”

“Ah, quite. Funny you should mention that. He gave chase to a ship harboring pounds of Reales during his voyage to our flank. Hope he comes back with precious little to show for it.” She spit in the air, “Edward fuckin’ Kenway…”

“*Heave a pawl, O heave away,*
*Weigh hey, roll an’ go!*”
*The anchor’s on board an’ the cable’s all stored,*
To be rollickin’, randy dandy-O!”

Adibas couldn’t help but admire the Captain. He found himself captivated by her sea foam eyes, and how she freckled in the sun. He reminisced the large scar that shattered her face, extending from her left ear, across her nose, all the way under the opposite eye. She’d donned it defending Edward as they fought a common enemy not a long while ago.

“Although...I imagine that Kenway left her scarred in a different way than any battle could.”

Deciding not to press his luck further, Adibas rested one hand on the hilt of his sword, focused on steering Her through the inlet waters as they grew closer to the island.

“Come breast the bars, bullies, heave her away,
Weigh hey, roll an’ go!
Soon we’ll be rolling her down through the Bay,
To be rollickin’ Randy Dandy-O!

“Heave a pawl, oh, heave away,
Way, ay, roll an’ go!”
The anchor’s on board an’ the cable’s all stored,
To be rollickin’, Randy Dandy-O!” The crew finished the chorus cheerfully.

Thaddeus stood attention below, breaking the silence from the Captain's Deck, “Permission ta’ approach the Captain, ser!”

“State your business, Officer.” Adibas ordered.

“Oh, enough with that daftness…” Naomi shook her head.

Tad walked up the stairs, joining them behind the wheel. He gave his Captain a squirrelly grin. Distracted, Adibas sought the source of his humor.

Naomi’s drenched attire hugged the curves of her body. She wore tight, black, armored leathers. She was armed with two swords, great in length; four pistols at the ready, with holsters on her chest and hip. The tails of her Captain’s coat sloshed behind her boots. All of it looked incredibly uncomfortable.

“Well, out with it, then.” Naomi balanced her elbows on the railing in front of them, resting her chin on her hand.

“Kit and I got ta’ talkin’ last night…” Thaddeus looked at the sails, cautious of making ill with the fierce woman.

“Aye?”

“Mentor Ah Tabai warned us of the Apple, and-“

“As he always does, with these things, Tad.” Naomi rolled her neck.

“Ah, well, in the manner the Mentor referred to the thing, as if some misfortune’ll dawn should you attach it to the Staff like 'da Codex said. I-uh, I question your wellness, Cap’n.”

“The Shantyman ain’t wrong.” Christopher ascended the stairs on the other side of them, “We should make landfall in Tulum before attaching the artifacts...and see this Codex of theirs that they were so reluctant fer us to witness.”

…

“Blasted worried fools…”

It was, in truth, a hardship to possess the Pieces of Eden in the manner that she did. The blood-stained Shroud tied around her waist spoke to her, as it held the voice of its original Precursor creator, Consus. The Sword haunted her dreams. The Staff, on occasion, had similar side effects. She knew her body was mortal and would not sustain Divine abuse forever.

“And this still be my damned ship.”

“Unless ya’ be plannin’ some kind of mutiny, I suggest you merry band of fellows question on another topic.” Naomi straightened herself, “Aye, it’s of unique circumstance. It was made clear that the Apple’s contents are not to be viewed by those of us on the Line. We'll find it, take it to Tulum, and be onward. Let the old Mentors deal with it...Quite animated about all this, they are.”

“You would follow so blindly?” Adibas asked.

Thaddues and Christopher exchanged glances, fearing for his safety.

“As I said, this is of no Lineman’s concern.” She delivered a harsh gaze to Adibas, then moved to Tad and Kit, “Nor is it yours…” Naomi returned her focus to the deck, “nor is it mine.”

“Maybe it ought to be…”

She slammed her fist at Adibas’s pressing, “Ya’ think I don’t know what’s at stake here? How do ya’ think it pains me, sharing blood with these...these Deities, not even fully understandin’ the few things they left behind on this Earth of ours?”
The crew hands below fell silent, looking on at the conflict. With a wave of her hand, they got back to work.

Turning her daggered eyes to the ocean, she lowered her voice, “I am touched by the concern, lads. I could ask for no finer Officers. Still,” She shrugged passed Thaddeus, “Have faith in your Captain…”

Naomi dismissed herself to her Quarters, doubt seeping into her own resolve as they sailed toward the uncharted island.
"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat."
-Genesis 3:6

Eve of Eden

Chapter Summary

He rowboat made landfall with a soft “thud.” Gently setting an oar at his feet, Adibas was the first to get out. The wood clamored beneath them as Naomi and the other sailors attached one arm to the boat, dragging it towards the beach. Their boots splashed the shallow waters. Dry sand clung to their leathers as they climbed ashore. They dropped it in unison, and the Shantyman sat on the edge, “Aye then, off ya’ be, and be safe ya’ ought.” Thaddeus grinned, taking a swig of his flask.

“Ye best be payin’ attention, mate. They aren’t far off our heels, I imagine.” Captain McNamara warned.

“Aye, aye, Cap’n.”

“We’ll be swift in our return.” Adibas said as he and Naomi departed.

Walking up the seagrass covered slope, the two pirates approached an arch formed by fallen boulders. A flourishing wetland lay underneath, however uninviting to them. Brightly colored fauna littered alcove, the area was teeming with wild life as birds of all colors flew, singing unique songs above them.

Dashing upon the overhanging mangrove trees, the two navigated whatever natural bridges they could find over quicksand pits. Naomi became enlightened as she felt the moss dislodging from behind her feet, the winding roots guiding her to the Mayan pillar she sought. They approached the crooked stone structure.

“Aye. Climbing, then.” The Captain grunted.

Twisting her armor and securing her weapons, she hoisted herself on the nearest rock. Adibas was quick to follow.

Their clothes hung heavy as water, sweat and dirt suffocated the fabric. Blisters began to form on their limbs from climbing in wet leathers.

“First Civs, blasted posh git, the like of ‘em.” Naomi cursed.

“Careful,” Adibas climbed next to her, “these are your kin you speak of, and we are encroaching upon their land.”

“Do you answer kindly when the Devil come knockin’?” She laughed.

“No, which is precisely my point. Show some respect and perhaps they will show mercy should anything happen…unexpectedly.”

“Quite.” She said.

Beating him to the top, Naomi extended her spyglass, looking onward to The Dishonored rather than hoisting her companion. Adibas shot her an unimpressed look as he pulled himself over the ledge, “They’ll survive the hour without your presence, Captain.” He brushed his knees off.

“Can’t hang about.” Naomi retracted the device.

“Come, Captain, let’s make past of this place.” Adibas walked towards the vine-entrenched gate that awaited them.

Naomi turned around to follow, but stopped suddenly. Before he knew what she was doing,
she grasp one of her flintlock pistols, loaded a flare into it and held it to the sky.

Just before pulling the trigger, she pushed her ear into the shoulder that was extended, covering the other with her free hand.

She fired a single shot, sending the red snake in the air, instructing the sailors to return to the ship. An answering shot echoed in the distance.

The order had been confirmed.

“Damn it, Captain.” The Quartermaster jumped at the gunfire, turning around in anger.

“I’ll not have my men or women risk their lives so I’ll not have a wee head pain. I feel something brewin’ Adie.” Naomi walked passed him as she plunged her weapon back into its holster on her chest, "Let's get this through."

The two pirates jogged to the ruined entrance. Naomi removed her pendant that hung from around her neck. It was perfectly circular with strange markings on it, and a snake circled the border with its own tail in its mouth. She held the device to the door, sending blue light through the cracks and crevices of a metal gate. Naomi rotated it clockwise, then counterclockwise, not quite able to get the combination correct.

“Blasted devices…” She muttered, her arms getting tired from spinning the it, “Same ol’ lock, same ol’ key.”

“Which is why one would presume you’d be faster at this by now…” Adibas yawned.

“Did all the men in your village talk this much?”

After a time, the entrance had become undone, leading way to a small staircase. The old, Mayan temple quickly evolved into a traditional Precursor entryway as the doors departed. As they ascended the steps, blue lights followed their footsteps, tracing every motion. The Assassins reached a pedestal in the dark chamber, the Apple of Eden floating upon it. It gave off a soft “humming” noise.

"Well, here it is." Naomi spoke nervously.

"Here it is." He repeated, "Please, be careful."

The Captain slowly reached for the artifact, her hand trembling. Something didn't feel right.

She fell to her knees the second the metal touched her skin. Roaring in pain, the visions of the Precursors engulfed her- swirling behind her eyes, ringing in her ears, crawling in her skin. She saw things-horrible things-tall, feral creatures, with limbs long as cannons, and horns furled behind their heads. A green, charging rift in the sky called to her. She saw a man with the head of a Lion leaning down to her, his fangs terrifying in sight.

"Captain!"

Reality snapped back in place as Adibas hoisted Naomi to her feet. She shook her head rapidly, wanting to forget the glimpse she’d had. The Captain drew her Sword of Eden, intending to use its’ translocation power.

“Take the short spell, for once?” Naomi joked, exasperated, "I really would like to get out of here. Now."

“Ahem.” He tapped his own nose, nodding upwards at her.

Naomi slowly lifted her fingers just above her lip. Gazing down, it was made known the blood that graced her fingertips, slowly seeping into the cracked leather gloves. She wiped it on her knee, letting the moment of concern pass swiftly.

“All I need is a wee bit of sleep." The Captain tilted her head back to ease the gushing from her nostrils.

The Dishonored fired warning shot at an approaching ship in the distance.

“Ah, for fuck’s sake.” She moaned in dismay.

The Captain stood close to the Quartermaster, grabbing his arm with the crook of her elbow. As vividly as her memory allowed her, she pictured the Captain’s deck on her ship. Her eyes gave off light like two suns, and within seconds, energy bursting from where they landed. Her hearing and vision briefly stunted, she stumbled in place, gaining control after a few moments. They had returned to the ship.
Naomi turned her back to the Helm, looking through her spyglass. It revealed a Templar ship closing in on them, its treacherous flag waving in the wind.

“Let’s fill their bowels with shot!” She dabbed her nose with her tailcoat after shouting at her crew. They responded in a unified, “Aye!”

Adibas shook his head in disapproval.

“Same ol’ Captain, same ol’ artifacts. One would imagine you’d be quicker at accepting the use of ’em.” Naomi mocked his previous words.

“Anchor out of the water, boys! The Templars fancy a wee swim, they do!” Kit ordered.

“Aye, aye!” They cheered.

Naomi tossed the Apple to Adibas and heaved the wheel, turning the ship so that Her heavy-shot cannons were aimed at the bastards’ ship.

“Arm the cannons!” She called out.

A shot fired from the enemy.

“Brace yourselves!” Captain McNamara ordered, dropping to a knee, shifting her hands to the inner spokes of the wheel.

Her crew fell to their bellies, covering their heads. Cannon balls roared passed them, plowing into the ship and scraping by the deck.

“Ready to fire, ser!” A sailor yelled after a swift recovery was made.

Naomi stood on eager feet, yanking the wheel of the ship, lining up the shot just as they came in an upwards roll of a wave.

“Fire!” She commanded.

The wood shuddered beneath them as *The Dishonored* hurled Her deadly cannonballs, waning as they flew.

“Prepare the chain shot!” Naomi had finally turned the ship fully around, now facing the enemy head-on, “Tops, gallants, half sail!”

On demand, the red, wolf-adorned sails dropped, filling with life as they pushed the ship at a steady pace.

“Feed her wind, boys, do not falter here!” Adibas motivated them as he watched the enemy closing the distance between them.

The ship’s rice ram sliced through the water like a prowling beast, bringing them ever closer. The Templar ship turned to its side, loading up another round.

“Ready, Cap’n!” Kit below shouted.

“Fire, lads!” She responded instantaneously.

The explosion echoed off the waves, rattling off cannon balls linked with chains. They sung as they plowed into the enemy’s masts.

“All sails into the wind, she’ll take it!” Captain McNamara ordered the Riggers.

The ship shuddered and jerked as if it were a stallion let loose, bucking its wild head before a charge.

“Brace, steady crew!” Naomi ordered again.

*The Dishonored* shoved the ocean to Her sides, teeth baring, dripping with venom as she pounced on Her prey. The ram breached the Templar ship, water soaring into its lower deck, sending the men aboard in a flurry. Naomi lurched forward from the sudden stop, the crew losing their balance and sending precious cargo overboard. The masts creaked and rolled, dissatisfied with the hasty approach.

“Douse all the sails!”

Naomi withdrew her Sword of Eden, taking the Apple from Adibas.

“Shall we board, ser?” Kit asked her as she approached him on Deck in the middle of the ship among the other sailors.

“Aye, let’s-“

Her men stopped and turned to her, their eyes glazed over. She recognized the effect. It’d been awhile, though. And she hadn’t been on the disadvantaged side of it.

“The Order of the Knights Templar will finally be rid of you, Precursor wench.” A foreign
Templar yelled, voice flaring with hatred.

The Captain saw a shadowy figure hold another Apple into the air. Her crew fell into his service.

They shakily reached for their pistols, their eyes hiding shame and failure. They could not resist the mind control of the Templar's Piece of Eden, and no matter how hard she tried, Naomi could not return the conscious that was once theirs. Slowly, they drew their weapons, barrels tossing and turning in their unstable hands.

Captain McNamara withdrew the Staff from the sleeve on her back and aligned it with the Apple.

“You’ll sleep in the depths tonight, Templar...” She murmured, reuniting the two forbidden artifacts, unsure of the consequence.
Hoist Anchor

Chapter Summary

“...Here once the embattled stood, and fired the first shot heard around the world.”
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

“You will always have my heart, this is true- but you have to understand why I say what I do.”
Edward held Naomi’s face in his hands, pleading her to listen to him.
“Do I not, now?” She shook her head free of his grasp, turning her back to him, “Do you think I am unfamiliar with the cruelties of men?”
Edward gently turned her back to him, brushing her red hair from her eyes. She avoided his gaze.
“You are still so full of life. Do something with it, other than love…” his voice trailed off. “Be infatuated with-“
“I do,” she affirmed, green eyes tainted with red, “I do love you. And I hate you for it.” Her brow furrowed as she yelled at him, shoving him away. Her eyes betrayed her, tears stinging the young Captain’s face. “Why must you be rid of me?”
“Because I knew from the first moment we met that I-“ Edward’s piercing blue eyes took to the floor. He mulled over the right words to say. Jaw clenched, teeth locked, he looked to her as he painfully choked the words out, “Because I knew, then, that I loved you, too.”

Naomi awoke with a shout. A white sky blinded her as frigid air pummeled her skin. Her lungs ached as if punctured by a dozen spears. She yelped as she sat up, grasping her abdomen. It’s as if she’d been a corpse left on a battlefield.
“Damn it all to Hell!”
Her forearm became stained with fresh liquid. Holes punctured her armor, pouring red from their depths, scraps of leather dangling from the open wounds. She released a blood-curdling howl as an overwhelming surge of pain came about.
Naomi noticed her Sword in the snow, glowing.
“Snow? Have I somehow returned to Ireland?”
Holding her fingers to her lips, she let out the signal whistle she and the her Assassins practiced daily.
A noise startled her- the crunching of footsteps approaching from behind. She yelped as she twisting to observe the sound, falling to her right elbow for support.
“Fuckin’ hell!”
She placed her hand on the red sash that graced her hips, the Shroud of Eden.
“Do something, Consus!” She whispered desperately.
As the pattern in the fabric began to pulse, the bullets began to retract out of her writhing body.
“Maker’s breath, what happened to you?” An unknown voice came from the bushy path to her right.
A man ran toward her, and a boom fired through the air. The wood on the bark splintered next to him. He froze.
“Back off, ya’ stinkin' bastard.” Naomi quickly holstered one gun to her chest and drew a second,
pointing it at him with a threatening 'click,' "Not another step for you, lest you want a skull full of shot."
"I am not certain on the magic you wield, but I can assure you I wish you no harm." The man’s voice was strong.
"Magic? Are you daft?" She winced, the conversation taking a toll. She peered down to her wounds, the puddle doubling in size.

The man tested his luck with the Captain, taking one foot forward. Her head whipped and she took another shot, missing terribly.
"Have you finished with that?" He asked.

He bent over to pick her up in strong, armored hands. With her remaining strength, she released her hidden blade and weakly struck to the man’s heart. She met fur and metal rather than flesh, much to her dismay. He was startled, but did not drop her.
"Stop trying to kill me, and perhaps there will be hope for you yet."

Naomi yelled as he lifted her, red dripping from his knuckles. He adjusted her so that she was leaning into him, her face smothered in warm and welcoming furs. As the world began to fade around her, she rest her hand on the Shroud, drifting into a sleep in the stranger’s warm embrace.

The sound of crackling fire echoed in the room. The scent of burning incense filled Naomi's nostrils, opening her sinuses and spreading warmth within her chest. She heard muffled voices, a harsh woman overpowering.
"Cullen found her…patrolling the…I do not know, Revered Mother…"

A door opened, giving way to a soft, lavender light.
"Will she survive?" A male questioned with voice that, given reason, could shake a building to its foundation.

The same man who saved her.
"W-whe-"Naomi gagged, feeling a rush of rusty, thick liquid escape her chest.
"She’s choking, sit her up!" The harsh woman ordered.

Naomi’s eyes widened, and she leaned to her side, unloading a stomach’s worth of blood on the stone floor. She let it drop from her mouth as she watched it swell and run through the cracks between the tiles. She saw the Shroud sitting on a desk next to her. With the only strength she had left in her, she clawed for it as if her life depended on it. It probably did.

"Awake, child." Consus, the Voice of the Shroud, echoed.

The Captain’s eyes shot open, disrupting her sleep.
"You must recover the Orb."

She looked around to candles lit around her. A night’s sky loomed through large, color-stained windows. It would have been beautiful if she could get passed the "not knowing where she was," part.
"Your equipment and the Pieces are in that chest. Make haste."

Knowing not to question Consus, she sprang to her feet and secured the Shroud around her waist, tucking it over her belt. She opened the chest as directed, holstering her pistol sword, Sword of Eden, and flintlock pistols into their respective holsters. Her pouches still contained ammunition and other weapons, much to her liking. Finally, she lifted the Staff of Eden, glowing upon her touch.
"HELP ME!" A woman called.
"You must be reborn as their Herald."
"What in God’s name are ya-"
“Now is the Hour of our Victory. Hold the sacrifice still.” An eerie voice echoed down the halls.

She left the small room stealthily, making certain to blow out all the candles as to not give her shadow away. The iron-clad wooden door opened without difficulty. She knelt in the doorway, peering ever so carefully down the hall. At the end of the stone corridor, she could see a green, crackling light filling the chamber.

“MOVE, or I shall move you myself!” Consus yelled, his voice dire.

Naomi lifted herself with the help of her Staff, and sprinted down the hall. Her wounds opened, making her cringe.

“What do we have here-“Naomi froze as she rounded the corner.

That which she gazed upon was none other than Satan himself. His skeleton was bare, his face contorted and twisted. His teeth shown through his torn skin, and his hands were those of bird claws. He and a church-looking woman stood in the middle of a circle of many uniformed soldiers. They kept her secured aloft, held by glowing constraints. The holy woman slapped a large, metal orb out of the creature’s hand.

“Run while you can, warn them!” The holy woman screeched.

“Recover the Orb. Be reborn.”

“We have an intruder- kill her, now!” The demon barked.

Naomi reached for the artifact without hesitation, sealing her fate.
Of Haven and Hell

Chapter Summary

"It is my will that Haven be restored, rededicated to the service of Andraste, and preserved for the ages. Let it be a sanctuary for pilgrims who seek out the Temple of Sacred Ashes. May they rest here beneath the cold, bright skies. May the glory of the Maker be revealed to them, as they gaze upon the grey peaks that are the work of His hand. Now and forever more, let this be a Haven for the faithful."

- Divine Justinia V

Green lightning crackled and shook her to the bone. Its foreign essence crawled within her gut, tainting her soul, burning the skin upon her hand. The Captain’s neck slung over her shoulder. Rolling it forward, she let loose a painful groan.

“Can’t I just die and get on wi’ it? For fuck’s sake…”

Naomi peered at her cursed hand, rolling her fingers, studying the strange mark. The light bounced off of the armor her captors wore. She jumped slightly, not noticing them surrounding her beforehand.

“You lads gonna stand there while I—she cleared her throat, “I adorn some glowing scourge?”

They ignored her.

“Aye, I don’t blame ya’, bein’ honest.”

They sheathed their swords in unison as a door slammed open, a cold burst of air calming her fiery temper. Two very different women approached her, clad in armor she’d never encountered before. Their markings held no familiarity.

One of the women bore a large scar on her face, a tad shorter than Naomi’s herself. Her eyes held the darkness that matched those of a Great White. Her hair was cropped, holding one, delicate braid—perhaps her only welcoming feature. The other woman hide under a hood, her hair the red color of newly struck iron. She held the stature and was dressed similar to that of an Assassin.

The Shark circled, stopping in front of Naomi. She bent to her ear, “Tell me why we shouldn’t kill you, now.” A think, rugged accent adorned her lips, “The Conclave is destroyed, everyone who attended is dead. Except for you.”

Naomi closed her eyes. Why were her memories so blurry? She couldn’t remember anything that’d happened.

The Shark embraced the scourged hand, shoving it in the Captain’s face, “Explain this!”

Naomi’s hand sparked as if instructed, “I don’t have a clue as to why me hand’s glowin’, now get it out of me face!”

The warrior tossed it aside in disgust.

“I cannot explain this Devil’s game.” Naomi sighed.

“What do you mean, you can’t?!” The warrior raged, “Divine Justinia saved your life. When Cullen found you, you had holes in your body. Actual, gaping, holes. She took you to the temple, where you lived. And then—she wrestled with herself, drawing her long sword.

“Yeh don’t know who you’re squaring with, lass. And I don’t remember—“

“You’re LYING!” The Shark lunched for the Captain, shoving her blade to her throat. Naomi looked into the eyes of the Great White like so many times before. The only difference with this one is that she didn't have four rows of teeth.
“Aye, you’d be doin’ me a great service.” She whispered as her sparkling hand cast a shadow upon her newly found enemy.

“We need her, Cassandra.” The other woman spoke, an even more intriguing accent voicing her words.

“Out with it, then. Rattle off my charges, wench.” Naomi hissed through clenched teeth.

The warrior sheathed her weapon, stepping back.

“Do you remember what happened? How this began?” The gentler woman asked.

Naomi closed her eyes, trying to remember. She gazed upon them with her Precursor sight, peering into her captor's colored auras. The Shark was red with aggression, but something else. A certain longing, a sadness. She had just lost someone important to her, and she thought Naomi the murderer. However, she needed her alive...for something.

The red-headed woman was even more hostile, much to the Captain's surprise. She held a great and deep despair. A despair so dark, that anger itself couldn’t even rise from her heart to see the light.

“I…I remember running. And then…a woman?” Naomi bowed, feeling blood gush from her nose.

“Fuckin’ artifacts from Hell.”

“A woman?” The hooded red-head verified.

“By Christ!” Naomi sneered. “Either push me into yer service or get on with it. I have no fancy for wastin’ time.”

“Go to the Forward Camp, Leliana. I will take her to the Rift.” Cassandra intervened.

“Sorry to ruin this chat, but I shant be goin’ anywhere without me weapons. All of them.” The Captain demanded.

Cassandra looked to her associate, her face contorting with anger. The hooded woman spoke, “Everything we found on your person is that the Forward Camp. Come with us, and we shall arm you for the fight to come. Until then, you will remain as Cassandra’s prisoner.”

Naomi evaluated the woman named Leliana. She wasn't lying, “Let this day twixt us, then.” She held her shackled hands up to Cassandra. “Shall we go then, Shark?”

Cassandra sighed, freeing her hands.

“You ladies are somethin’ in a hurry.” Naomi commented while rubbing her wrists and stumbling to her feet. “God sprang something on that ya’ ain’t ready for?”

“It…would be easier to show you.” Cassandra’s voice lost it's vigor.

Naomi let the Precursor gift go back to sleep. The women walked outside, the cold gracing Naomi’s tan and scarred skin. Her eyes adjusted as she looked on, her lungs nearly failing as she gasp at the sky.

The howling rift.
Chapter Summary

"You say that you are my judge; I do not know if you are; but take good heed not to judge me ill, because you would put yourself in great peril."
- Jeanne d'Arc

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.
knock my 'silly sword' from my hands."

The two women began following a worn trail. She observed the water, frozen and still.

“What I’d give to smell the winds of Nassau…”

“Your mark must be tested on something smaller than the Breach.” Cassandra’s remark snapped her captive’s attention, “Open the gate! We are heading into the valley.”

The sky flared, sending the fiery pain up Naomi’s arm. Refusing to let the ground meet her knees again, she stood strong, resilient. She noticed her hidden blades still attached to her wrists. The Captain buckled under a second wave of pain, still fighting the urge to fall.

“The pulses are coming faster now.” Cassandra warned, “The larger the Breach grows, the more rifts appear, and the more demons we must face.”

“There you go runnin’ at the mouth with that demon blasphemy.”

“You have not seen one?” Cassandra asked, confused.

“Nay, because they aren’t real.”

“The one who did this to my face says differently.” Her features hardened, “They said you…stepped out of the Rift, then fell unconscious, a woman standing behind you. Everything in the valley was laid waste, including the Temple of Sacred Ashes…I’m surprised you didn’t see any. Though, I suppose you will see soon enough.”

“Charmed.” Naomi grunted.

A green rock hurled across the sky, landing in a small opening to their right. Shielding her face from the impact, Captain McNamara looked on, “What in the Seven Hells…”

“A timely arrival.” Cassandra drew her sword, placing her shield in front of her. “Stay behind me!”

A monster stood from the crater, seven feet in the air.

“It’s the horror from my vision…” Everything she’d thought she’d known about the world crumbled around her.

“Is…is this all real?” She turned to look at the Breach, looming over the world, “Have I finally gone mad?”

Cassandra’s shriek grabbed her attention. The demon had jumped out of the ground before her, knocking her shield out of her hand. The warrior dodged attacks with her sword, but was struggling to maintain a solid defense.

“Ay, pissy little prick!” Naomi ran to the side of the demon, waving her hands, “I’ll have words with ya!” She withdrew her two hidden blades.

The demon turned its attention to the taunting pirate.

“Piss. Now what?”

It had furled horns behind its head, hands the size of a Helm. It whirled a giant claw at her. She ducked and tried to counter attack with the blade, but the creature was too fast. Naomi circled the demon, studying it, activating her Precursor vision to find a weak spot.

The back of its knees.

The Captain charged, dodging a predictable frontal attack. Sliding underneath the monster’s dripping claws, she jammed one of her wrist blades into the back of its frail, thin leg. The demon howled, falling to its other knee. Naomi quickly got to her feet and jumped on top of the creature, grabbing its horn for balance, and impaled the other blade into its skull.

The monster disappeared. Naomi screamed as she fell through the air, hitting the hard, frozen ground.

“I-I think I…” She lifted her hand from her side, revealing blood trickling into the snow, “We have to hurry. I don’t know how much more my body c-can…” She yelled in pain as her mark flared up, “Curse my luck!”

“You survived your first encounter with that demon, and took him down…I’d say your luck was quite favorable, if not a bit reckless.” She acted as a crutch for the Captain as they walked, ”You could have been in far worse condition by now.”

“Aye, I suppose I didn’t think-“ Naomi hissed as her lungs stung as she dripped on the warrior’s armor.
“Save your strength. We are almost there.”
They came to a large, snowy staircase, limping as they climbed. “We’re getting close to the rift, you can hear the fighting!” Cassandra pointed out.
“Well, I’ll do my best to not get myself killed while ya’ slay the big bad demons. Can’t say I’ll be much help.” Naomi leaned on her own feet and forced herself up the stairway.
Another horned beast ambushed them. It flung one of its massive arms down at her, claws ready to gash her body. She dodged the creature with a painful roll, and repeated a slight puncture to the back of its knee, sending it down to one leg. Naomi spun quickly, aiming for the creatures’ chest. Her blade met her target, face inches away from the monster’s jaws. She bore into it’s eyes as it died, cursing the beast into oblivion.
“Not bad.” She heard a gruff snicker from a deep voice behind her.
“Quickly, before more come through!” A being that somewhat resembled a man grabbed her wrist, lunging it towards the rift.
Naomi’s nerves flared, her arm grew sore. She yelled and swore, watching as she absorbed the rift into her marked hand.
“Fuckin’ HELL!” She pressed the bloody hidden blade to the man’s neck as she grabbed his collar, “What did you do?”
“I did nothing- the credit is yours.” He held up his hands in surrender, grinning slightly, “Whatever magic opened the Breach in the sky also placed that mark upon your hand. I theorized the mark might be able to close the rifts that have opened in the Breach’s wake—and it seems I was correct.” He cleared his throat, “Now, could you lower your blade?”
The blade simply went back into her gauntlet, and she lowered her arm. There was something unsettling about him, and not just his pointed ears.
“Ma serannas.” He spoke.
Naomi gave him a disgusted look.
“Meaning it could also close the Breach itself?” Cassandra cut into the conversation.
“Possibly.”
“Joy and bloody fuckin’ joyness...Where in God’s name am I?” Naomi seethed.
“And here I thought we’d be ass-deep in demons forever.”
There it was-that gruff voice again. Naomi looked around, not able to find the source.
“Here.” He waved a hand within her line of sight to get her attention.
She lowered her gaze, and looked at the man in awe.
“Varric Tethras: Rogue, storyteller, and occasionally unwelcome tagalong.” He winked at Cassandra, who responded with a curled lip.
“You’re-“Naomi started.
“A dwarf?” Varric finished, “First time?”
“For everything, I suppose.”
After some arguing on whether Varric would travel with the band of misfits, it was decided that he’d stay with the group due to necessity. Cassandra was not happy about it.
“My name is Solas if there are to be introductions. I am pleased to see you still live.”
“He means, ‘I kept that mark from killing you while you slept.’” Varric chimed in.
“Then I believe I owe you my thanks. Naomi nodded, graciously, ”And, perhaps, an apology.”
Solas wiped the smudge of blood her blade had left on his neck.
“And what might our savior’s name be?” Varric chimed.
“I go by manya’ names, but you can call me Joan.”
Naomi was a bit gladdened to have more people with them, as Cassandra was intimidating company to keep. Still, it’d be best to keep her true identity to herself.
“Cheery bunch of mates you’ve got.” Naomi cackled, grasping her ribs as the adrenaline wore off.
“You should be mindful of your wounds.” Cassandra spoke coldly.
A few moments went by, Naomi monitored her injuries.
“So, did you do it?” Varric asked.
“I’ve committed no short list of sins in my life, but opening a tide in the sky and unleashing
“demons is a charge not on my charter.”

Varric shook his head. “Should have spun a story. Less likely to lead to premature execution.”

“Do I look like I’m in the business of stories and politics?” She rebutted.

“The Rift is gone, open the gate!” Cassandra yelled at the men above as they approached the metal entrance.

“Right away, Lady Cassandra!” They answered.

“Lady Cassandra, aye? You sure open a lot of gates with that mighty voice of yours.” She teased.

“I open more skulls with my mighty sword.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt it, lass.”

Changing the hostile conversation, Solas added some good news, “We’re clear for the moment. Well done.”

“Whatever that thing on your hand is, it’s useful.” Varric clucked.

They made their way over to the red-headed rogue, who Naomi learned was named Leliana. She was arguing with a man who accused the Captain of being the “miracle-murderer” everyone believed her to be. The old prune shot a nasty, fearful look at her as she hobbled up to them.

“As Grand Chancellor of the Chantry, I hereby order you to take this criminal to Val Royeux to face execution!” Chancellor Roderick commanded.

“You’ve a long line to wait in to get a swing at me, mate.” Naomi spat on the ground.

“Order me? You are a glorified clerk, a bureaucrat.” Cassandra laughed.

“And you are a thug,” he countered, “A thug who supposedly serves the Chantry.”

“I don’t follow you people.” Naomi slammed her metal-reinforced knuckles on the table in front of them. “You either let me do the job and get outta my way, or make me go through forcefully- up to you. I’ll have either choice with no remorse. You, on the other hand, the same should not be said.” She glared at Chancellor Roderick.

He remained quiet.

“Good. Now, I don’t know if I’ll be alive long enough to accomplish anythin', so let’s make past of this chitchat and get to moving.”

Leliana spoke up, then. “We are faced with two options of attack. Our forces can charge as a distraction, while we go through the mountains. It'll be quicker that way. However, charging forward with our forces may result in less casualties, with time as the sacrifice.”

“We must fight alongside our men to prevent losses. Enough have died on this day.” Cassandra looked aside.

“True. However, my agents are some of the most skilled, and they can handle the mountain passes with your help.” Leliana looked to the Captain.

Naomi laughed.

“You’d put the fate of your men in a stranger? Can't say I'd be as trusting.”

“You’re the one putting your life at risk for reasons unknown to you. Stranger or not, that gives you the right to decide.” Cassandra’s voice was cracking under stress.

The comment gave Captain McNamara pause.

“All things considered, I shall charge with you and yours, lass.” She coaxed, “While we’re on the subject, I believe there are a few things here that belong to me.”

Cassandra guided her to a chest with a strange, spiraling symbol on it.

“As promised.” She jerked the padlock.

“Right then, let’s go give it to the big man in the green hole.” Naomi gave the Breach a challenging look as she equipped herself.

Leliana was tasked with gathering the remaining survivors in the valley.

“Ah, and, old man?” She turned back to look at the pruned Chancellor, “I do mean, it is a very, very, long line. I wouldn’t be so hopeful.” She laughed, waving him away, cringing at the pain of her ribs.

“Spose’ I deserved that one,” She cursed her injuries as she limped away.
Chapter End Notes

Trial of Joan of Arc
Chapter Summary

"May the best days of your past be the worst days of your future."
-Irish Blessing

The stench was the first thing to be noticed when they reached the summit. Everything was on fire; the trees, the ground, the bodies still tarred.

“Aye, mates…” Naomi swayed slightly, holding her stomach. “Yeh best look ‘way.” She threw up profusely, uncontrollably. Cassandra walked to her side, holding her hair behind her. She looked away, grimacing. The Captain waved her off, but she stood there, still.

“Apologies.”

Solas and Varric turned to look at her.

“Alright, there, Spitfire?” Varric laughed.

“Hardly.” Naomi swiped her mouth with the back of her wrist.

Solas raised an eyebrow, “Your wounds. They’re healed. How?”

Naomi shrugged, “Can’t keep me down, I spose’.” She yet live, despite the demons and the multiple bullet holes in her armor.

“You look like a ghoul.” Varric snickered.

“Aye, and you look like…well, you wouldn’t know what it was, anyway.” She walked passed him, bloody footprints in her wake.

Stopping abruptly, she glanced back at Cassandra, unsure of how to proceed. A raging fire demon stood before her, facing one man and what seemed like injured soldiers.

“I’m assumin’ we’ll be assisting this lad too, then?” Naomi drew her swords, and more demons approached.

“Cullen!” Cassandra yelled as he took a blow to his shield, his lion’s mane wavering.

“Let’s show them what we can do, eh?”

Naomi appeared before Cullen, startling him, and lunged the Sword of Eden at his neck. He dodged swiftly, the Sword impaling a demon that had sprung from the ground behind him. Their faces were inches apart from each other.

They held each other’s gaze for a moment- his molten amber eyes peering through the lion’s mouth of his helmet. His fur-lined coat matted with blood, his armor dirtied and grimed, his shield knocked.

The rift exploded behind them, and another demon caught Cullen’s attention.

“How many rifts are there?” Varric shouted, launching his bolts into the faces of his enemies.

“We must seal it if we are to get passed!” Solas shouted among the chaos.

“Quickly, then!” Cassandra agreed.

Captain McNamara ran into the heart of the rift, impaling demons as she went. She saw two approaching her from either side and sheathed her swords. Aiming her pistols up, one facing to her left, the other to her right, she pulled both triggers, iron balls burying themselves into both of the demons’ faces. The loud noise shook the party. Everyone stopped to look at her, frozen in place with two smoking flintlocks. She holstered them and approached the rift, anguished.

“Be mindful of how close you get to that thing!” Cullen shouted from across the battlefield.

Naomi lifted her hand, and the rift started to enter her arm. She cried out in pain as a blast knocked her down flat. A terror demon stood over her, attacking with its teeth.
“Ah, my favorite!” Naomi released her hidden blades and dug them into the beasts’ neck, kicking it in the jaw as it leaned in to devour her. The beast was stunned for a moment, and before it had time to recover, Naomi came down on it with the Sword of Eden, missing its head and impaling its shoulder. She held on to one of the horns as to not lose balance as it bucked, trying to get her off of it. The others ran to her, but the demon disappeared into the ground, taking her with it.

A moment went by, nothing else around them but the humming rift itself. They awaited her return, looking around frantically.

“Where did it take her?” Cullen shot a look to Solas.

“I am unsure.” He frowned.

The demon sprang up behind them, roaring, Naomi and the Sword still attached to its shoulder. Using the pistol sword, she beheaded the demon, quickly falling to the ground as the beast vanished. Cullen dropped his sword and shield to his side, dashing a small distance, leaping to break her fall.

They skid on the ground, landing on their sides- Naomi in his strong, armored embrace. She coughed as she waved the dust away, cursing the foul stench of her foe.

“Keep savin’ me and you might find yourself with my company, mate.”

Cullen stood, extending a hand. She grabbed his forearm, and he pulled her to her feet.

“I’m more interested in how you’re walking, to be quite honest.”

“’Aye, you’d not be wrong to.” She put her hands on her hips, looking back to the rift. His observed her massive scar, down to the puncture wounds and holes that still ran her armor ragged.

“Let’s handle the green gate, yeah?” She questioned, snapping his attention forward.

He hadn’t noticed her staring at him, and he could have sworn she showed a slight blush.

Cassandra crossed her arms, glaring at her, “If you would.”

Naomi nodded, holding her marked hand up to the rift. The pain shot down into her shoulder, leaving her gasping for air. She pulled her hand with precision, and the rift slammed closed. She grasp her arm with her free hand, wishing the process didn’t have to be so painful.

“Bloody fucking…” Naomi’s voice faltered.

“Sealed, as before. You are becoming quite proficient at this.” Solas grinned, folding his arms behind his back.

“Let’s hope it works on the big one.” Varric rolled his eyes.

“Well done.” Cullen jogged to them.

“Curly!” Varric waved.

“Varric…” Cullen all but whispered, giving a half-assed wave back, “I hope they’re right about you,” he stared at the Captain.

She sighed, “All I’m certain of is that we’ve got a common enemy, and I reckon they’re close.”

“We’ll see soon enough, won’t we?”

“Spose’ we will.” Naomi answered.

The party wasted no time jumping into the scorched area, bodies burned, charred, and still aflame.

“So this be where you find me, eh?” The Herald asked.

“The Temple of Sacred Ashes…” Solas murmured.

“What’s left of it…” Varric whispered.

“Yes. That, is where you walked out of the Fade, and our soldiers found you. They say a woman was in the rift behind you- no one knows who she was.” Cassandra confirmed.

Naomi had no words. She walked among corpses of people who had families, of those who died in service to their cause. She did not appreciate death among honorable people.

Focusing on the massive rift ahead of her, she gulped, watching it expand and shrink repeatedly.

“The Breach is a long way up…” Varric peered into the sky.
“You’re here! Thank the Maker.” Leliana skipped to her with a troop of scouts trailed behind.
“Leliana, it pleases me you’ve arrived safely. Have your men take positions around the temple.” Cassandra gave the order, “This is your chance to end this. Are you ready?”
“Aye, as ready as I ought to be.” Naomi said bluntly.
“Seal the rift down here, and perhaps it will even seal the Breach.” Solas encouraged.
“Let’s find a way down to the crater.” Cassandra began scaling the walls.

“Now is the Hour of our Victory.” A voice rang throughout the temple.

Naomi’s headache grew worse, recognizing the voice, but unable to recall from where.

“Bring forth, the sacrifice.”
“What are we hearing?” Cassandra asked shakily.
“A guess? The person who created the Breach.” Solas responded.
Naomi lost her balance, stumbling in place.
“My head…ugh. We need to hurry…” Blood trickled from her nose.

They quickened their pace, only stopping again when they saw abnormally tall crystals that glowed a sinister red.
“You know that stuff is red lyrium, Seeker.” Varric was uneasy.
“I see it, Varric.”
“But what’s it doing here…” He was irritated at her lack of understanding.
“Magic could have drawn on it from beneath the temple.” Solas with another answer.
“I have no fucking idea what they’re yappin’ on about.” Naomi withdrew herself from the conversations, walking ahead.

“Whatever you do, don’t touch it.” Varric concluded.

“Keep the sacrifice still.”

“Someone, help me!” A familiar, heavily accented voice rang through the air.

“What do we have here?” Naomi’s own voice echoed throughout the area.
“That was your voice. Most Holy called out to you, but…” Cassandra was interrupted by the Rift contracting and opening.

A memory played for them. It showed Naomi running into the room, bandaged and bloodied.

“Run while you can, warn them!” The Divine called to her.

“We have an intruder- kill her, now!” She knew she’d heard it before, and racked her brain for where.

“You were there, and the Divine, is she…? Was this vision true? What are we seeing?”

Naomi thought back to the first moments she spent in this world. She remembered waking up in snow, reaching for the Shroud, and then…nothing. But the building that the memory showed- it seemed so familiar.

“Echos of what happened here. The Fade bleeds into this place. I believe that, with the mark, the rift can be opened, and then sealed safely. However, opening the rift will likely attract attention from the other side.” Solas interrupted the silence with some rationale.

“That means demons- stand ready!” Cassandra drew her sword in one hand, her shield in the other, facing the rift with her Great White eyes.

Soldiers surrounded them filled with fear, swords drawn and shaking. Naomi turned to face them, and saw Cullen in his lion helmet barking orders.

Leliana and her archers lined the rim of the opening, standing at the ready of signal. She held one hand behind her back, and the other at an angle, waiting to give them the order to fire.

The Captain’s arm began to shake and flare. Gripping it, she looked at Cassandra, who gave her a nod. Leaving her companions behind, Naomi fearlessly approached the rift, yelling in pain as the Fade energy ripped through her body.

What she saw was unlike anything other. There she stood, closer than anyone else, to a monstrous “Pride Demon,” as they were shouting. It stood twenty feet in the air, appeared to have ram’s horns, and stood on two legs.
"NOW!" Cassandra shouted, raising her sword in the air and charging. The beast back handed Naomi sending her flying into a large stone, knocking her temporarily unconscious. Arrows flew through the air with a whistle, plummeting themselves into the demon’s body. Cassandra beat her pommel on her shield, yelling to get the beast’s attention. She quickly dodged and deflected incoming attacks, doing her best to take shots at any opening. Varric unloaded his magnificent crossbow into its chest while Solas spun and twirled his staff in his hands as if it was a dance. Cullen’s troops held off the other demons that spawned with ease, however, the Commander found himself occupied.

He ran over to Naomi, dropping his shield and sword to his sides while landing on his knees in front over her.

“No, no, no,” he thought to himself, “we can’t do this without her and her mark. She must live, she has to-“

“Commander.” She said plainly, rising to her feet. “You sure know how to follow a lass into mischief.” She extended a hand to help him up.

“I suppose.” He smirked.

“I do believe this demon has overstayed its welcome.” Naomi grinned.

“Weak it with your mark!” Solas shouted as he cast a barrier over Cassandra.

“Aye, aye!” The Captain held her arm to the rift, gritting her teeth and swearing under her breath, “If it’s a dust up ya’ want, lad, I’ll be happy to give ya’ one!” Naomi yelled as the rift exploded, stunning the large demon.

She drew her Sword of Eden, and only a shadow of her remained. Using translocation, Naomi made her way above the demon, landing her blade above his head. He came to swat at her, but she quickly vanished, appearing behind his legs. She cut behind the knees, and then ended up on the side to flank the enemy. She felt reinvigorated, shimmering a light blue from Solas's barrier magic.

The beast rampaged on, whipping its chains of electricity wildly in the air. Naomi was almost caught by one, the Sword saving her. She’d appear in one place, and then the next second that passed by, she’d be across the way, blood spewing from the monster from a newly found wound. Every time it would harden its skin, she’d weaken it by tampering with the rift.

After a few more wounds and fatigue from being deflected and slashed by Cassandra, the beast began to stagger.

Naomi herself felt her strength waning. The Pieces were the only kind of advantage she had in this world, though they drained her as much. She feared she wouldn’t last and knew she had to put it down quickly.

“Now’s a good a time as ever...” Naomi thought to herself.

She translocated behind Cullen, helping him slay the last of the excess demons.

“Commander, pull our forces back!” She tried to yell, but it came out as a desperate gasp. She was panting from exhaustion.

“We can’t ju-“

“Pull them back!” She roared.

Cullen’s face grew twisted, both confused and taken aback by her demeanor.

“Everyone, fall back, NOW, GO!” He yelled repeatedly across the battlefield as they fell into a retreat.

“For the love of Christ himself, I’ve never had so much trouble telling soldiers to run away!” She thought to herself.

Ducking under her shield, Cassandra looked behind her to see the small army falling back behind the arches of the once-temple.

“Wha-“The beast knocked her off of her feet, sending her shield to the ground.

“Oy! Pride Beastie, yeah? Ugly bastard, you are!” Naomi shouted at the demon. He did not turn his gaze from Cassandra, who was now being drug to safety by Varric and Solas.

“What are you doing?!” Solas screeched at her.
“Insanity personified…” Varric mumbled. Quick-drawing two pistols held in the holders behind her, she shot them into the beast’s back, holstering them and drawing the pair she kept to her front. “Aye, didn’t like that, didja?” She loaded the chamber as the Pride Demon turned to face her. She fired the other pair near the creature’s face, earning her a roar that shook the ground beneath her. “Bout’ blasted time, idiot.” Stowing her guns, she held the Sword of Eden high into the sky with both hands. The core in the hilt began to pulse, its beating light getting brighter, bigger, with each passing second. A snake of white light slithered around her with the speed of the wind, deflecting the chain attacks from the Pride Demon. Within a matter of seconds, she was fully charged. With one mighty, full-bodied, swing of the Sword of Eden, a blade of light sliced the beast in two, leaving a scar in the earth and a bloody mess of entrails in its wake. Naomi fell to one knee, gasping for air as she regained control of her body. The metal clanked next to her as the Sword fell from her hand, now grasping the wrist of her pulsing, green, limb. With both hands, she heaved the glowing Mark to the Breach, barely having the strength to lift her arm. The deadly green light shot through her body and then- to the Black, the Captain journeyed.

Cold- the bitter cold. Her vision was blurred, her ears-ringing. She felt a strong grasp around her, a gentle rocking and clicking, the crunching of snow. “W…h-“ She tried to speak, but her lungs did not fuel her words. “Try not to speak. Everything will be alright.” He spoke with a daring confidence, but so, so warm. Warmth. Warmth from the furs that surrounded her, a scent of pine needles and earth, like a wet forest after a strong rain. She smiled to herself, closing her eyes and pressing her cheek to the fur-lined wall. A soft thudding pierced through the drowning noises her injured ears conjured. She smiled again, looking upwards. A brown blur hovered over her as she strained herself to focus, squinting in frustration. The jaws of the lion peered back at her. “Lion’s don’t have eyes in their mouth.” She thought to herself in her stupor. Naomi plopped her head back into the fur wall, and drifted off to sleep with the help of the humming heart of her rescuer.
The Threat Remains

Chapter Summary

"I am not angry or sad or happy to see you. I could not give a shit. You don't even ripple."
-Gillian Flynn

The smell of salt wafted before her, a scent that was more home than anywhere Naomi had ported. Walking freely topside, disguised under the name of “Nathan,” she swabbed the deck for the Captain of the HMS Zealand.

Two men grabbed her arms from either side of her, raving as they drug her to the Captain’s quarters, her fellow Irishmen looking at her pitifully from a distance, “Off to the Captain’s Quarters with you, Nate.”

“Aye, what did I do?” She held the voice of a man.

“Don’t know, don’t care.” The Englishmen pushed her through the doors, forcing her to stumble and fall to her knees. She shuffled to her feet, saluting her Captain at once.

“Ser!” She shouted, panting in embarrassment.

Captain Abbey stood up slowly, walking over to the doors she’d just entered. He gently shut them, the clasp faintly clicking. She focused on his desk, waiting for reprimand.

She felt cold, rough hands grasp her shoulders, gripping the linen shirt she wore, tearing it off with a mighty pull. Grabbing a dagger she kept in her belt, she turned suddenly, raising it to his throat. The bounds that made her chest flat were exposed.

“Aye, truth be it, then. You’re a woman.” He grinned, staring her down.

“Don’t like bein’ stripped, that’s all.” Her green eyes fixed on his, looking more feminine to him by the second.

“And what do you plan to do, ‘Nathan?’ Slit my throat, a Royal Captain, on board a Royal Naval ship with a Royal crew? Save a few hired Irishmen, your odds don’t look too grand. How about we lower our weapons and chat?” He flicked his wrist, revealing a pistol she hadn’t noticed he’d drawn.

“Aye, let’s chat.” She lowered her weapon, something she’d regret for the next eleven years.

Asping for air, Naomi sat up quickly, throwing the covers on the floor as if trying to escape them. She looked around, frantically, finally figuring out where she was.

“Haven.” She felt strange, and looked to find herself in a tan, tightly fitted outfit with what seemed like studs down the middle.

“What in the piss is this posh shit?”

A young pointed-ear creature walked through the door, lanky and tall, much like Solas. This one was much less fierce, however. And female.

“Ah, Herald, I didn’t mean to-”

“Herald? That’s not my name, lass,” Naomi declared, “What can I do for yah?”

“I was i-instructed t-to bring you t-th-th-”

“The items in yer hand?” Naomi stood up, approaching the young female.

“Look in the chest!” She shrieked, dropping the pile of belongings she held and yelling as she fled the room, the door slamming shut with a loud “bang.”
Shaking her head, the Captain knelt to find her armor and blouse. While bloodstained, they were now cleaned and mended.

“Thank Jesus himself. Gettin’ real tired of digging in boxes for my things.” She whispered.

While getting strapped into her comfortable armor, she noticed the aforementioned chest at the end of the bed. She opened it, and rejoiced wholeheartedly to find all her belongings fully intact. A note was attached to the Staff of Eden:

“Please come to the Chantry when you awake, if a doctor has not escorted you.”

The handwriting was very sloppy.

Hearing people crowded around the outside of her door, she walked to the window to the left side of the cabin. Resting her hand on the hilt of the Sword, she translocated herself across the threshold, walking along the back of the buildings, undetected by the citizens.

She looked up to see the green rift still howling in the sky.

“I-I failed. What in the blasted Hell? Why didn’t it work?” She unfurled her hand and wiggled her fingers, playing with a soft, green light in between her knuckles. She scolded, and continued onward.

As soon as she saw the large temple, she translocated to the side of it, scaling the stone exterior with ease. She entered through a high section of the stained-glass window, holding back a sneeze as the dust puffed in front of her.

Naomi moved through the rafters of the Chantry, silently. Hearing arguing, she stopped just before the room at the end of the hall.

She climbed higher into the roof’s infrastructure, passing over the wall planks, rolling onto her back to slip through small spaces. She eventually found herself looking down at the screaming match, holding the planks to her side, her left foot balanced as her right leg curled behind her.

The Chancellor and Cassandra were arguing, Leliana watching patiently.

“Have you gone completely mad? She should be taken to Val Royeux immediately to be tried by… whoever becomes Divine!” Chancellor Roderick bellowed.

“I do not believe she is guilty.” Cassandra said plainly, crossing her arms.

“The prisoner failed, Seeker. The Breach is still in the sky. For all you know, she intended it this way.”

“I do not believe that.”

“That is not for you to decide. Your duty is to serve the Chantry. And to not surrender a captive’s weapons to her bedside!”

The Captain dropped to a rafter a little lower, making her way down through the roof.

“My duty is to serve the principles on which the Chantry was founded, Chancellor, as is yours.”

Naomi dropped from the lowest plank onto the main table, rising slowly, holding her hands up in delight, albeit sarcastically. Cassandra pulled back, almost drawing her sword. The Chancellor cried out in horror, pointing a flailing hand.

“Chancellor, me harty, how I’ve missed thee!” She gave an awfully fake bow.

“Chain her! I want her prepared for travel to the capital for trial!” He dribbled.

“Disregard that.” Cassandra contested, “Lady Herald, I see you are well and…able.”

“You walk a dangerous line, Seeker.” The Chancellor reminded her, “The Breach is stable, but it is still a threat. I will not ignore it. Neither will I ignore your charades once this is through, you derelict!”

“Aye, it remains,” Naomi hopped down off the table, walking over to an unoccupied corner, “How many times must I almost die for you strange fellows before you believe me when I say: I. Am. Not. Guilty?” Naomi rolled her eyes, leaning against the wall, crossing her ankles and arms.

“Yet you live. A convenient result, insofar as you’re concerned.”

“Mate, you aren’t suggesting-” Naomi snickered, “I’d be the richest woman in Nassau-nay, I’d be ownin’ Nassau, if I’d be able to conjure holes in the sky. This is not the case, by far.”

Leliana stepped in, having remained quiet. “Someone was behind the explosion at the Conclave. Someone Most Holy did not expect. Perhaps they died with the others—or have allies
“I heard voices in the temple. The Divine called for her to help.” Cassandra reinforced.
“Her survival, that thing on her hand—all a coincidence?” He retorted.
“Providence. The Maker sent her to us in our darkest hour.” The Seeker’s face grew hard.
Naomi began to feel uncomfortable.
“I’m anything but innocent, lass.” She took a serious tone, unfolding her arms, “You can’t possibly believe I’m some kind’a blessin’?”
“No matter what you are, or what you believe, you are exactly what we needed, when we needed it. We are all subject to the will of the Maker, whether we wish it or not.”
“The Breach remains, and your mark is still our only hope of closing it.” Leliana agreed.
“Ya’reckon, as much as I loathe this prune-skinned bastard, he has sound reasonin’. Yeh don’t know where I hail from, you don’t know how I came to this wretched Haven, whose name, by the way, I learned from common gossip; yah couldn’t even tell me where I was. Yeh haven’t learned a thing about me.” Naomi was frustrated. “Yet, aside from these blasted truths, my life yet remains in your ‘righteous’ hands. I have yet to learn who this ‘Maker’ or ‘Andraste’ even are, and still, you all honor me as some sort of champion. Pitiful.” She raised a hand to Cassandra to silence her as she began to respond. She was in no mood.

The Shark and the Assassin-lookalike panged at the words, seemingly ashamed at their behavior. Naomi had only been there for a few days, and had done more about closing the Breach than those they once paid worship to.

Roderick turned to Cassandra, ignoring Naomi’s speech altogether. “This is not for you to decide.”

The Seeker turned to a desk and lifted a hefty, metal-bound book. She slammed it onto the table, the echo carrying off into the corners of the room.
“You know what this is, Chancellor. A writ from the Divine, granting the authority to act. I will make this for me to decide.” Cassandra began to corner the Chancellor, approaching him slowly, deadly, her voice rising with passion and authority as she spoke. “As of this moment, I declare the Inquisition reborn. We will close the Breach, we will find those responsible, and we will restore order, with or without your approval.”

Naomi burst into laughter, clapping her hands excitedly. “Show him what for, lass!”

This seemed to recover the Seeker from the verbal reprimand before.

“I intend to.”

The Chancellor realized he was outnumbered in opinion, and nervously left the chamber.

“Herald, this is the Divine’s directive: Rebuild the Inquisition of old, find those who will stand against the chaos.” Leliana sighed and shook her head, “We aren’t ready. We have no leader, no numbers, and now no Chantry support.”

Cassandra cut in, “But, we have no choice: we must act now. With you at our side.”

“My warnings fall on deaf ears, I see. Do what yeh must, and when you have a moment, do be a dear and tell me what in the fuckin’ Hell I’m ‘sposed to do about that big pissed off thing in the sky.” Naomi cursed the women and turned to leave.

Leliana and Cassandra looked at each other.

“Agh…” Naomi gripped her face, shaking her head, “I’d have a quick kip today, I believe.”

She backed into the doors, opening them and bumping into someone.

“Apologies.” She didn’t look up to the person, weaving around them, blood dripping from her chin to the floor.

“These Pieces will be the quick death of me.”

Cullen watched her stumble away, concerned.
Knights Templar

Chapter Summary

"To betray, you must first belong."
-Harold Philby

“It doesn’t exist between us for a reason,” Edward joked to Blackbeard, “she’s a lost sea hound searching for a purpose. I ain’t have the time to guide her.”
“I’d be quite vexed if it was me you’d be runnin’ your yap about.” Naomi took a seat next to Kenway, “Far be it from me to be a burden on a fellow Captain. Perhaps if you’d be able to watch yer own tail, I’d have more time to do this ‘searching’ of mine.” She spoke wryly as Adibas sat next to her.
“A woman watching my tail? I’ve had worse things to complain about.” Edward joked as he nodded to the other Captains in the tavern. They laughed together, agreeing.
“If she be the lost sea hound, why is it every time she fancies another man’s company, you show up like a ghost from the depths?” Anne Bonny slid Naomi a drink.
“I imagine it’d be because he fancies her.” Vane cackled, Edward quickly turning into the source of their humor, now.
“Ah, he wouldn’t last an hour with the likes of me.” Naomi downed her ale.
“Oh, Ireland, I’ve missed yeh.” Anne gave her a hug.

Naomi woke with a sigh, missing home more as the hours went by. She stretched and cracked her neck, looking around the room. She’d half expected to wake up in her Quarters, having a nightmarish dream. Alas, this was not the case.
The dust finally began to settle. The last 28 years of her life, gone in an instant- and for what purpose? To save these strangers, to save this new realm, to fight demons who were real? The most important question that bogged her mind was the fate of The Dishonored and her crew. What became of them?
“There’s got to be reasonin’ behind this madness. Where do I even start?” She wasn’t sure, and wasn’t comfortable enough to ask anyone else.
She dressed herself, grateful that the holes in her leathers had been mended; even if it wasn’t of the Great White skin that she had them crafted with. She armed herself in all of her weapons’ glory, ready to embark on another day’s strange work. There was a knock at the door of her cabin. Naomi answered it slowly, wishing she could be left alone for more than a brief moment.
“What is it?” She said upon opening, not caring who was on the other side.
Cassandra stood there, amazed at Naomi’s never-ending crudeness.
“I would like to formally introduce you to the most crucial members of the Inquisition.” She said flatly.
“More politics, then?”
“It seems anything not involving a blade is politics, in your eyes.”
“Aye, you’re a keen one, lass.” Naomi departed alongside the Seeker with a frustrated slam of the door.

She held memories of the West Indies in an attempt to negate the bone-chilling weather. There was snow in Ireland, but she hadn’t dealt with it in years.
Usually blending in with her surroundings, she’d not yet adjusted to the way people looked at her as she walked around the small village. She’d definitely not grown accustomed to being viewed as a prophet of sorts. Putting her hood up, she kept her eyes averted, trying to ignore the new prospect.

The two walked a short while in silence before Cassandra struck conversation.

“This must be hard for you.” Cassandra spoke solemnly, “I apologize for not being more considerate in the beginning.”

“We’re passed apologies- no need.” Naomi was blunt with her disregard.

“You’re still angry?”

“I have no ill will against yah or yer Inquisition. I’m angry at the situation I find myself in- nothin’ more, nothin’ less.”

The Seeker scrounged for another topic.

"You were asleep for three days..." Cassandra whispered.
"Was I? I’ve was awake for longer."

Silence followed until they got to the Chantry.

“Does it trouble you?” She questioned the mark.

“Not until the moment I use it to seal holes in the sky, it’s quite behaved as it were.”

“You’ve given us time, and Solas believes next time you will succeed, provided enough power.”

Naomi paused.

“How does he know what this things made out of? How did he know my hand would seal the first rift?”

“Solas is an apostate-"

“A what?”

"An apostate. One who practices magic out of bounds of the Circle; a safe haven.”

“Magic, Naomi. What else would it be?” Naomi thought to herself sarcastically.

“Ah, alrighty then. Continue on.”

“As I was saying- Solas is an apostate who joined us willingly. He knows about things we have no scholars on. His face is bare of markings normally donned by elves. I find all of him odd. However, he is a powerful ally and an asset to us at this time. Come, now, let us go into the war room.”

“Well, then.” Naomi nodded to her, “Spose’ you have a plan?”

“We do.”

They stepped into the room where three figures stood around a large map with various markers on it. She recognized the red-headed woman, and the man-

“You’re the lion!” Naomi gasp excitingly. “Oh my, you look quite different without a helmet on.”

She winked at him.

Cassandra cleared her throat.

“May I present Commander Cullen, leader of the Inquisition’s forces.”

“Such as they are.” He spoke quietly.

“I do owe you a heap of favors, Commander. I do hope memory serves you in keepin’ track of how many.”

“This is Lady Josephine Montilyet, our Ambassador and chief diplomat.” Cassandra, once again, ruined Naomi’s prowling.

“It is a pleasure, Your Worship.” Josephine bowed her head.

“And of course, you know Sister Leliana.”

“My position here involves a degree of...” Leliana chose her words carefully.

“She is our Spymaster.” The Lady Seeker assisted.

“Yes, tactfully put, Cassandra.”

“Aye, so I assume you bright bunch have concocted some sort of plan involving me risking my life
to save the great people of this land, yeah?"
“I mentioned that your mark needs more power to close the Breach for good.” Cassandra led.
“Which means we must approach the Rebel Mages for help.” Leliana followed.
“Mages, you mentioned them before. What degree of magic, now?” Naomi questioned.
“Can’t believe I’m buyin’ into this…”
“The mages were once confined to the Circles all around of Thedas, being forced to practice their
gifts under the watchful eye of the Chantry. A rebellion began in Kirkwall, and has spread
throughout the city’s borders. We may still contact the Rebels yet.” Leliana explained.
“And I still disagree. The Templars could serve just as well.”

The pang of danger that shot through Naomi could not be explained. Templars- here? Why was Cullen in support of them; how did he know of their existence? Has he not seen the Assassin Insignia littered upon her armor? More questions arose that Naomi could not answer, and in her state of confusion, she now felt threatened.
“We need power, Commander. Enough magic poured into that mark.” Cassandra argued as Naomi
was lost in thought.
“Might destroy us all. Templars could suppress the Breach, weaken it so—” Cullen cut her off.
“Pure speculation.” Leliana interrupted.
“I was a Templar. I know what they’re capable of.” Cullen bickered.
“You were a Templar?” Naomi began to circle slowly toward him, stalking her prey, “And tell me,
lad, how does one just leave the Templar Order?”
“When Lady Seeker Cassandra called on me, I answered.”
“Just like that?” She questioned, not far from him now.
He grew nervous.
“Does this trouble you, Your Worship?” Josephine became tense.
Naomi stood in front of Cullen, staring into his unshielded eyes for the first time. His
facial structure was strong—proud even. A slight scar graced his lip. This had the face of a man
who’d been through Hell and back, there was no doubt about that. She studied him, made him
sweat, and observed his flickering stare.

“Unfortunately,” Josephine spoke up to ease the awkward standoff, “neither group will even speak
to us. The Chantry has denounced the Inquisiton— and you, specifically.”
“Who is this Chantry you keep speakin’ of?” Naomi grew tired of her own ignorance.
“They are the practitioners of the Chant of Light, teachings left behind by Andraste, the prophet of
the Maker.”
“Aye, so all this time, we’ve been talkin’ about a magical sort of Christians? Andraste be Jesus,
the Maker be God himself, by the sound of his title?”

The three advisors looked amongst themselves, not knowing what Naomi referred to.
“I understand, that’s all.” Naomi waved her hand, “Can’t we just ignore them? Rough ‘em up?”
“As I’m sure you’ve heard, some are calling you the ‘Herald of Andraste.’ That frightens the
Chantry. The remaining clerics have declared it blasphemy, and we heretics for harboring you.
Ignoring such claims, as well as responding to them with violence, would surely do nothing more
than escalate the issue.”

Naomi burst out into guffaw.
“Just like these religious folk, yeah? There’s a Breach in the sky, a swirling whirlpool of death,
doom, and demons. And these right arses are concerned about wee ol’ me?” She laughed on.
“They do know it’s a threat, they just don’t think we can stop it.” Cullen intruded.
“Well we will be stopping it, without the help of your bloody Templars.” Naomi immediately grew
hot.
“The Chantry is telling everyone you’ll make it worse.” Josephine cut in before Cullen had time to
defend himself.
“There is something you can do, however. We do not find ourselves in a hopeless situation.”
Leliana aided in Josephine’s attempt to redirect the conversation.
“I’ve received a raven from a Chantry cleric by the name of Mother Giselle. She has asked to
“speak with you. She knows those involved better than I, and her assistance would be invaluable.”
“She’s asked to speak with me? Directly? Fancy me that.”
“From what I know of her, she is a kind soul and not the sort to involve herself in violence. You will find Mother Gisselle tending to the wounded in the Hinterlands near Redcliffe.”
“Am I supposed to know where in the bloody Seven Hells that is?”
“I will be joining you.” Cassandra crossed her arms, daring Naomi to argue.

The Seeker turned to leave.

“In the meantime, let’s think of other options. I won’t leave this all to the Herald.” She sighed, “We will leave at first light. I suggest taking the day to make any necessary preparations.”
She exited the room.

“Your Worship.” Josephine curtsied herself into dismissal.

“Do try not to harm each other.” Leliana waved off.

Naomi faced the door, fists clenched, allowing the sharp points of her metal-reinforced-knuckled gloves to show prominently.

“You may have saved me life multiple times, Templar, but do not mistake my gratitude for quar'er.”

She turned to face him, “Cross me, and I will put you down.”

She was gone before Cullen could speak.

After exiting the building, Naomi began walking towards the gates of town, planning to stroll in the woods to ease her aching skull.

A single word that she grew tired of hearing gave her pause: Templar.

Flipping her hood, she looked to her side. Finding a bench to sit on, she began eavesdropping on a conversation.

“Oh yes, the Inquisition’s Commander is quite handsome. I’d surely be a happy bride, wouldn’t you say?”

“Ah, Amilia, be careful what you wish for! He’s the former Templar Knight-Captain from Kirkwall. Maker only knows what kind of damaged man that’s wrought.”

“But what a lovely mess to... put back together?” The women giggled.

“Knight-Commander of the Order of the Knights Templar... not a title I’ve heard in my day, but it sounds important.” She thought to herself, “Important enough to assassinate.”
Siren's Song

Chapter Summary

"She swore vengeance on all men with dark hearts."
-Lisa Papademetriou

Chapter Notes

***Some sexual content warnings apply***

It was late afternoon before the Captain decided to go back to her cabin. She’d spent the day exploring, listening in on various conversations, trying to familiarize herself with her surroundings. She still hadn’t talked much with the people she’d become acquainted with. Her trust was definitely lacking.

“I cannot imagine the Mages would be too welcoming to their once-captor Templars.”

Another piece of conversation Naomi had overheard. It seemed that this war would be the talk of the town.

“How they’ve extended their paws into the pockets of this land is beyond me.”

She took the back way behind the buildings and boulders, not wanting to be around the people of Haven any longer. It was then that she heard two men clamoring ahead.

“Do you think she’s in there?” A husky voice inquired.

“The Lion…” Naomi growled.

“If she is, she’s probably resting. Best leave her to come out on her own time. She’s been through a lot, it appears.” Another familiar voice- Solas, the ‘elf,’ as Cassandra had called him.

“You’re more familiar with her ailments. Tell me, what involves the magic on her hand?” Cullen was curious.

They walked a bit farther away from her door, but stopped to talk at the end of the entryway.

“It’s unlike anything I’ve ever witnessed. A mark on a hand that closes tears into the Fade. I wish I understood it more, but I would not know without further research. That is something we don’t have time for, sadly.” Solas’ voice reflected his hunger for knowledge.

“Might it be suppressed?” Cullen hesitated to ask the question.

“What Templar abilities?” Solas seemed offended.

Small gusts of wind began to muffle their words. Wanting to get closer to the conversation, Naomi silently crawled to the cabin and up the wall, slipping into the window. She stealthily landed to her feet, not alarming her objectives. She pushed her ear to the door.

“Do you see an easy way to test that? She’d surely kill anyone who tried.” Solas snickered.

“What did I miss?!” She scolded herself.

If there was one thing she knew how to do, it was to get a man into a room with her. Alone.
“Well, I don’t doubt that. Still, it makes me uneasy that we know so little of her.” Cullen confessed.

“Commander, has anyone asked her the right questions?” Solas asked him.

There was a short silence.

“No, I don’t suppose we have…” Cullen seemed genuinely saddened by this.

“Perhaps you would do well to, rather than make wild assumptions based on false pretense.”

“And what exactly does that mean, Apostate?” Cullen sneered.

“You all jump to the conclusion that she was sent by your ‘Andraste,’ she has become a Divine figure. And yet, she is not respected enough for hardly anyone around here to even to ask something as common as her true namesake? Or perhaps where she is from?”

That seemed to throw Cullen.

“And I suppose you have acquired all of this information?”

“I know only that she introduced herself to me as Joan. As for the rest, I choose to study those at a distance, and let them give information to me in their own time. I can assure you, however, she is not from Thedas. I have reasons to be curious other than fearing her. I do not wish to gain intelligence on the woman because I see her as a threat, like some. That being said, I find it more appropriate to keep my questions to myself.”

“You speak in tongues, mage.” Cullen grasp his temple, frustrated by the statement.

“Good night, Commander.” Solas gave up on the conversation and dismissed himself.

Her armor had been hung, and her weapons stored in her chest. She stood in her leather corset and pants, boots to her knees and bracers on her wrists. She had removed her blouse, exposing her arms, chest, and mid-drift. She ran her hands through her hair, working it out of the ponytail she’d fashioned, her hearth flickering into her green eyes.

She opened the door.

“Planning to knock, or fancy a cold stance outside me door, Lion?” She purred, pushing her elbow to the door frame, her other hand gracing her hip.

The Commander was taken aback.

“Maker’s breath…” He took her sight in willingly. She had sun-kissed skin, and nautical tattoos all over arms. Her chest bore a sea creature with long arms, resting right above her cleavage-

“Commander?” She asked, eager.

“Oh, put the doubt to rest, there’re only one of me, Commander.” She grinned, “Joan is just a handle. We’ll make it our lil’ secret.” She winked at him.

“Naomi, in truth. Naomi Elizabeth McNamara.” He almost jumped as she shut the door, locking it promptly.

“Lovely, ey?” She smiled, pouring the remnants of her flask into two cups.

“Well-yes, what I mean is, it’s not one I’ve heard before.” He gulped.

“Ah, yes, I-uh…” He turned a light shade of red. “I had hoped that we could discuss this afternoon’s…hostilities.” He stammered, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Please, do come in.” She turned her head slightly, exposing more of her neck. “I’ve not accepted this cold. Quite a black spot, innit?”

“Herald, I-“

“Naomi, in truth. Naomi Elizabeth McNamara.” She grinned, “Joan is just a handle. We’ll make it our lil’ secret.” She winked at him.

He sheepishly walked through the doorway, their faces only inches apart as he did.

“Tell me, how did the Lion come to reside in this frozen perch called Haven?” She leaned back in her chair, sipping her drink with both hands. While grasping the cup, her elbows pushed her bosom higher.

Cullen picked his cup up, leaning his elbows on his knees, focusing on his drink instead of the temptress in front of him.

“Well, I suppose. A twist of fate and a hint of misfortune.” He gave a crooked grin, the scar on his lip accentuating his features. He took a sip of the drink, quickly choking and coughing.
“What in the name of Andraste-“
“It’s spiced rum, Commander.” Naomi chuckled to herself. “Does it not strike your fancy?” She knocked her portion back, slamming the empty vessel on the table.
“I must confess, I heard a good bit of your conversation with Solas. Do you intend to weaken me, or the Breach, Commander?”
“My intention is to keep you, and the people around you, safe from any catastrophe brought on by that thing. If that includes suppressing your mark come a time where you might find yourself unable to control it, then so be it. You can agree with that sediment, can you not?”
“I could agree with it, aye. There’s only one mishap, though.”
“And that would be?”
“I don’t believe the damn tale yer spinnin’.” She stood up swiftly.
“A shame really, I do find you quite strapping.”

Attacking with unnatural speed, she back handed the cup out of his hand and straddled him. She pressed a hidden blade to his neck-her other elbow had him pinned down. The back of the chair stuck in between his armored backside and the wall.

Their loins balanced each other, her chest pressed against his, their lips barely apart- his facial hair tickled her nose as she took in his manly scent.

But her eyes grew deadly.
“Aye, how’d you find me, then?”

His face was strained as she didn’t give him enough leeway to even look down at her. The blade would surely injure him if he did.
“Crocodile got your tongue, Templar?” She hissed the last word.

“Is that was this is about?” He whispered through locked teeth.

“Your Father of Understanding has not been kind. How it is you’ve not figured out by now- that the Assassins will always know what you’re up to? I’ll never understand.”

“Assassins? What is this madness?”

Moving her other arm lower, Naomi released the other blade on her wrist. She threateningly guided it up his thigh, over his hip, and alongside his chest, the metal scrapping against his armor.

“Do not play coy with me, Knight-Captain. Or should I say, Grand Master? How sad were yeh when the island be bare and the Apple be in the wind?”

She turned her head to the side, grabbing a fist full of his hair. She forced him to meet her gaze.

“A fine specimen, indeed... Pity.” She pulled her arm back, ready to strike.

The Commander made a daring counter.

Cullen’s large, gloved hand grabbed her wrist, pushing it away from him. Naomi predictably countered with her other wrist blade in a blind rage, ending up with both wrists in the his fists. He pushed her against the wall, holding her hands above her head.

“Stop this! How many times must you try and end my life before you realize we’re on the same side?!” He shouted.

“Not quite how I pictured our first dance, but I do appreciate your enthusiasm.” Using her pinned wrists as an anchor, she wrapped her legs around him, pulling him in.

She forced her lips unto his, her tongue thrashing in his mouth, making quick small hums as she kissed him vigorously. Chagrined, she felt him harden against her, squeezing her legs around his hips even tighter. Pushing his head to the side with her cheek, she demurred in his ear, “Naughty Lion, this one...” She kissed him below his jaw, a low moan escaping Cullen’s lips as his body shuddered. His vision began to blur.

Leaning back only slightly, she gave a playful tug on his ear with her teeth.

“Sweet dreams, Commander.”

She was released as he collapsed to the floor.

…
A blurry figure greeted him he came to. He felt sick, his abdomen in knots. Cullen coughed, revealing a dry throat.

Naomi sat next to him, grim in expression. She lifted a bowl of water to his lips, gently allowing him to drink. He glared at her angrily, not taking his eyes off of her, even as he accepted. She remained silent.

“What did you do to me?” Cullen demanded, struggling to break free. He lay on her bed, bound to the wooden frame.

She smirked, cleaning her lips off with a hand towel.

“Puncture a sleep dart, mix it’s innards with rum, and you’ll find yerself a fine serum…Something I learned from me mum.”

“That drink you gave me- I knew it was foul.” He glowered.

“Nay, that was but spiced rum, Commander. The real trick was here.” She tapped her mouth, "'Dab on your lips, seek truth with a kiss.’ I took the antidote beforehand.”

She gripped the Staff of Eden in her hand. It began to glow with a gold hue.

"Is this what you do to people you can't overpower? Poison them?"

"Make no mistake, if your life was truly the prize I sought- I'd be a rich, rich woman. I admit, there's a bit of sport involved. However, luck be on your side, as your memories have convinced me that the Templars here are...well, unlike mine, even if their ideals are similar, however innocent you may be."

She leaned over him, and held the Apple to his eyes. His face glazed as he became lost in a trance.

“You’ll see to returnin’ to your quarters, then. This'll be a dream in the mornin’ to you. Good 'morrow, lion.”

Cullen awoke with an exasperated gasp, bits and pieces of the erotic assassination attempt playing in his mind.
Dullahan

Chapter Summary

"I've heard of them. Seen a few. They're not as rare as you'd think, but they are very, very difficult. 'Spirited' and 'stubborn' suggest a reasonable resistance. No, they're just plain mean. Spur a horse a little too hard, and you're getting a brush against a tree. Kick this thing the wrong way, and it's taking a piece of you. That said, there's utility here. As fast and strong as any other, and the rider who masters one is making a statement. Not just 'I can do what you can't.' It's almost 'I can do what you wouldn't even dare.'"
-Master Dennet on Dracolisks

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Naomi prepared herself for travel, unsure of what laid before her. She was eager to explore the strange lands, and left for the training grounds to find Cassandra. When she crossed the wooden boundary near the front of Haven, she heard shouts of multiple people coming from the stables. Allowing herself to be sidetracked, she pranced over out of curiosity and melded into them, softly pushing her way to the front.

She gracefully removed her hood, unsure of what she was looking at. The stable hand was wrangling a scaled beast as another man was trying to get a saddle on its' back. It was a large, horse-sized lizard of sorts, bright red in color. Black markings littered the beasts’ hide, swirling the entire way up to the horns that framed its crimson eyes. She saw what she thought were fangs, but couldn’t get a good look due to a frame-trap of some sorts upon the poor creature’s muzzle. It knocked the man to his bum, and kicked the other into the fence.

"Found yourself in a spot of trouble?"

"Does it look like I’m having a good time?" The stable hand grumbled, trying to get the creature to calm down by tugging on the leash.

"I wasn’t talkin’ to you, I was talking to it."

"The man who gifted us this ‘trained mount’ failed to mention he was a demon from the Western Approach!"

"Give me that..." She snatched the ‘leash’ from the man and dismissed the other, entering the ”arena.”

"Step aside, please. Come on, now, clear the area and go about your business.” Cullen gave orders behind her, "Herald, what are you-"

"Shh!" She waved a hand to him, watching the creature reel in dismay.

“It’s alright, lad, I’m not gonna’ hurt you.” She dropped the leash to the ground as the beast reared., “Aye, I feel your frustration. People lookin’ at you all funny, blaming you for bein’ here when you had little decision in it.” She spoke calmly and softly to the beast, inching forward and extending a hand with caution.

"See? I’m not so bad, beastie.” Her gaze kept to the ground, not wishing to challenge the creature by looking at him directly, "Now, I’m going to take this off, and you’re going to behave.”

Carefully, Naomi took the trap around his mouth in her hands. The creature flared its’ nostrils, unsure if he should allow her to progress.
“You aren’t seriously—” Cullen began to protest.

The metal cage had been made free of the dragon-like creature’s mouth with one, swift, tug. He let out a horrifying shriek into the air. He did not have hooves, but rather claws that dug deep into the earth as his scaly tail flickered in anger. Naomi put herself in a defensive stance between him and the crowd, doing her best to keep him cornered as to prevent his escape.

“Ah, that feels good now, doesn’t it?” She raised her voice to Cullen behind her, “Commander, be a dear and fetch me some meat? With fangs like those, he’s surely not havin’ the straw these daft men lay for him.” She sparred with the creature who took a chomp at her.

Naomi bopped the thing on his nose.

“Now, I’ll be havin’ none of that from you, lest you want me to name you something insulting, like ‘Fluffy.’” She extended a finger to him, shaking it disapprovingly.

Astounded, Cullen did as she asked, grabbing a skinned nug that hung in the front of a nearby butcher’s shop. He threw a few coins on the counter to quiet the man yelling at him.

Nug hanging in hand, he marched through the crowd, people giggling as he did.

“You’ll hear about this later…” He mumbled as he tossed it to her.

Without taking her eyes off of the beast, she grabbed it instinctively, leaving the crowd to gasp and praise her for her skill.

“I thought seeing you walk around with a skinned nug was strange.” Varric came to his side.

Naomi remained focused on the task at hand, but found it funny to imagine the almighty Commander running about with this skinned creature in his hand.

“So this is how this is going to work,” she held the skinned animal to her face, forcing the beast to pay attention, “I’m going to feed you, but only after you cooperate.”

She took one step at a time, ready to dodge if he decided otherwise. Keeping her eyes to the ground, she extended a hand, aiming for his snout. Tension thick in the air, the crowd watched on as Naomi’s hand pressed gently on the bridge of the creature’s face. She exhaled in relief and tossed the nug into the air. He leapt for it, swallowing the meat in a few, massive, chomps.

“Aye, there ya go, lad! You’ve earned a proper name!” She placed her hand underneath is jaw, scratching him as a reward. He hummed and wiggled his tail in delight.

“Did you just- pet, a dracolisk?” The Seeker had joined the crowd.

“A what?” She turned to face Cassandra, the dracolisk resting his head on Naomi’s shoulder as she continued to pet him, "This big lizard?"

“A dracolisk. The dragon standing behind you.” She said, bluntly. “Commander, how could you allow her to be so reckless?”

“She was knee deep in dragon-taming when I arrived; I only assisted her to preserve her limbs, Lady Seeker!”

“Hush, now, lest you rile him up again.” Naomi turned to her new friend, "I think I’ll keep you.”

She retrieved the leather seat from the ground that the man had thrown in a hurry.

“Where’s the proper bridle for him?” The Herald asked as she was done securing the awkward, custom saddle.

“I’ve got to see this.” The stable hand who’d been trying to wrangle him earlier tossed it to her without hesitation.

The contraption made the dracolisk uneasy.

“Open up,” Naomi opened her own mouth as demonstration, “Oh, don’t be difficult.” She pushed the metal bit against his teeth.

Giving in, he bit the bar, positioning it to make it more comfortable in his mouth. She wrapped the loops over his horns, admiring the handy work that went in to building the piece. “Herald, don’t!” Cassandra declared, stepping over the fence.

“Move!” Naomi hopped up onto the dracolisk, kicking his sides, "Ahoy! Just likea' horse, he is!"

Barely escaping the clutches of a protective Seeker of Truth, he took off in the direction where there were few gathered, jumping the gate with ease.

“You are trained, aren’t you? That’ll show em!” Naomi yelled in excitement.
Together, they rode off down the trail out of the village into the forest. She found herself among strange creatures in the outskirts of the snowy tundra. They were large, four-legged, furry things with horns she could not describe. Finding a nice spot near them among the trees, she decided it was far enough to have stretched the dracolisk’s legs. She smiled at the beast, patting him on the neck.

He was hesitant, looking behind them.

"Herald?!" Hooves rattled in the distance.

“He’ll have an angry exchange of words prepared for us, I imagine.”

Cullen barreled into the field, charging on a brown horse with a beautiful, black mane. With hot hair blowing from its nostrils, the horse charged until The Commander pulled it to a stop next to the dracolisk. The beast snapped, letting another shriek escape its massive jaws. Cullen’s horse backed away in panic, bucking it’s head and standing on its hind legs, challenging Naomi’s mount with its hooves.

“Calm down!” He pulled on the reigns, finally settling the animal, “That was quite a show you put on.”

“Apologies,” She lowered her head, "Perhaps I am reckless because I question the reality of all this. I thought this would all be a dream to wake up from, yet every night I dream of home, in truth. Quite ironic.”

The sadness on her face softened his rage.

“Where do you call home, Your Worship?”

“You wouldn’t know where I spoke of even if I told yeh.” She looked up into the sky, staring at the Breach.

The two began to trot back next to each other.

“We expect you to learn so much about this world of ours in such little time. I only see it fair that you educate us on yours, as well.”

“Are you curious, Commander?”

“Perhaps.” He admitted.

She focused on the frozen landscape in front of her.

“I was born in Ireland, a country seized by a tyrannical occupation. The population kept goin’, but they took our resources, leaving us to defend what precious little we had left.” Cullen listened to her speak as her words turned sour, "The city of Dublin had many’a opportunities, unless you had tits. So, my mother being smart in the sort, passed me as a young man, and I found work among a ship on my thirteenth year. Her name was Medusa’s Scorn, Captained by…” She choked, her voice cracking, "Captain Johnny McGrath.”

“Where are you from, Commander?” She quickly changed the subject.

“I was born here- in the country of Fereldan, to a small village named Honnleath. Like you, I have also been in service since the age of thirteen...previously within the Templar Order.” Cullen rubbed the back of his neck, nervously.

Naomi still grew tense from the word, her fists tightening on the bridle.

“The Templars where I am from are not of the kind-hearted sort. They are the root of everythin’ evil that walks about. I’ve lost Brothers and Sisters at their hands, and I’ve taken even the lives of even more of theirs.” She spoke with a quiet anger, "They fear free will, death be the only answer to insubordination.”

Pausing before continuing, she looked to the Commander.

“I’ve lived the last eleven years of my life huntin’ them down. I swore an oath to keep the minds of people free from those who’d enslave’m. Can you explain to me how these Templars, or the Chantry they serve, are different? Do they not fear the free will of men, and all but rid them of free will because of it?”

“I cannot.” Their eyes were fixed upon each other in ferocity, “I once believed that the Templars’ purpose was to provide a safe place for the Circle Magi to practice their craft. I thought it a noble duty. Still, Herald...you must understand that there remains Templars who hold the Chant of Light close to their hearts.”
Naomi studied his face and searched his intentions. This was a man of honesty and nobility.
“I will consider your stance, as well as the others’, Commander.”
“That is all I ask.” He was grateful, admiring her beauty against the snow-driven forest.

They reached the borders of Haven where an angry Cassandra stood waiting for them.

Varric and Solas were ready and waiting.

“Running off wouldn’t be the most ridiculous thing you’ve done today, Spitfire.” Varric winked.

"Ah, Spitfire, yes...interesting li'l nickname you've got there. Speakin'o which, name's Naomi. Sorry for the mix-up in the beginnin'."

“Is it not Joan?” Solas asked inquisitively.

“Nay, it’s just a handle.”

Cullen thought to himself, and wasn’t sure how he already knew that.

“Why would you lie to us about your name?” Cassandra glared at her, unstinting.

“My name gets me in loads of trouble, where I’m from. I’d imagine my bounty lies at more than 5,000 pieces by now.” She shrugged.

“What does that translate into coin, here?” Varric inquired hopefully.

The two of them laughed at the prospect of him turning her in.

“Did you name him yet?” Solas asked, lifting his chin towards the dracolisk.

“I think I’ve settled on one, aye.”

“And?” Cullen asked impatiently.

“Dullahan.” She patted the beast on its side, “His name is Dullahan.”

“Sounds elvish.” Varric grumbled.

“Believe me when I say that it is not.” Solas chuckled.

“I’m from a country by the name of Ireland. The Dullahan is a legend of ours. He rides, with his own head in arm, on his black horse, whose eyes are red like the sun. The beast pulls a wagon whose wheels are made of thigh bones as he uses a human spine as a whip to stay on course. He ceases only but for a person when it is their time to go, and when he speaks their name, their soul is his.” She pet the dracolisk as she told the gruesome tale.

“Wouldn’t you be the Dullahan in the story?” Solas asked uncomfortably.

“Spose’ so. But you’re only gonna’ stop to give them what for, ey, Dullahan?” She scratched the beast underneath it’s chin. "He’s just as terrifying as the tale, especially with that shriek of his.”

Varric mounted his war ram. Solas followed suite upon the back of a hallah, and Cassandra on an armored horse.

“Be safe.” Cullen waved off as the group departed.

“Maker have mercy.” He went back to training the men, shaking his head in disbelief.

Chapter End Notes

Tale of the Dullahan
Chapter Summary

"To say that nothing is true, is to realize that the foundations of society are fragile, and that we must be the Shepard of our own civilization..."

-Ezio Auditore da Firenze

The path to the Hinterlands was perilous as they were not greeted with peace. Men and women clad in armor wore shields and drew heavy swords, slicing away at others wearing only clothes and baring staves. Magic of all sorts flung through the air, freezing a man in place-burning, another.

The land itself was so beautiful, though, despite having been touched by an unforgiving society. Small huts with roofs of grass littered the area. Everything was so vulnerable.

Avoiding the conflict, the party chose a higher route to take them to the closest Inquisition camp. The mountain was steep, and Naomi was thankful for her dracolisk even more so. They were welcomed by a female dwarf.

“Herald of Andraste? I’ve heard the stories. Everyone has. We know what you did at the Breach. Inquisition Scout Harding, at your service. I—all of us here—we’ll do whatever we can to help.”

“Harding, huh? Ever been to Kirkwall’s Hightown?” Varric cackled.

“I can’t say I have. Why?”

“You’d be Harding in… Oh, never mind.” He quieted himself.

“Uch.” Cassandra scolded.

“Are all of the Hinterlands as welcoming as what we saw on the way in, lass?”

“I fear so. As much as we want to end the widespread violence, we originally came here to secure horses for the Inquisition’s forces. I grew up here.” She lost enthusiasm as she spoke of her war torn homeland, "People always said that Dennet's herds were the strongest and fastest on this side of the Frostbacks.”

“Are those the mountains?” Naomi whispered to Varric.

The dwarf nodded his head.

“But, with the Mage-Templar fighting getting worse, we couldn’t get to him. Once you’ve finished your business here, I implore you to seek out Horsemaster Dennet.” She continued, “Mother Giselle’s at the Crossroads helping refugees and the wounded. Our latest reports say that the war’s spread there, too. You’d best get going, no time to lose.”

The group decided to leave their mounts at camp, continuing on foot. To be cautious, Dullahan was tied farthest from his herbivore companions. The scouts enjoyed watching him devour the meat that they fed him.

“I know it’s a sight to see, but don’t be gettin’ him fat before I return!” Naomi called out as they descended the cliff.

A battlefield presented itself before them. Burn marks, ice sculptures, and blood covered the area. Cassandra did her best to lead them through safer paths, but it was becoming apparent that such a trail did not exist.

“How do I defend myself against fire, ice, and whatever else these lot can do?” Naomi looked to Solas.
“The barriers that I place on you should negate most of the damage. You can also depend on Seeker Cassandra to nullify their magic. Other than that, I advise you do your best to not get caught.”

“Comforting.” She shot him a bland look.

“You aren’t seriously thinking into charging into that mess, are you?” Varric looked up at her.

“They’re trying to defend the refugees!” Cassandra called out as soldiers defended the village.

Naomi pointed to her as if proving a point.

“I reckon she is.”

“Look like they could use a hand!” Varric shouted sarcastically, “Bianca was getting bored, anyhow.”

“Bianca?”

“Time and place, Spitfire.”

Cassandra charged ahead, appearing to cast a spell onto the Mages, cutting off their power mid-cast. Naomi took the opportunity to attack, using the Sword to place her behind the assailant, cutting his neck with a practiced swipe. Using both of her long blades, she deflected a strong attack from behind her, sending a Templar stumbling. He quickly raised his shield, something Naomi had little practice battling against.

Her companion charged in from behind, delivering a mighty blow to the distracted man’s head. It rolled to Naomi’s feet, a bloody Seeker standing in its wake.

“Down!” Solas shouted.

Having been used to ducking on a moment’s notice, the Captain met the ground, a hurdling fireball flying above her. She watched as the elf quickly disposed of it with a boulder conjured out of thin air.

Feeling overwhelmed, she took two pistols into her hands, wanting to kill as a means to ease her frustrations. She fired one, sending an iron bullet into the skull of a caster. The other shot took the eye out of an archer a short distance away from her. Jamming the now-empty pistols into the holsters behind her waist, she snatched the two from her chest, spinning low to the ground to dodge a sword. Looking up at her confused attacker, she quickly pressed the pistols to his chin and pulled their triggers, sending shrapnel and gore into the air.

“What are those?” Varric called out.

“Time and place!” Naomi yelled back.

A pile of bodies stood at the feet of the band of companions, all of them covered in humanly bits.

They were greeted and thanked profusely by a troop of soldiers, who all saluted them upon their arrival. They escorted the group to a deathbed and a woman with a silly hat.

“There are Mages here who can seal your wounds. Lie still.” A gentle, French-sounding voice whispered to a dying man.

“Don’t…let them touch me, Mother. Their magic is-”

“Turned to noble purpose. Their magic is surely no more evil than your blade.” She reasoned.

“Mother Giselle, I presume?” Naomi intruded upon the heartbreaking scene.

“You cannot just interrupt—” Cassandra started.

“I am. And you must be the one they’re calling the Herald of Andraste.” Mother Giselle answered.

“Hardly, Mother. Best to keep your distance, lest your God strike you down for merely speakin’ with me.” Naomi jested, “I am no prophet.”

“I know of the Chantry’s denouncement, and I’m familiar with those behind it.” She acknowledged. The Mother began to walk and suggested the Captain to follow, “I won’t lie to you: Some of them are grandstanding, hoping to increase their chances of becoming the New Divine. Some are simply terrified. So many good people, senselessly taken from us…”

“That’s no excuse to add oil to the fire.” Naomi scowled at the ravaged expanse below them.

“They don’t know that. This is my point. Go to them, convince the remaining clerics you are no demon to be feared.” Mother Giselle encouraged.

“If they’d only know the half of it.” Naomi laughed to herself, kicking a rock with her foot, “I
know we’ve only just met, but I’m not the gentle sort. Don’t think I’ve given them much other to believe. What’s more, these people want me dead. You’d have me delivered to them with a pretty bow?”

“You are no longer alone. They cannot imprison or attack you now.”

“Numbers’ve never stopped anyone I’ve crossed in the past.”

“You just need some of them to doubt. Their power is their unified voice. Take that from them, and you receive the time you need.”

“Doubt can be rather troublesome.” Captain McNamara agreed.

The two continued to walk.

“I honestly don’t know if you’ve been touched by fate or sent to help us…but I hope.” Mother Giselle confessed, “Hope is what we need now. The people will listen to your rallying call, as they will listen to no other. You could build the Inquisition into a force that will deliver us…or destroy us.”

“I am familiar with such balance of power, Mother Giselle.” She looked at her Assassin’s Insignia on her glove.

“I will go with you back to Haven and provide Sister Leliana the names of those in the Chantry who would be amenable to a gathering. It is not much, but I will do whatever I can.” The holy woman departed, leaving Naomi standing alone on the hill.

“What in God’s name have I been wrapped up in, this time?”

Wanting to get a move on, she returned to her party, telling them that they must escort Mother Giselle to Haven at once.

“She has a plan, that’s all I can speak on right now. We will come back when we can do more for the Inquisition.”

Needless to say, they agreed. After Mother Giselle packed her small satchel of items, the champions walked with her back to the camp where Scout Harding and their mounts awaited. Cassandra offered the Mother her horse, deciding to walk on foot to spare the old woman the hardship.

“You could always saddle up with me, Cassandra.”

“I’m not getting on that thing.” The Seeker curled her lip at the dracolisk.

“Now, Lady Seeker, the Maker creates all of his creatures equally.” Mother Giselle chimed.

“Was that…was that a joke?” Varric laughed on his Ram.

“I believe it was.” Solas chuckled underneath his breath.

“Not all of us in the Chantry have such dry sense.” The Chantry woman affirmed.

Naomi looked to her with doubt.

“For me life’s sake, I hope that to be true.”

...
“Many blades have tried.”
“I will go with her.” Cassandra took a step forward, “Mother Giselle said she could provide us names? Use them.”
“But why, this is nothing but a-“ Leliana protested.
“What choice do we have, Leliana? Right now we can’t approach anyone for help with the Breach. Use what influence we have to call the clerics together. Once they are ready, we will see this through.”
“Cassandra,” Naomi leveled her head, “thank you. I feel much more at ease knowin’ you’re watchin’ my back out there, lass.”

The compliment earned her a grin from the fierce warrior.
“There is a small fishing village to the north. The journey is but a day, and night has already fallen. Given you have the energy, we should set sail tonight if we wish to arrive in the morning. Leliana’s ravens will reach them in time.”
“Aye, I’ll meet you there.”
“Until then.” The Seeker left.
“I hope you know what you’re doing.” Cullen mumbled.
“Do I seem the type to run off into danger without regard?” Naomi teased, nudging him with her elbow.
“Yes. Yes, you do.” Cullen laughed, turning a slight shade of red.

The dream he had haunted him. Not because of what she did to him, but how he envisioned her doing it. What he remembered of their kiss, the way she tasted, how she smelled—

“Calm yourself, Rutherford. She is the Herald of Andraste and you are the Commander of the Inquisition.” Cullen shook his head, attempting to clear his thoughts.
“Just…be safe.” The candle fire danced off of his amber eyes as his scarred lip gave her the gentlest of smiles.
“I will, Commander. Who would you give chase to if anything happened to me?” She taunted.
“Ahem.” Josephine cleared her throat, “We should…prepare letters for your ravens, at once.” She spoke to Leliana, who followed the Ambassador out of the room.

They could hear the two women giggle as the door closed behind them.

“Cullen…” Naomi said.

The sound of his name escaping her lips made his heart flutter.
“Yes, your-“
“Pardon, call me Naomi. You've right spent enough time with me by now to know I’m not the ‘Herald of Andraste.’” She snickered.

“On the contrary. Spending time with you has…verified the claims, more than anything.” His eyes traced the horizontal scar that divided her face.
“Given you’ll get to know me, I’ll yet convince yah otherwise.” Naomi winked as she began to leave.

“Oh-I-uh, sure.” Cullen rubbed the back of his neck, looking away timidly.
“Take care of Dullahan while I’m gone?” She turned to ask him as she opened the door.

“Gladly.”

With that, she left him.

“Sure?! SURE? That was the best I could come up with?” Cullen scorned himself as walked out of the room, only to be intercepted by the other two advisers.

“Commander, if you would.” Josephine pointed at the door that Leliana held open.
“I smell a trap.” He bleated.

Leliana walked out to grab his elbow, pulling him in behind her. Josephine shut the door. The two women lined up before him, hands clasped and smiling. They were obviously excited about something.
“That was a loss for words if I’ve ever seen one!” Leliana squealed.
“You have a tell, Commander. I saw it once or twice.” Josephine’s Antivan accent rolled off her tongue.
“You’re blushing!” Leliana said.
“Oh, for the love- I don’t have time for this.”
“Good night, Commander!” Josephine called after him as he rushed out of the room.
“I shall find you when they send word!” Leliana laughed, her beautiful voice flooding the chamber.

Cullen was all but running away from the two women, grunting and grumbling as he marched.
Chapter Summary

"...To say that everything is permitted, is to understand that we are the architects of our actions, and that we must live with their consequences, whether glorious or tragic."
-Ezio Auditore da Firenze

Chapter Notes

"Where Am I to Go M'Jonnies" linked to first line of lyrics.

"Stop calling it that, this is not a ship." Naomi corrected under her breath, walking onto the boat with her knapsack.

“What would I call it, then?” Cassandra was irritated.

“A raft. Look at this, is this pine wood? Where is Her Captain?”

A man wearing a golden mask like something out of the Venetian period approached her. The lanterns danced off of his golden-threaded clothes.

“This is my uncle’s ship, who’s charged me of being Captain. You’d respect—“

“It is a pail with sails strung about.”

She did her best to keep to herself, even as everything about his man set her off. His posh clothing while on board, the hired man sailing the damned thing, the piss poor condition it had been kept in, even the crew seemed starved. This man didn’t resemble a Captain to her. It felt more like a hired hand who’d surely turn her and her companions in before the night was through. He wreaked of dishonesty. His aura only solidified the fact.

This man had no intention of helping them, and she had no way to prove it.

"Might as well call this Her Majesty's-"

“Hey, are you listening to me?” The masked man put a hand on her shoulder. "Get your bloody fuckin’ hand off me before I stain this timber red!” Naomi swatted his limb away.

She prayed it left a mark.

“What she means is thank you for charting a late-night voyage.” Solas interjected, placing himself between them.

Naomi followed Varric to the sleeping quarters.

“We’re gonna work on that temper of yours. You’ll be fit for the Chantry in no time.” Varric joked, “Might as well start calling you ‘Sister’ now!”

“Quiet yourself….” She playfully scooted the dwarf in the room.

“Ungrateful wench! Lady Seeker, you should know that I do this for you, and no other!” The Orlesian man walked away, rubbing his sore forearm.

Cassandra scolded and marched to follow them, Solas pacing behind.

“I fear for her safety in Orlais.” Cassandra said, “Her attitude puts us more at risk, there, than the Breach, here.”

“We can agree on that, Lady Seeker.” Solas held a serious tone to his voice, “Although, the
Orleasians could do with being less sensitive to criticism. Perhaps, in this regard, she is exactly what we need.”
“I hope you are right.”
They joined the others, who had already claimed their beds.
“Yeh know, I was going to leave this one for you, but my wee body just felt so frail from harborin’ this nasty, nasty mark on my hand.” Naomi dramatically stretched out on the largest bed in the room.
“I just wanted the nicer one.” Varric shrugged.

“You’re bound away to Kingston town, that’s where you’re bound to go.
To me!
You’re bound away to Dublin Port all through the ice an’ snow,
For I’m a young sailor boy and where am I to go?”

“You’ll be an able seaman lad, when you’ve served your time.
To me!
You’ll ship as a seaman lad aboard the Blackball Line,
For I’m a young sailor boy and where am I to go?”

“One day you’ll sit for your ticket, lad, this work will serve you fine.
To me!
You’ll finish up a Captain, lad, all boats of Line are prime,
For I’m a young sailor boy and where am I to go?”

She’d dreamt of Thaddeus and her shipmates singing on the open waters, her at the Helm of the Dishonored. She almost felt the warm winds brushing her skin, the salt water spraying on her face. Reality hit her as she replaced the events in leading up to her arrival.
They’d been on the ship-attacked by Templars, who unknowingly had a Piece of Eden. Naomi connected the two artifacts and ended up in Thedas. Surely the rest would be dead, either from their attackers, or whatever else the Captain caused.
All of them. Gone. Forever. And her ship? Eleven years of hard work, sunk to the bottom of the seas, alongside the bones of her crew-her family.
What of Edward and the Assassins? Did they avenge them? Tears stung the Captain’s face, regretting the time she’d given herself to reflect. She looked at her sleeping companions, cursing them underneath her breath.
“All I am is a tool to them.” The tears quickened.
“There, child. All will reveal itself.” Consus hummed into her mind.
“You’re speaking to me. Why?”
“Are you angry with me?”
“I know you’ve seen me thoughts, Consus. Don’t take me for a fool. You know more than you’re lettin’ out. That’s why you’ve been silent as a mouse.”
“Such is the order of things.”
“What does that mean, you blasted sheet!?” Naomi yelled, out loud.
Cassandra mumbled and rolled over.
“If this world falls, so will the other. Do not trust the Dread Wolf.”

The door burst open, a woman ran to them fervently. “T-there’s something you should see, Herald.”

“What is the meaning of this?” Cassandra leaned up, yawning and stretching.

Her tired face was even more terrifying than her angry face.

The sailor waved to follow her, and then ran up on deck.

“Can’t even catch a kip these days, eh?” Naomi yawned.

“What’s a kip? And why do I want to catch it?” Varric asked.

"A nap. A kip, is a nap." Solas sounded less than enthused.

It was still nightfall, the stars and moon loomed in the clear sky. Off in the distance, a green, harrowing light bounced off of the waves.

“A rift…” She held back another yawn, “Captain, take me to that shore…”

“I will do no such thing!”

“Won’t you?” Naomi’s hand began to glow, crackling as she clenched her fist, “There’s a hole in the fuckin’ sky," she pointed to the Breach, "that causes more holes on the fuckin’ ground," her direction changed to the rift affront, "and that’s one of em’. So, unless you think this piece’o’shit schooner can outrun demons, turn Her right fuckin’ ‘round, and take me to the God damned shore!”

“You’re not worth the gold…” he murmured, “Drop anchor near the shore, Helmsman.”

“Smart lad.”

Naomi hopped on the railing, holding the rope ladder for support. She extended her spyglass, unlocking it with one snap of a button. She could only catch glimpses of a much larger ship than the one they were on.

"Why couldn’t we sail on that ship?” She sighed.

“Can’t make out a flag or anything of sorts, but that ship outranks this one, I’d imagine.” Naomi jumped back down.

“And what would you know of ships, all mighty Herald?” He sneered.

“A lot more than you, or your blasted uncle.”

“Herald,” he started, “do you realize the implications I have brought upon myself upon putting my ship in your service?”

“Aye. And I am grateful for it. But yah know what pisses me right off?” She stormed, “When fancy lads like you come into possession of a boat and fancy yerself’ the best damned thing the ocean has ever seen. Yeh don’t even pilot Her, you have a Helmsman do it for yah. So yes, I appreciate you puttin’ the inconvenience of my needs aside, but the respect of a Captain is earned, not gifted from an uncle.” She lowered her voice, “And don’t you think for a second I don’t know the price on my head.”

The masked Captain seemed startled by this comment, leaving her to move about as she wished.

Once they were close enough, they dropped anchor into the depths. Naomi and her party climbed into a small raft and began to descend. She detached the rowboat as it kissed the glassy, black water. The oars lapped around them, speckles of green splashed in the air, the shore humming with life as the rift waned. Sounds of horror carried across the water; demons roaring, men yelling, and gunfire.

Gunfire?

“Sounds like those strange contraptions strapped to your chest.” Varric noted.

"Rowboat approaching in the distance, ser!” A voice echoed.

Her throat tightened, her teeth began to chatter. She stopped rowing, standing up. Her party began to question her as she fumbled to load a flare into her gun. Her arm extended above her head. She pushed her shoulder against her ear, and covered the other with her free hand. A single shot rang throughout the air, its’ red tail soaring into the sky.

The seconds seemed hours as the red flare crackled and growled overhead, shining brightly as it arched and dispersed. An answer was deployed. The signal burned hot, quickly
ascending into the night’s sky. The spotlight moved upward as it climbed higher and higher, revealing a single, revitalizing flag. A flag that she'd never thought she'd see again. The Assassin’s Insignia.

Naomi looked onward at the shore, into the rift. She ignored the shouts coming from the people around her, grasping the hilt of the Sword of Eden. They were surrounded in the legendary white light. Roughly landing onto the shore, they rolled and scrapped against the stony beach. A clearly injured demon stood over a man. He lifted a massive claw, bringing it down towards its victim. Naomi placed herself in between the man and beast, sending a shock wave of light and energy into the demon’s heart.

As it staggered, Cassandra took the opportunity and charged the demon, slicing at the back of the knees. Varric finished it off with multiple bolts to the skull.

Given time in between waves of demons, the rift began to expand and shrink, sending crystals of evil prowess through the ground. She extended a hand to the man on the ground, who embraced it with familiarity, “C-Captain…?” Adibas couldn't believe his eyes.

“Aye, mate. It’s me.”

The reunion was cut short, as more beasts sprung from the ground.

“Wraiths!” Solas called, “Weaken the rift!” He spun his staff, whipping the elements at his foes. “Get to safety, mate. I’ll rejoin you-“

“Thaddeus…” The Quartermaster nodded to the bloodied shantyman behind him.

Naomi handed Adibas the Shroud of Eden, “Go!”

She glided to the rift while the others had the wraiths distracted. The mark on her hand pulled the green rift, tearing through her soul and essence as her body healed the tear into the Fade. The demons disappeared into the now-sealed hole.

“Agh, damn it…” The Captain fell to the ground.

Solas ran to her side, rolling her over. He raised her head, supporting her neck with his hand.

“Drink this.” He held a strange flask to her lips.

It tasted of dirt, piss, and grass. She snorted, cursing the concoction. However, immediately after, she felt lively.

“An elfroot potion.” He clarified.

“Tastes like day-old fish.” She hacked.

“I don’t want to hear about how you know what that tastes like.”

As Adibas ran to their side, Cassandra drew her sword on him.

“Who approaches the Herald?” She glowered at him, “You look like a common bandit.”

"Who says I'm not?" He asked.

“Get yer sword out his face, lass.” Naomi coughed.

The Quartermaster stood strong, a leather vest draping his naked chest, chiseled like a statue. Various tattoos and scars littered face and body. An orange rag covered his right eye, extending around his head.

“Tad is stabilized, Captain.” He spoke, staring down the Seeker.

“Captain?” Cassandra turned to Naomi.

“The plot thickens.” Varric chuckled.

“Aye, Captain McNamara of The Dishonored and Her crew. We must get her aboard post haste.” Adibas’ Creole accent garnished his words.

Naomi rolled to her belly, pushing herself upward on her feet. She dusted the rocky sand off of her, stretching and cracking her neck. She and her Quartermaster embraced, being reunited at last. Her hands brought his chest to her forehead. Relief washed over her as she listened to his heart, proof of him being alive.

“What happened here?” She whispered.

“We barely set up camp when that...whatever that was, spawned from the sky. Tad and I had journeyed by rowboat, the others hadn’t had a chance to follow, God willing.”

“Hah, amen to that, mate.” She pulled back from him, placing her hands on his shoulders, "Let’s
get going, then.”
“We can’t just leave—Cassandra hadn’t noticed that the Orlesian man was long gone, “That scoundrel! I paid him in advance!”
“I told you not to…” Varric said, “Shoulda’ let me handle it.”
“Ugh…” Cassandra scolded.

The Captain and Quartermaster walked over to an unconscious Thaddeus, gently lifting him into the long boat of *The Dishonored*. They pushed it into the water, walking into the shallow ocean. Naomi paused, "Can any of you row?"

Cassandra, Varric, and Solas stood silently.

“Blasted all…Right then. Cassandra, go with me mate Adibas. I’ll row you other scallywags in the merchant’s raft, assumin' we can get at it…”

Naomi and Varric exchanged ideas as they looked at the since-drifted lifeboat. The Seeker observed the newly introduced man. She took notice to the many intricate designs on his face. It seemed as though some scars were intentional, as if to highlight the ink upon his skin. He extended a hand towards her.

“Adibas Lacroix, Quartermaster.” He introduced himself.

She took his hand willingly.

“Cassandra Pentaghast, Seeker of Truth.” While holding her hand, he escorted her to the front of the small boat.

“A noble title.” He grinned.

“It is an Order, of sorts.”

As she took her seat, he grasp the backside of the raft in his large, strong hands; his muscles strained as he pushed it into the water. Once it began to float, he pulled himself in, grabbing the oars. He turned the boat so that *The Dishonored* was to the back of him, and began to pull the raft towards Her. He was facing Cassandra as he rowed.

“So the Herald of Andraste is also the Captain of a ship.” Cassandra chuckled in disbelief, “The days get stranger as they pass.”

“I can get behind that sediment.” He sighed.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be insensitive. You aren’t even from—“

“Do not apologize. I can imagine these are hard times for us all….” He trailed off, “Thank you for keeping her safe and bringing her to us. We were not pleased to learn of our separation.”

“You and the injured fellow?” Cassandra looked at the man wrapped near her feet.

“Aye, and the others.”

“Others?”

“All twenty of us.” He laughed, “Judging by the size of the ships we’ve seen here, you’re all in for quite a surprise.”

Cassandra looked up from him, sizing up the ship now that they were closer. It was a huge brig, approximately sixty meters long, forty-nine meters high, and twelve meters wide. It was easiest the biggest ship she’d ever seen, "It is…magnificent.”

“She. *She* is magnificent.”

“Oh, uh…what did you call Her, again?” The Seeker asked.

*The Dishonored.*” Adibas answered, “We commandeered her from the Spanish. They were transporting us slaves to Mexico until our Captain McNamara and her...associates, gave chase. Hard to believe that was eleven years ago.”

“You’ve been sailors for eleven years?” She asked.

“Longer than that for some of us individually, but aye, eleven years together. In truth, privateers don’t stay in one place for too long. It's a miracle, it is.”

“Privateers…you mean pirates?”

“Raft'ta broadside!” Christopher held a lantern over the edge of the ship, “Leave it'ta you'ta come back from'n island with a woman, Adibas!” He cheered as he lowered the two hooked ropes.

“Aye! She not be the only lass to come aboard tonight, mate!” He called up, attaching the hook at
his end.

After a few attempts, Cassandra had hers hooked as well. She gulped as the raft began to ascend. This ship was much, much higher than any vessel she’d been on before.

“What’s goin’ on?” Tad croaked as he began to wake up.

The red sheet began to glow. Adibas quickly snatch it, furling it into a ball. Cassandra shot him a distrusting look.

“Your next song’ll be of it, Tad. It’s quite the tale.” Adibas grinned.

The row boat reached the top of the lift. The deck was wooden, made of all colors, not black like Her armored hull. Lanterns dangled and danced in the delicate wind, shining on the various crates, nets, and other items that Cassandra did not recognize. Adibas left the small vessel first, extending a hand for Cassandra. Together, they helped Thaddeus onboard.

“Names’ Christopher, you can call meh’ Kit. Its’a pleasure, m’lady.” He extended a gnarly handshake.

“Cassandra.” She answered.

“Second life boat, ser!” A sailor called from the other side of the ship.

“Raise her, me trumps.” Adibas walked toward the middle of the deck, “Round here, yeh scurvy dogs!”

The crew looked amongst each other, confused. They all gathered around Adibas, who was not answering any questions. Thaddeus leaned on Aquila for support.

“What’s all this about?” Quill asked him.

“Not a guess in me, mate.” Tad grinned.

“What in God’s name happened to you?” Kilean sneered.

“It’ll be a song in the wee future, keep yer breeches on.” Thaddeus laughed.

As the ropes began to turn, the lift churned as the men pulled. Silence soon overtook the crew, only the waves and wind could be heard. Cassandra shifted uncomfortably, being the only stranger on board. After an immeasurable amount of time ticked away, the rowboat was surfacing to the deck.

There she stood, clad in the Captain’s armor, her pistols and swords glistening. She grasped the rope in one hand, standing with one foot on the edge of the raft. With a commanding step, she hopped over the railing, boarding The Dishonored. “And what do yeh all think yer doin’, standin’ round’ like this? Get back to work!”

Her crewmates cheered, quickly surrounding their Captain as if she’d been the second coming of Jesus himself.
"As to hanging, it is no great hardship. For were it not for that, every cowardly fellow would turn pirate and so unfit the sea, that men of courage must starve."
-Mary Read

"Don't Forget Your Old Shipmates" linked to first line of lyrics.

The crew divided, highlighting the Helm at the end of the man-made corridor. Adibas extended his arm, invitingly.

"Shall we set sail, Captain?"
"Aye, mate. I fancy we will.” She smiled at him.
“So, all of this is yours?” Varric spoke up.
“Oh, did I forget to mention I was a pirate?” Naomi laughed, turning to him, “maybe you all shoulda’ been more mindful of yer company.”

The Captain turned her back to the small group. She felt a pang of resentment towards them.

It's not that she disliked the Inquisition, but she definitely didn’t appreciate the gauntlet she’d been running since joining.

“Have you told them?” Adibas whispered to her as they walked through the sea of crewmen.

The Captain rested her right hand on the hilt of her sword, grinning.

“Adie, what’s the third tenet of the Creed?” She asked him quietly.

“Never compromise the Brotherhood.” He understood.

“Should we let them on the Captain’s Deck, Quartermaster?” Naomi yelled, as to draw attention away from their whispered conversation.

He pondered for a moment.

“Spose’ they’ve earned it, Captain.”

“Aye, follow us, then.” She waved at them.

Drawing ever closer to the Helm, she gently slid her hand up the railing, walking up the stairs that lead to the control of her infamous ship. She took in every step, every breath; her heart gave way to her excitement. She stood in front of the wheel, staring. The blackened wood, the golden borders, the red gems that sparkled in the sun; even the compass in the middle was decorative with leviathans painted on the inside. She slowly took the leather-wrapped handles in her longing, anxious hands.

Her eyes gained a certain ferocity, her smile- ear to ear. She raised a single fist into the air.

“Spread her wings to the wind, mates!” Naomi roared over the deck, the men and women responding with equal vigor.

The wheel spun, turning the ship around.
“Quill n’ Kilean on deck!” Captain McNamara ordered.
She watched as her associates scrambled to get the two affront.
“Cap’n!” They responded in unison.
“Take one of these down with yeh, they have maps and such. I’ll be getting’ Her ‘way from the shore while you chart course.”
“Aye, aye!” They responded.
Cassandra, Varric, and Solas looked at each other.
“Fine…” Cassandra mumbled, “I have a map you may use.” She regretfully walked down the steps.

The sails of The Dishonored, red in color, came to life among the foreign seas. The gold-threaded Celtic embroidering that lined the borders had a soft glow to them as they touched the faint sunlight. The two mainsails held black, snarling, wolf heads that faced each other, a sword dividing them.
“I think I know what time it be, Cap’n!” Thaddeus yelled.
Naomi saw the Shantyman open a keg of rum.
“Lord have mercy…”

**Safe and sound at home again, let the waters roar, Jack.** Tad started.
**Safe and sound at home again, let the waters roar, Jack.**
**Long we've tossed on the rolling main, now we're safe ashore, Jack.**
**Don't forget yer old shipmate, faldee raldee raldee raldee rye-eye-doe!**

The ship was picking up speed, Naomi humming along with the men.
“Quite fitting, this one.”
“Aye, he’s a crafty one.” She paused, “Adibas…”
“Aye, Captain?” He looked at her from the side.
“You did a good job taking care of Her, mate. I’m proud of ya.”
“I merely kept the wheel warm. I knew you’d come back to us.” He crossed his arms protectively, watching the crewmen work.
“Hah, you’d be more hopeful than I, then. I’d be dead if it weren’t for these merry bunch.” She referred to the Inquisition.
“Then you have my thanks.” He looked behind him, studying the two non-human beings.
They returned an equally curious look.
“It was our pleasure.” Solas nodded.
“She’s more trouble than she’s worth.” Varric surmised.
“That be the truth if I’ve ever heard of it!” The Captain agreed.

**Since we sailed from Kingston town, four years gone, or nigh, Jack.**
**Was there ever chummies, now, such as you and I, Jack?**
**Long we've tossed on the rolling main, now we're safe ashore, Jack.**
**Don't forget yer old shipmate, faldee raldee raldee raldee rye-eye-doe!**

“Isabela won’t be happy about this.” The dwarf huffed.
“Isabela?”
“She’s been called the ‘Pirate Queen of Thedas. She doesn’t respond well to competition.”
“Good thing she has none, then.”
“She doesn’t?” Adibas looked at Naomi, confused.
“Nay, lad, she’d have to have half a damned chance to be competition for us. We’re out of her ranks, mate!” The two laughed hysterically.

Varric found Naomi’s arrogance astounding. Solas chuckled to himself, as usual.
“This is why you’re Chuckles…” Varric whispered to him.
Naomi gleamed at the bickering.
“How long have you sods been at sea in Thedas?”
“We arrived with three days supplies, and I’d press we’re empty.”
“Three days, just sailin’ around?”
“Aye. Aimlessly. Drove us near insanity.” He shook his head, as if wanting to forget.

“We have worked the self-same gun, quarterdeck division.
Sponger I and loader you, through the whole commission.
Long we’ve tossed on the rolling main, now we’re safe ashore, Jack.
Don’t forget yer old shipmate, faldee raldee raldee raldee rye-eye-doe!”

“We’ve got a lot to discuss, eh?”
“The short spell is-I woke up in the snow damn near my end, was rescued by an astoundingly handsome fellow, blew up a holy building of which their Pope-of-sorts lived in, and was then dubbed the Herald of their Prophet Andraste after failing to seal that huge hole in the sky. Oy, and me hand glows and closes the other li’l holes that come about. That bout’ cover it?”
“Sums it up to a degree.” Solas affirmed.
“I leave you alone for just three nights’ time and you blow up a building and become a Saint. My, the Lord has funny ways of guiding us, he does.” Adibas’s velvety voice boomed with laughter.

‘When the middle watch was on, and the time went slow, boy,
Who could choose a rousing stave, who like Jack or Joe, boy?
Long we’ve tossed on the rolling main, now we’re safe ashore, Jack.
Don’t forget yer old shipmate, faldee raldee raldee raldee rye-eye-doe!’

Kit met the Captain on deck, Cassandra trailing behind him.
“Aye, First Mate, what’ll it be?” Naomi addressed him.
“Three leagues northwest, Cap!”
Using the compass inlaid in the Helm, Naomi steered the ship accordingly.
“So, when we get to this place- Val Royeaux, it’s called- there’s a mighty fine chance the entire city’ll try to kill me on sight.”
“Ah, so nothing new, then?”
“They reckon I blew up their Temple of Sacred Whaters, killing the Grand Divine, or what have you.”
“Temple of Sacred Ashes; killing the Divine Justinia, head of the Chantry.” Cassandra resounded, “A murder most heinous in the eyes of the people.”
“Only issue is- I didn’t do it. And now I’ve gotta’ go convince a right grand collection of arses o’that.” She sighed, “Remember the good ol’ days where if yah had a disagreement, yah beat the piss out of each other and called it square?”
“Aye, Captain. I imagine this lot of ours still live in those times. Hope we can keep ‘em there.”

There she swings, an empty hulk, not a soul below now.
Number seven starboard mess misses Jack and Joe now.
Long we’ve tossed on the rolling main, now we’re safe ashore, Jack.
Don’t forget yer old shipmate, faldee raldee raldee raldee rye-eye-doe!

The sunrise came up off the water, gracing them with its presence. The sky was clear; the clouds were red, pink, and orange. A small trail of light began to form upon the water, inviting them to the edge of the world. Glowing chops kissed the Hull of The Dishonored, Her wolf sails howling into the wind.
“Ever see the sun rise at sea, before?” Naomi whispered.
“I have not.” Cassandra walked over to the railing of the ship, leaning over.
Her purple-hued armor glistened like amethyst caught in sunlight, casting glimmers of color onto the wood. Her shield and sword casting a similar display—she was spectacular.
Naomi caught Adibas staring.
“Aye, what’s this we have here?”
“What?” He looked to Naomi, startled.
“Don’t play daft.”
He cleared his throat, and listened to Thaddeus sing away.
“It’s quite lovely. The air out here is delightful.” Solas took a deep breath of the ocean air.
“Leave it to the elf to talk about air.” The rouge dwarf held his stomach, “Are we almost there?”
“Feelin’ sea sick?” Adibas looked to him and pointed to the railing farthest away from them.
Varric hobbled over, releasing his bowels into the water.
“Cassandra, you’re not goin’ to his side?” Naomi jokingly asked her.
“No. He is not the Herald, he doesn’t get my assistance when he loses his stomach.” She laughed.
“Seeker, did you just laugh?” Naomi looked to her.
“I did.” Her face hardened.
“Well, that was a short spout.”

But the best of friends must part, fair or foul the weather.
Hand yer flipper for a shake, now a drink together.
Long we’ve tossed on the rolling main, now we’re safe ashore, Jack.
Don’t forget yer old shipmate, faldee raldee raldee raldee rye-eye-doe!

“At eleven knots for three leagues, we’ve an hour till’ landfall. So, let’s get’ta talkin, yeah?” She spoke to Adibas, as well as the three standing behind her.
They had a lot of catching up to do before they were all on even footing.
Friendship Paid in Nugs

Chapter Summary

"Here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master...Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and go? 'Thou shalt' is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, 'I will.'" -Friedrich Nietzsche

Come, now, why won’t you eat it?” Cullen growled to Dullahan, waving a dead rabbit at him over the fence. The dracolisk remained sleeping, head resting upon his crossed front claws. He opened an eye to observe Cullen, going back to sleep soon after. His scale-bound tail flickered with amusement.

“If you starve, she’ll have my head, you blasted gurgut…”

“Still struggling to feed him?” Leliana walked from behind, meeting the Commander’s side. “He hasn’t eaten since she last fed him, and who knows how long he went hungry before that. He’s got to be starving.” Cullen rubbed the back of his neck.

Leliana leaped the fence before Cullen had time to protest. He frowned, quickly following her, hand on hilt. She snatched the rabbit from him.

Dullahan’s eyes opened with a start. His neck ascended quickly, as if being alarmed—a low rumble escaping his jaws.

“Remember last time? She made him do a trick?”

“Leliana, don’t go near—”

An excited yelp rang from behind them.

“Are you going to feed him, Leliana?” Josephine clapped her hands, “Oh, it was such a grand sight when the Herald fed him that nug.”

Dullahan stood, looking at Leliana and Cullen closely. He shook his head, disgruntled.

“Oh, is the bridle bothering you, boy?” The Spymaster made a pouty face.

“Do you need my assistance? I’d love to—” Josephine began to lift her ruffles, as to not catch them on the fence.

“No! Having one of you ignore me is quite enough.” Cullen held his hand out to stop the Antivan woman.

She frowned at him, dropping her ruffled pantaloons in defeat.

“Cullen?” Leliana smiled at him, nervously.

“You can’t be...oh, you are. You are serious. Why wouldn’t you be?”

“Just imagine how impressed the Herald would be, hearing about how her brave Commander approached and unbridled her prized beast.”

“Maker have mercy…”

Taking a deep breath of the cold, mountainous air, he reached for the bridle. Dullahan raised on his hind legs, landing quickly, giving a warning stomp.

“The eyes, Commander! Don’t look him in his eyes!” Josephine shouted.

“How else am I supposed to know if he’s going to bite my face off?”

“I’ll watch for you.” Leliana giggled.

“I’m glad you’re enjoying this.”

Averting his eyes to the ground, he slowly reached a hand out for the dracolisk’s
muzzle. Sweat beaded his forehead, and his hand began to shake. Was he really trying to wrangle in a dracolisk? Why was this thing even here in the first place? Was it safe to keep-

A scaly boundary interrupted his thoughts.

Slowly turning his head, he realized that his hand was placed firmly on the beast’s nose, only inches away from his jaws. Cullen’s eyes widened in fear. He quickly wrapped his fingers around the bridle strap, giving it a quick tug. Dullahan opened his mouth willingly, allowing the metal bit to drop from his fangs. Cullen let it dangle underneath his chin, not daring to go any farther.

The creature yelped in excitement, letting out small shrieks that invoked terror, even if he meant it to be celebratory. He whipped his head up and down with joy, staring at Leliana intently. With an enthused arm, she threw the rabbit into the air. Dullahan stood for it, knocking Cullen to the ground with excited kicks from his front legs.

With a single snap of his jaws, the rabbit was devoured. He stood there, innocently licking his scaly mouth, eyes searching for more.

“Still hungry?” Leliana nervously asked, “Josie?”

“Oh, Josie!” Josephine ran to the side of the fenced-in area. She had two armfuls of food with her- nug, rabbit, even deer. Each meat was packed delicately.

“Oh, Josie,” Leliana laughed, “I don’t think the dracolisk knows how to appreciate the fancy wrappings on his meal.”

“Then, as Ambassador to the Inquisition, it is my job to educate him on such things.” She proclaimed, handing the bounty over the fence.

“An expense for the Herald’s mount. No price can be put on such a thing.” She waved her hand, dodging the question with elegance.

Cullen yanked the nug from the top of the pile, quickly tossing it into the air. Dullahan leapt, spinning as he caught it. Some of the villagers stood and watched, now clapping their hands. Dullahan dropped the nug to the ground as he landed. Pinning one half with a mighty claw, he ripped it in two with a tug of his jaw. After a few mighty chomps and a massive swallow, he picked up the other half to finish. He released a mighty roar into the sky.

Josephine threw a fish into the air, having the beast repeat the trick, much to their excitement.

The three advisers found themselves bonding with the dracolisk, coming to love his quirky demeanor.

After his meal, Dullahan trotted over to Josephine. She yelped as he rubbed his nose against her face, scared he was trying to bite her. Once her yelps turned into laughter, Cullen put his sword away.

“That would have been unfortunate.” Leliana simmered, tucking her own dagger away as she climbed out of the stable fence.
“Until next time, Dullahan!” Josephine patted the beast as her friend drug her away.
“That’ll be enough dragon-cuddling for you. Let us get back to work.”

Cullen looked to the beast as he turned around, fire in his eyes.
“I don’t suppose…” He walked up to the beast, slowly putting the bridle back on.

Dullahan made him jump as he snapped up the metal bit. The beast knelt his head down, offering a horn as support.
“You are a smart creature, aren’t you?”

The Commander grabbed the horn willingly, grasping the saddle horn in his other hand. Putting his foot in the stirrup, he pulled himself up with the help of the dracolisk’s mighty head. Dullahan allowed the Commander to settle comfortably into the seat upon his back. Cullen gave the creature a slight kick to the sides, sending the animal flying.

He turned to wave at Leliana and Josephine as he barreled passed them, both women frozen in their tracks, gawking.
"Tantum religio potuit saudrere malorum. So potent was religion in persuading to evil deeds."
-Lucretius, 99 BC

Royeaux Crusade

Chapter Summary

Naomi steadied the wheel as Val Royeaux harbor came into view.

“Ease her off the wind, lads!” She called out.

“Douse to half-sails!” Adibas shouted behind her.

The group of them spoke for the entire voyage. Adibas had described the events that transpired before their departure, leaving out key elements such as the Pieces of Eden and the Assassin Order. Cassandra educated them on the Chantry and its hierarchy; Varric spoke of the events of Kirkwall and the mage-templar war; and Solas spoke of the Fade and magic. The explanations greatly clarified things for Naomi, and she appreciated the time they’d spent talking.

Still, she found herself with more questions than before.

They approached the city, cautiously.

“I don’t think their docks are large enough for us, Captain.” Adibas spoke.

“I’d reckon you’d be right, mate.” Naomi reached for her Sword, “I can simply-“

“No. You cannot use magic—or whatever it is that you do. The city is already on edge. Showing up out of thin air would surely cause more unrest.” Cassandra interjected.

“The Seeker is correct. We cannot rally the Chantry even more so.” Solas pondered.

“We be rowin’ then?” Naomi sighed, “Spose’ the 4 of us can fit in a long boat. We’ve fit 5 in it before.” Adibas seemed taken aback by not being invited to join them.

“Take Her off the winds, boys! Drop the anchor to the drink!” Naomi gave the command, “Adibas, if you’d join me. Mates, I’ll be swift in my return; I know we’ve got fancy people to piss off in a timely manner.” The Captain and her Quartermaster disappeared into the deck below.

Cassandra, Varric, and Solas huddled together in the corner of the Captain’s Deck.

“What do you think they’re talking about?” Varric whispered.

“I do not know. But I am no longer sure if we can trust the Herald with as much as we do.” Cassandra admitted, even if she didn’t want to.

“I see no reason to pass judgement. We don’t know who she is, or what kind of person she is, just quite yet.” Solas said hotly.

“The last pirate I trusted almost got the entire city of Kirkwall slaughtered. Matter of fact, she managed to motivate the the Qunari to level half the city. Pardon me for having apprehensions.” Varric scoffed.

“Apprehensions and predetermined bias are two different things entirely, dwarf. Lady Seeker Cassandra- I would think you, of all people, would agree.”

“I do.” Cassandra put an end to the conversation.

Below, Naomi sat at her desk in her Quarters, Adibas sitting across from her.

“They don’t have guns here, mate. That means no gunpowder. No cannonballs. I believe we can employ the Inquisition to develop as such if we run through our stocks, given the Carpenter’s blueprints...but if they don’t have the technology to begin with-”

“Seas baring defenseless ships, having no cannons...” The Quartermaster thought of all the bountiful possibilities.
“Mate, that’s not what I’m sayin’. We’re a target. All it’ll take is some fancy sailor to look at Her and wonder, ‘Aye, what be those gold things pokin’ out Her sides?’”

Adibas weighed her words.

“What would you have us do?” The Quartermaster asked.

“I need you lot to stay behind and watch the ship. Make sure She doesn’t get looted. I’ll have a guard put on Her when we return to Haven, but I don’t have that choice at present, mate.”

“I understand, Captain.” He sighed.

Naomi reached her hand out, giving him a strong handshake.

“Don’t forget what we talked about earlier, either. They’re called ravens here, not pigeons.” She laughed breathlessly.

“I know, Captain. I’ll send Kilean after you’re far out.” Adibas smiled, “I do listen.”

“Selectively. What’s the woman’s name I gave you?” She tested him.

“Sister Leliana.” He repeated blandly.

“Aye, there ya go, mate.”

Naomi returned to the group awaiting her return. They hurried into the longboat strapped to the side of The Dishonored, prepped and ready for them to row to the docks. Having much practice and riding the waves in, it didn’t take too much time for Captain McNamara to get them into the city.

When they reached the port, they paid the harbor master and went on, being approached by a hooded, young woman.

“Lady Herald,” she dropped to one knee.

“Oh, none of that.” Naomi lifted the girl by the cloth of her shoulders, having her stand.

“You’re one of Leliana’s people. What have you found?” Cassandra looked on, seeing a crowd behind the main gate.

“The Chantry Mothers have gathered in the central market—as well as Templars, Lady Seeker.” The scout stuttered.

“Templars? Why?” Cassandra seemed to be put off by this information.

“The people fear the Inquisition—The scout was cut off by a woman gasping, dropping what was in her hand and walking swiftly the opposite direction.

“Just a guess, Seeker, but I think they know who we are.” Varric snickered.

“Your skills of observation never fail to impress me, Varric.” Cassandra shook her head.

“Rawr, me harty!” Naomi held up cat-like claws, hissing and laughing as the woman evolved her brisk walk into a run.

“Don’t encourage them, Spitfire.” The dwarf let out a loud laugh.

The humor soon left the group.

“They believe the Templars will protect them.” The scout continued.

“They wish to protect the city? From us?” This seemed to throw Cassandra.

“Let’s get this over with, then.” Naomi charged forward, having the men open the gates with a simple command.

“Stand weary, guardsmen. The Inquisition is among us.” They heard a guard captain speak in the barracks above.

The people soon dispersed, giving them plenty of room to navigate to the front. A woman awaited them, surrounded by Templars. The Chantry stood tall behind her.

There were so many faces that looked upon her in curiosity, and perhaps a pinch of fear. Men. Women. Children. Elderly. They were uncertain about her—about the Inquisition.

“I expected looks, but…what in the blazes are they all standin’ round here, fer?”

She bumped into someone while lost in thought.

“Pardon.” Naomi cleared her throat anxiously.

“Brushed by the Inquisition…” The man was more nervous than she, “An omen, perhaps?”

“Ignore the comment, Lady Herald.” The whispered advice was overshadowed by Cassandra’s fake, audience-appealing smile.

A woman awaited them in the clearing. She could be seen above the sea of heads, only by
the raised staircase that stood at the center of the plaza with what, judging by the garb the woman wore, Naomi would assume to be the Chantry standing tall behind her. Armed men stood on either side of her, guarding the stairs of the entry and exit. An iron-rod railing separated them from their crowd on their podium.

“Good people of Val Royeaux, hear me!” A Chantry Mother announced as the party approached her, “Together, we mourn our Divine. Her naïve and beautiful heart silenced by treachery! You wonder what will become of her murderer. Well, wonder no more!” She continued as the crowd behind the Inquisition party chattered. “Behold, the so-called Herald of Andraste! Claiming to rise where our beloved fell…” Her voice trailed off as she pointed to Naomi, sending the viewers in a tailspin. “We say this is a false prophet! The Maker would send no stranger in our hour of need!”

Naomi grew impatient.

She could deal with a few suspicious villagers, but to be put on suspicions in the midst of a huge city? The Chantry itself? She’d hoped they’d come to their senses by now.

How she could ever allow herself the waste of time allotted to such hope was lost upon the Captain.

“You’d name me the enemy while a big, green, tide devours the sky? Are all the people in the Chantry so daft?”

“Remember what we talked about.” Varric facepalmed, “So much for that…”

“The Inquisition seeks only to end this madness before it is too late!” Cassandra pleaded.

“It is already too late,” The Chantry Mother raised her hand to present the troop that marched to her.

Men in decorated armor followed an aged, more tenured soldier to her stead. She began to introduce them, and the sheer number of them made put the Herald on edge.

“The Templars have returned to the Chantry! They will face this ‘Inquisition,’ and the people will be safe!” The holy perpetrator declared.

“Those are the Templars, eh?”

A young recruit landed a stiff one right into the Chantry Mother’s jaw, knocking her to the floor. Another Templar put his hand on his sword defensively.

The ripple of horror and shock that spread through the crowd like syphilis defeated the Inquisition.

“Still yourself. She is beneath us.” The tenured man excused the raw performance of his battalion mate.

“This mad grab for power has to end,” Naomi spit on the ground, shouting over the ensuing chaos, “The Breach is one thing, but now we’re goin’ ‘round punchin’ old ladies?”

“Can we give him Chancellor Roderick?” The Herald whispered to Varric after her lecture.

“I don’t think you want him around camp.” Varric nodded to The Seeker.

Cassandra’s face was void of all hope. It was the single-most depressed expression they’d seen from her yet.

“That’s…” The Shark began, calling out after her revelation, “Lord Seeker Lucius, it’s imperative that we speak with-“

“You will not address me.” He roared to Cassandra as he walked passed his guards, descending the opposite end of the stairs of the platform.

“You’ll not take that tone with her, lad.” Naomi growled at the Lord Seeker, resting her had on the Sword of Eden, “This yer Captain ‘er something?”

“Previously, it would seem,” Cassandra raised a hand to the Herald, and then returned to Lucius, “Lord Seeker?”

“Creating a heretical movement, raising up a puppet as Andraste’s prophet. You should be ashamed. You Inquisition dogs should all be ashamed! The Templars failed no one when they left the Chantry to purge the Mages! You are the ones who have failed! You who’d leash our righteous swords with doubt and fear! If you came to appeal to the Chantry, you are too late. The only destiny here that demands respect is mine.” He shamed Cassandra, and the Inquisition, publicly.

“You done runnin’ that shit-stenched yap’o yours, mate?” Naomi intervened, “I’ll not sit here and
be made a fool in front of the very people I risk my life to save, and neither will this Inquisition.”
“You will hold your tongue in my presence, False Herald.” The Lord Seeker drew his sword.
“Templars! One of your own commands the Inquisition’s forces. Join us, as he did!” Solas tried to make amends, being the fair sort, “Commander Cullen would be honored to have you join upon our ranks.”
“‘One of our own…’ Cullen Rutherford is no longer a member of our order. Some cried at the loss, claiming him “a staunch and loyal member of the Order.” So loyal, I say, in fact, he abandoned these men for this sorry excuse for a woman.” The Lord Seeker quickly eyed Naomi. “But Lord Seeker…What if he really was sent by the Maker? What if-?” Cassandra started.

It was the slap of the knuckles that she heard first. Not the crack of the jaw, not the chatter of teeth biting down on tongue-flesh, not the split in skin upon her friend’s face. Lucius struck Cassandra with force perpetuated by rage, misogyny, and abandonment of duty.

Naomi drew her blade, charging to his front, holding her hidden blade to his throat.
She felt a strong hand restrain her at the crook of her elbow, only to feel another embrace her waist. Solas had stopped the Assassin in her tracks.

The show had sent the crowd in a flurry, leaving and running in evacuation.
“When I spill yer blood on the golden streets of this city, may history remember that it was you who dealt the first blow, you foul fuckin’ bein’…” Naomi growled into the Lord Seeker’s face, her leathers crinkling as her armor tightened in protest as she struggled to relax.
“I will make the Templar Order a power that stands alone against the Void. We deserve recognition, independence. Not the mages. Not the Inquisition.” He leaned away from his would-be attacker.
She retracted the blade.
“I’m fine, I’m a’right. Let me go, now, please, thank you kindly.” Hesitation marked Solas’s hands, but he complied nonetheless.
Cassandra glared at the Lord Seeker with a deadliness that Naomi had not seen before.
“You have shown me nothing, and the Inquisition…less than nothing.” Lucius spit on the ground in front of the two women, “Templars! Val Royeaux is unworthy of our protection! We march!”
Cassandra pulled her shield and sword, lunging at the man who’d hurt not only her body, but her dignity. Naomi was now the one grabbing elbows with crook of her own, putting her Seeker friend in a stronghold. The Shark thrashed, bashing the Herald in the face with her shield in her flurry to escape. The blow had not been intentional, but was forceful nonetheless.
“Well fuck me and call me a whore…” Naomi shook her head her vision blurred from her bleeding eyebrow, “Cassandra, it’s not worth it, lass. You’ve got to come off it-For fuck’s sake, watch where yer swingin’, Seeker. You almost stabbed me with that fuckin’ thing!”
As if being reminded, having been addressed by her title, Seeker Pentaghast’s senses came to. Her arms settled, the weapons took their places at her sides once again.
“I’m fixin’ to let you go, now. Don’t go killin’ anyone- not here.”
Stumbling away out of rage, Cassandra looked off to the side, wanting to hide the bruise surfacing on her face.
“He shamed me. Called me ‘nothing.’ Denounced me in front of the people of this great city. And you’d prevent me from-”
“Making a right arse out of yerself, aye. And a felon, I might add.” She put her hands on her hips.
Her brow bled profusely, blood trailing around her eye, splitting off and running into the crevice of her large scar.
“I’m-”
Naomi waved her off, walking back to the docks. Varric stood next to the Seeker.
“Charming fellow, isn’t he?” He patted the her arm.
“Has…Lord Seeker Lucius gone mad?” She whispered to herself.
“Fortunately, the Templars weren’t our only hope.” Solas stood to her other side.
“I wouldn’t write them off so quickly. There must be those in the Order to see what he’s become. Either way, we should first return to Haven to inform the others.” Cassandra looked up to follow
Naomi, “Where did she go- she was just there?” They looked around frantically. Naomi stood atop a tall building, looking down at them spinning in circles. “I’d imagine they’ve discovered my disappearance.” She sighed, standing up from her crouched position.

She turned, admiring the sun glistening off the waves, The Dishonored rolling in the distance as they bucked Her. The salty air graced her skin as a gentle breeze lifted from the roof tops.

She ran along the seam of the roof, toward the direction the Templars left. Breaking into a free run, she swung from poles, climbed chimneys- anything she could get her hands on. Naomi welcomed the liberation of having no boundaries, and the reassurance that if she’d fall, she’d just as surely catch herself.

Perhaps figuring the mystery of this land wasn’t the hardest task at hand. “Perhaps the struggle of these lands is to not lose sight of yourself in the process.”
Red Jenny

Chapter Summary

"I begin by taking. I shall find scholars later to demonstrate my perfect right."
-Frederick the Great

Naoimi stalked her target— the Lord Seeker. Using her Precursor abilities, she caught
the end of their conversation before the large gates slammed shut.
“…resistant to red lyrium. They’re unusable to us, now. I gave you orders— now follow them.”
She saw the Templars hesitate, dismissing themselves otherwise.
“Red lyrium… that glowin’ bit Varric went on about. Stupid Templars don’t seem too thrilled.”

Dropping to the streets, she began walking back to the center of the city, anxious to tell
Cassandra what she’d heard.

An elf woman emerged from the shadows, sheepishly addressing the Captain, “I heard of
this gathering, and I wanted to see the fabled Herald of Andraste with my own eyes. If it’s help
with the Breach you seek, perhaps my people are the wiser option.” She spoke in hushed whispers.
“And who might you be?” Naomi crossed her arms inquisitively.
“I am Grand Enchanter Fiona, leader of the Mage Rebellion.”
“Oh, uh, apologies. My—uh, pleasure?” Naomi attempted a curtsy, failing miserably.
“Consider this an invitation to Redcliffe: come meet with the Mages. An alliance could help us
both, after all. I hope to see you there, Lady Herald.” The Grand Enchanter vanished, leaving
Naomi a bit alarmed.

“More pleasant than that Lord Seeker fellow, if not for the cloak ‘nd daggers.”

The Captain walked among the citizens of the fancy city, sticking out in bloodied clothes
and tattered armor. Naomi gazed upon the weapons of the city’s guards, curious as to why they
were so “medieval.”

People shied away from her in fear. Plenty of the city’s citizens were still in a flurry
from what had happened, and she felt partly responsible. Making her way back to the market, she
realized her companions were no longer there. Naomi decided the harbor would be the second
best place to look.

She finally found Cassandra, Varric, and Solas standing in a circle, yelling at each other.
“What’s got you sorry sods ina’ tiff?” She marched down to them.
“You—you’re—”
“I told you she didn’t leave us.” Varric sneered.
“I had faith in you, Lady Herald.” Solas smiled.
“The raft is gone, I thought—“Cassandra stammered, again.
“You think you’d just scare me away like that, then?” She walked to the empty space the raft once
took. “Well, this’ll give me a right good head pain.”
“What are you—“Cassandra started.
“Aye, I have no patience for arguin’ or explanations. Now take me hand, lass.” She extended her
hand, starting the chain they all made. “Huddle ‘round, now.”

They were blinded by a sudden flash. Before they could open their eyes, they were
already on The Dishonored.
“C-Captain on deck!” Adibas shouted, “I dread when you do that…” He scolded her as she
stumbled about, landing on the railing to regain balance.
Naomi let off an innocent shrug. Blood tickled her lips, made them twitch in discomfort. The iron taste in her mouth alerted her to the developing geyser. She withdrew a handkerchief, throwing her head back.

"Seems someone jacked me longboat. Had no choice in the matter, save jackin’ another longboat."

"Aye, this girl...thing." Kilean shoved someone onto the Deck.

"Huh...You there- address these accusations." Naomi ordered.

"You glow, right? You're the Herald thingy?" A mischievous-looking elf girl looked up.

"Aye, that’d be me. And you're the one stupid 'nough to steal from me?"

"Let's see...you're kind of plain, really. All that talk, and then-you're just a person? I mean, it's all good, innit?" The elf let loose a menacing cackle, "Wasn't really gonna' steal from you. Bad for business. Stealing from potential Friends."

"Who are yeh, lass? Whats this be about?" Naomi waved Kilean off, letting her captive speak and stand freely.

"One name. No, wait, two, it's...well, it's like this," The blonde prisoner stood up, rubbing her now-freed wrists, “My friends told me I should look into a man dealin’ with peoples’ papers. The friends of Red Jenny. That’s me. Well, I’m one. It’s just a name, yeah? It lets little people, ‘Friends,’ be part of something while they stick it to the nobles they hate. Rich tits always try for more than they deserve.” She grumbled under her breath, “‘Blah, blah, BLAH-arrow in my face!’ So here, in your face, I’m Sera, ‘The Friends of Red Jenny,’ are sort of out there. I can use them to help you. Plus arrows.” She nodded to the quiver on her back.

"Aye, so you’re another network of spies...Seems to be a trend in these parts. What’s your angle, thief?" Naomi hammered the elf for a clear-cut answer.

“Here’s how it is. You ‘important’ people are up here, shoving your cods around, ‘Blah blah, I’ll crush you!’ Then, you’ve got generals and oathbelchers, and sure, you have soldiers, like the dead guys protecting that other dead guy paid to intercept any Inquisition ravens. All those helmets, and what gave them up, you might ask? Some drunk who got written orders lifted from him because someone else is pissed about bills. I didn’t know that idiot from manners.”


“No, I’m not Captain Swordface, all marchy. But, if you don’t listen down here too, you risk your rafts. Look, do you need people or not? I want to get everything to get back to normal, like you.”

Naomi buckled in a fit of humor, unable to catch her breath.

"A-adibas," She leaned on his shoulder for support, “C-captain S-S-Swordface! Marchy!” Tears were running down her face. The Quartermaster began to laugh, as did the rest of the crew. Sera smiled nervously.

"Aye, lass, yeh can join us sea fairin’ folk. We could use your network’o spies. You have my thanks for sparing Kilean the trouble of getting’ her hands bloody. Can’t imagine you’d take a letter thief well, yeah?"

“I’d’a cut her hands clear off.” Kilean snorted.

"Are you sure about this? We don’t know who she is.” Cassandra asked Naomi fervently.

“No, but she’s of good intentions.” Naomi responded coldly.

“How do you know she isn’t a threat to us?” Solas wondered.

“She just knows. She always knows.” Adibas cut them off.

"Oh, and girl?" She walked down to the elf, towering over her, "If you ever steal from me again, farce or no, I'll right make a necklace out of your sticky li'l fingers."

...
wagons to port in one night’s time; weather permitted. It is also requested that a guard schedule for the mentioned 30 soldiers be made for constant watch at the docks.

My Best,

Kilean Jones

Sea Artist Apprentice of The Dishonored”

Also, a picture of a butt.

“What is the meaning of this?” Cullen growled.

“I will put my resources to use, asking who these Dishonored are, or Kilean Jones.” Josephine scribbled away on her board.

“My spies lost contact with the Herald after…well, that’s the other matter of business.” Leliana leaned over, resting her hands on the large table. She looked up to Cullen.

“I regret to inform you that Lord Seeker Lucius has seized the majority of the Templar Order- and, they, well, exited Val Royeaux rather menacingly.” She sighed.

“Is she alright?” Cullen’s brow furrowed, not concerned with anything else.

“The Herald?”

“Yes. Is she?” He was trying not to openly plead for an answer.

“We do not know. As I said, they lost sight of her.”

“You don’t just lose sight of the Herald of Andraste…where’s the report your scouts sent?”

“Commander-“

“Show it to me.” He said, bluntly.

Leliana looked at Josephine, who gave her a reassuring nod. The Antivan Ambassador handed Cullen the report.

“…lost sight of the Herald after Lord Seeker Lucius struck Lady Seeker Pentaghast. The Herald held a blade to the Lord Seeker, causing the crowd to panic and flurry. Cassandra, Varric, and Solas later reported by the docks. They came from an unusually large ship; it’s making the Orlesian harbor master nervous. Will send word when we find the Lady Herald…”

Cullen crumpled the paper out of anger.

“There was an…altercation between Cassandra and Lucius? And the Herald involved herself…then went missing?”

The three of them stewed for a moment, trying to come up with possible explanations.

“This Kilean will get their soldiers, and their Commander.” Cullen dismissed himself from the war room.

Josephine and Leliana exchanged worried looks.
The Dishonored

Chapter Summary

"The cabin of a small yacht is truly a wonderful thing; not only will it shelter you from a tempest, but from the other troubles in life, it is a safe retreat."
-Francis Herreshoff

Chapter Notes

"Roll boys, Roll!" linked to first line of lyrics.
the right thing, Seeker, and yeh know it to be true. I didn’t want to see you get all chopped up by all of Lord Arse’s li’l followers; that’s the only reason I stopped you. We square, mate?”

Cassandra was at a loss for words. She stood, shocked.

“Uh, yes, I suppose we are. May I ask another question before I take my leave?”

“Aye, if you must…”

“Why was one of your sailors sending word? And to whom?” Cassandra remained untrusting.

“I was asking the Inquisition for soldiers guarding our ship. Better to ask forgiveness than permission, I ’spose.” Naomi shrugged, “Is that all?”

“Yes, Herald. I will see myself out.” She paused near the large, charter-littered desk that was previously disregarded.

“Are-were, all of these yours, Lady Herald?” She asked, picking up a sheet of paper.

“Not mine. Simply told ’em’ where to go and when. A fine fleet, we had…” She lamented, “Oh, and, Seeker.”

“Yes?”

“Captain.”

“Captain Herald of Andraste?” Cassandra grinned, placing the paper down on the table.

“There’ll be none of that!” Naomi mused.

Once Cassandra left, she let out a sigh, slumping back in her comfortable chair.

“We’ve been through a lot, eh?” She spoke to her ship as she reminisced. Various flags of enemies’ ships hung on the walls. The large table in the middle of the room still held all the other ship names in her fleet back home. Her model of The Dishonored that Edward had built for her rested on a cabinet.

“Sally Brown, she's the gal for me boys!

Roll Boys! Roll boys roll!

Sally Brown she's the gal for me, boys!

Way high, Miss Sally Brown!”

“Christ, mate, how does yer voice keep goin’?” She grumbled, “Fuckin’ Tad.”

“It's down to Trinidad to see Sally Brown boys!

Roll Boys! Roll boys roll!

Down to Trinidad to see Sally Brown boys!

Way high, Miss Sally Brown!

She's lovely on the foreyard, an' she's lovely down below boys!

Roll Boys! Roll boys roll!

She's lovely 'cause she loves me, that's all I want to know boys!

Way high, Miss Sally Brown!”

Naomi put her hidden blade into the small lock in her desk, giving it a quick turn. The drawer containing the seals popped open, and she lifted the device she’d been previously interrupted with. The images faded into full picture; flashes of Nassau, Kingston, and the ocean water of the West Indies- and Edward. His daring, fearless eyes-his furrowed brow that always gave way to his anger. She watched as he hung on the side of his ship from the rope ladder, letting his hand catch wind as they sailed. He was meant to be there, just as she. It was their life- it was all they knew.

And now, she knew nothing.

“O’l Captain Baker, how do you store yer cargo
Roll Boys! Roll boys roll!
Some I stow for'ward, boys, an' some I stow aft'ward
Way high, Miss Sally Brown!
Fourty fathoms or more below boys!
Roll Boys! Roll boys roll!
There's fourty fathoms or more below boys.
Way high, Miss Sally Brown!"

Her eyes began to swell. As she jerked her head and placed the device on her lap, something caught her attention.
“What’s this…?”
Naomi hadn't noticed a wooden, hand-carved box on her desk. She nervously picked it up, roughly the size of her palm.
A note was attached.
“May this find you home to us; me, more importantly.” –Edward

“Oh, way high ya, an' up she rises
Roll Boys! Roll boys roll!
Way high ya, and the blocks is different sizes
Way high, Miss Sally Brown!
Oh, one more pull, don't ya hear the mate a-bawlin? 
Roll Boys! Roll boys roll!
Oh, one more pull, that's the end of all the hawlin'
Way high, Miss Sally Brown!"

“Vex me to me face, behind me back, all that; but alone, you’d be the sweetest man I’ve…” She shook her head free of thought.
What lay in the box was a small ring with markings similar to those of the pendant she wore. It had a certain familiarity, but she wasn't sure from where.
She bit the leather of her glove, pulling it off and letting it hang from her teeth. Slipping the ring on, Naomi watched as it was brought to life, releasing a blue light- and then fading.
“And just what in the piss does this do?” She scolded.

"Sally Brown she's the gal for me boys!
Roll Boys! Roll boys roll!
Sally Brown she's the gal for me, boys!
Way high, Miss Sally Brown!”

The ship lurched to a stop. Pushing herself up with the help of her desk, she reached up to pinch her lantern dead. Regrettably, she approached the doors leading out of her private quarters.
The cold air met her face, causing her to block her view with an arm.
The men and women of The Dishonored lined up on either side of her, making a corridor to the bridge extended to land. They saluted her.
“Captain on Deck!” Kit yelled.
She walked down the middle of them, hand resting on the Sword of Eden. She stood strong there for a moment, looking at all the soldiers that had accumulated on land and- Cullen?
“I see you got my note in a timely fashion.”
“I-yes, I did,” he shifted uncomfortably, rubbing the back of his neck.
“Captain,” Adibas shuddered from the cold, “would you have us unload Her cargo?”
“Aye, mate, lighten her up.”
“You’re a Captain, now?” Cullen crossed his arms, grinning.
“Always have been, Commander.”
He blushed slightly, clearing his throat.
“What do you make of all this?” Cassandra’s harsh voice came from behind Naomi.
Varric, Solas, and Sera followed behind her.
“I’m not quite sure what I’m looking at, yet.” He admitted.
“I’m the Captain of this brig, The Dishonored. Slew 40 or so men to get Her, we did. Must have come to Thedas with me when we got tripped up in…whatever we got tripped up in. Now, let’s get my crew warm and fed. Did you make a schedule to keep Her sound?” She asked him, her hot breath pushing steam.
“The ship, she means.”Varric crossed his arms.
“I-uh-yes, rotating men through the day and night. The docks will be heavily monitored and armed.”
He looked on as the men and women formed a loading line, passing items off to the wagons he’d provided.
“A Captain of a ship of this size?” He thought to himself.
“Who’s this stick in the mud- all ruffled feathers?” Seras sneezed.
“The Inquisition’s resident ‘Captain Swordface.’ And yes, he’s quite ‘marchy.’” Naomi caught herself in a second fit of laughter, Sera joining her now.
“W-what is this?” Cullen was thrown off.
“I’m finding these two women to be quite dangerous, together. Best keep your distance.” Varric snickered as he left the small group, helping the sailors unload.
Small comments about Solas's appearance fluttered throughout the crew. He patiently explained that he was an elf, and they were not fake ears.
“Lady Herald, if you’ll have a moment.” Cullen walked off to the side, as to get out of everyone’s way.
She followed him, almost too willingly.
“There’s someone who’d very much like to see you. He’s learned a new trick, too.” The Commander held his fingers up to his strong jaw, giving a loud and peculiar whistle.
A shriek was heard in the distance.
“Dullahan!” She smiled at the Commander tiredly, “Is that him?”
“That it would be.” Cullen returned a gentle gaze.
“You taught him?”
“Rode him every afternoon, too. Lots of nugs were lost in the process, however.” He let out a small chuckle
“Commander Cullen, 'Slayer of Nugs', 'Trainer of Dragons.'” Naomi held her arms out dramatically, “Has quite nice ring to it, doesn’t it?”
Dullahan leapt from behind a large shrub, charging for them.
“Captain! Look out!” Adibas yelled from on deck.
Her crew stopped work, suddenly, watching the red and black demon hurl himself at their Captain. Before they had a moment to react, the dracolisk was already inches away from Naomi’s face, licking her with a bloodied tongue.
“That’s disgusting, mate! Leave me be! Agh, blasted snake!” She coughed and cackled, the smell being quite mortifying.
“Three days…Three days. And you’re playing with a…”
“Dracolisk-dragon-thingy.” Naomi finished his thought for him.
“How could you allow her to be so reckless?” Adibas growled to Cullen.
“Why does everyone keep asking me that?” He mumbled to himself. ”Like she’d listen to any order I’d have to give…”
“We’ll meet you at the Chantry, Commander...” She placed a gentle hand on his shoulder, "And
Cullen…thank you, for everything.”
“I-uh-hmm, oh, no problem at all! I shall see you when you return, then, Lady Cap- I mean, Lady Herald.” He cleared his throat, quickly leaving the docks.
“A peculiar fellow…” Naomi smiled as she watched him leave.

“Lady Cap…” Naomi looked at him, a smile playing about her lips.

“…”

“It’s good that you’ve returned…we’ve heard of your encounter.” Josephine spoke quietly.
“You heard?” Cassandra’s swollen face twisted into confusion.
“My agents in the city sent word ahead, of course.” Leliana revealed a sinister grin.

They were in the war room, discussing their next plan of action.

“It’s a shame the Templars have abandoned their senses, as well as the capital.” Cullen folded his hands on his hilt.
“Fuck em’ and fuck the capital. Blasted place can sink to the bottom of the sea.” Naomi growled, “That old hag almost had me executed, she did.”
“In any case, Lucius has taken the Order somewhere…” Leliana’s voice faded into genuine curiosity, “but to do what? My reports have been…very odd.”
“Might have somethin’ to do with that red lyrium git.” Naomi found herself being stared down by anxious faces, “What?”
“Red lyrium?” Cullen seemed panicked.
“I…may have overheard the Lord Arsehole-something about something or someone being resistant to red lyrium.” And then he said, ‘They’re unusable to us, now. I gave you orders- now follow them.’” Naomi mocked his voice, holding her hands out as if he was fat, "Sounds to me like a noble bunch of no good.”
“That is…quite worrisome.” Leliana crossed her hands behind her back, pondering.
“Or…” Jospehine started, hesitantly, “the Herald could simply go to meet the mages in Redcliffe, instead.”
“Think the mage rebellion is more united? It could be ten times worse!” Cullen argued.
“Grand Enchanter Fiona didn’t seem vicious- or involved with red lyrium.” Naomi grinned.
“You’ve met with Grand Enchanter Fiona? When?” Cassandra’s face burrowed in anger.
“Val Royeaux, right after I ran away from all you to spy on the Mighty Arsehole. She…approached me…on me way back…to port.”

Naomi swayed backwards, losing her balance and stumbling in place.
“We shouldn’t discount Redcliffe. The mages may be worth the risk.” Jospehine’s words rolled off of her tongue like a bubbling brook.
“They are more desperate than you realize.” Cullen shook his head, looking at Naomi worriedly.
“So-it’ll be dangerous…I’ve been laughin’ in the face of danger since…since I walked out of the blasted Fade, as you call it.” Naomi took to the wall for support.
“Right now, I’m not certain we have enough influence to approach the Order or the rebellion safely. Perhaps we should discuss this once we’ve gained more agents, in more places.” Leliana chimed.
“I agree.” Cassandra huffed.
“Lady Herald, you look ill. Are you alright?” Cullen looked on, watching her eyes shudder.
“I’m fine. If you’re all quite done bickering, I’d like to rest, if that’d be good and well.” Naomi dismissed herself, walking out of the room belligerently.

Outside, Adibas waited for her, hesitant to leave her side.
“Walk me home?”

Adibas took one of her arms, as she stumbled, putting it over his shoulder.
“You look like Hell, Captain.” They walked together, him being her support.
“Would make sense, I feel as such.”
“You’ll be pleased to know that everyone’s been fed, and properly outfitted for the weather. Resources run scarce here; they fashioned some of our furs from the blankets we brought from Her
cargo. Resupplying them wouldn’t be a bad task to put the crew on. Watching that poor innkeeper
arrange rooms for them in the tavern was a sight you should be sorry you’ve missed.”
“They stationed our people in a tavern?” Naomi laughed, “They’ll regret that in less but a few
hours.”
“Aye, that they will.”
Together, the two of them dredged through the snow unenthusiastically. Naomi directed
him to her cabin, where he released her from his support.
“I feel a good sleep coming on. Settle yerself in, I’ll find yeh when I wake.” She smiled at him
gratefully, limping into her room.
"Sleep well, Captain."
Adibas walked down the small hill towards the front of the village, now appropriately
outfitted in furs. He walked to the frozen river front, looking up at the Breach.
“What did we get ourselves into…?” He sighed.
Hearing shouting in the distance, he saw Cassandra, now taking her frustrations out on
training with the soldiers. Appreciating a familiar face and admiring her form, he snuck up on her.
“You are a skilled fighter.” He complimented.
She was startled by his approach.
“Thank you.” She responded bluntly.
“I hear you’re quite a force of nature.”
“Some would say. Did you need something?” She stared at him with her fierce, almond eyes.
“There is something that I must discuss with you.” He verified, "While she may not act on it, I’m
afraid her situation is much more dire than she lets on."
“Go on…”
“Those artifacts that she uses-“
“The enchanted weapons?” Cassandra asked.
“No. They are not enchanted, it is not magic. It is advanced technology - there is a large
difference.”
He shifted, lowering his voice.
“They drain her. They are powered by her life force- hence the nose bleeds and sudden fatigue. I
fear she believes they are the only means of protecting herself here.”
“I cannot say I disagree with her, then. She has no magic, no abilities. It’s difficult for soldiers to
defend themselves from people who do. Tell me, where do these artifacts come from?”
“I’m afraid I cannot delve into that at this time.” His words were like a vault.
“Fine. I will speak with Solas to try and remedy her ailments…on one condition."
“What would that be?”
“You tell me the name of those strange weapons you all carry.” She pointed to his sash that was
holding a pistol tight to his person.
“This is a pistol, ‘Lady Seeker.’” He mocked.
“A pistol? And please, call me Cassandra.” Her scar stretched as she smiled.
“Aye, a gun. You load it like this…” Adibas took the ramrod from the bottom of the barrel,
loading the gunpowder and linen-wrapped lead ball with precision.
“And then….” He held it to the dummy she’d been practicing on.
A flurry of sparks shot from the flint above the handle. The dummy’s head exploded,
the barrel leaving a smoking trail. Small bits of wadding hung from the opening, still burning. He
blew the fire out before holstering his weapon.
“Technology.” He grinned, waving her off as he left for the tavern.
She stood there, looking between the dummy and back to Adibas, repeatedly.
“How in the name of Andraste…?"

Naomi sat at her desk in the Captain’s Quarters, peering into a new Memory Seal.
"I've been at sea for seventeen years, now. The things I have witnessed, the things I have done...And it all adds up to what? Being at the mercy of these strange lands? Nay, I will not accept this as truth. Still, I reckon I've never laid anchor in a place where our maxim rings louder. 'Nothing is true, everything is permitted.' Thedas is the embodiment of these words. The people here need a leader, Mentor, and God willing I'll give them one."

She held the Assassin’s hand pledge to her heart, making it the last image recorded in the Seal.

Naomi plopped on the bed behind her, grateful to sleep in her own room. “Thirty bloody soldiers and a slew of villagers...stealthed past em’ all. I still got it.”
Establishing the Order

Chapter Summary

"Assassins are meant to be quiet. Precise. We do not go announcing conspiracies from the rooftops to all who pass by!"
-Achilles Davenport

“I would, Kenway, but…” Naomi rest her hand upon her stomach, “I’ve told you once, and I’ll remind you- I can’t.”
“It’s a Spanish Galleon filled to the brim with riches- what could possibly be the reason you’re passing up this grand opportunity?” He yelled at her.
“I am ill.” She rubbed her stomach in small circles, “That’s all.”
“She’s telling the truth, mate. She’s been loosening the hatch at least twice a day.”
“Thank you, Adibas.” Edward made a disgusted face.
“Take Vane, sure he’d love to chase Reales with yeh.” She rolled her eyes.
“Aye, he’d be the better Captain out of you two, anyhow.”
“That’s not going to work, Edward.” Naomi scoffed, her eyes widening, “I think it’s about to happen again.” She lurched forward.
“Come, Captain, let’s get you to Quarters. Luck be with you, Edward.” The Quartermaster gave him an unenthusiastic wave.

Adibas helped Naomi settle into her cot once they entered her room on The Dishonored.
“When are you going to tell him?” He asked, handing her his flask.
“Are you mad, mate?” She sneered.
“It’s not but fresh water, Captain.”
She took the small container, downing it without a second thought.
“Many thanks…and I reckon I won’t.” She sighed.
The two of them sat in silence for a brief period.
“Ireland.” She whispered, rolling over to face the wall.
“What’s that, Captain?” Adibas looked at the back of her, confused.
“Take us to Ireland.”

Naomi grumbled as she began to wake up.
“Curse these damned dreams…I swear, Consus, if you’re the one givin’ em to me, I’ll stitch you into the sails myself.”
As her foggy vision began to clear, she noticed a note folded on her desk. She yanked the piece of paper in her hands.
“Found you. Rest easy, Captain. Please call a meeting with the advisers when you awake.
-A”
“Good mate, Adibas.”

She let out a mighty stretch, feeling the most rested she’s felt since her arrival. Leaving the Quarters, she marched herself onto the dock. To her surprise, Dullahan was tied to a post, waiting for her. He chewed on the chain, irritated.
“Mornin’ lads!” She waved to the soldiers guarding the docks, “And just what do you think you’re doin’?” She laughed at the dracolisk.
“Lady Herald!” They all saluted her. “You’ve been asleep for two days, ser.”
Naomi looked to the man who spoke to her.

“And no one came to wake me?” She asked as she released Dullahan from the post.

“The dark-skinned gentlemen wouldn’t let them. Said the only reason he told them where you were was to avoid them burning the village down looking for you.” He laughed a bit, “We didn’t even see you board.”

“Aye, that you didn’t. Guard my ship with a bit more wit?” She taunted, hopping onto the beasts’ back.

“You all have my thanks.” The Captain saluted them as she spurred Dullahan, headed for Haven.

As she rode, the sky let out a shuddering, waning sound. Lightning crackled through the sky, coming from the Breach. It swirled like God was releasing the Four Horsemen themselves. Naomi’s hand began to spark and glow.

“Well, this ain’t good.”

“Time is of the essence, child. A decision must be made. I pray you choose the correct alliance.”

“There’s a wrong alliance? Damn it, Consus. Tell me who to choose, then!”

“There are many outcomes. Some have already occurred, both in the past and future. And still, this timeline-diler than them all. Seek the one who would undue time.”

“God damn the First Civilization…”

Naomi approached the gates to Haven, the soldiers opening them with a salute. She gave a wave to them, her hand crackling as she did. The Captain galloped up to the Chantry. A large group had gathered around the front of it, and she heard arguing in the distance. She slowed the dracolisk to a crawl, approaching the people cautiously.

“I hope they fed you as of late.” She laughed, patting his head, “Don’t be chompin’ anybody’s bits off, now.”

She stood in the back of the crowd, unnoticed by the people watching the display.

“Your kind killed the Most Holy!” A Templar shouted.

“Lies-your kind let her die!” A Mage growled, raising his staff in defense.

“Shut your mouth, Mage.” The Templar spat, drawing his sword.

“ENOUGH!” A roar came from the bowels of the Chantry.

Cullen rushed to the two men, pushing them apart from each other with mighty, one-handed shoves.

“Knight-Captain!” The Templar addressed him.

“That is not my title.” The Commander was disgusted being addressed as so, “We are not Templars any longer, and we are all part of the Inquisition.”

“And what does that mean, exactly?” Chancellor Roderick used the chaos to his advantage.

“Snake in the grass…” Never missing a chance to argue with the Chancellor, Naomi dismounted, walking her beast through the crowd.

The people gave her plenty of space.

“Back already, Chancellor? Haven’t you done enough?” Cullen crossed his arms, towering over the feeble old man.

“I’m curious, Commander, as to how your Inquisition and its “Herald” will restore order as you’ve promised.”

“Of course you are…” Cullen rolled his neck, “Back to your duties, all of you!”

As the crowd began to thin, Cullen noticed Naomi and her dracolisk.

“Mages and Templars were already at war,” the Commander continued, “Now they’re blaming each other for the Divine’s death.”

“Which is why we require a proper authority to guide them back to order.”

“Who, you? Or other random clerics who weren’t important enough to be at the Conclave?” Cullen hurled the insult in the most sarcastic voice he could muster.

“Hah! And you think it should be the rebel Inquisition and its so-called ‘Herald of Andraste?’ I think not.”
“Far be it from me to claim the rite of holiness, Chancellor. Lest you forget it was your own Chantry-following people who’ve dubbed me their ‘Herald of Andraste?’” Naomi stood next to the handsome Commander, “So in far you’ve been the only obstacle against us working together.” “We might, if your Inquisition would recognize the Chantry’s authority.” Chancellor Roderick growled.

“There is no authority until another Divine is chosen.” Cullen pinched the bridge of his nose. “In due time. Andraste will be our guide, not some dazed wanderer from a mountainside, who, I might add, is a pirate!”

“Cullen,” Naomi crossed her arms, “Remind me why you’re allowing this piss-ant to stay in Haven?”

“Clearly, your Templar knows where to draw the line.” The Chantry man sneered. “Do not refer to him as if he is some pet, Chancellor. Furthermore, there are no Templars here.” Naomi growled, Dullahan snarling behind her in return. “No need for that,” Cullen turned to pat the dracolisk on his muzzle, “He’s toothless. There’s no point in turning him into a martyr simple because he runs at the mouth.”

Naomi looked on, seeing a clear divide where the Mages and Templars stationed themselves. “Does the Mage-Templar war touch all corners of Thedas?” She asked, keeping the dracolisk’s bridle tight in her hands. “Impossible to say.” Cullen sighed, “With the Conclave destroyed, I imagine the war has been renewed…with interest.”

“Your organization flouting the Chantry’s authority will not help matters. This is exactly why all of this should be left to a New Divine. If you are innocent, the Chantry will establish it as so.” The old man pestered. “The Mages and Templars tear these lands apart because they’ve hurt each other’s feelings, and you’d have them left to it in order to put a new fancy arse on the high seat of the Chantry?” Naomi threw Dullahan’s bridle at Cullen, who unexpectedly caught it, “And to boot, you’d spat on the efforts of the only people trying to numb Thedas’s pain?” Naomi approached the Chancellor angrily, her voice rising as she spoke, “Nay, you’d not grieve if the ‘Herald of Andraste’ was conveniently swept under the rug. You’d rather sit on your hands, crying about some lass who died trying to make this world better. I’d bet me ship she wouldn’t be ignoring the Breach in the sky, and all the rifts spouting demons ‘cause of it. She’d be taking action. She did take action. SHE wrote the Divine Writ granting us permission to establish the Inquisition.” Her hands took to the man’s coat, pulling his face close to hers, “I dare you to forget these truths once more.” Her throat rumbled with hatred.

“Captain.” Adibas spoke from behind the Chancellor, the Officers surrounding behind them. To her left, Cassandra, Josephine, and Leliana jogged towards the commotion. Naomi dropped released the Chancellor, snapping out of her blinded rage. “And to think, you represent the ideals of this band of misfits.” The Chancellor spat as he marched away, his pride in ruins.

“I’ve never struck the elderly…Lord give me strength to keep it that way.” She shook her head. After sending Dullahan off to the stables with a very scared soldier; the Advisors, Cassandra, and Naomi’s Officers fell in line to the Chantry. "Your face is looking quite better." Naomi addressed the Seeker. "Thank you. As is your brow." Cassandra jested. “There are two matters that require your immediate attention, Lady Herald.” The Ambassador intervened, “We did our best to delay them at the request of your Quartermaster.” Josephine nodded at Adibas approvingly. “Many thanks. I will meet you in a moment’s time. I’d have a quick word with my Officers.”

With that, Cullen, Leliana, Josephine, and Cassandra left to enter the war room. Before her stood Adibas, Christopher, Aquilla, Kilean, and Thaddeus. When the door slammed shut, she led them to a quiet room in the Chantry, away from prying eyes.
“I do not believe the Brotherhood has extended its’ reach, here.” Adibas observed.
“But neither have our Templars. These Templars are different, no?” Kilean spoke.
“Aye, that’d be correct.” The Captain verified, “But I must speak with you all about something of great import; quickly. Consus spoke to me this morn. He’s been talking less, but saying more.”
“What exactly does that mean?” Aquilla pushed up his spectacles.
‘Right before I encountered The Dishonored, he said something about ‘not trusting the Dread Wolf.’ He couldn’t tell me anything more because this entity was listening in. Consus fears it.”
“So, let me straighten this out. The Precursor sheet tied to yer waist, all dubbed in magical healy powers and the consciousness if its’ creator, is scared of somethin’ by the name of the Dread Wolf?” Thaddeus mocked.

Christopher shushed him, as his voice echoed against the stone walls.
“Tad, I know it sounds less than sane, but it’d be the truth. And this morning…” She shook her head, “He spoke of different outcomes occurring in the past and future, but that this particular timeline would decide the fate of both worlds.”
“And then what?” Adibas put his hands on his waist, knowing she was withholding.
“The last thing he told me was that I needed to make the right alliance as a means to find a man trying to ‘undue’ time.”
“Let me guess,” Aquilla started, “in true First Civ fashion, he didn’t tell you which alliance would be appropriate?”
“It’s as if he couldn’t, Quill. I don’t think he can safely speak with me without this Dread Wolf hearing him. He’s been so quiet lately…”
“What would you have us do, Captain?” Kilean asked.
“Most of the ladies n’ gent’s here believe we’re a buncha’ drunks and swindlers. Keep up that reputation. Keep yer eyes and ears wide open.” She spoke as low as she could.
“What is the second tenet of the Creed?” Naomi asked her Officer Assassins.
“Hide in plain sight.” They responded in unison.
She gave them a nod as to depart.
“Captain,” Kilean spoke up, “if I could say one more thing, on behalf of all of us.”
“What’s that, Apprentice?” Naomi turned to the Englishwoman.
“We’re sorry, for before. For shooting you.” She looked down shamefully, the rest of the men shifting.
“I was more impressed how few of yeh didn’t miss.” Naomi sighed, “None of you were at fault. I’ll accept yer apology, though, if it’ll make sleep come easy. I spose I owe you all apologies for getting us into this mess to begin with…”
“We’d undergo even greater hardships for our Captain.” Adibas extended his hand.
Naomi grasp it with vigor, their hands making a fist that stood between their fierce gazes.
“Nothing is true,” Naomi started.
“Everything is permitted.” Adibas finished.

The Captain left her Officers with renewed hope, feeling more confident. She entered the war room up the hall, anxiously awaiting the news. The door swung open, hitting the stone wall a bit harder than she intended. “Apologies.”
“That door’s hinges will give, one of these days.” Cullen raised his brow.
“Someone ought to tell the door to gain a thicker hide, then.” She laughed to him.
“Ahem.” Cassandra cleared her throat, getting their attention.
“Lady Vivienne, the First Enchanter of Montsimmard has extended an invitation to her salon at the Chateau of Duke Bastien de Ghislain.” Josephine began the meeting.
“And I must attend this posh gig?” Naomi whined.
“Madame de Fer, the Lady of Iron, is well known as an unofficial leader of the last Loyalist mages of Thedas.” Leliana continued, “Gaining the support the Imperial Enchanter would benefit us immensely.”
“’The Lady of Iron?’ Sounds like a lass I’d share a pint with.”
“She’s also liked by the Chantry, and a well-respected player of The Grand Game.” Josephine added.

“The Grand Game?”

“A game of politics and murder, cherished by the Orlesians.” Cullen sneered.

“A simple way to put it, even if put together by a harsh Fereldan.” Josephine raised her eyebrow in scrutiny.

“Something I’m well versed on, then.” Naomi added.

“You are?” Cassandra’s interest had been peaked.

“Aye. I’m not all sea-hound, lass. I know how to work the courts, just as well. A silver tongue and a spine of steel.”

“Precisely.” Josephine clapped in excitement, “I simply cannot wait to review the noble houses with you!”

“Hold on, a moment—”

“You cannot expect to be thrown into Orlesian company without knowing who will be there!” Leliana backed Josephine.

Naomi waved her hand, not wanting to continue this conversation.

“What’s the other order of business? You said there were two things that required my ‘immediate’ attention?”

“Ah, yes. A messenger from the Storm Coast.” Josephine’s excitement was wicked from her being as she flipped through the pages on her writing board.

“The ‘Storm Coast?’” Naomi perked up.

“Guards, let the young man enter.” Cullen ordered.

The soldiers standing outside opened the door, allowing an armored lad to enter the war room. Leliana threw a thin, light sheet over the heavy map markers. The Spymaster was not so trusting.

“I’ve got a message for the Inquisition.” He spoke surely.

“State your name, soldier.” Cullen asked.

“Cremisius Aclassi, with the Bull’s Chargers Mercenary Company.”

“Oh, mercenaries?” Naomi leaned forward with anticipation, ”Do tell.”

“We mostly work out of Orlais and Nevarra—”

“Nevarra? You’re one of the Iron Bull’s Chargers, then?” Cassandra’s voice rose with suspicion.

“That’s right. My Company Commander, Iron Bull, offers information-free of charge. We’ve got word on some Tevinter mercenaries gathering out on the Storm Coast. If you’d like to see what the Bull’s Chargers can do for the Inquisition, meet us there and watch us work.” Cremisius wore a cocky smile.

“Anything in particular I should know of this commander of yours?” Naomi asked, excitedly.

“Uh, well, he’s a Qunari. Big guys with horns?”

Naomi returned a blank stare.

“He leads from the front, he pays well, and he’s a lot smarter than the last bastard I worked for. Best of all, he’s professional. We accept contracts with whoever makes the first real offer. You’re the first time he’s gone out of his way to pick a side.”

“Big horns and ambition? Spose’ I should be honored.” Naomi reckoned, “What can your Chargers offer the Inquisition?”

“We’re loyal, we’re tough, and we don’t break contracts. Ask around Val Royeaux, we’ve got references. Iron Bull wants to work for the Inquisition. He thinks you’re doing good work, and we’re the best you can find.”

“Guess I’d be stupid to pass up on this offer, then?” She extended a hand, which he took willingly.

“Captain Naomi McNamara- Herald of Andraste, and Extremely Lost.” She formally introduced herself to the young soldier, “Come now, let’s grab a pint’o drink. We’ll set sail for the Storm Coast in the morn.” Naomi put her arm around him, exchanging banter as they left the war room.

The advisors exchanged looks with each other.

“Uh…meeting adjourned?” Josephine shrugged.
Chapter Summary

"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."
-Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Chapter Notes

"Santiano" linked to first line of lyrics.

Naomi barged in the dimly lit tavern with her new friend, merry in spirits and excited for the day to come. The faces of the men and women carrying on uplifted her further, joyous to see them alive and well. Her Officers were scattered throughout the building, making idle conversation with villagers of various ranks.

"Ahoy, vicious crew of The Dishonored! Drink tonight, lads and lassies, for we be hoistin’ anchor at first light in the morn. Our new friend, here,” She lifted the soldiers arm, “will be takin’ us to his Mercenary Company, wishin’ not be employed by the Inquisition.”

The crew cheered in unison and ordered another round of drinks. The Captain weaved through the over-abundance of human bodies to a rather large, unoccupied table. Cremisius sat next to her, anxious among strangers, but familiar with the scene nonetheless. Seemingly appearing from the shadows, her Officers joined her at the table. Adibas slid two large pints of ale across the wooden surface.

"Cremisius, these are the fine Officers of me ship, The Dishonored."
"Adibas Lacroix, Quartermaster."
"Christopher Byrne, First Mate. Aboard, they name me ‘Kit.’"
"Aquilla Callahan, Sea Artist. Call me Quill."
"Thaddeus Gallagher, Shantyman. You’ll hear the name ‘Tad,’ that’d be me."
"Kilean Jones, Apprentice Sea Artist. I have no fancy nickname, save for the occasional Englishwoman slur.” She laughed.

“You’d b’right ’bout that! Yer startin’ to sound more like us ever’ year, lass!” Tad downed the remainder of his ale.

"Pardon my ignorance, but ‘Sea Artist?’” Cremisius interjected.
"I chart the seas with maps and magnets. It’s a damned of a job, keepin’ up with this one.” Quill nodded to Naomi.

“Aye, that’s why I gave you a smart lass to help yer old noggin, laddie.”

An hour passed as the chatter between them grew drunken. They exchanged tales of the sea and mercenary contracts, matching each other’s stories with ones more gruesome. Sera, Varric, and Solas had joined them, having heard the gathering from outside the tavern. The two rogues fit right in, adding to the “merry” conversation. The introvert mage had little to add to the less-than-heroic stories, but appreciated the company supplied by the people he’d begin to call friends.
A quiet hush fell on the tavern as Leliana, Josephine, Cassandra, and Cullen walked through the door.

“Oy, it’s Captain-Stickuphisarse!” Sera whispered.

“Careful, Buttercup.” Varric drank.

“Aye, get these folk a pint on me!” Naomi cheered, ordering the Advisors their first round.

She waved them over to her large table, stealing a vacant chair from the bar.

“Fine of you lot to join us, finally!”

“We were tying up some loose ends. Working.” Cassandra shot Naomi a sly grin.

“Oh, well ‘scuse me, I only make the hard decisions and shoot green rifty piss out my hand.” Naomi laughed, “I think I’ve right earned a night I won’t remember.” She raised another mug in the air.

“Where’d you get that one?” Adibas searched, “You've jacked me ale, Captain!”

“Aye, what are mates for sides’ jackin’ each other’s ale?”

“You posh nugget!” Thaddeus roared, “Now that it’s a full party, I have a surprise for yeh!”

“Brace yourselves.” Aquilla warned.

“Avast, Captain! We’ve new company, they should hear the tale of how The Dishonored came to be, aye?” He stumbled to a chest in the corner of the room, grabbing a Spanish guitar in his rough hands.

He plopped it down in Kilean’s lap.

“A grand idea!” Naomi raised a mug in the air, swaying slightly.

“Remember when I told you lot we stole The Dishonored? Her name was the Santiano.” The Captain hiccuped, her face reddened.

“I was the harbormaster’s daughter at the time She pulled into port, I’d never seen a brig so tattered.” Kilean laughed, “After hearing the tale of the battle and a woman for a Captain, I thought fer sure, the struggle deserved to be sung.”

“I fancy this will be a night of great length. Perhaps first light will be a bit too early.” Cremisius drank his ale.

Kilean grabbed the guitar in her shaking hands, clearing her throat as the crew roared in approval. She sat on the table and crossing her legs, balancing one foot on the chair.

“Alright, lads!” She announced.

Cullen, Josephine, and Leliana looked to each other, confused.

“They sing and drink. It’s what they do.” Cassandra laughed, feeling a bit tipsy.

“You’re a wise one, Seeker!” Varric praised.

“The navy would never have a lass at sea!
Away, Santiano!
So I went in search of piracy,
Along the coast of Mexico!”

The tavern fell silent as Kilean’s raspy, gentle voice flooded the halls, the crew responding even louder. Cullen looked to Naomi, noticing her looking at him. She quickly shifted her gaze when she’d been discovered. Leliana smiled, noticing the exchange. She nudged Josephine and whispered something into her ear. To two women shifted their excitement over to the performance, never having experienced such a display from sea-goers.

“And now,
We sail the southern seas,
Away, Santiano!
And we’ll have those navy lads on their knees,
Along the coast of Mexico!”
The companions were enthralled by the method of story-telling, especially Cassandra. She rested her chin on her fist, watching Kilean in awe and anticipating the next segment of the tale. Adibas admired her grace, something he felt was ignored by the others far too often. Naomi nudged him on his arm, his face quickly faltering.

Kilean strummed the strings of her instrument, sending flares of music throughout the room.

"So!
Heave her up,
And away we'll go!
Away, Santiano!
To Mexico where the warm winds blow,
Along the coast of Mexico!"

Kilean launched herself from the table, knocking the chair down in progress. She flitted around the room in a trance, involving her audience.

"In Mexico I want to be,
Away, Santiano!
With a cask of rum on a drinkin' spree,
Along the coast of Mexico!"

The crewmen in the tavern sang in unison, raising their mugs and sending their contents flying up and over the rim. Two of the Spanish sailors stood up, taking one another’s hand, tactfully. The man spun the woman round, her blouse fluttering above her waist. They began an intricate dance of spins, dips, and a lot of hip movement. Leliana, and Josephine watched on; the Orleasian-influenced women being intrigued by the foreign and wild dance.

“Them native lads I do adore,
Away, Santiano!
With their eyes that shine and coal-black hair,
Along the coast of Mexico!”

Kilean flirtingly sat on a sailor’s lap as she sang, being as he fit the description. The couple in the background continued to dance, the man lifting the attractive sailorwoman for a leg sweep of the floor, earning him a small yelp from his other lads.

“So!
Heave her up,
And away we'll go!
Away, Santiano!
To Mexico where the warm winds blow,
Along the coast of Mexico!”

Adibas stood in front of Cassandra, extending a hand with a bow. Upon her shocked expression, he raised his head, smiling mischievously. After some quick coercion from Varric and Leliana, she took Adibas’s hand, who wasted no time at all dancing her into the fray.

“When I was a young lass in me prime,
Away, Santiano!
I'd have them Irish lads two at a time,
Naomi laughed, clapping her hands excitedly. Cullen blushed slightly at her enthusiasm. He felt a pinch on his arm, giving him a startling jump. Josephine nodded to Naomi, trying to convey a message with her fluctuating eyes and brows. Cullen shook his head, “No,” and drank more heavily than before. Him being distracted, the Captain had the opportunity she’d been looking for. Already sitting next to him, she wrapped both of her arms around his large, muscular bicep, encouraging him to stand to his feet. She all but kidnapped him away from the table.

“But I'll never leave the sea to settle down,
Away, Santiano!
When I can have a lad in every town,
Along the coast of Mexico!”

Kilean scanned the room for Varric, giving him a wink as she sang, and he returned a wave. Naomi and Cullen laughed as they slopped around like two drunken fools. She fell on him multiple times, and he on her. She was too far gone, and he hadn’t a clue.

Adibas led the Seeker with ease.

“So!
Heave her up,
And away we'll go!
Away, Santiano!
To Mexico where the warm winds blow,
Along the coast of Mexico!”

Solas and Cremisius were twisted in their chairs, fixated. Sera had disappeared with a woman of the crew. Varric polished Bianca in his seat as he nodded his head to the tune. He, of course, would appreciate the storytelling, and planned on asking more questions about it later.

“Oh the times is hard and the wages low,
Away, Santiano!”

Naomi stumbled into the crook of Cullen’s arm, catching herself by putting her arms around his neck. They stared into each other’s eyes as Kilean sang, held by their shared embrace.

“But we pirates all must roll and go,
Along the coast of Mexico!”

Kilean strummed the guitar viciously as she finished the tale. The Spanish couple ended the song with the man catching the woman, who clung to him in an exaggerated position with her right leg and arm. The tavern exploded with cheerful roars at the conclusion of their own story of accomplishment.

Hand-in-hand, Naomi and Cullen stumbled outside unnoticed. She held on to him for support, as she’d drank much more than he. Walking her to the cabin, he did his best to keep her upright.

“Yeh know, I didn’t think you’d actually do it!” She hiccupped.
“I had just enough to drink, I suppose.” He hummed.
“Ey!” She jokingly punched his stomach, “You sayin’ you’d have to be drunk to dance with the likes of me?”
“No—that’s not what I meant, not at all,” he laughed nervously, “I’ve just never found myself to be
a good dancer.”

“Uh-huh.” She teased.

“Come, now. You’re stunning, and you know it.”

They stood outside of her door, keeping each other warm in the nights’ unforgiving cold.

“Damned right, I do. It’s another issue of hearin’ you say so.” Her face flushed, looking up to him, “Spose’ I find myself quite smitten with you ‘swell, Commander.”

Cullen took a sharp breath, surprised by her words. The scar on Naomi’s face lifted as her red lips creased into a gentle smile. She placed a leather-covered hand onto his cheek, gently tracing the scar on his lip with her thumb. Her fortified heart was at a loss.

She quickly withdrew her hand from his face.

“Good night, Lion.” Naomi stumbled into the cabin in a hurry, slamming the door behind her. She slid to the floor, paralyzed.

The Commander stood there, holding his hand where hers left a warm trace. Shaking himself out of a daze, he began the march back to his own place of rest.
Chapter Summary

"The test of our character comes not in how many tears we shed, but in how we act after those tears have dried."
-Madame Tussaud

Chapter Notes

Meteor hammer demonstration linked within text.

He sun shone through the windows, casting rays of light on the hungover Captain’s bed. She grumbled, rolling over. Naomi pulled the blankets over her head, forming a cocoon. Just as she began to fall asleep again, she heard a familiar scream.

“Adibas?”

She vaulted out of bed, grabbing her swords, pistols, and Staff on her way out. Naomi ran unprepared, putting her boots on in the cold and tying her sash as she went. A second yell whipped through the wind.

“Kilean?”

Breaking out into a full sprint, the Herald ran towards the sound, forcing people out of her way when necessary. The sounds led her to the training grounds.

Her sailors were beating the living shit out of the Inquisition scouts.

“Aye, what’s this?” She marched down, irritated.

“You don’t need training…?”

“No, Captain. We’re training them.” Aquilla grinned.

“I leave you sods alone for one bloody night and-“

Cullen walked out of his tent, glistening in the sunlight. He stretched as a courier delivered a letter, speaking excitedly.

“Commander! The Officers of The Dishonored were training us this morning and we’ve learned quite a few things.” The young recruit was proud of himself.

“Oh? Such as?”

“Like to throw dirt in someone’s face if you’re down and they’re not-”One soldier started, “or to kick em’ in the balls if you’re losing!” The other soldier finished.

“Well…that’s practical.” He snorted.

Cullen hadn’t noticed the small group of pirates huddled before. When he did, he immediately grew nervous.

“S’what’s this about those Officers kicking the living piss out of your recruits?” Sera hopped down the hill joyfully.

“I don’t think that’s how it went.” Cullen grumbled.

“As far as I can tell, most of your recruits are fresh outta’ the womb, yeah? How are you supposed to be all Commander-like if your men can’t even take down a bunch of smugglers?” She menaced.
“Smugglers? What’s that ‘spose to mean?” Naomi marched down next to them. “Aren’t all pirates smugglers?” Sera sat on a barrel, kicking her feet excitedly. “We’ve never smuggled-” “Captain.” Adibas cut her off blandly. “Okay, maybe once-” Kilean cleared her throat, urging the Herald to confess. “Aye, fine, we smuggle for the good side, though. That doesn’t mean all pirates fight like dirty henchmen.” Adibas and Kilean looked at each other, dumbfounded by their Captain’s naivety. “I bet your sailors couldn’t even knock the shields out these pretty boys’ hands. Those ones only won cause’ they’re older. Lots older.” Sera cackled. Cullen crossed his arms, pleased with himself. “You take that back…Any one of us sailors could take three of these recruits easily.” The Quartermaster rolled his eyes. “Oh, is that so?” The former Templar looked at the Captain critically. “Come now, Commander. You do an excellent job with them, and ‘you know it.” Naomi tried to recover from the insult. “Don’t think so. That sounded like a challenge to me.” Sera bit into an apple, feet still kicking. “Sailors can’t fight for piss.” What appeared to be a seasoned fighter challenged them from the grounds, “Only good for drinking and swabbing. Let me take care of this riff raff for you, Commander.” “This is the Herald of Andraste’s Quartermaster, you’re speaking to. You’d watch your tongue- or surely lose it.” Cullen shot the insult down. "Captain, let me-" "No, Adibas. Lots of these men and women flock to Haven and all they’ve seen is me gallivant ‘round with this mark on my hand, save for the ship. A Captain defends her crew." Naomi untied Consus, piling him on top of the pistols she handed to her Quartermaster. She withdrew her swords, adding them to the pile. Next, she loaded the staff on to Adibas’s aching arms. The Captain turned to look at her fully-armed challenger; dressed head to toe in plate armor- sword and shield at the ready. She daringly removed her leather chest plate and shoulder pads, placing them on a table next to her. Standing in her corset and blouse, she rolled her sleeves up, revealing more of her tattoos. “I’ve seen those before…” Cullen shook his head, his memory failing as to when. “Herald, I would advise letting me handle this.” The Commander snapped back to reality. “I’m gonna’ muzzle this bastard.” She spit on the ground in response. “You don’t even have any weapons on your person, Herald!” The challenger yelled from across the pit. “Aye, I have four weapons on me person, mate. And now, you’re gonna get real up close and personal with em’ when I stomp your eager arse into the dirt.” Naomi’s companions, sailors, and even Cremisus began to show up. They’d been scheduled to meet as to set sail, but they certainly didn’t expect to find a duel. The soldier charged at her, bringing the wooden sword directly over his shield in a downward jab. Quick as a cat, Naomi flanked the soldier, side-stepping ferociously. She hurled a deadly right fist in his side, her iron-knuckled gloves denting his plated armor. “One.” She whispered. They circled each other like two predators fighting over a fresh kill. Her Precursor vision began to trickle in, identifying the man’s weak spots. With a swift flick of her wrist, a pouch on her belt became undone. The man took the opportunity to strike, swinging his shield at her and slicing the air.
Naomi took to the ground, rolling on her back as she did. Gaining momentum and holding her balance with her hands, she kicked the man’s pommel with the heel of her boot as she circled into a low-stance crouch. His sword flew, sliding through the dirt. She kicked off a barrel behind her, using the velocity to bring a fist aimed to his jaw. He blocked with his shield, pushing her back.

The Captain positioned herself between him and his sword, backpedaling with calculated steps. She took the bought time and released the meteor hammer from her pouch, the silk-encased ball of iron leaping through the air.

“What in the name of Andraste?”

The meteor hammer swung violently, wrapping itself over every limb that Naomi balanced it on, its deadly ends taunting the soldier at her front. Swinging it around her neck, she caught one end in her hand as the other hung freely, swaying with a fatal silence.

“Two.”

The soldier took a step forward, costing him the advantage. She begun spinning both ends in a spiral motion, moving towards him with sporadic steps. He crouched, covering himself with his shield as she came into striking dance.

Jumping into the air with a practiced spin, Naomi rolled off the shield with her back, landing behind the soldier. As quick as a scorpion releases its stinger, sending it flying as the red fabric shimmered in flight. Retracting it, she swung it upwards and grabbed the length, shortening the leash and quickening the ball as it came down on him like a hammer. Rolling over and covering his chest just in time, the echo of the dent rippled through the air.

“Done yet?” She taunted.

"With all due respect, Herald, I've taken a few Pride demons in my day.”

With his sword a few feet behind him, he all but galloped backwards as Naomi continued to spin her meteor hammer. Stopping in the middle of the dance, she unexpectedly stepped and leaned forward, extending her arm and sending an end loose in his direction. He deflected it, but the unbalanced soldier fell to his back from the force.

He scurried backwards, grabbing his sword and being struck to the chest as the ball came down again.

With the help of his sword, the man stood, chest heaving. He regained his form, putting his mangled-heap-of-metal-for-a-shield in between his body and hers.

Spinning the fabric around her back, she unraveled herself to gain speed, letting the metal fly even farther. With the last of his strength, the soldier took a risk and left himself open. He swung his shield in deflection, catching the end as it almost hit him. The iron ball violently veered to the left, burying itself in a barrel of flour. It exploded with a white plume of smoke, stuck in its’ contents. She tossed the other end aside angrily.

"Spose that was clever.” The Captain sneered.

Naomi ran at him with blinding speed. He struck at her with a downwards swing, watching with interest as she parried the sword forward. Her hidden blades ground the edges of his steel.

"Three.”

“Did she just block the sword with her wrist?” Varric looked up to Cullen.

The Commander just shook his head. "She has daggers in her gauntlets. I was wondering if they'd make an appearance. They certainly did when I found her...” He rubbed the back of his neck.

She swept her muscular leg underneath him, sending the soldier to the ground.

"Four’s a bit desperate. I’d yield before it makes an appearance.”

He released a fistful of loose dirt into her angered face, buying him enough time to stand to his feet. She stammered and spat, trying to get the dirt from her eyes and mouth. Eyes watery, she saw a blurred image of him as he swung, barely missing her as she jumped backwards. She growled, reaching into another pocket on her belt. He came at her again.

Dodging him, she quickly strapped a fabric mask across her face from ear to ear. Her
shoulders hunched, she prowled, waiting for him to make a move. When he did, she threw a smoke
grenade to the floor, disappearing from the crowd.

He coughed, waving his arm frantically to clear the air around him. Precursor vision still
activated, she could easily keep track of his glowing aura as she positioned herself behind him.
With another mighty sweep of the ground he fell on his chest. Jumping on his back, she grabbed
his arms with the crook of her elbows, locking her fingers to secure the hold. Writhe as he did, he
was unable to move.
"Four."

As the smoke began to clear, the sailors cheered and whistled for their now-exposed
Captain. Naomi released him, helping the man to his feet as the sparring concluded.
"A fine duel." She smiled.
"I suppose 'fine' will have to do," The man coughed, dusting himself off, "was certainly less than
'honorable.'"
"Must be all that swabbing!" Adibas shouted, jokingly.

Naomi walked to the barrel, putting a foot to its side as she pulled her meteor hammer
free. Folding the fabric around the metal ball, she tucked it away neatly. Pulling her mask down,
she grinned at Cullen as she walked past him.
“Come along, now. We’ve got a miss schedule to catch up to.” She waved to her crew, who
surrounded her and gave her strong pats on the back.
“That was a retired Chevalier.” Cassandra stood next to Cullen.

The Commander stood there, unblinking.
"Of course it was." He groaned.
"Iron rusts from disuse; water loses its purity from stagnation... even so does inaction sap the vigor of the mind."
-Leonardo da Vinci

“Ring her to half sail!” Naomi yelled over the waves crashing against them.
Cassandra clung to the side of the railing, crouched with her arm around it.
“Are you sure this is a good idea?” She yelled over the wind.
“She’s been through worse, lass. Tis a drizzle! The tricky part’ll be gettin’ to shore.”
“There’s a dock nearby that’s reinforced by iron deposits. Should be deep enough, even for a ship of this size!” Cremisus yelled.
“Aye, tell me where it is!”
He helped Naomi steer The Dishonored to the north. Sailing by, the Captain grew saddened as she saw how many ships marred the shores of the Storm Coast.
The waters near the docks were deep enough to anchor the ship. She brushed against the strong dock, giving off a violent screeching noise as the crew extended the bridge.
Naomi and her companions walked down the narrow, wooden dock.
“Do yah smell that?” The Captain took a deep breath, putting her hands in the air, stretching.
“It smells of dead fish and salt.” Cassandra sneered.
“Aye, isn’t it wonderful?”
“Sure, if you’d like to cover yourself in a bucket of piss.” Sera scoffed, looking at Cremisus, “Is it always like this? All rainy?”
“I’m afraid so.” He chuckled, “A mercenary can’t complain about where his or her work takes them, though.”
“I’m sure the coin has a lot to do with your tolerance.” Varric was displeased.
“That it does!”
They followed the stony beach until they heard swords rattling off in the distance.
“Is that them?” The Captain asked.
“Might be.”
Their pace quickened.
“I think we’ll send scouts here once we’re done galavantin’ ‘round collectin’ agents, yeah?” Naomi turned to look at Cassandra.
“It would be a strategic option, Seeker.” Solas smiled.
“I will bring it to Leliana’s attention.” She answered blandly, wiping the wet hair from her face.
Rounding a large pillar, they stumbled upon the Chargers swiping away at weird mages.
Cremisus drew his sword, running into the fray.
“Shouldn’t we help them?” Varric looked up to Naomi.
“Nay, they be mercenaries. Give them a chance to sell their swords.” She crossed her arms, looking onward.
“They’re damned good…” She sighed, knowing the Inquisition would have to pay a great deal for them.
Naomi’s companions grew anxious behind her as ferocious roars came from the battlefield. A large creature with horns swung an axe bigger than anything she’d ever seen.
“I take it that’s the…what was it, Kiwari or other?”
“Qunari.’ And yes, that would be him.” Solas found the comment humorous.
“That’s a rather boisterous laugh comin’ from you, ‘Chuckles’.” Naomi spat.
The onslaught soon concluded, leaving a heaping pile of bodies at the mercenaries’ feet.
The group drew near them slowly, as to not earn themselves a misfired swing.
“Chargers, stand down!” The Qunari man yelled as they closed in.
“Krem, how’d we do?”
“Five or six wounded chief. None dead.” Cremisus answered.
“That’s what I like to hear. Let the throatcutters finish up, then break out the casks.”
“Sounds like my kind of night.” Naomi extended her hand, “Captain McNamara.”
He shook her hand with a mighty grab, slightly startling her.
“The Iron Bull.” He introduced himself, “So you’re with the Inquisition, huh? Glad you could make it. Come on, have a seat. Drinks are coming.”
“Hah! I’d fancy a mighty fine spell of drink, at present.” The others hung back, chattering with the rest of the Chargers.
Cremisus joined the two as they sat on empty cargo boxes. He was doing his best to balance three mugs.
“I hear you’re looking for work?” Naomi asked as Krem handed her the mug smushed in the middle.
“I am! Let’s not have this talk before my drink, though.”
The three of them gulped down a good portion of their contents. Naomi coughed, not being able to drink as much as them.
“Tastes like it was scooped from the bilge of my ship…” The Captain wiped her lower lip clean.
“It’s not the best, but it gets the job done.” The horned-man admitted, “I see you’ve acquainted yourself with Cremisus Aclassi, my lieutenant.”
“Good to see you again, chief. The last few nights at Haven have been…adventurous.”
“Throatcutters are done then.” Another mercenary came to them, addressing Iron Bull.
“Already? Have ‘em check again. I don’t want any of those Tevinter bastards getting away. No offense, Krem.”
“None taken. Least a bastard knows who is mother was. Puts him one up on you Qunari, right?”
Krem cackled, finishing his drink and dismissing himself to help the others.
Taking another sip, Naomi and Iron Bull looked to the waves. The rain still trickled down from the sky.
“Aye, on to business, then.” Naomi finished her drink, hissing as she sat the empty vessel on the ground.
“Well, you’ve seen us fight. We’re expensive, but we’re worth it…and I’m sure the Inquisition can afford us.”
“Spout your number. I’m sure it’ll cost me a grand ol’ time.” She crossed her arms.
“It wouldn’t cost you anything personally, unless you wanna buy drinks later.” He chugged the rest of his mug, “Getting me drunk would probably be more costly. Just a warning.”
“If you’re half as tolerant as me, I wouldn’t doubt it…What’s your angle, mate?”
“Your Ambassador- what’s her name- Josephine? We’d go through her and get the payments set up. But, the gold will take care of itself, so don’t worry about that. All that matters is we’re worth it.”
“Can’t argue that the Chargers seem like a well off company.”
“They are. But you’re not just getting the boys, you’re getting me. You need a frontline bodyguard, and I’m your man. Whatever it is-demons, dragons? The bigger, the better.”
“I seem like the lass who needs a bodyguard? Much less chasin’ round’ dragons?” Naomi chuckled. “Though I ‘spose those could come quite in handy.” She held her fingers to her head, jokingly giving herself horns.
“You wanna touch them?” He leaned his massive head over, putting them near her.
Without hesitation, she grabbed one with her hand, gently petting it.
“You’ve no clue how badly I wanted to ask. I’ve never seen a ‘Qunari’ before. I’m not particularly from these parts.”
“Ah, so, I’m assuming you’ve never heard of the Ben-Hassrath?” He leaned up again.
“Ben, who?”
“The Ben-Hassrath, well-me, spies that we are; remain concerned about the Breach. Magic out of control like that could cause trouble everywhere. I’ve been ordered to join the Inquisition, get close to the people in charge, and send reports on what’s happening. But I also get reports from Ben-Hassrath agents all over Orlais. You sign me on, I’ll share them with your people.”
“Mate, I’ll gladly tell yeh, being a spy typically doesn’t include tellin’ people yer a spy.”
“Look-whatever happened at that Conclave thing, it’s bad. Someone needs to get that Breach closed. So whatever I am, I’m on your side.”
“But you didn’t hide yer intentions because?”
“From something called the ‘Inquisition?’ You’ve been tipped off sooner or later. Better you hear it right up front from me. Plus, your hand glows. You don’t lie to someone with glowing hands.”
Naomi pondered his words, laughing to herself at how she’d kept her own secrets from the Inquisition.
“And what exactly would you be sendin’ home in these reports of yers?”
“Enough to keep my superiors happy. Nothing that’ll compromise your operations. The Qunari want to know if they need to launch an invasion to stop the whole damn world from falling apart. You let me send word of what you’re doing, it’ll put some minds at ease. That’s good for everyone.”
“And of their reports?”
“Enemy movements, suspicious activity, intriguing gossip-it’s a bit of everything. Alone, they’re not much. But if your Spymaster is worth a damn, she’ll put ‘em to good use.”
“She, eh?” Naomi sat up, defensively.
“I did a little research,” The Iron Bull shrugged, “Plus, I’ve always had a weakness for redheads.”
“Hah! Is that so? In that case, I’m the redhead.”
“I’ve noticed.” A low, perverse growl escaped his throat.
“Right then; Leliana sees your reports before you send ‘em.” Naomi stood, “If you compromise the Inquisition or lie to me, I’ll mail yer balls off with a detailed report of how I acquired ‘em.”
“Wouldn’t have it any other way.” He towered above her.
She gulped.
"Maybe threaten the big, blue, horned man less."
“Krem! Tell the men to finish drinking on the road. The Chargers just got hired!” He turned his head, yelling.
“What about the casks, chief? We just opened them. With axes!” Krem shouted back.
“Find some way to seal them. You’re Tevinter, right? Use blood magic!”
“You’ll have a harder time keeping my men away from those casks, ‘chief.'” The Captain rested her hand on the Sword’s hilt, silently observing her newly hired company.

…

“She’s a beast!” The Iron Bull yelled, standing on the railing as The Dishonored tore through the waves of the Storm Coast.
“Aye, that She is!” Naomi called.
“His horns are amazing…” Adibas whispered.
“Jealous?”
“Aye.” He admitted, eyes not leaving the Qunari man.
“Are these cannons?” Iron Bull yelled across to the Captain.
“Aye, how’d you know ‘bout cannons?” She was thrown off by the question, "Quartermaster, take the Helm, if you would."
Adibas did as requested, doing his best to listen in.
“More like how do you have them?” Bull kept his voice lowered.
“I’ve been wonderin’ this whole blasted time why none of these piss poor ships had cannons.”
“No one has them except the Qunari and their Dreadnoughts- which is why I’d like to know how
you came into possession of them.”
“Lad, I don’t know if you’ve come to this conclusion on yer own, but I’m not even from Thedas. I
don’t know what a Dreadnought is.”
“You’re not from Thedas?” He turned his head, interested.
“Aye, and where I’m from, every ship worth the wood it floats on has cannons.”
“Does that mean you have gaatlok, too?” He looked at her, his eyepatch adding a menacing
feature to his silver-toned face.
“Gat-what?”
“Blackpowder-the stuff that goes ‘boom.’”
“That’d be gunpowder. Aye, I’ve got a good bunch. Got to supply four’y-six cannons, right?” She
crossed her arms, leaning back.
“Qunari are the only ones with blackpowder…” His voice trailed off, “Listen, you can’t let them
see this ship. They’d try to sink you for sure.”
Naomi burst into laughter.
“You ever seen a Man’O’War? We’ve sunk 6. Let them come with their Dreadnoughts…No
offense.” She was still laughing at the idea, shaking her head at the stupidity.
“I don’t know what a Man’O’War is, but I know that the Dreadnoughts have leveled entire fleets
before. They’ll see you as a challenge and want to make sure that you know they’re better- and
that means an unexpected battle on the water.” He sighed, “And the recipe for gaatlok is their
most guarded secret. They’d assume you stole it if they caught you. The cannons, too, no matter
how odd they’re shaped.”
“And I suppose you’re going to try and send a report of this?” Naomi raised an eyebrow.
“Just a fair warning. I won’t say anything. I like my balls where they are, boss.”
“Good.”
She didn’t let him catch on then, but his words made her uneasy.

…”

Cullen paced in the war room, waiting for Josephine and Leliana to arrive.
“What is taking so long?” He growled to himself.
The door creaked open gently, the two women timidly walking in.
“Well?” He asked.
“The agents I sent to the Storm Coast found a slew of dead bodies amongst the shoreline. They
were finished by throatcutters- which means mercenaries. It appears our Herald has already made
contact with the Chargers.”
“I’ve also asked for help establishing ourselves in the Storm Coast while Leliana’s scouts are
present.” Josephine added.
“It’s been a day and a half- why isn’t she-they- why aren’t they back yet?”
“It’s unclear, Commander. We’re doing our best to find out why.” The Spymaster looked at him
curiously.
“Very well.” He sighed.
“She’ll be okay, Commander. She’s tough.” Josephine assured.
“We cannot close the Breach without her. Maker help us, I hope she is.”
“Is that the only reason you’re so concerned?” Leliana questioned.
“Yes,” Cullen cleared his throat, “Of course. My concern is for the others, as well.” He rubbed the
back of his neck. “They are all indispensable. Except maybe Sera…”
Leliana and Josephine looked at each other, doing their best to hold back a laugh. "Pfts,”
and sounds of held-back laughter escaped their lips, ending in the two bursting out as they began to
leave.
“I’ll find you when we find them.” Leliana said as she shut the door behind her.

…

“I-is that Val Royeaux?” Cassandra called out, peering as they closed in on the city.

“Douse all sails!” Naomi roared.

“Heral-ugh-Captain!” Cassandra marched to the Helm.

“What can I do yeh for?”

“What do you mean-why are we not near Haven?”

“We have another invitation to address, don’t we?” Naomi smirked.

“But Josephine hasn’t gone over everything with you, yet! What will you wear?”

“Aye, calm down, lass. I simply came here because we were already at sea- we only had a day to get here, any way!”

“You didn’t want to sit through her lessons, you little shit!” Cassandra yelled.

“You callin’ me a liar, lass?” Naomi cocked her head sideways at the Seeker.

“No, I-“

“It’s faster this way, and I can sleep another night aboard the ship, sound as a kitten. What’s so wrong ‘bout that?”

“You could have told us. We passed Haven.” She sneered.

“Not my fault none of you noticed.” Naomi angled her ship to drift towards the harbor.

Emerging from below deck, Adibas yawned and stretched, his bare chest muscles expanding and contracting under his vest. The Seeker was immediately distracted, blushing when the Quartermaster caught her staring.

“Mate, you’d do well to cover yourself. It’s cold as a witch’s tit in these parts.”

Cassandra quickly averted her eyes.

“Now that yer arse is movin’ round, I think I’ll change into me dress clothes and get this nonsense dealt with.”

“It’s been some time since you’ve worn those things. Do they still fit?” Adibas joked.

Naomi elbowed him in the chest as he took the wheel.

“Good morning to you, too, Captain.” He mumbled.

She hopped down, as her Quarters was right below the wheel.

“The best of the mornin’ to you!” She yelled to the disgruntled man.

“And the rest of the day to yourself!” Kit shouted across deck, inserting himself in the banter.

“Blasted Irish…” Adibas mumbled.

The Captain placed all of her weapons on a desk, tearing off her sweaty Assassin armor and blood-stained clothes. In a small chest, she pulled out a flowing tailcoat, accented with a chain on the front. She rest it on the table, allowing her to quickly put on a ruffled black blouse over her corset. Naomi then slipped a pair of grey, tight-fitting pants on, tucking her shirt into it. She slipped her heeled-swashbucklers on, folding the top of the boots over as she hiked them up.

Naomi pulled the long tailcoat on, the green velvet shimmering in the lantern’s light. She buttoned the gold clasps in the front, and tightened the corset ties in the back. She then pulled her long-sleeved blouse’s ruffled wrists to the cusps, hiding her hidden blades underneath the jacket’s tight, green sleeves. She turned to the mannequin behind her that wore her armor and a large, feathered Captain’s hat. She took the hat in one hand, and sheathed the Sword of Eden in the outfit’s loan sword holster.

“They’re gonna’ have a good laugh at me, I’d imagine.” Naomi growled.

She walked up on deck, and the men fell silent.

“Would all of you handle yer slack jaws?” She growled.
"Apologies, Captain." Kit's eyebrow raised, "It's been awhile. Since that high profile target in Spain, to be exact."

"Hop off it, mate. I'm only wearin' this posh git till' this silly gathering is through."

"I'd imagine the Commander will be sad he's missed it." The Quartermaster taunted.

"You should definitely leave it on for Curly, Spitfire." Varric winked at her.

"You know what- I fancy I'll go to town meself." She hastily walked the planked bridge, all but running away from scrutinizing eyes.

Adibas laughed, causing the rest of the men and women board the ship to do the same.

"She never could take a compliment. Spose' we'll wait here till actual morning, yeah?" Adibas looked to the Seeker.

"I'm supposed to just sit here and let her go into a city that hates her by herself?"

"Lady looks like she can handle herself among a bunch of rich nobles. Besides, who wants to go to these things?" Iron Bull crossed his arms, shaking his head.

"Certainly not me. Let her go talk to all the fancy tits." Sera sat on a barrel of gunpowder, "Better off on this ship for a few hours than in that shit hole."

"I'm with the lady-elf." Iron Bull nodded.

Cassandra shook her head, storming off after the Herald.

Arriving to the chateau, she’d tell the man at the door how to address her as he asked her a series of questions. Her flame-red, naturally curly hair flowed freely underneath the hat, giving her a flow of lush elegance as she entered the room. Her heels clicked as she walked amongst the crowd with precision.

“Captain McNamara of Haven! Representing the Inquisition!”

Naomi flitted across the room, walking nobly with her back straight and her hand on her Sword hilt. The beautiful weapon captured many of the Orlesian’s gaze. An echo of whispers could be heard throughout the party.

A nobleman in a golden mask bowed to her.

“What a pleasure to meet you, my lady. Seeing the same faces at every even becomes so tiresome.” He said politely.

“Tis’ an honor to be here. Though I imagine, my face feels a bit lacking.” She was the only person not wearing a mask.

He returned a courteous laugh.

"You're not the only one."

A harsh Nevarran accent rose the hairs on the back of Naomi's neck.

"Ah, Lady Pentaghast! I didn't hear your arrival."

"Don't you 'Lady Pentaghast me, Herald." She whispered hotly, "Evening."

The two Orlesians curtsied themselves, "Lady Seeker, it is a pleasure."

“So, you must be a guest of Madame De Fer. Or are you here for Duke Bastien?”

“I...we, are here at the request of the First Enchanter Vivienne.”

The man nodded, and a woman dressed in interesting clothing approached her. She wore a large collar with a dipped, feathered hat.

“I have heard the most curious tales of you. I cannot imagine half of them are true.” She whispered.

“I’d argue you they all be true.” Naomi laughed.

“Better and better. The Inquisition should attend more of these parties.”

“Fuckin’ posh nonsense. Least these two seems nice.” She herself.

“The Inquisition? What a load of pig shit!” A familiar voice traveled from the lips of man she'd
met before.

The merchant from the ship.

“Washed-up Sisters, crazed Seekers, and filthy pirates! No one can take them seriously.” He
descended the stairs and marched passed Naomi, “That’s why I left them ashore- everyone knows
the Inquisition is just an excuse for a bunch of political outcasts to grab power.” He sneered.
Naomi smirked, "'Spose I owe you an apology for how I treated you before. Serves me
right."

“We’ve been the only organization trying to maintain peace around here. Let us not forget the
Breach in the sky.” Cassandra was less than graceful about her defense.

“Right, and here comes the outsider, restoring 'peace' with an army and ship!” He spewed with
sarcasm, “We know what your ‘Inquisition’ truly is.” He growled as his face invaded hers.

“If you were a woman of honor, you’d step outside and answer the charges.” The man reached for
his sword.

A single “click” broke the silence that had fallen on the party. The man stood in a blue
aura, seemingly frozen in place. Naomi felt the cold air graze her skin.

“My dear Marquis, how unkind of you to use such language in my house…to my guests.”

Vivienne, the woman who sent the invitation, descended the stairs, one careful step at a
time. Her golden horns sparkled in the dim lighting, the beautiful cloth that hung tightly to her
skin shimmering with movement. Her entire ensemble resembled a dragon- a woman of ferocity
and power. Even her mask angled her eyes in such a way that would strike fear into the heart of
the bravest man.

“You know such rudeness is...intolerable.” She began to circle the merchant.

“Madame Vivienne, I humbly beg your pardon!” He begged.

“You should.” She positioned herself in front of him, “Whatever am I going to do with you, my
dear?”

The dragon-lady turned to face Naomi, her lush lips giving way to humbling words.

“My lady, you’re the wounded party in this unfortunate affair. What would you have me do with
this foolish, foolish man?”

Naomi thought back to the night that the merchant had left her and her companions
stranded on the shore. She’d been lucky The Dishonored had been there, but she considered what
would have happened if it hadn’t been.

“I’ve been less than innocent in provoking him. However, this is your house. I leave his fate in
your able hands.” Naomi nodded to her.

Without hesitation, Vivienne’s hand shot to the Marquis’s face, making him look directly
to her.

“Poor Marquis, issuing challenges and hurling insults like some Fereldan Dog Lord.”

The First Enchanter quickly took a step back, raising a powerful arm in the air. She
snapped her fingers with an echo, letting the man free from her wintery grasp.

“And all dressed up in your Aunt Solange’s doublet. Didn’t she give you that to wear to the Grand
Tourney? To think, all the brave Chevaliers who will be competing left for Markham this
morning...and you’re still here. Were you hoping to sate your damaged pride by defeating the
Herald of Andraste in a public duel? Or did you think her blade could put an end to the misery of
your failure?”

The Marquis looked down in defeat. His eyes began to swell, his shoulders began to
shake.

“Didn’t your uncle give you that ship, as well? Must you live on handouts of wealth and mercy?
Run along, my dear. Do give my regards to your aunt and uncle.” Vivienne shooed him off.

Naomi felt a pang of guilt. She watched him crumble, but felt as though he’d be a good
man if given the chance.

“I hate affairs like this...” Naomi watched the once-insult-hurling man sloth away.

“I’m delighted you could attend this little gathering. I’ve so wanted to meet you.” Vivienne
nodded towards a windowed balcony, to which Naomi followed her.
“Allow me to introduce myself. I am Vivienne, First Enchanter of Montsimmard and Enchantress to the Imperial Court.”

“Charmed.” Naomi introduced herself, “I am Captain McNamara of The Dishonored; most recently acquired by the Inquisition.”

“So exciting!” Vivienne clapped her hands enthusiastically, “Ah, but I didn’t invite you to the Chateau for pleasantries. With Divine Justinia dead, the Chantry is in shambles. Only the Inquisition might restore sanity and order to our frightened people. As the leader of the last loyal mages of Thedas, I feel it only right that I lend my assistance to your cause.”

“The Inquisition will be happy to have you, Lady Vivienne.” Cassandra spoke on behalf of the Inquisition.

“Ah, Seeker, glad you could join us.” The graceful mage flashed her a smile.

“Great things are beginning, my dear, I can promise you that.” Vivienne ordered two glasses of wine from the butler as he walked past, handing one to each of her guests before her.

“So, tell me about this ship I keep hearing about.”

“Of course, Madame.”

“From the Iron Bull to the Lady of Iron…the only similarity between them are the horns.” She took a much larger sip of her wine than was appropriate.

... 

The Dishonored set sail back to Haven after a long night of tales, dances, and apologies. The crew, as well as the Inquisition companions, had become restless while they'd been away for the four hours at the Chateau. Vivienne was quite impressed. The introductions were brief, and it appeared Vivienne wasn’t going to mesh well with the others. She mainly kept to herself upon the voyage back, aside from Seeker Cassandra.

Naomi walked to their side, leaning on the railing as she spoke.

“They’re going to have my hide for coming to see you without Josephine’s ‘lessons.’” She smirked, "I'm far from a woman of the court."

“You Played just fine, my dear.” Vivienne stood straight, gazing to the water, "But you definitely have room for improvement."

“The Grand Game, she means.” Cassandra explained.

“Correct. Keep your tongue in line and dodge questions with grace...something I feel as though is not practiced by this ship's Captain." The Imperial Enchanter smirked, "I am on your side, Herald. No need to Play with the likes of me."

“Aye, that’s reassuring to hear. Wasn't sure how long I could keep up that act." The Herald admitted.

"Could you try to, just until we get back to Haven? It was most humorous to watch."

"Watch it, 'Lady Pentaghast." Naomi looked to her, "You might just get what you wish for."
"Bias, speculation and all of false pretenses make way to the sound of the sweeping steel, and then finally, his soul, as ready as his eyes dry from this final understanding, enters His promise of its purist form."

-Ser Andrew, 9:4 Dragon

“...she thinks she can just insert herself into a ball in Val Royeuax knowing nothing? No Houses, no names? The gull!” Josephine paced back and forth angrily, scribbling a letter as she yelled.

“Josie, I’m sure she handled herself just fine.”

“As fine as a starving mabari in the Winter Palace…” Cullen huffed.

A single knock echoed on the door.

“May I interrupt?” Naomi’s muffled voice came through the wood.

In a whirlwind of golden ruffles and quiet grumbles, Josephine marched over to swing the door open. She stood awestruck in the doorway.

Naomi had left her formalwear on, the fire bouncing off of the green, velvet swirls on her tail coat. She stood before her, taller than her in heels, hat in hand as to be polite to the Chantry.

“’Spose I’m in trouble, then?” Naomi grinned.

“Heral-Capt-oh, whatever you are. You look…stunning.” Josephine stepped aside to let her in, allowing Leliana and Cullen to see her.

“Oh, Maker…” Cullen’s face immediately turned red.

He looked away to try and hide it.

“I do love your boots, Lady Herald. You look quite ravishing.” Leliana bit her lip.

“Aye, aye, enough with all this.” Naomi reached down her shirt, pulling her flask from between her breasts.

She took a plentiful swig.

“And it’s gone.” Josephine scoffed, walking back around the table.

“I’ve hired the Chargers and Lady Vivienne is making herself quite comfortable here in the Chantry. I’d write it as a successful couple’o days.” She raised her flask to the Ambassador.

“I will be the judge of that.”

“There is another matter at hand, Herald.” Leliana stepped forward, “It seems that, with the Ben-Hassrath and Red Jennies at our side and Lady Vivienne’s influence at our disposal, we may be in a position to reach out to the Mages or Templars.”

Naomi looked to Cullen, who avoided her eye contact at all costs.

“I’ve discussed such matters with the First Enchanter, Solas, and Cas-“

“I cannot wait any longer.” Cassandra came through the door, “Have you told them yet?” She seemed distressed.

“I was just about to-“

“Tell us what?” Cullen crossed his arms, doing his best to remain professional.

The advisors and Cassandra began to chatter, talking among themselves with their voices raising louder and louder, talking over each other.

“MAGES!” Naomi yelled, “I support making contact with the Mages. I’ve read the letter from Redcliffe- we cannot allow the Magister’s occupation to continue.”
Cullen’s face crinkled into anger, as Josephine and Leliana exchanged surprised looks. “We don’t have the man power to take over the castle,” Cullen growled. “Come up with another way to close the Breach, or give up on this nonsense and go get the Templars.”

Furrowing her brow, Naomi uncrossed her arms and cocked her head at the Commander. “Go get the Templars? Am I your errand-boy now, Commander? And yeh know what’s nonsense? That thick skull of yours.” She jabbed a finger at him. “Redcliffe is in the hands of a Magister, Cullen. You know as well as I, this cannot be allowed to stand.” Cassandra tried to diffuse the quickly-brewing argument. “The letter from Alexius asked for the Herald of Andraste by name. It’s an obvious trap.” Josephine was taken aback by the Seeker. “He’s so complimentary, we are certain he wants to kill you.” Leliana sighed.

Cullen shook his head in utter disbelief. “Redcliffe Castle is one of the most defensible fortresses in Ferelden. It has repelled thousands of assaults. If you go in there, you’ll die-and we’ll lose the only means we have of closing these rifts.” The Commander sliced the air with his hand, “I won’t allow it.”

Naomi’s voice took a dark tone. “Well isn’t that just like a bloody fuckin’ Templar to tell someone else what he ‘won’t allow,’ Knight-Captain.” Venom practically fell from her mouth.

Cullen took a sharp breath. He felt a pang in his chest as if she’d physically wounded him. His face hardened, and his jaw remained screwed shut.

There was a long pause among the conversation. “If we don’t even try to meet Alexius, we lose the mages-and leave a hostile, foreign power on our doorstep.” Leliana whispered. “Even if we could assault the keep, it would be for naught. An Orlesian Inquisition’s army marching into Ferelden would provoke a war. Our hands are tied.” The Ambassador was quiet.

Cassandra let loose a low grumble, “The magister-“ Has outplayed us.” Cullen’s words were barely audible. “We cannot accept defeat now. There must be a solution.” Cassandra shook her head.

“Wait,” Leliana cut Josephine off, eyes widening in realization, “There is a secret passage into the castle- the same one that the Hero of Ferelden used to save Redcliffe Castle during the Blight. It’s an escape route for the family…It’s too narrow for our troops, but we could send agents through.”

“Too risky. Those agents will be discovered well before they reach the Magister.” Cullen rubbed his temples. “That’s why we need a distraction.”

Naomi perked up. “While I may just be a means of closing the Breach,” she purposefully ignored Cullen’s harsh gaze, “I can make one Hell of a distraction.” “The plan puts you in the most danger. We can’t, in good conscious, order you to do this.” Cullen’s voice was low and hoarse. “Order me? Aye, it’s a sound plan, if you’ll allow it. We’ll leave tomorrow, then. Please send word of such.” Naomi turned on her heel, putting her hat on in defiance.

Leliana ran to Naomi’s side as she stormed down the Chantry. “What is it?” The Captain was clearly irritated. “There is one other matter,” Leliana walked briskly to keep up with her, “Several months ago, the Grey Wardens of Ferelden vanished. I sent word to those in Orlais, but they have also disappeared. Ordinarily, I wouldn’t even consider the idea they’re involved in all this, but the timing is…curious.”

“And just what in the piss are Grey Wardens? Why must you all talk to me like I’m from this God-forsaken place?” Naomi yelled, causing a hush in the Holy building. “They are…an order of warriors with exceptional skill. They’re dedicated to fighting darkspawn-
a certain type of tainted creature; the creatures responsible for Blights from the book that I read to you on your sick bed...”

A frown made itself present on Naomi’s face.

“Leliana, I’m sor…”

“The others have disregarded my suspicion, but I cannot ignore it. Two days ago, my agents in the Hinterlands heard news of a Grey Warden by the name of Blackwall. If you have the opportunity on your way to Redcliffe, please seek him out. Perhaps he can put my mind at ease.”

Naomi sighed.

“And if he can’t?”

“Then there may be more going on than we thought. Thank you, Lady Herald.” Leliana rushed away, keeping her head low.

Naomi looked on, regretting taking her frustrations out on the Spymaster. She looked to Vivienne, who’d witnessed the argument.

"Not the most graceful, my dear."

The Captain groaned, walking towards the main doors. She took her flask in hand, downing its contents in one, fell swoop.

…

Back on The Dishonored, Naomi tossed her less-than desired clothing back into the chest. After throwing on loose, clean breeches and a simple, cotton shirt- she strapped herself in all of her leathers, holsters, and weapons. She welcomed their weight, as she felt incomplete without them.

She walked up to the Captain’s deck where Adibas oversaw the cleaning of the Helm.

“Quartermaster.” She nodded.

“Captain.”

“I’ll be riding the Hinterlands tomorrow morning. If you could watch the ship…”

“You needn’t ask.” He smiled, “Something else is on your mind, however.”

Naomi looked at him pleadingly.

“This place wears on me, Adie.” Her eyes shifted to the Breach above them.

“Aye, I know, Captain. You’re doing a damn fine job, though.”

“You figure?”

“That I do. Have you noticed how the crew questions nothing- how they follow you, no matter the circumstance? That is not the charisma of your Sword; that is you. You are their leader, and you are quickly becoming theirs, too.” He pointed to Haven, “Perhaps you did not choose this role in so many peoples’ lives, Captain, but you are the most fit for the duty by far.”

Naomi looked down in shame, unable to express herself. It’s true her Sword granted her certain leadership capabilities, and so, it was impossible to tell if their reactions would be the same without it.

“They do need a leader. I thought me ready. Lest you not forget that I’m no natural born leader, Adie… and I’m afraid I’ve committed too much sin in my life to be deemed a ’Herald.’ We Assassins, Pirates as we are, fight for freedom; we fight for a just and noble cause. But we are still driven by desire… Thatch had it right, before he died-” Naomi whispered as she quoted her late friend, Blackbeard, “‘In a world without gold, we might have been heroes.’”
Exalted March

Chapter Summary

"Hear now, Andraste, daughter of Brona,  
Spear-made of Alamarr, to valiant hearts sing  
Of victory waiting, yet to be claimed from  
The steel-bond forgers of barren Tevene."
-Canticle of Andraste

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Naomi fed Dullahan while the rest of the village slept. Her nightmares kept her from sleeping soundly. She couldn’t stop thinking about her quarrel with Cullen.

“Where does he get off talkin’ to me like that…?” She petted Dullahan on the nose, angered.

“We’re gonna’ have quite the adventure tomorrow, lad…hope you’re ready to go back to that God awful place.”

The beast walk underneath the hooded stables, laying on a large stack of hay. The other beasts around him grew anxious. She sat next to him, leaning on his scaly hide with her legs crossed as she thought.

“If I die tomorrow…would I want to leave my affairs in such disarray?  This is why I despise emotions.”

“Better off lockin’em up and throwin’ away the key, eh?” She patted Dullahan.

“Get some sleep, beastie. We ride the long hull, tomorrow.”

Naomi lurched to her feet, thirsty for drink to null her aching heart. She walked up into Haven, searching for the building she’d drown her sorrows in.

She heard music playing, and knew she’d be close.

When Naomi arrived, she was surprised to see so many of her sailors mingling, Even more to her surprise, her Officers sat with some familiar faces…even Cullen. Naomi sighed, turning to leave before anyone saw her.

“Can’t even grab a quick spell of drink without seein’ people I don’t want to see.”

“Boss! Over here!” Iron Bull waved her down.

Naomi turned to him.

“Avast, me harties!”

“Captin! We were just discussing that time in Havana when—”

“Oh, all of the Havana stories should be kept to yourself.” She grunted.

“Precisely.” Kilean lifted an ale to the air, clashing against Iron Bull’s.

Adibas continued his tale, Cassandra sitting at his side.

Naomi felt Cullen staring at her, and ignored it.

“We’d just made port Havana, the capital in the country of Cuba.” The Quartermaster hollered.

“I’ll never forget when she and Captain Kenway saw their faces plastered on a whorehouse.”

“Aye, ‘nd she said, ‘They could’ve at least put me face on a decent whorehouse.’” Aquilla added.

“Oh, the regret on Kenway’s face when he told her that it was a decent whorehouse.” Kit roared.

“Don’t forget the good crack his jaw took afterwards.” Tad raised his drink, earning her a cheer.

Naomi made no comment, as she was already through chugging an ale that was twice the
size of the men’s’, supplied by her new favorite person, the Iron Bull.

“This one might actually be able to drink me under the table, Chief.” Krem sneered.

The Captain slammed her empty mug down, shouting, “Another!”

“Shouldn’t you be sleeping?” Leliana turned to her.

“Aye, me and these lot. But, like them, nerves got the best of me, and here we all are.” Naomi shrugged.

“Do yah miss him?” Kilean nodded at Naomi.

“Who?”

“You know right well who.”

She swore under her breath.

“Well, you know right well what the answer is then.” Naomi shot her a silencing look as she drank her second drink.

“They’ve got anything stronger?” She asked Sera.

“If they do, it’s stored away for the important people who don’t have glowing hands.” She giggled.

“You all should really be resting.” Josephine sipped her wine.

“Aye, but if it’ll be me last night, I’d rather spend it with me mates than a cloth and pillow.”

Her Officers cheered, bashing their mugs against each other.

“I’m glad you’re so light-hearted about the prospect of you dying.” Cullen mumbled.

The rest of the table fell silent from the awkward comment.

“Don’t worry, Commander. I’m sure if I fall, you’ll find some other way to close the Breach.”

Naomi spat, slamming the second empty mug on the ground.

Cullen stood up, flipping a few coins on the table.

“I’m glad you’re so light-hearted about the prospect of you dying.” Cullen mumbled.

The rest of the table fell silent from the awkward comment.

“Don’t worry, Commander. I’m sure if I fall, you’ll find some other way to close the Breach.”

Naomi spat, slamming the second empty mug on the ground.

Cullen stood up, flipping a few coins on the table.

“Maker be with you all, then.” He nodded to everyone who saluted him off.

Refusing to let him get under her skin, she continued to drink with her Officers and companions.

“You know, the Ben-Hassrath are a lot like your Seekers, Cassandra.” Iron Bull took a gulp of his drink.

“I highly doubt that.” She huffed.

“Maintaining justice in the ranks, operating under a veil of secrecy, investigating corruption and threats to the order, and you deal with it all so quietly. Most people never notice.”

“Interesting, though we do not break the minds of our prisoners.”

“Well, keep at it! You guys will get there.”

Naomi laughed at the banter, listening in to the rest of them.

“Alright, why ‘Buttercup?’” Sera asked Varric as she downed another drink.

“You seem the type. Or exactly not the type. I forget how these things are supposed to work sometimes.”

“You don’t forget anything.” She sneered.

“And you noticed! That’s why you’re Buttercup.” He clapped his hands.

Through the merry conversation and the company of her sailors, she couldn’t shake the memory of Cullen’s twisted face when he left the tavern. Maybe she’d be too hard on him? She did invade his mind, after all. She certainly wasn’t an innocent party in all this.

…”

“Mentor!” The young girl and her brother ran up to Naomi, holding a small sword in her hand.

“How many times must I repeat myself? Have they reinforced nothing while I’ve been gone?” She nodded to the girl.

Blushing, the young girl put the sword back in her sheathe.

“No running with swords—“

“Unless you’re in combat.” The brother finished, sticking his tongue out at his sister.

“Did you bring us presents?” Their little faces brightened with joy, staring at her anxiously.

“Aye, that I did. I brought these all the way from Havana.”
As she knelt to eye level with the two children, she pulled out two wooden, carved statues- a bird for the little girl and a horse for the boy.

“It’s so pretty, Mentor…”

“Thank you, Mentor.” He smiled.

“You’re welcome, little Assassins.” She beamed at them, “Steering clear of trouble ’round Dublin Port?”

“We are. Though I wish we could be on a ship like you!” The girl whimpered.

“And Edward…” The boy grinned.

“Your feet be best on land, children.” Her face saddened, “I wouldn’t wish the seas for either one of you.”

“Mentor O’Mailey says you’ve been sailing for the Dublin Bureau since you was thirteen!”

“Aye, even if I didn’t know so,” She nodded to herself as the children didn’t understand her comment, “Still, that gives you both eight years. ’Till then, you best pay mind to what they’re teachin’ you and count yerselves fortunate.” She plucked both of them on the nose, “Run along now. I’ll say ‘goodbye’ before I take my leave.”

Naomi remained crouched on the ground as she watched them run into the arms of their Assassin guardians. Adibas came behind her, resting a hand on her shoulder.

"You're doing the right thing, Captain."

The Herald's eyes separated in a watery blur on her wake. A sound crackling through the air caught her attention. Outside, a strong, snowy gust descended itself upon the village.

“Thunder snow?” She asked herself.

The phenomenon was extremely rare. A second crackling through the air affirmed her suspicions.

“Lovely.” She mumbled.

She dressed herself in the most furs that she owned, the thick fabric feeling uncomfortable under her leathers.

“Is this my life now? Having memories as nightmares, only to wake up to some strange situation right before gearing up for battle?”

In less than a grand mood, Naomi dredged her way to the stables. Her companions were ahead of her, gearing up their mounts with satchels of food and other supplies. Without exchanging words, she walked by them, greeting Dullahan with a few scraps of meat. She pet his scaly head as he purred.

“So, this troublesome creature is your beast?” Vivienne walked over to her, clad it the most glamorous armor Naomi had ever seen- her dragon horns still spiraling to the heavens with silvery twists.

“Aye. His name is Dullahan.”

“Mind your fingers, my dear. And the kinks in your armor.”

“Kinks?”

“You cannot let them get to you. And should such an unspeakable act happen, you can’t let them know. You address your sailors in this manner, no?” Vivienne crossed her arms.

“Aye, that I do,” She mulled her words, “So, in the Chantry, you were givin’ me the Eye out of disgust for my transparency?”

“If you mean me staring- quite. I’ll teach you to Play yet.” The majestic woman dismissed herself, scolding at the “abomination of a horse,” she was given.

The Captain reflected upon her words. It was true she never let her sailors see her falter, save for Adibas. She did it to protect them, but more importantly, to guarantee their respect. She hadn’t considered that, perhaps, the same tone should be taken with the people of Thedas.

With a new perspective, Naomi shook herself free of the rut she awoke in. After gearing up her dracolisk, Naomi mounted and trotted over to the rest of them.

“Poor bastard.” She shook her head towards Iron Bull.

“What?” He furrowed his brow.
“The horse. For having to tote your oversized arse around.”

There were other conversations buzzing around the group as they began to travel.

“So, an apostate?” Vivienne pulled in next to Solas.

“That is correct, Enchanter. I did not train in your Circle.”

“Well, dear, I hope you can take care of yourself, should we encounter anything outside your experience.” She sneered.

“I will try, in my own fumbling way, to learn from how you helped seal the rifts at Haven,” He paused, “Ah, wait. My memory misleads me. You were not there.”

The group laughed at his wry remark.

“I’ve heard things about you, too, Vivvy.” Sera glowered.

“It is properly Madame Vivienne, official mage to the Imperial Court.”

“Yes, that’s what I heard. Not the title, the snotty bit.” Sera rolled her eyes.

“However shall I recover from your condemnation?”

“You’re still doing it. Can you even shut it off?”

“For you, my dear? No.” Vivienne vexed.

Naomi found herself reflecting on the banter she and her sailing mates exchanged after a long expedition. Thatch, Kidd, Hornigold, Vane, Rackham…all dead. She cleared her head of such thoughts, remembering what Vivienne told her. She hadn’t noticed Cassandra next to her, staring blankly in the distance as the snow hurled towards them and their mounts.

“Somethin’ on yer mind, lass?”

Cassandra looked to her, shaking her head “No.”

“Don’t lie to me, I always know.”

“Just…thinking.” She lowered her voice.

“Bout what?”

“Did I do the right thing?” Cassandra looked at her, confusion in her eyes.

She was an interesting woman. Naomi could never tell if The Seeker was her friend, bodyguard, or warden.

“What I have set in motion could destroy everything I have revered my whole life. One day they may write about me as a traitor, a madwoman, a fool. And they may be right.”

“Aye, they may be. But ‘they’ aren’t here, and that’s what makes you, better.” Naomi’s face grew stern, “You’re a woman of faith, aye? What’s this Maker of yours tellin’ yeh?”

“I can only guess if this is all the Maker’s will. But I believe you are innocent. I believe more is going on here than we can see. And I believe no one else cares to do anything about it. They will stand in the fire and complain that it is hot.”

“A rightful comparison.” Naomi snorted, “If not for you, everyone would still be gawkin’ at the damned thing. Don’t think you had much else a choice, lass.”

“Didn’t I? My trainers always said, “Cassandra, you are too brash. You must think before you act.” I see what must be done, and I do it.” She sighed, shaking her head, “I see no point in running around in circles like a dog chasing its tail. But I misjudged you in the beginning, did I not? I thought the answer was before me, clear as day. I cannot afford to be so careless again. I fear that I have been.”

“Wasn’t as if I hadn’t given’ you a reason to not trust me. Damn near blew the whole village up, so it seems.”

“I was determined to have someone answer for what happened. Anyone. I cannot invoke the Inquisition with the same mentality.”

A long pause settled in between the women. Cassandra was right- there was definitely more going on than what they could see. Naomi didn’t just appear without reason. A question she’d been dodging started to float around in her head…was there a way to get back home, or was she stuck here forever?

“Do you believe in the Maker? Do you believe you were chosen to be the Herald of Andraste?”

Naomi looked to her, smiling.

“It tickles me every time I hear the name ‘Andraste.’ Leliana told me of her, and the similarities
are astounding. Can’t be for coincidence.”
“What are you referring to?”
“The name Andraste is long lost anywhere on Earth—where I’m from. She was an Icenic war
goddess, invoked by Boudica, Queen of the Celtic Iceni tribe who led an uprising against the
Roman Empire,” She cleared her throat, “The Icenic were tribespeople and the Romans were
from a great empire similar to…well, nothing culturally like Orlais, but the size was similar.”
Cassandra nodded her head, appreciating the clarification.
“The Romans flogged her, raped her daughters, called in her dead husband’s debts. Months later,
eighty-thousand or so Roman lives were taken by the swords under her command—swords guided
by the goddess Andraste, so they say.”
“An Exalted March…or something like it.”
“Aye, something to that effect. So, when you ask me if I believe in the Maker, I’m unfamiliar with
the idea. But when you ask me if I believe I am the Herald of Andraste…I find it hard to deny the
parallels. I’d be blind to deny my part in this.”
“Is that your version of a ‘yes?’”
“Don’t get clever.” Naomi smirked.
“That’s…comforting.” Cassandra seemed uplifted, “Surely the Maker put us both on this path for a
reason. Now, it simply remains to see where it leads us.”
“And we can only hope to take down eighty-thousand enemies on our way.”
The Herald wished she’d felt as confident as the woman she spoke of.

Chapter End Notes

Icenic Andraste
Parley

Chapter Summary

"Many a time, a man's mouth broke his nose."
-Irish Proverb

The group managed to seal a few rifts on their way from Haven to the Hinterlands. Upon arriving, they’d been greeted by Corporal Vale, a man tasked with overlooking the refugee situation at a small outpost. Running odd jobs where they could, Naomi and her companions performed tasks such as bringing furs for the cold people and recovering herbs for a healer in need. They even found time to contact Dennet, the horse master.

They’d go into a wolf’s den, killing the wolves and the demon controlling the beasts. They also marked positions for guard towers, clearing the way of bandits in between. She sent word to Haven to oversee the construction of the towers.

Dennet invited them to stay the night in the guest house. They’d acquired multiple agents and sealed more than one rift in the day, and welcomed rest underneath a solid roof. Dennet’s wife delivered them a plentiful dinner and supplied their mounts with water and feed- even Dullahan.

Words could not express their gratitude. After the woman left and their bellies full, they sat around for a night cap- the alcohol supplied by Naomi, of course. The Captain’s rum was not popular among all, however.

“This is absolutely dreadful.” Vivienne passed the makeshift glass, “How you consume such a substance is beyond me.”

“It’s not supposed to taste good Vivvy, it’s supposed to get you pissed!” Sera grinned.

“This is hardly enough to get me drunk.” Iron Bull grunted.

“The blessing of having a small frame.” Varric said.

“I feel as though I’m committing a crime drinking just it.” Solas chuckled.

“Aye, it’s kindle for pirates, and should feel as such.” Naomi raised her flask.

“Are you actually a pirate?” Cassandra asked, suspiciously, “You and your entire crew wear that same symbol-the same one on your flag. It’s worked into almost every piece of armor and weapon you all arm yourselves with.”

Naomi dodged the question, “If you’re still guessin’ if I be a pirate, I must be goin’ soft.”

Vivienne greatly approved.

Redcliffe came into view as the seven-person army moved closer.

“There’s somethin’ goin’ off over there.” Naomi pulled her spyglass from its holder, peering ahead in the now-clear weather.

“Another rift!” She yelled, spurring Dullahan ahead of the rest of them.

“Herald!” Cassandra called, charging after her.

A large terror demon stood before a squadron of soldiers just in front of the gates to Redcliffe. Dullahan charged forward, shrieking in the air as he did. Naomi stood to her feet, balancing herself on the saddle as he ran, reins still in hand. As he got close enough to the demon, she leapt into the air, drawing her swords. Their blades buried themselves into the demons’ back, the cannon from her pistol sword firing a shot. The bullet tore through the demon, leaving a trail
of slimy, green goo as it exited the other side of it.

Yelling out in rage, the wounded creature called aid from the other demons around it. Her party caught up to her. Being distracted so high up on the creatures back, she looked down to notice how some of her companions were moving much slower than the others, and some much quicker.

“Be weary, mates! Somethin’s off here!” She sent a burst of energy through the Sword of Eden, exploding the monster into the air. Falling, she translocated in front of the rift, shouting as her hand began to absorb the energy from the rift. The crystalline structure cracked, and the enemies around her were stunned. They made quick work of them, allowing Naomi to seal the rift for good.

“More gunpowder?” Iron Bull whispered.

“Aye, I’ll show you later.”

Cheers rang around them as the guards of the large gate saluted her, granting them passage into Redcliffe.

“Thank you, Inquisition.”

The village was much larger inside the gates than it appeared from the other side. It smelled of fresh water and crisp pine trees. Huts with thatched rooves littered the area; it had very interesting infrastructure. The docks on Lake Calenhad were glorious, as many colorful merchant ships littered the area. Redcliffe Castle loomed in the distance, its flags whipping in the wind.

“This'll be the place, then. ‘The Gull and Lantern’ tavern.”

“Are you sure this is where she invited you?” Cassandra asked.

“That’s what the report said.” Iron Bull crossed his arms.

They tied their mounts outside of the building and entered, cautiously.

“Welcome, agents of the Inquisition.” Fiona greeted them immediately, “First Enchanter Vivienne.” She gave her a nod.

“My dear Fiona, it’s been so long since we last spoke. You look dreadful! Are you sleeping well?

“There it goes again…” Sera mumbled.

“What has brought you to Redcliffe?” Fiona asked, her formalities expiring.

Naomi laughed nervously, looking around.

“Lass, your memory fails you. You invited me here back in Val Royeaux, lest you forget.” Naomi grew anxious.

“You must be mistaken. I haven’t been to Val Royeaux since before the Conclave”

“Don’t play that game with me, lass.”

“I’d have no reason to invite you here. The Free Mages have already...pledged themselves to the service of the Tevinter Imperium.

A ripple of shock flew through the party.

“Fiona dear, your dementia is showing.” Vivienne leaned on one hip, crossing her arms.

“An alliance with Tevinter? Do you not fear all of Thedas turning against you?” Cassandra asked sarcastically.

“Andraste’s ass...I’m trying to think of a single worse thing you could have done. And I’ve got nothing.” Varric rolled his eyes.

“This right here is why you can’t trust mages…” Iron Bull whispered to Solas.

“I understand that you are afraid, but you deserve better than slavery to Tevinter. Surely you can be reasoned with.” Solas cut the slew of comments.

“As one indentured to a Magster, I’m afraid I no longer have the authority to negotiate with you.” Fiona addressed the elf directly.

“Aye, bring me who can, then. Time isn’t something I have a plentiful bounty of, mate.”

“Welcome, my friends! I apologize for not greeting you earlier.” An older man stepped from the shadows, wearing strange and pointy clothing.

The flames of the torches snipped behind him, illuminating a curious face.

“Agents of the Inquisition, allow me to introduce Magister Gereon Alexius.”

“The Southern Mages are under my command. You are the survivor, yes? The one from the
Fade?” He looked her up and down, “Interesting.”
“Let’s cut the chatter, yeah? I’m here for Mages. Need help closin’ the huge rift in the sky- maybe you’ve seen it?” Naomi spat, her patience forever growing thin.
“Right down to business! I understand, of course.” Alexius sat down, inviting Naomi to the table, “Felix, would you send for a scribe please? Pardon my manners. My son Felix, friends.”
“Why does this posh git keep calling us ‘friends’?”
“I am not surprised you’re here. Containing the Breach is not a feat that many could even attempt. There is no telling how many mages would be needed for such an endeavor. Ambitious, indeed.” Alexius continued.
“Does that mean you’ll lend your Mages to our cause?” Naomi yawned, wanting a clear answer.

The young man Felix grew faint, stumbling over himself in a daze. The Captain stood quickly to catch him before he hit the ground, helping him to his feet.

Naomi tried to not pay too much attention to the young man’s swift actions as Felix slipped her a note. It was a trained motion, and his subtle actions left her impressed.

“Felix!” Alexius shot up, helping his son.
“I’m so sorry! Please forgive my clumsiness, my lady.” His voice was soft and sweet.
“Come, I’ll get your powders. Please excuse me, friends. We will have to continue this another time. Fiona, I require your assistance back at the castle. I shall send word to the Inquisition. We will conclude this business at a later date.” Alexius helped his son into a chamber.

“I don’t mean to trouble everyone…” Felix muttered as his father shut the door behind them.

Naomi looked down to the note, reading it quietly for the rest of her group.

“‘Come to the Chantry…you are in danger.’ The piss is this?”

“Ooo, very mysterious.” Varric rubbed his hands together, “Only one way to find out.”
“Ugh, more walking?” Naomi rolled her neck, walking ahead of the rest of them, “Let’s get this over with so I can set sail-damned ground hasn’t got this much attention since before my 13th year.”

The group hauled up the large hill to the Chantry in disdain.

“Why’d it have to be so high up?” Sera complained.

Naomi mauled over the events that had just transpired.

“The Tevinter Imperium is really as bad as you lot make it out to be, yeah?”
“It is. And I question the Free Mages for joining them.” Solas sighed.

The group topped the large hillside to find the Chantry empty, save for one, unexpected presence.

A rift had torn inside the building, and a single man fought off the demons- glistening in stone-accented armor with a staff that hurled magic at his enemies.

“Good! You’re finally here! Now, help me close this, would you?”

His mustache was long and precise, and it held Naomi’s attention.

“Your horns might have some competition.”


“Not you…” Naomi removed the Staff of Eden from her back, twirling it as she slammed it onto the ground.

Light slithered its way to underneath the rift, stunning the small demons littered in the building. She lifted it, and the bodies rose in the air. Hurling the Apple end towards the ground, the demons bashed against the stone floor of the Chantry. Yawning again, she approached the rift, placing the Staff back on her back.

“Let’s get on with this…” She raised her hand, closing the rift with ease.

“Fascinating. How does that work, exactly?” He approached Naomi, taking her hand in his.
“Careful, now.” Naomi pulled her hand back quickly, “I don’t know you from dirty bath water.”

“Ah, getting ahead of myself, I see. Dorian of House Pavus, most recently of Minrathous. How do you do?” He gave a slight bow. He was a gorgeous, gorgeous man.

Tight robes surrounded him, being kept in place by various leather straps. Only one of his arms held a sleeve, the other exposed his large, caramel bicep; adorned in cuffs and bracers.
“Let more Tevinter in, suddenly they’re scurrying out of the walls like roaches.” Vivienne glared at him.

“Now, now, I’m ever so much more handsome than a cockroach.”

“That you are, indeed.” Naomi winked at him.

“Watch yourself. The pretty ones are always the worst.” Iron Bull cocked his head.

“Suspicious friends you have, here!” Dorian raised his hands, “Magister Alexius was once my mentor, so my assistance should be valuable- as I’m sure you can imagine.”

“So, you’re a Magister?” Cassandra had yet to put her sword away.

“All right, let’s say this once. I’m a mage from Tevinter, but not a member of the Magisterium. I know Southerners use the terms interchangeably, but that only makes you sound like barbarians.”

“And let me guess. You’re betraying your mentor because he’s evil and doing some evil things and you want to do the less evil out of either of you. Got that right?” Naomi raised her brow.

“Look, you must know there’s danger. That should be obvious even without the note that I sent you. Let’s start with Alexius claiming the allegiance of the mage rebels out from under you. As if by magic, yes? Which is exactly right. To reach Redcliffe before the Inquisition, Alexius distorted time itself.”

“So that’s how he got here right before the Divine died…” Naomi pondered.

“You catch on quick.” Dorian smiled at her, his teeth perfectly white.

Naomi turned to address the band of Inquisition warriors.

“You don’t believe this do you? It’s daft.” Sera furled her lips in disgust.

“If true, it’s almost certainly dangerous.” Solas seemed interested.

“Manipulating time itself?” Vivienne turned to Solas, “Many have attempted over the ages, but never once succeeded.”

“Considering I was brought here from a different realm all together, I’d watch what we chalk as ‘daft’ versus ‘something we just don’t know about.’” The Captain brought the banter down to a minimum.

“The rift you closed here? You saw how it twisted time around itself, sped some things up and slowed others down. Soon, there will be more like it, and they’ll appear further and further away from Redcliffe. The magic Alexius is using is wildly unstable, and it’s unraveling the world.”

Dorian’s voice lost its upbeat charm.

“Then perhaps he’ll have some answers for my…questions.” Naomi squeezed her fist, silencing the green flares coming from underneath her gloves.

“I’d like more proof than, ‘Magical time control! Go with it.’” Sera sputtered.

“I know what I’m talking about. I helped develop this magic. When I was still his apprentice, it was pure theory. Alexius could never get it to work.” Dorian crossed his arms behind his back, pacing, “What I don’t understand is why he’s doing it? Ripping time to shreds just to gain a few hundred lackeys?”

“He didn’t do it for them.” Felix caught them all by surprise.

His footsteps echoed against the solid stone.

“Took you long enough. Is he getting suspicious?” Dorian walked over to him.

“No, but I shouldn’t have played the illness card. I thought he’d be fussing over me all day. I’m very ill, you see. Have been for months. Probably fatal.” Felix explained, “On to more pressing matters-my father’s joined a cult. Tevinter supremacists. They call themselves the ‘Venatori.’”

“So, he’d rearrange time and snagged the Mage Rebellion just to find me? I’m flattered.” Naomi raised her hands sarcastically.

“They’re obsessed with you, but I don’t know why. Perhaps because you survived the Temple of Sacred Ashes?” Felix guessed.

“You can close the rifts. There’s either a connection or they simply see you as a threat.” Dorian place his fingers on his chin, setting his elbow on a fist in contemplation.

“If the Venatori are behind those rifts, or the Breach in the sky, they’re even worse than I thought.” Felix coughed.

“You know you’re his target. Expecting the trap is the first step in turning it to your advantage. I
can’t be seen with you; especially because Alexius doesn’t know I’m here. I’ll be in touch.”
Dorian turned to walk away, “Oh, and Felix? Do try not to get yourself killed?”
“There are worse things than dying, Dorian.” He solemnly answered.

Rather dreary for the first few days on the road, yeah?” Naomi sipped her ale, not wanting to get too hammered.
“At least we’re alive to complain about it.” Varric grunted, looking around the tavern, “Too many refugees here. Reminds me of Kirkwall.”
“I hear reconstruction of the city is progressing well. Is that true?” Cassandra asked him.
“I know things are bad there, Seeker.”
“I wasn’t trying to…”
“You weren’t trying to remind me how bad it is in Kirkwall? So you decided to ask me about it?”
“About its recovery!” Cassandra defended herself.
“What you’re talking about the buildings. People don’t recover so easily.”
“I think it’s time for a change of topic.” Naomi intervened, nodding her head over to a bearded man at the bar.
“Who’s that, all grizzly?” Sera turned her head.
“Looks like the guy Leliana asked me to check out. Fits the description. Let’s have a looksee.”
Naomi stood to her feet, walking over to the stool next to him.
She sat and ordered another drink, peaking at him from the side of her eyes. She feigned shock as best she could.
“Blackwall? The Warden Blackwall?” Her eyes glistened as if she was an adoring fan.
The man spit his drink out back in his cup, wiping the back splash from his beard.
“You’re not…how do you know my name?” He grew angrily defensive.
“Aye, you just told me, mate.” She took a swig from her mug, extending her hand, “Captain McNamara of the Inquisition. How yeh be?”
He didn’t shake her hand.
“You wound me!” She retracted the gesture, “I’m askin’ round ‘bout the disappearance of the Wardens. Wonderin’ if it has anything to do with the murder of the Divine. Poor timing on your part, mate.”
“Oh, Maker’s balls, the Wardens and the Divine? That can’t- no, you’re asking, you don’t really know.”
“Guilty as charged.” She took another sip.
“First off, I didn’t know they disappeared. But we do that, right? No more Blight, job done, Wardens are the first thing forgotten.” He drank, “But one thing I’ll tell you: No Warden killed the Divine. Our purpose isn’t political.”
“Tellin’ me mates I was no politician didn’t seem to stop me from gettin’ wrapped up in all this mess. Why should the Wardens be any different?”
“It’s true- I haven’t seen any Wardens for months. I travel alone, recruiting. That doesn’t give you proper grounds to accuse them of murder.” He glowered.
“I haven’t accused anyone of anything, as of yet. I just need a wee bit’o information.”
Blackwall sighed, just wanting to be left alone.
“Grey Wardens can inspire, make you better than you think you are.” His voice trailed off,
“Maybe they returned to our stronghold in Weisshaupt? That’s in the Anderfels, a long way north.
I don’t really know. Can’t imagine why they’d all disappear at once, let alone where they’d disappear to.”
“You’re not really givin’ me anything of use, mate.” She looked at him curiously, “So, why are you still ‘round?”
“Training farmers to defend their lands from the war these idiots caused.” He growled.
Naomi was defeated in her purpose.
“Right, then. Enjoy your drink…and your farmers.” Naomi stood to walk back to her table.

As she began to walk way, he spoke up.

“Captain…McNamara, did you say? Hold a moment.” He stood to face her, “The Divine is dead, and the sky is torn. Events like these, thinking we’re absent is almost as bad as thinking we’re involved. If you’re trying to put things right, maybe you need a Warden. Maybe you need me.”

Naomi made a twisted face, pretending to think it over.

“What say you, mates?” She turned to her companions.

“The Inquisition needs all the support it can get, but what can one Grey Warden do?” Vivienne challenged the sunken-eyed man.

“Save the fucking world, if pressed.” He softened his hard face into a grin, “Look, maybe fighting demons from the sky isn’t something I’m practiced at, but show me someone who is. I might even get a few to honor those bloody treaties in this disaster. Being a Warden means something to a lot of people.” Blackwall pleaded.

Naomi looked to her table, they gave her various nods of approval.

“Warden Blackwall, the Inquisition accepts your offer.”

“Good to hear,” his smile widened, “From this day forward, this Warden walks with the Inquisition.”

“You may regret that in the morn’, lad.”
"Once more into the fray,
Into the last good fight I’ll ever know.
Live and die on this day.
Live and die on this day."
- John Ottway

Seliana hummed in her tent, smiling as she scribbled letters and took a parcel from a delivery scout. It was addressed to her specifically and written in awful handwriting.

“I’m not very good at apologies, but I shouldn’t have been such a harsh sod during our conversation. If I die, I wanted you to know that.
-Captain McNamara, Herald of Andraste, Still Very Lost”

The Spymaster cackled aloud, something that never happened after reading a report. Josephine ducked in, curiously.

“I was passing by and heard you laugh. What is so funny?”

“Nosey Josie!”

“I asked you to never call me that right before we both left Orlais.” Josephine whined.

“Nosey Josie, Noisy Josie, No-“

Cullen walked out of the Chantry, still pale in the face.

“Nothing to report, Spymaster.” Josephine shuffled out of the tent toward the opposite direction in a hurry.

Leliana pretended she was working on something. They both avoided him.

Cullen walked in, board in hand.

“What do you think about a sea-faring supply route? It would help us immensely in the matter of time.” He asked her.

“Commander, when was the last time you slept?”

“I’m sleeping just fine, Leliana.” He growled.

“It’s just that, ever since they left, you’ve been a little…”

“You’ve been a right arse.” Adibas entered the tent.

Leliana and Cullen turned to him, surprised to see him not on the ship.

“I’ve come to request more furs. The sailors are cold from keeping the ice off of The Dishonored’s hull.”

“Well, we don’t have any more furs to give to you. We can’t get supplies from the mainland because of the war. We barely even have any men to help secure the routes. If you want furs, you and your sailors are going to have to get them yourselves with that big ship of yours.”


“If you needed our help, all you had to do was ask.” Adibas brought his voice down to a rumble.

“Spymaster, Commander!” Josephine ran into the tent, “Oh, and Quartermaster. My apologies.”

They all looked at her, urging her to continue speaking.

“Come, you must come see this at once!” She ran out of the tent.

None of them could figure out if she was horrified or excited. The three of them marched down, near the gates of Haven. What they saw left them frozen in their place.

Hundreds of refugees came in from the mountainside. Some rode in on horses. Others
walked on foot alongside their mounted comrades. Wagons filled to the rim with goods and necessities were pulled by various horses in the crowd.

The horse master Dennet approached Josephine first, leading the pilgrimage. “Ambassador.” He nodded to her. “Master Dennet, a pleasure.” She curtsied him, “We were not expecting your arrival. I will arrange your quarters at once.”

“Thank you, Ambassador Montilyet. Most of these people bring their own tents and things. We’ve wrangled food, supplies, and various necessities the Inquisition may need along the way. Your Herald and her associates are doing a fine job securing the Hinterlands. There has been little activity reported since they tore through the lands; sealing rifts and helping establish those guard towers.” He smiled, dismounting his horse.

Adibas looked to an awestruck Cullen. “As you were saying, Commander?” The Quartermaster laughed, “Looks like the Captain took care of those trade routes.”

“Lady Nightingale, this report just arrived from Redcliffe. I believe it to be urgent.”

Cullen and Adibas turned around as Leliana retrieved the letter from her scout. She walked back to them, Josephine joining her. She opened it slowly, allowing them to read it together.

Having been up early, Naomi sat at the table downstairs, eating breakfast alone as the sun began to rise. Guards intruded upon the tavern, knocking door to door- searching for the Herald of Andraste. Naomi sat there, food hanging out of her mouth and wide-eyed, watching them walk right passed her up the stairs. “Idiots!” She thought to herself. She finished her meal in a hurry, leaving a few coins on the table as she ran upstairs, trailing the guards. “We are here to retrieve the Herald on the behalf of Magister Alexius.”

Her companions stood in a line before them. “Aye, all yeh had to do was send a messenger!” Naomi yelled, mouth still filled with food. She finished chewing and took a large swallow. “We have been instructed to take you to the castle- now.”

“How obscenely rude.” Vivienne slammed her door in the guardsman’s face, who prepared to knock down the door. “She’s getting dressed, you idiot. Besides, that’s a bad idea. You don’t want to see the Lady of Iron angry.”

“It matters not what she is doing. You were the only one invited.”

“Why bust down the bloody door, then? Listen, where I go, they go. There will be no argument, lest you want to challenge me directly.” Naomi crossed her arms daringly. Her words gave them pause. When everyone was dressed, fed, and had their things together, the band of them walked to the docks, grabbing the next ferry to Redcliffe Castle.

The soldiers lined up on either side of the agents, escorting them through the main gates. “Announce us. You’ve insulted the Inquisition enough for one day.” Vivienne sneered at the man standing on the inside of the throne room. “The Magister’s invitation was for Mistress McNamara alone. The rest will wait here.” He crossed his arms, two guards falling in behind him. “Captain, Or Herald- it’s growing on me, really. Definitely not mistress, well, not anymore…” She cleared her throat, “Anyhow, I’ll say this ‘gain. They come with me wherever. No contest
The men all exchanged nods, deciding it wasn’t worth it to argue.

“My Lord Magister, the agents of the Inquisition have arrived.”

“My friend! It’s so good to see you again. And you’re…associates, of course. I’m sure we can work out some arrangement that is equitable to all parties.” Alexius sat in his throne.

“There he goes blasted well goes again, calling me ‘friend!’”

“Are we mages to have no voice in deciding our fate?” Fiona spoke from the side.

“Fiona, you would not have turned your followers over to my care if you did not trust me with their lives.”

Naomi challenged the Magister, breaking free of formation.

“If the Grand Enchanter wishes to be part of these talks, then I will brand her a guest of the Inquisition.” Her tone was as professional and correct as she could muster.

“T-thank you.” Fiona nodded humbly.

“The Inquisition needs mages to close the Breach, and I have them. So, what shall you offer in exchange?” Alexius ignored the proclamation.

Naomi folded her hands behind her back, a single strand of her hair dangling to the side of her face from her ponytail. She dipped her head down, pacing back and forth as she spoke.

“You see, I know, that you know, what I want to know. That being said, I’d much rather discuss your time magic.”

“I’m afraid I have no idea what you mean.” The Magister denied her.

“Felix, what have you done?” Naomi challenged the Magister, breaking free of formation.

“He took initiative and is trying to stop whatever Devil’s game it is you’d be playin.” Naomi crossed her arms, standing in front of the Magister.

“So speaks the thief. Do you think you can turn my son against me? You walk into my stronghold with your stolen mark- a gift you don’t even understand- and think you’re in control?” He stood, angrily, “You’re nothing but a mistake.”

“Stolen mark, eh? What’re you goin’ on about, old man?”

“It was the Elder One’s moment, and you were unworthy even to stand in his presence.”

“Father, listen to yourself! Do you know what you sound like?” Felix pleaded.

“He sounds exactly like the sort of villainous cliché everyone expects us to be.” Dorian all but pranced into the room, inserting himself next to Naomi.

Alexius swiped the air with his hand, “Dorian… I gave you a chance to be a part of this. You turned me down. The Elder One has power you would not believe. He will raise the Imperium from its own ashes.” The Magister walked down the stairs to his throne, “He will make the world bow to mages. We will rule from the Boeric Ocean to the Frozen Seas.”

“Well, this escalated with haste.” Naomi rolled her eyes.

“My people will not be involved in this.” Fiona whimpered.

“Alexius, this is exactly what you and I talked about never wanting to happen! Why would you support this?” Dorian shouted at him, drawing his staff.

“Stop it, father. Give up the Venatori. Let the Southern Mages fight the Breach, and let’s go home.” Felix went into a coughing fit.

“No! It’s the only way, Felix. He can save you!”

“Save me?”

“There is a way. The Elder One promised. If I undo the mistake at the Temple…”

“I’m going to die. You need to accept that now.”

Naomi backed up to her agents as the Magister became more unstable with every word.

“Seize them, Venatori! The Elder One demands this woman’s life!” Alexius ordered.

Arrows whistled through the air as knives sliced in unison. The guards that once surrounded the room now bled in a heap of flesh on the floor.

“Can’t imagine they’ll do much seizing, save for the ground.” Naomi scoffed, “Give up this gig, your men are dead. Really dead.”
“You…are a mistake. You should have never existed!”
    Alexius charged an amulet in his hand, hurling a green light towards them.
“NO!” Dorian yelled, sending his magic flying at the Magister.
    A large rift opened in front of them, Dorian and Naomi disappearing into it.
Chapter Summary

"To err is human; to forgive, divine."
-Alexander Pope

The crate of potatoes slipped through her small hands, sending the precious food rolling about the wooden pier planks of Swansea, Wales. Some of the older men laughed at “him.” Naomi did her best to pick them all up before Captain McGrath came back from his rounds in the city. “Need help with that?” A boy matching her age asked, dressed in field clothes.
“Aye, that’d be grand. Captain’ll be back, soon.”
The two put the potatoes back into the wooden crate, scuffling to get them from under the feet of passerby.
“You work on that galleon?” The boy asked.
“That I do.” She observed his clothes, “Does your family own a farm?”
“That they do.” He grinned, “Been bringin’ product to this docks for a while, now.”
“I’ve been workin’ this dock since I was thirteen. Never seen you here before.” Naomi squinted at him, “We sail here once a day from Dublin Port across the Pond.”
“Alright, alright. My parents thought it best to wait till I was fifteen to come to port. Lots of things goin’ on ‘round here.” The boy admitted, “Might run a stand a year from now when I’m sixteen.”
“We be the same age, then.” She bragged, “’Cept next year, I’ll be a Rigger, instead.” Her chin pointed towards the ship, “Hoistin’ up and droppin’ the sails.”
“Sounds dangerous,” The boy observed the Medusa’s Scorn, “Must be fun- working on a ship. Get to go to new places all the time. I’m stuck in the dirt digging up or pattin’ down plants all day.”
“If we’re layin’ out honesties, it gets bleak. Can’t make any friends, can’t see me mum- and we go to the same places erry’morn, erry’noon, erry’night.”

The crate grew heavy in her hands as she hoisted it up from the ground, “Thanks for the hand, mate,” Naomi hoisted the crate in one arm, struggling to balance it on her knee as she shook his hand, “Nathan McNamara. A pleasure.”

“Edward Kenway,” He answered, “I’ll see you ‘round, Nathan.” He bid her farewell and departed back to his parents, who scolded him for neglecting his duties.
“One more year,” Naomi smiled, “I’ll be swingin’ down havin’ a ball in no time.” She gave herself a toothy grin, struggling to walk up onto the ship with her heavy load.
“One more year.”

[Click. Click. Click. Fingers snapping.]
“Wake…Herald…Hey!”

“Dorian?”
The fingers migrated to poking her face.
“You can’t be dead. I’m too handsome to panic, and dead Heralds of Andraste make me panic.”

“Dorian.”
The Captain’s eyes blinked to life, greeted by a mustached mage looming over her.
“Needn’t poke me face, all happy out and such.” She groaned.
He hoisted her to her feet.
“Are we still in the castle?” Naomi wiped her mouth, the taste of dust crusting her lips.

Crystals of red lyrium shot out in all directions within the makeshift dungeon. A shallow pool of water covered the floor. This place had been long-since neglected, or perhaps the evil gemstones were tampering with its’ foundation.

Naomi wasn't sure of anything except that she was ready to leave, and they'd just arrived.

Dorian smiled as he looked around, “Displacement? Interesting! It’s probably not what Alexius intended. The rift must have moved us…to what? The closest confluence of arcane energy?”

“Don’t know what you’re rattlin’ on about.” Naomi walked over to a red crystal, looking at it, “Last thing I remember we were in front of Magister Dickweasel.”

Dorian burst into a fit of laughter.

“Step away from the red lyrium, child.”

“How’d I know you’d speak up, now?”

She did as commanded.

When Dorian finished laughing, he sighed to himself, wiping tears away from his face.

“Let’s see. If we’re still in the castle, it isn’t…oh! Well none of this was here, and this does seem quite aged…AH! Of course! It’s not simply where- it’s when! Alexius used the amulet as a Focus. It moved us through time!”

“You’re much too animated for this. How can you assume such nonsense?” The Herald rubbed her head.

“Alexius has taken his research to exciting new heights. We’ve seen his temporal rifts before. This time we simply…passed through one. Let’s look around, see where the rift took us. Then we can figure out how to get back…if we can.” He scampered off, Naomi jogging behind him, her question ignored.

She’d try again.

“A focus…a temporal rift…can anything be a focus when making such a rift?”

Naomi fervently remembered combining the two, now fate-sealed Pieces of Eden.

“I don’t even want to think about what this will do to the fabric of the world. We didn’t ‘travel’ through time so much as punch a hole through it and toss it in the privy.” Dorian crossed his arms, resting his chin on his hand in thought.

"Dorian."

The glistening Tevinter turned to her.

"Ah, right. Apologies. Time magic. It was something of a fascination, if you will-of Alexius, Tevinter- all parties involved who shouldn't be delving into such things. Displacing oneself not only through dimensional space, but time as well."

“So you’re tellin’ me he made the amulet a focus to make a…time-portal-rift-thing that sent us to a different time?” Naomi’s brow furrowed, “Or, like you said, punched time in the nose.”

Dorian observed their surroundings, lighting a torch with a flick of his wrist. The flames burned hot, sending gross little pests scurrying back into the cracks and mold that had made them fat.

“Correct, and, correct,” He affirmed, “Yet, which end of time we’ve stepped into remains to be unseen. I assure you, the castle did not look like this before we left.”

Naomi soon found herself following Dorian through a narrow passageway, the ceiling almost too low for them to stand up straight.

And they were both rather short.

"How do we get back? Can we go back?” She asked him.

“I have some thoughts on that. They’re lovely thoughts, like little jewels.” He wiggled his free fingers dancingly.

Naomi gently placed her hand on the Staff of Eden, allowing the Apple to record things around her. She had a feeling this journey of theirs would make an interesting Memory Seal.

The castle was damp and smelled of dirt, shale, and limestone. Age had not been kind to the walls, the cracks allowing drips of time-neglected water to conquer surfaces with moss. Death
was stagnant in the air, the smell of rotting flesh and further unanswered questions stuffing her
nose as she peered from one overgrown red lyrium deposit to the next.
"I read stories like this, people gettin' lost and all that. Usually doesn't fair too well." She pulled her
fabric mask out of her pocket, placing it over her mouth and nose, "Gonna' have to keep a sharp
eye, lad."
"Thank you for the keen suggestion, Lady Herald. I aspire to be as observant as you, one day."

With Dorian at her side, the two embarked down a hall, ducking their heads to avoid roots
that hung above them like snakes that would otherwise hang them. Naomi sneezed, scaring
Dorian, causing him to double the flame in his hand. It nearly burnt his eyebrows off. A crime
most unforgivable.
"Calm down, man. Dust makes me nose tickle, is all." She ran a finger under her nose through her
mask.

"Herald, is that you?" A hoarse voice echoed from the room ahead of them.
Dorian paused ahead of her, "Did you hear that?"
"Sparkler?" The voice carried through the halls.
It sounded hollow and distant, distorted and twisted.
"Keep your voice down, dwarf." A man unknown to them threatened.
"Varric." Naomi whispered.
"Can we just leave him?" Dorian joked.
Their quickened their pace to find the source, "And miss on all the lovely banter between
you two? Not likely."
Dorian entered a small chamber, the hinges of a wooden door grinding the rust away in
between them.
"Well, well, if it isn’t more Venatori scum. Have you missed me, my darlings?" He twirled his
staff in front of him, sending ice into the farthest soldier.
There were three.
"Blood of the Elder One!" A Venatori the other two soldiers roared.
Naomi unfurled two pistols from her chest, unloading them into the helmets of the two
men. She reloaded them as their bodies fell to the floor.
This room had been a bit more in running order than the other, lined with four cells that
could easily hold someone down here for the rest of their lives. More crystals, still. Naomi could
have sworn they made sounds.
"Quite handy, those seem." Dorian snickered.
She looked around as she put her freshly loaded pistols back into their holsters.
"Can be. Can also be more trouble than they’re worth.” Naomi saw him.
Varric.
Imprisoned. Corrupted. A red glow clung to his eyes, and his body gave off crackling
energy. He was a shadow of his former self, a demon in the dwarf's skin. When he spoke, his
voice was perverse and echoed, as if his former self was trying to speak through the haze of evil
clouding him.
"Andraste’s sacred knickers. You’re actually alive? I wasn’t sure. The hallucinations are too
realistic nowadays.” He stood up.
"Alexius sent us into the future.” Dorian answered for her, “We have arrived to save you!"
"Everything that happens to you is weird.” He chuckled at the Herald.
"You’d be right ‘bout that, mate…” She agreed.
"I’m always right. And when I’m not, I lie about it.” He gave her a wink, “So, what are you doing
here? Or did you just bring my pal here to trade quips with me?”
"If I said yes, would you believe me?” The mage chuckled.
"Yes.” Varric smirked.
"Okay, really, though. If we get to Alexius, and I just might be able to send us back to our own
time. Simple, really. No time distortion- no angry reddened dwarf.” Dorian explained.
"That…may not be as easy as you think. Alexius is just a servant. His “Elder One” assassinated
the Empress and led a demon army in a huge invasion of the South. The Elder One rules everything. What's left of it, anyway."

“What’s this ‘Elder One?’” Naomi asked.


“It’s the same old tune, ‘Let’s play with magic we don’t understand. It will make us incredibly powerful!’ Gets quite old, doesn’t it?” Dorian sighed.

“It does, indeed.” The corrupted dwarf agreed.

“I’m familiar with the sort…” Naomi was reminded of the Assassin-Templar war raging on elsewhere, “Is Alexius in the castle?” The Captain asked Varric as she removed a lock-pick kit from her belt.

“Yeah. If you wanna take him down, I’m in.”

“Is this ‘Elder One’ around?” Dorian seemed hopeful.

“Probably not.” Varric’s chest rose and fell, his vigor leaving him for a moment.

Naomi did all she could to remind herself that this was preventable- that she could stop this future from ever happening: if the mage was to be believed, of course.

The prison door swung open, releasing him. The Captain returned her tools to their proper place.

“Let’s get moving.” Dorian walked ahead, Naomi and Varric following behind them.

“What happened to you?” She frowned.

“Red lyrium.” He shook his head, “It’s just what it does.”

She remembered Consus’s warning as they ran through the dungeon, water sloshing beneath their feet. It was a confusing maze of ups, downs, lefts, and rights. She was thankful Dorian had been there to guide them through this Hell hole.

“What do you think, Sparkler?” Varric joked to Dorian, “Ten royals says the next thing we run into farts fire.”

“I’ll take the bet. I win either way.” He laughed.

“Varric? That you?”

A static version of a once-familiar voice rang through the chambers. Naomi came to yet another cell along the right side of the hall crystalline hall.

Sera.

Or what was left of her.

“Oh, shit! You too? No, no, no! You can’t be here. You’re dead, and they don’t come back!” She cried.

“Right, she’s a spirit-came back just to haunt you.” Dorian fake growled at her.

“Why? I didn’t do piss to her!”

“Oh, for the love of- No one’s dead! Alexius used time magic!” Varric groaned, “Look, we’re going to end this and get you out of here. Does that help?”

“A bit. Sort of. Something should.” Sera shuddered as Naomi began to work on the lock of the cell, “The day you died? I ran out of arrows making them pay. Then it didn’t matter anymore. He’s got demons and gods and… I had a bow. And I just…I wanted them to hurt!” The city elf choked on her own tears, “If you’re really here, I’ll frigging die to spit in their faces.”

Naomi met Sera’s intense gaze, and she saw a reflection of herself as a younger woman. The same look that she’d had when her nativity almost led to her demise. She wouldn’t wish it on anyway.

“Hold on to that feeling, Sera.” The Captain pulled the elf to her feet, “You’ll need it when we find Alexius.”

“Damn right we will.” The blonde elf was pure rage, “Last of us up here. In that room.” She pointed up ahead, “Bull was the last to get dragged out. Took down a few with ‘em. The elfy-elf still wails in my sleep, no matter how much I shout at him to shut up. Could use his help, yeah?”

“We could.” Dorian agreed, “Let’s go free our apostate friend.”

The entrance to the final cell was a few paces away. They hushed themselves as they heard voices through the door on the other side of the arched, stone funnel. The doors were warped
wood, framed by an iron casing that aged all but well.
“Use these if you need them,” Naomi handed Sera and Varric each a dagger from their holsters on
her thigh.
Dorian caste a barrier on the party, bashing the door in with a kick.
Two more Venatori soldiers, heavily armored, javelins at the ready.

“You are running out of time.”
“What do you want me to do, just leave him here?” She said aloud.
Her companions looked at her briefly, engaging in combat after the Venatori men charged
them, pointed ends out.
“Herald!” Solas yelled from a cell to her right.
Naomi sidestepped, grabbing the wooden pole with her hand, punching the armored helmet
with her other, the metal knuckles of her gloves leaving indents as she pulled it away. Hard steel.
He was still dazed, and his weapon was still gripped by his enemy.
Sera took the opportunity to trip him, sending him to his back, relieving the javelin of his
grasp. The city elf kicked his helmet off with a mighty thrust of her leg, slicing his throat with
blinding speed.
Dorian set the other soldier aflame just as the Venatori knight made a move to attack
Varric.

Now, Varric faced a Venatori on fire.
“Thanks for that!” He yelled, dodging flaming javelin.
“Whoopsies!” The mage caste a lightning bolt towards the metal soldier, forcing him to flail like a
fish mid-motion. He soon fell to the floor.
Varric frowned at him.
Naomi’s enthusiasm grew smaller as she saw the large amounts of red lyrium being stored
in the cells. The place looked like it hadn’t been visited in months, like a cave found out in the
wilderness.
An imprisoned Solas remained silent, watching, frightened by the sudden noise. Naomi
noticed his aura was different. She’d seen it before in passing but he always seemed...guarded. He
was fragile. Demoralized.
“The dead haunt me, yet…” He stuttered, “I’m sorry. It’s all my fault, I did this- that orb, The
Elder One. Forgive me.” He sobbed.
His aura turned feral, like a wild animal. Whispers of a mad man escaped his lips as he fell
to his knees. Naomi knelt down to him, rested her hand on his glowing shoulder. The red light
illuminated her, as if a holy savior sent to save him.
From himself.
“Solas, it’s me. We’re all alive.” Naomi’s Precursor vision dug deep into the elf as he lifted his
head, “Tell me, what did you mean of the Orb and the Elder One? How are you to take the blame
for this?”
“There was a burn on the ground. You’re supposed to be dead. How are you here?” Solas asked.
“Dodgy with that question, wasn’t he?” Dorian’s mustache twirled on his finger, “Fascinating.”
“Fascinating indeed.” Varric glowered.
“Make sense.” Sera’s dagger dripped with blood to her side, “Make sense now.”

“Beware the-“ Consus’s voice was blocked from Naomi’s consciousness.
“What did you do?” She whispered to the elf in front of her.
He looked upon her with the eyes of a man who’d seen too much, and dabbled too far.
“You would think such…understanding would stop a man…from making such terrible mistakes.
You would be wrong…believe me.” A woman’s feint whisper interrupted the Captain’s
interrogation, “This world is an…abomination. It must…never…come to pass.”
Naomi looked to her right, hearing her more vividly. A large crystal grew in the middle,
the faint silhouette of a being growing out. Horns spiraled from the top of it. Familiar horns.
Decorated horns.
Vivienne’s horns.
She was bound to the large structure, literally having sprouted from its side.  
“Vivienne…” Sera murmured, “I thought y-y-ou-“  
“The screams…they did nothing for me. I stopped…long ago. Please, come here… I must… I must…” Vivienne’s neck rolled, as if losing consciousness, “The year… 9:42, Dragon. Cassandra…tried…we all did…but red lyrium does strange things to…Seekers.”  
“Jaysus,” Naomi thought to herself.  
She wasn’t sure where Vivienne began and where her prismatic tomb ended.  
“Then it’s true, we’ve missed an entire year.” Dorian seemed deflated. Not a way he usually acted when he was right about something.  
“Then we go back.” Naomi growled.  
“Can you reverse the process?” Solas grabbed the Captain’s shoulders. It startled her—she almost hit him, “You could return and obviate the events of the last year. It may not be too late…”  
“Please…stop this from happening. Alexius…serves the Elder One. More powerful…than the Maker…No one…challenges him and lives.” The Enchanter’s voice wavered, “Leliana…Cullen. Find them. Go quickly, before the Elder One learns you’re here…”  

The Lady of Iron raised a shaking hand. It shook violently, as if the act was like lifting a sack of lead, “Do…not…trust…him…” Vivienne’s last breath dispersed in front of them, giving an added chill to the room.  
Naomi gazed as the Orlesian’s limp body hung from the side of the crystal. Its sharp edges began to dig into her hanging stomach, allowing blood to trickle to the ground.  
Her attention turned back to Solas.  
“Why would she say that?” She asked him.  
“I’ve made mistakes, Herald. We all make them, don’t we?” He began to sob once again, “I beg you, let me atone for my sins, allow me to fix what pride had wrought.”  
The Captain looked behind her.  
“Need all the help we can get.” Varric flipped his dagger, catching it by the hilt.  
“Oh fucking fuck fuck, get to your feet and let’s GO!” Sera marched towards the exit, “Scavenger hunt for dead people. Ridiculous.”  

The party found a staircase winding up to a second floor. The castle was eerily vacant of guards, of anyone, really.  
“Gunpowder sped up the process.” Solas choked, “When the Elder One seized The Dishonored, they all died trying to protect it. They failed. The contraptions he made with the possession of such technology…”  
“Silence yourself, apostate.” Dorian hushed.  
Naomi did her best to not engage in conversation. It was a nightmare. Not reality. No, she couldn’t accept anyone’s fate to this. She simply gave him a saddened look over her shoulder and kept marching in silence. No use in getting worked up in something that wouldn’t happen.  
Their clothes grew damp as they hastened up the never-ending staircase, the crystalline horror becoming more abundant at every level. Not a single shadow was safe from its glow.  
“I believe this is the floor that holds the throne room.” Dorian spoke quietly as they climbed the last of the stairs.  
They heard screaming and a thud as they reached level ground.  
“You will break!” A man, yelling.  
“I will die first!” A heavily-accented response. A charming lisp.  
“Leliana…” Naomi grit her teeth at the recognition of her voice, pulling a pistol from behind her holster. She unloaded its chamber into the lock of the door that swung open from the targeted impact.  
“Or you will.” Leliana, suspended from two chains, took advantage of the distracted Venatori soldier, grasping his neck with her muscular legs.  
She resembled a spider pouncing on a prey caught in her web, the precision of her motion was unsettling. A single “crack” echoed throughout the room, the soldier falling to his face onto the stone.
Leliana was a monstrous shell of what Naomi had left in Haven. Her face had been aged; wrinkles in all direction of her once-beautiful face. Her eyes had lost their color, and she had hallowed sockets for lids.

Naomi ran to her aid, unlocking the cuffs that hung her from the ceiling.

“You’re alive!” The Spymaster coughed.

“And you’re safe, now.” Naomi’s voice was saturated with angst.

“Forget ‘safe.’” Leliana rubbed her wrists and stretched her knees, “If you came back from the dead, you need to do better than ‘safe.’ You need to end this.”

She walked over to a chest in the corner of the room, equipping her bow and quiver full of arrows. Leliana tossed Sera a spare. The bloodthirsty elf released a menacing cackle.

The torture chamber was littered with weapons and tools. They looked like devices from medieval times. They’d prove useful in arming her allies.

“You…aren’t curious how we got here?” Dorian asked the Nightingale.

“No.”

“Alexius sent us into the future. This, his victory, his Elder One – it was never meant to be.”

“Why did you ask me if you were going to tell me anyway?” The Nightingale glared.

This Leliana was not the same person from before, and not just by looks.

“You Mages always wondered why people fear you…No one should have this power.” Leliana’s fists curled to her sides, “This is all pretend to you, some future you hope will never exist. I suffered. The whole world suffered. It was real.”

The Captain’s head bowed, almost ashamed. She couldn’t let Leliana’s words falter her strong resolve. It wasn’t real. They’d never go through this. It wouldn’t ever happen. She shook her head, clearing her thoughts.

“We’ve wasted enough time. Let’s keep moving.” Naomi left the room, anxious see if they’d find Cullen.

Part of her hoped that she wouldn’t.

Just as Dorian predicted, the throne room was close. The Inquisition party bounded through an upkept door, this time, into the long dining hall of Redcliffe Castle. There were a few Venatori agents, but they were quickly dispatched by the skill of Naomi’s companions.

“The door. It is from Eden. You have the Key.”

“What do-“

The Captain turned to find something she hadn’t expected to find at the opposite end of the hallway. A Precursor gate. A barrier that stretched almost as high as the ceiling, almost as wide as the tattered and destroyed room they stood in. Sky outside was blackened with ash; there was only a sinister echo of flame that cast shadows upon the towering door.

“Maker’s Breath! Where did Alexius find this? How did he even move it here?” Dorian ran his hands along the patterns, resting his torch on the stone ground.

“It’s ancient Elvhen. I did not know such structures still existed.” Solas studied the barrier further.

“Can we open it?” Leliana inspected it as well.

“Aye, we can open it.” Naomi walked slowly to the door, dumfounded.

“How…how is this here?”

She fumbled around in her shirt, pulling out the circular pendant; the same one that opened the temple door right before she arrived in Thedas.

Just as all the others, a circular hole stood waiting in the middle, illuminating at the serpent-decorated key that she wore around her neck.

The Herald ignore the gaping mouths on either side of her. There was no time to explain. The gate opened with a loud grinding noise, alerting all those who’d stand on the other side of it.

Alexius stood at the center of the room, his back turned towards the door. Stained glass, both cracked and attended to, illustrated on either side of the chapel-resembling throne room. It was truly beautiful, even in its decayed state.

Still no sign of Cullen.
“Least you could’a’ done is killed me proper, mate.” Naomi taunted.

The maddened mage slowly turned to face them, fear reaching to each side of his face.

“And here you are, finally. I knew you would appear again. Not that it would be now. But I knew I hadn’t destroyed you. My final failure.” Alexius growled.

“Oh, I doubt that. You don’t seem to be good at much. ‘Cept for dying.” Sera drew an arrow, aiming at him.

“It doesn’t matter now. All we can do is wait for the end.” The old man drew his staff.

“It does matter, and I will undo this.” Naomi’s Sword of Eden began to glow.

“How many times have I tried? It cannot be undone. Your Commander tried, so, so hard…and now look at him.” Alexius waved a hand, instructing the guards opened a door.

Felix was the first to exit, taking place next to his father. He had a strange limp, as if he’d been sewn together with burlap and tie.

“How long had he been in there?” She wondered.

Next came a man. A prisoner.

He only wore breeches and his boots. His shining armor gone; it seemed unnatural to see him so exposed. His hands were bound in chains, led by two Venatori men.

“C-Cullen…”

Large, red crystals shot up the side of his shoulder, smaller red diamonds cursing the right side of his face. His amber eyes had melted into a smoldering red, filled with anguish and regret.

“Naomi?” His voice was deep and twisted, unlike the others, unlike any being she’d ever spoke with before.

It was definitely not how she wanted to hear him say her name.

“Ruin and death, that’s all that matters. The Elder One comes: for me, for you, for us all.” As Alexius spoke, a roar from above shook the temple, sending rocks colliding with the ground.

Leliana leapt to the side of the throne, a blur of vengeance and years of perfecting murderous skill. She grabbed Felix from the ground, holding a knife to his neck.

“That’s Felix? Maker’s breath, Alexius, what have you done?” Dorian sobbed.

“He would have died, Dorian! I saved him!” Alexius turned to Leliana, “Please, don’t hurt my son, I’ll do anything you ask.”

“That is necromancy, not salvation.” Dorian spat, “Give us the amulet, Alexius!”

“Let him go,” Alexius’s voice trembled, “I swear you’ll get what you want.”

Leliana’s eyes grew deadly. The world seemed to pause. The lights dimmed, the sounds halted, everything stopped.

“I want the world back.”

The Nightingale glided her dagger across the walking corpse’s neck, sending blood spurting through the air.

“No!” Alexius swung his staff, sending magic through the air.

The explosion knocked the two guards, and Cullen, to their sides. Using the distraction as her companions engaged in combat, she ran towards the Commander, plowing her swords into the chests of the two guards on the ground. Leaving them sticking out of the bodies, she dropped to her knees next to her Lion, holding his head in her hands.

“Let me save you, this time…” Her eyes welled as she traced the rocks growing from his face, “I should have listened to you. I’m so sorry.” Her hands trembled underneath her.

“Sh…” He tried to calm her, but his distorted voice only made her more distraught.

She used her hidden blade to unlock his restraints, allowing him to stand on his own. She drew her weapons from the bodies on the ground, whipping the blood from them. Cullen grabbed the dead Venatori’s sword and shield.

“Let us end this.” He whispered.

Together, they charged into combat.

Alexius sent bolts of magic towards them. Dorian and Solas hurled magic at him from a distance while shielding the rest of the party. Varric and Sera launched deadly arrows and bolts into his barrier, weakening him further.
Alexius teleported to either side of the room, making them chase him when his barriers grew fragile. Dodging his attacks here hard, and even harder once he opened a rift, allowing demons to flood the room.

A pride demon caught Naomi at the heel, landing her on her back. The beast picked her up in its hand and waved her around, sending her into a daze. She used her hidden blades to stab its hand.

Cullen roared, red energy soaring through his body. He began to charge the demon head on, his sword leaving a blazing trail behind him. He leapt higher than should be possible, and stabbed the demon in his chest, bashing it in the face with his shield. His naked muscles ached at the abuse from the red lyrium growing from his body.

The demon stumbled, dropping Naomi and allowing her to translocate to the ground. A whirlwind of red surrounded the two, and the pride demon quickly disintegrated. Cullen landed on the ground, pained, but alive.

Naomi sealed the rift, finishing off the rest of the demons, leaving her arm feeling ablaze. Alexius was quickly slain once his magic waned and his barriers fell.

“He wanted to die, didn’t he? All those lies he told himself, the justifications…He lost Felix long ago and didn’t even notice. Oh, Alexius…” Dorian whispered, covered in blood, taking the slain mage’s necklace into his hands.

Sera nodded to the companions around her. They seemed to have exchanged an unspoken vow. The beast in the sky let out another ferocious roar that shook the castle again.

“Frig, frig! That’s how they won. How it won!” Sera was in a panic.

Cullen looked to Naomi.

“Make it right, and I’ll fight. We’ll fight.” He choked on his words, leading the agents outside.

“Leliana, shut the door behind us.” He ordered.

“No! I will not allow you all to commit suicide.” Naomi’s heart was in pieces.

“Look at us. We’re already dead. The only way we live is if this day never comes.” Leliana shut the large, wooden doors and dropped the blockade. Cullen and the others were out of view, trapped on the other side.

“Cast your spell. You have as much time as I have arrows.” Leliana stood between them and a horde of demons stampeding through the castle.

Dorian prepared the spell, pouring every ounce of power he had into the small amulet. The sounds that came from the hallway were horrendous. Flesh tearing, screams echoing, blood curdling, gunshots, bodies plummeting to the ground…a red pool began to form at the bottom of the doors.

“Through the darkness, I am shielded by flame.” The Nightingale whispered, loading a single arrow into her bow.

The doors ripped open, the bodies of her companions pouring in under the feet of their murderers.

“Andraste guide me. Maker, take me to your side.” Leliana continued to rapidly unload her bow into the demons, holding the line and backing up ever so slowly.

A bullet plowed itself into Leliana’s shoulder; she was unable to grasp her own arrows. She started swinging her bow violently, bashing in skulls with pure force.

“No!” Naomi began to run to her, but Dorian grabbed her elbow with his free hand.

“You move, and we all die!” He yelled.

Another pride demon walked through the door, holding Cullen’s dead body in his hand, his head in another. The heavy feet of the monster flattened the bodies that littered the floor.

A portal opened behind Naomi. Dorian pulled her in with haste, but it was too late. What she saw would never be forgotten… And certainly never forgiven.
"We are one brotherhood. As we share the glory of our victories, so too should we share the pain of our defeats. In this way, we grow closer...we grow stronger."
-Assassin Malik Al-Sayf

Dorian and the Captain appeared to have returned to Redcliffe. Naomi was stuck in a blank stare, unmovng, silent. Alexius stood just where he had been when he cast his wicked spell, his devilish smile fading into a frown of defeat.

“You’ll have to do better than that.” Dorian antagonized the crumbling mage.

Alexius fell to his knees, unsure of the cause of his failure, “You won, Dorian. There is no point extending this charade.” The Magister whispered, “Felix…”

“It’s going to be all right, father.” The sick son tried to assure his father.

“But you’ll die…”

“Everyone dies.” Felix looked away from him, observing a silent Naomi.

“Put aside all claim to Redcliffe, and we let you all live.” The Herald sputtered.

Alexius was calm, quiet. Relieved, almost. It’s almost as if following the orders of his superior drained him, and that burden was now lifted from his shoulders. They took silence as his confirmation.

Two Inquisition soldiers came behind the fallen Magister, taking his arms into their hands. His gaze remained locked to the ground, his body limp, his lips unmoving. Felix followed him, bidding farewell to Dorian.

The Captain absorbed the silence, observing her companion’s faces as tears began to intrude her eyelids.

“Well, I’m glad that’s over with!” Dorian stretched, adding some humor to the solemn environment.

Royal soldiers burst through the doors, piled in by the ranks, lining the sides of the hall with practiced formation. They held the same crest, the one Naomi had learned to be of the kingdom of Fereldan.

“Or not.” Dorian sighed.

A pair of nobles walked down the aisle of soldiers. The couple had the stink of highness, something the Captain had little experience dealing with, save for assassinations.

“Grand Enchanter, we’d like to discuss your abuse of our hospitality.” The man spoke.

“Your Majesties.” Fiona shuffled over, bowing.

The others bowed as well. Save for Naomi, of course.

“When we offered the mages sanctuary, we did not give them the right to drive our people from their homes.” The red-headed woman donned in armor agreed.

“King Alistair, Queen Katya, we never intended-“ Fiona begged.

“In light of your actions, good intentions are no longer enough. You and your followers have worn out your welcome. Leave Fereldan, or we’ll be forced to make you leave.” The one known as King Alistair stood strong.

“But… we have hundreds who need protection! Where will we go?” Fiona sobbed.

“With us…” Naomi’s words were barely a whisper, “Join the Inquisition.”

The Herald took to Fiona’s side, resting a gentle hand on her shoulder, “Join us as free souls
who’d fair ill under politics and borders…”
“And what are the terms of this agreement?” Fiona asked hotly.
“The Inquisition is better than what Alexius gave you, yes?” Dorian asked.
“No one fights well for their captors.” Blackwall added.
“I’ve known a lot of mages. They can be loyal friends if you let them. Friends who make bad
decisions, but still. Loyal.” Varric thought fondly and ill of Kirkwall all the same as he spoke.

The voices of her friends brought tears to the brink of rearing their ugly heads again.
Naomi found it harder to contain herself, but refused to show spectacle in front of two of the most
powerful people in Thedas.

Fiona thought about the situation she found herself in.
“It seems we have little choice but to accept whatever you offer.” The elf looked to the Herald.

The Captain shifted her cold gaze to the King and Queen.
“Your majesties, I would have you know that the Inquisition wishes not to undermine your
authority in such a matter,” she smiled awkwardly, “Fiona.” She lifted the elf to her feet, “We
would have you fight as allies at the Inquisition’s side.”
“A generous offer. But will the rest of the Inquisition honor it?” The rebel mage was not yet
convinced.
“I’ve seen…” Naomi looked to Dorian, “We’ve, seen, a future in which Thedas does not unite. We
cannot afford to be divided. The Breach threatens us all—livin’ and dead alike. If we are to have a
lick’o chance closing it, we depend on the full support of you ‘nd yer followers.”
“It’s ‘a generous offer,’ indeed. I doubt you’re going to get a better one from us.” The Queen added,
resting her hand on her hilt as if underlining the overstay of the mage rebellion’s welcome.
“We accept. It would be madness not to. I will gather my people and ready them for the journey
to Haven. The Breach will be closed. You will not regret giving us this chance.” Fiona bowed out
to the leaders of Fereldan, then to Naomi, and took her leave.

The Queen observed the Herald fondly, “You remind me of myself when I was younger.”
“Pardon, your grace. I do not believe we’ve formally met.” Naomi extended her hand, to which the
Queen gripped it welcomingly, “Naomi McNamara.”

“Katya Theirin.” She responded.
“Your majesties, pardon the rudeness of the Herald of Andraste, for she comes from lands not
practiced in the Court.” Cassandra glared at Naomi, slowly rising from where she once bowed her
head, “You would show these heroes some respect.”

Even the reprimand from the Seeker helped Naomi come to peace with the future that’d
been halted. However, she had to remain in character…for now.
“Heroes?” The Captain blurted, “Sounds like there’s a story to you two.”
“Outlandish indeed.” Katya snickered.
“You stand in the presence of the Commander of the Grey, or Hero of Fereldan as some may
address her.” Blackwall scoffed.
“I was there too, you know.” Alistair grinned.
“Yes, yes…and this is my loyal, loveable husband who so valiantly fought at my side when we
took down the Archdemon with the rest of the Wardens.” Katya smiled at her King, laughing at his
goofy facial expression.
“You’re both Grey Wardens?” The Captain asked.
“That depends who you ask, Herald. Some would deny our claim to still be active in the field.
Admittedly, we do spend most of our time running a kingdom.” The Queen responded
sarcastically.

Alistair yawned, “Being bored to death in the Courts for most your days seems like a
suitable cure to the Warden’s connection to the Darkspawn, if you ask me.”
“While we are on the subject,” Cassandra interjected, “Would you know of what became of the
Wardens?”

The Queen and King both grimaced at the question. It appeared to have been a sore
subject.
“That’s a matter of…private discussion. One held amongst Wardens.” The Queen’s brow furrowed, “You’ll forgive my hesitation to classify such information.”

“I would.” Naomi nodded, “We have a Warden of our own.”

Alistair seemed surprised by this information, “Who would that be?”

Naomi nodded her head to Blackwall.

Katya spoke hotly to the man, “State your name, Warden.”

A bead of sweat escaped the bearded man’s forehead, “Gordon Blackwall.”

King Alistair snapped his fingers, “Ah, I remember you. My, you haven’t aged a bit.” His toothy grin put Blackwall at ease, “Knew you looked familiar.”

The Queen observed him, her eyes squinting as if searching the man’s soul, “Interesting.”

Naomi was uncomfortable by the harsh analysis on her friend. She decided to return the focus to the matter at hand, “You can count on the Inquisition to protect Fereldan from the Breach. Demons won’t be swooping down from the heavens for much longer.”

“Swooping is bad.” King Alistair huffed, “You have our thanks. We will support you where we can.” King Alistair gave her a nod, and took the Queen’s hand in his.

“Have you heard it, too?” The Queen’s question to Blackwall interrupted the relaxing conversation.

Blackwall shook his head, “No.”

“Now is not the time, my love.” The King guided his armored Queen back from whence they came, “Not now.” He repeated himself.

They left together, their ranks falling into place.

Naomi turned to her followers, who gawked at her. She couldn’t help but notice the shift in Blackwalls’ aura—nervousness. She wasn’t given much time to study him.

"Not even to a King and Queen?” Cassandra hissed, "You couldn't bow once?"

Hearing the scorn of the harsh Nevarran voice moved her. The tears would not dam themselves any longer, as the Herald embraced the Seeker into a strong hug, weeping softly on her shoulder.

"I never thought I’d miss bein' yelled at so much in my entire life," She laughed, resting her hands on Cassandra's shoulder, "It warms me to see you 'live in well, Cassandra."

The shock on the Seeker's face was contagious, as the Herald's companions were taken aback at her sudden, soft demeanor.

"Close yer yaps," Naomi turned, wiping her eyes, headed for the village to meet Fiona and the Mages, "We've got work to do!"

Naomi sat on Dullahan’s back in silence as they walked alongside the mages on their voyage back to Haven.

“If Fiona and her malcontents are joining us as allies, we need to be prepared. Abominations are inevitable. Cullen doesn’t have enough Templars to handle incidents. Some of the rank and file need to be trained.” Vivienne spoke to Cassandra.

“The last thing we need are abominations running around.” The Seeker agreed.

“It’s good to see someone with an understanding of the situation.” Naomi could feel her harsh gaze behind her, “I’ll have a word with Cullen. We are reliant on his people absolutely. There has never been a greater threat to mages than the Breach. Until it is closed, no one is safe.” The Lady of Iron whispered.

“If no mage is safe, do yeh see yerself as a risk, too, then?” Naomi spoke from the front

“I am a risk, darling. Better to know it and use caution. Magic is dangerous, just as fire is dangerous. Anyone who forgets this truth gets burned.”

Naomi rolled her eyes to the woman behind her, giving a silent scowl.
“Tell me something. You said once that you wanted to change things. What future would you build for mages?” Vivienne asked Cassandra.

“The Circles need to be restored, but freely. Mages should have liberties, but also supervised for their own protection.”

“That’s comforting to hear, but you’ll find opposition to the idea even among friends. It’s something to consider, my dear.” Vivienne appreciated Cassandra’s understanding.

The Captain led the front, remaining silent and disengaged from conversation.

“A divided Thedas will fall… I’ll bloody well level the Heavens to stop it. We need to combine our knowledge, our resources…” She sighed to herself, “There’s already a divide between my people and the people of Thedas. We drink in each other’s company, but that covers it. It has to change.”

She turned to look at her companions, all laughing and bantering with another. Naomi wanted to embrace all of them, one by one, thankful they were alive and able to tease each other.

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The Mage Rebellion reached the fishing village just on the outskirts of Haven. It was small—too small to hold all of them. Many of the refugees gawked at The Dishonored at port as they passed Her. The vessel floated gracefully as the water remained swift underneath the ice blanket that would otherwise tame it.

“I’ll catch up.” Before they could say a word, Naomi and Dullahan took off towards the ship.

She posted him right outside the bridge, saluting the soldiers as she walked aboard. The sailors cheered for her, crowding near the edges of the ship to welcome the hundreds of mages as they poured around the bend.

“Adibas, in my Quarters. Now.”

“C-Captain, you’re back! It’s been three days’ time!”

Losing composure, Naomi walked into her room. Adibas hurried in after her, concerned.

Once the doors were fastened, she turned to him, tears streaming down her face.

“I tho-thou-thought—“Her whole body was shaking.

Adibas ran to her side, holding her as tight as he could without harming her. She buried her face into his chest, squeezing onto him as if he’d been a life raft.

“Shh, it’s okay, Captain. Whatever it was, it’s over, and you’re here now.” He pat her back lovingly.

She trembled, unable to speak.

“I hate this place…” She managed to croak, “I’m so sorry I brought you all here.”

“Captain, look at me.” He lifted her face so that she’d meet him face to face. “As Quartermaster, is it not my job to see to the status of the crew? Do you know what I haven’t heard, not once?”

Naomi shook her head, ‘No.’

“The blame being placed on you. Many of our sailors know by now that the chances of us going home are slim. They’ve accepted it.”

“Why can’t I accept it, then, Adibas? It’s not just home, or the Assassins, or even that blasted pirate I miss— it’s them. What if I—“She inhaled sharply, “what if I never see them again? What if I fail here, and condemn their world?” Her voice trailed off, “I should have told him…”

She shook herself free of Adibas’s embrace.

“I saw the future of Thedas if we don’t unite. I was cast a year ahead—”

“You went a year into the future?”

“Ask Dorian, then, he was with me…” The images crossed her eyes.

“Who?”

She sat down, growing faint.

“Adie,” She looked up to him, “I saw unspeakable things. The Apple recorded most it.”

“If it’s that important, perhaps you should show us. Now, about the future thing—”

“There’s also something else I must speak with you on.” She leaned up, folding her hands, “We need to tell them.”
“What, exactly?” He asked.

“What, exactly?” She whispered, “You know as well as I we aren’t here by coincidence. There’s something afoot, and I’m sure if we don’t make past of it now, our world will suffer just as well as Thedas. I know we shan’t compromise the Brotherhood, Adibas, but by letting it die and not taking new recruits, are we not doing just that?” She gasped in between frantic outbursts.

She sat in her chair, fingers now curled around the edges of her seat.

“Gather the Officers and tell the crew- today’ll be the day we inform the others of our ranks.”

Adibas nodded in agreement, hesitant in movement.

“What is it?” She asked him, eyes still red.

“I worry for you. You’re reaching your carrying capacity, Captain.”

“What’s that ‘sposed to mean?”

“The pressures of our Assassin-Templar war were enough. But to add two more on top of it? The war on demons and the Mage-Templar war? Top this off with the fact I am the only one you talk to…I worry. I worry that, one day, if something happened to me—”

“Enough.” Naomi shook her head, “I’ve seen a future without you,” She sputtered, “I will not allow it, nor any talk as such.” Her body shook violently.

“As you wish, Captain.” He wore a gentle smile.

“Leave me.”

“Aye, aye!” He saluted her with the Assassin’s pledge, and dismissed himself.

“Prepare yourself. He comes for you, yet.”

“Damn it, Consus. I’ve never hated your voice so much as I do now.”

“It is not a matter for debate. There will be abominations among the mages, and we must be prepared! I have a moral obligation to agree with Lady Vivienne.” Cullen argued.

“If we resend the offer of an alliance, it makes the Inquisition appear incompetent at best, tyrannical at worst.” Josephine shook her head out of frustration.

“What was she thinking, turning mages loose with no oversight? The Veil is torn open!” Cullen shouted, rubbing his forehead.

“We need them to close the Breach. It’s not going to work if we make enemies of them.” Cassandra defended her.

“Don’t forget we also sent word to Therinfall Redoubt. They openly chose to ignore us because of our Mage-alliance. That doesn’t sound like a bunch of noble Templars to me, Curly.” Varric crossed his arms.

“Enough arguing! None of us were there. We did not see what they saw. We cannot afford to second-guess our people. The sole point of the Herald’s mission was to gain the mages’ aid, and that was accomplished, was it not?”

“The voice of pragmatism speaks! And here I was just starting to enjoy the circular arguments.” Dorian inserted himself into the conversation, leaning on the wall next to them.

“We should look into the things you saw in this ‘dark future.’ The assassination of Empress Celene? A demon army?” Leliana turned to Dorian.

“Sounds like something a Tevinter cult might do. Orlais falls, the Imperium rises. Chaos for everyone!” He applauded.

“One battle at a time. It’s going to take time to organize our troops and the mage recruits. Let’s take this to the war room.” Cullen nodded.

The Chantry doors opened for Naomi and her Officers. She wore a blackened, hooded, half-cape that was covered in intricate Celtic knot designs and a large Assassin Insignia emblazoned in silver. Her worn boots clicked as she walked through the hollow, now silent halls. She had an executive presence that could not be ignored.

She drew in a harsh breath when she saw Leliana and Cullen, imagining them in their
“future” forms. She didn’t enjoy the idea of Josephine being tortured to death, either. Her gaze shifted to Dorian.

“I take it you’re staying, then?” She allowed the distraction.

“Oh, didn’t I mention? The South is so charming and rustic, I adore it to little pieces.” He returned the gesture.

“There’s no one I’d rather be stranded in time with, future or present.” Naomi held her hand out to him.

“Excellent! But let’s not get “stranded” again anytime soon, yes?” He shook it with a strong hand, excitedly, “Something big is about to happen, isn’t it?” He pried.

“You said you had questions for me when we got back. Now’d be the time’ta ask ‘em. These are the Officers of my ship.”

They passed introductions.

“You’re a sailor, now?” Dorian and the others walked with them.

“Since I was a wee lass, aye.”

“We’ve sailed together for eleven years to date.” Adibas smirked.

They poured into the room, surrounding the large table.

“It’s a little cramped in here…” Iron Bull mumbled, moving around people.

“Can you not elbow my jaw?” Blackwall snickered, pushing the Qunari’s arm away from him.

Naomi and her Officers took to the front of the table. With all of them crammed into the small room, the temperature became quite hot.

“Advisors, companions, Officers…I’ve asked you to join me today based on the events Dorian and I witnessed in Redcliffe.” She started.

“A year ahead in Redcliffe; one that stems from our dear Lady Herald dying.” Dorian clarified, twisting his mustache.

“Point being, it was shit. And it came to pass by my death and our division.” She leaned on her Staff, “I know of your meetings that do not include me. I am sure you’ve learned of ours, ‘swell.”

The Spymaster blushed slightly, giving her a wry grin.

“No more.” The Captain took the staff in both hands, tapping the ground with its’ bladed end, "Today, we extend the warm embrace of the Brotherhood."
The First Civilization

Chapter Summary

"We built you in our own image, we built you to survive."
-Minerva

He Apple came to life, projecting illusions onto the wall with bursts of light. From what they saw, they were no longer in the war room. They were watching the memories of Naomi the second time she found a Piece of Eden—her Sword.

Gasps and sounds of alarm littered the room as they watched the images pass. A man’s voice filled the room as they watched the recording.

“Naomi, be careful with that thing.” Edward grabbed her hand, his piercing blue eyes tearing through her soul.

Naomi’s hand extended before her, reaching for a Sword that was stuck in stone. A hand shot from her peripherals, grabbing her wrist.

The bracers he wore had the same insignia as she.

“Come off it, what’s the worst that could happen?”

“Uh, how about dying?” His brow furrowed, “You can’t be so reckless.”

“You shouldn’t be the one lecturing me about being reckless.” She spat.

“Aye, I have a fancy for finding meself in danger. Doesn’t mean you have to follow my lead.”

“Edward, are you asking me to take control?”

“Just be careful.”

His face had the same tan, too, and his scars made him appear menacing. He had sandy-blonde hair that was tied back from his face. He obviously cared about her, and begrudgingly released her wrist.

Following her own memories, her eyes focused back on the weapon.

“The Sword of Eden…” Naomi whispered as she wrapped her nervous hands around the hilt.

Upon drawing it free from the stone, her world went black.

The room was dark before the next part of the recording started, the illusion holding everyone’s attention.

“Child of Isu, we have long awaited for you to find us.”

A spectral woman walked to her, dressed in robes and intricate jewelry. She wore a headpiece that screamed of authority.

“What is happening? Who are you?” The young Naomi sounded panicked.

“Do not fear me, girl. I am Minerva, scientist and member of the Capitoline Triad. You and your people call us the ‘First Civilization,’ ‘The Ones who Came Before,’ ‘Precursors.’ However, we were called the Isu in our time.” The heavenly woman frowned., “But I am afraid that we failed. We were betrayed.”

“You…you’re a Precursor?” Naomi dropped to one knee, “Forgive my ignorance, m’lady.”

“We do not have the time to waste on such formalities, Child. The Sword of Eden was designed to aid our military leaders against the Humans in the Isu-Human war. It will grant
you charisma and leadership qualities, as well as deadly combat capabilities. You must not abuse this power.”

“The Human-Isu war…Mentor Auditore speaks of this on a Memory Seal…What combat abilities do you speak of, Your Grace?”

“Translocation, echolocation, and the ability to cut through any substance. Charge the hilt with life energy, and it will release a shockwave that could decimate an entire battlefield. It is my hope that it will aid you in the Assassin-Templar war. Your Bureau must win. You must find a Staff, and an Apple. You must close the…” Minerva stopped speaking, looking around in fear, “I must take my leave, now. The Traitor is listening.”

“Who? Minerva!”

The images of the temple trickled back in, a blurred picture of Edward’s face clarified in her wake.

“Naomi! Don’t you die on me…” He growled, shaking her, “Blasted First Civi’s!”

“K-Kenway…” She mumbled.

“Jaysus, McNamara, what was that stunt ‘bout?” He wiped her face with a piece of cloth, blood trickling down her chin.

“We must speak with Mentor Ah Tabai…” She trailed off, standing up with Edward’s help.

Naomi’s looked out to the cliff side, revealing a gorgeous tropical island with blue, crystalline water. The palm trees swayed beneath the open-walled temple. The Jackdaw and The Dishonored loomed in the distance. She extended her hand to Edward, Sword of Eden in the other.

“Let’s give this a go, yeah?”

“What’s this?” He took her hand, and they were instantly cast upon the deck of her ship.

Seconds later, she collapsed to the ground, Adibas yelling at Kenway in the background.

The room faded back into normalcy. The Staff fell to the floor as she took a sharp breath, gasping for air and buckling forward. Blood dripped from her face to the map in front of her.

“Captain…” Adibas whispered, “Are you alright?”

“Aye.” She raised a hand, dismissing his concern.

Thaddeus picked the Staff off the floor, leaning it into the corner of the room.

“The First Civilization were the humanoids who came before us on our planet, Earth.” She wiped her nose with the back of her sleeve, tilting her head to the ceiling. Adibas handed her a cloth.

“They created humans to be enslaved as a workforce, ingraining a special coding in them.” The Quartermaster continued, “This coding enabled them to be controlled. The artifacts used to control them were called the Pieces of Eden- Eden being a location controlled by the Isu during their era.”

“The humans eventually rebelled, led by Adam and Eve, two Isu-Human hybrids who stole the Apple from their vault.” Naomi added, “The war distracted the planet from a prophecy that threatened them all- an impending solar flare headed for Earth.”

She leveled her head to face the rest of them.

“Sound familiar?”

“A war between two factions distracting the lands from impending doom?” Blackwall sneered sarcastically.

“The Breach!” Cassandra exclaimed, “Like how the Mage-Templar war is distracting Thedas from the Breach!”

“Right, lass.”

“Do go on.” Dorian was enthralled.

Solas shifted uncomfortably.

“The Capitoline Triad-formed by Juno, Minerva, and Jupiter-tasked themselves with finding a solution to save the planet. Sadly enough, they failed, and the Old World was obliterated. Few Humans survived, even less Isu. Religion and history get their names wrong, but..."
“And that brings us to current times.” Adibas began talking again, “Ancient temples scattered the planet, long lost forgotten by time. These temples house the Pieces of Eden. Many have stumbled upon them, but only those with a Precursor bloodline may access their true potential.” He nodded to Naomi, “That would be people like her and Edward Kenway, the man you saw in the projection.”

“So, what we watched—those were your memories?” Sera asked her.

“Aye, they were.”

“He’s sure handsome. You guys get ina’ lot of trouble together?” Sera prodded.

“That they did.” Kiliean answered behind Naomi.

“Not the point.” The Captain growled.

Cullen rubbed the back of his neck.

“Throughout history, two major factions fought over these Pieces.” Aquilla continued the story.

“The Assassins, and the Templars.”

Naomi and the Commander met eyes.

“The Templars believed that, by collecting as many Pieces of Eden as they could, they could force a universal peace upon the people. They’d sacrifice their free will and essentially enslave them again.” Aquilla growled.

“And then there’s us.”

“Us?” Iron Bull asked curiously.

“The Assassins.”

“You’re assassins?” Leliana seemed shocked.

A ripple of unrest shot throughout the small gathering.

“We are not just those who’d kill blindly. We follow the Assassin’s Creed. We have morals, tenets, rules, guidelines. We have a maxim. We are an organization that fights for freedom and the free will of those around us. We fight for peace through civil means, and kill those who would oppose or threaten that ideal.”

“As Left Hand of the Divine, I can sympathize with that.” Lelliana smirked.

“The Assassin-Templar war has raged on for thousands of years. Even now, I continue to lose many Brothers and Sisters to the Cause…and I can only hope that we are winning, now.” Kilean’s face saddened.

“What are these rules, these tenets?” Vivienne raised her brow.

“We have already said more than allowed, agreeing that the information shared today would cause minimal damage, should it be leaked. The tenets are for those of the Brotherhood alone.” Adibas whispered.

“So, that symbol you all wear…” Cassandra started to piece together the information.

“Aye, the Assassins Insignia.” Naomi seemed proud, “I tell yah all this now not simply to be transparent, but I believe…” Her brow furrowed as she tried to ignore a raging headache developing within her skull, “I believe Minerva was trying to warn me of the Breach that day.”

“Why would you think that?” Varric asked.

“The day that I came here…well, it would be easier to show you.”

“Captain, the Staff drains you with a vigor the other Pieces do not possess. I think it best to give it a rest for now.” Adibas whispered to her.

“Are they magic?” Dorian cocked his head, his arms folded into his signature “thinking” pose.

“No, the blasted things are technology. There’s a mad difference.”

“Technology?” Sera inquired.

“The offspring of science and time. It’s a definitive process, not wild and unstable like your magics of Thedas. These weapons were forged no differently than the swords and daggers held on your person. They were just…well, the ‘ anvils,’ so to speak, were…” Aquilla sighed, trying his best to break it down.

“So they’re enchanted?” Iron Bull spoke up.

“No, they’re not enchanted.”

“That’s a subject for another time.” Adibas continued, “The goal of the Assassins- to learn the ways
Naomi described the events that had transpired before Cullen found her in Haven. This included finding the Apple, being ambushed by the Templars that Edward was supposed to have taken care of, as well as the Templar Captain who controlled her sailors, leading up to forcing her combining the Apple and Staff.

“So, those wounds on you when I found you…were from your own men?” Cullen asked in a hushed tone.

“And women,” Naomi clarified, “but yes. They were not of their own minds.”

“And this Minerva you saw in your vision, she told you to find the Staff and Apple right before she warned of this ‘Traitor’ listening?” Leliana was trying to piece the puzzle together, “How long ago was that?”

“I’ve had the Sword for…Christ, how long has it been? Years, I reckon. At least four ago. Found the Staff a few after, and the Apple- well, you know the rest.”

“Needless to say, the topics exchanged in this room cannot be made public.” Kilean spoke the obvious.

“We merely shared ‘tis with yeh ‘cause we wanna help.” Thaddeus added.

“That’s enough for today, however. I will answer the many questions I’m sure you all have at a later time. For now, if you’d allow it, I’d like to speak with the Advisors privately,” She turned to her crew mates, "That'll be all. You have my thanks for your time."

The Officers left the room in practiced discipline, however resilient Adibas was to the prospect. Some of the companions, however, were not so eager.

“Are you going to be alright, boss?” Iron Bull asked her.

“I’ll be fine, Bull.” She smiled, “It’ll take a lot more than some green git and shiny weapons to get rid of me, mate.”

Chuckling, the group left the room. Solas left without a word, and Naomi found it strange.

Cassandra took to her side.

“Now that it’s just the five of us…” The Captain started.

She picked wrapped both hands around the staff again.

“Are you sure?” Cullen asked, concerned.

“Aye. It’ll be brief.”

Naomi used the Staff and Apple of Eden to only show them the battle with Alexius, not anything beforehand—including her opening the door or any previous conversation. The party was red and crackling with red lyrium poisoning, the dragon’s roar could be heard in the background. Leliana and Cullen saw themselves, both decayed and abused.

She ended the projections just as she ran to Cullen’s aid, also keeping the heart-touching scene and the gory bits out of sight. Her body began to tremble as it ended. She took a seat at the head of the table, her face growing pale.

The four of them stood in silence, horror-struck.

“That roar- I’ve heard it before.” Leliana’s tone was fragile.

“An Archdemon…” Cullen’s voice cracked.

“Does that mean this is another Blight?” Cassandra held her breath for the answer.

“It is too early to know. Perhaps this was just a new type of demon. We should not jump to conclusions just yet.” Josephine remained collected, “For now, we must decipher who this Elder One is, and try to make the connection to Minerva and this ‘Traitor,’ she speaks of. I will send word to my contacts,” She tapped her board with her writing utensil out of excitement, “Without actually asking.”

“And what of this red lyrium?” Cassandra pondered, “Herald, didn’t you report earlier that Lord Seeker Lucious mentioned it?”

“Aye. Said something of some lot being resistant to the stuff. Don’t know who or why. Wanna fill me in on this Archdemon, blight nonsense?”

"A Blight, the release of darkspawn, occurs when an Archdemon is formed by the corruption of a
High Dragon," The Seeker looked to the Spymaster, "We must find out if this is true."
"On it." She passed her a hardened grin.
"Uh, 'High Dragon?' There's fuckin' dragons here, now, too?"
"Perhaps we should have a lesson on this, Lady Herald." Josephine suggested, "For now, you
should rest after to events of Redcliffe. The information shared today provides some insight unto
your arrival, however more questions are presented...I thank you. We, thank you."

The fuzzy feeling in Naomi's chest from the gratitude of those sharing her space made
her uncomfortable.

"In the meantime, I'll begin preparations to march on the summit. Maker willing, the mages will
be enough to grant us victory." Cullen cleared his throat, “and keep you alive.”

They concluded the meeting and began to leave the room. Naomi grabbed Cullen’s arm
as he walked passed; he looked down to her as she still sat in the chair.

“If I could speak with you, alone?” She whispered.

The three women left them to their privacy.

“What is it, Lady Herald?” Cullen sat beside her, resting his arm on the table, “Or is it, ‘Captain
McNamara, Herald of Andraste, member of the Assassins, formally put?’"

“That'd be a mouthful, hm?” She smiled wryly, struggling with her words, “I wanted to…well, I
regret the way I acted before I left.”

“Is this your way of saying sorry?” He chuckled.

“Don’t make this harder than it has to be,” he gave him a weak smile, “I shouldn’t be involvin’
foreign vendettas when weighing on decisions.”

“I apologize, as well. I handled myself poorly and involved my past just the same.”

“Does that mean you’ll stop starin’ at me, now?”

“W-what? I don’t...stare.” He blushed slightly.

“Pity.” She huffed, shakily taking his hand in hers across the table.

She slumped in her seat as if ill.

“You nd’ I have a lot in common, Commander. Responsible for lives of those who’d aspire to be
us, playing games with them without room to consider em’ as ‘people’...I need you to make me a
promise, Cullen.” Her grasp tightened on his hand.

“Anything.” He whispered.

“If I fall at the summit,” She swallowed, “take care of them. I’ve been at their charge for more
than a decade, now. Our ties run deep, Commander. They will be lost, as I would be...was-without
them.” Her eyes fell to the floor.

Cullen took his other hand, resting it on top of their knotted fist. This snapped her
attention back to him.

“You have my word.” His promise pulled at her heart strings.

“Thank you, Commander.”

She reached her hand to touch him where he was infected with red lyrium.

“You look much better without rocks growin’ out yer face.” She giggled.

He leaned into her hand, allowing her fingers to graze his blonde mane.

“Let’s keep it that way, then.”

“A sound plan.” She whispered.

A green light hummed against his skin.

Naomi pulled her hand away from him, standing up so suddenly that the chair fell
backwards behind her. Lightning began to crackle. She grabbed her wrist, trying to tame the
energy escaping her body.

“Damn it all..."

“Herald-”

“Stay back-I'm sure it'll be over, sure enough.” She grimaced.

The flare subsided, just as predicted.

“It’s growing again.” Naomi gritted her teeth, “We have to close that wretched beast.”
“I’m confident we will. I’ll get back to work.” Cullen nodded to her, excusing himself from the
She left shortly after, hearing arguing coming from Josephine’s office. Mother Giselle shook her head as if she didn’t know what was going on.

“The Inquisition cannot remain, Ambassador…” Muffled voices came through the door.

Like most warnings, Naomi ignored them, walking in without knocking.

“This is an inopportune time, Marquis. More of the faithful flock here each day. But allow me to introduce you to the brave soul who risked her life to slow the magic of the Breach.” Josephine held her hand towards Naomi.

“Lady Herald may I present the Marquis DuRellion, one of Divine Justinia’s greatest supporters—“

“And rightful owner of Haven. House DuRellion lent Justinia these lands for a pilgrimage. This “Inquisition” is not the beneficiary of this arrangement.”

“Interesting, considering the inquisition was begun by the Left and Right hands of the Divine.” Naomi cocked her head, "Right?"

Josephine nodded, "I see you do pay attention...on occasion."

“I’ve seen no written records from Sister Leliana or Seeker Pentaghast that Justinia approved the Inquisition.” The Orlesian man argued.

“If he won’t take her at her word, I’m afraid Seeker Pentaghast must challenge him to a duel.” Josephine gave her most pitiful look to the Captain.

“What?” The noble shuddered.

“It is a matter of honor among the Nevarrans. Shall I arrange the bout for tonight?” She flicked through her stack of papers on her board, finding a schedule and dipping her quill in ink. "I believe she has quite a few openings, training all day, and such."

“No! No, perhaps my reaction to the Inquisition’s presence was somewhat hasty…” The fear in his eyes made the Herald laugh, "'Hasty?' The color left your face quicker than a...-

Josephine scolded, hushing Naomi’s insolence.

“We face a dark time, Your Grace. Divine Justinia would not want her passing to divide us. She would, in fact, trust us to forge new alliances to the benefit of all, no matter how strange they might seem.” Her silver tongue slithered.

“I’ll think on it, Lady Montilyet. The Inquisition might stay in the meanwhile.” Marquis DuRellion left the room in a bustle.

Naomi nodded her head, pursing her lips in approval.

“You’re a force to be reckon with, aren’t yeh?”

“We expect more people in Haven. Each visitor will spread the story of the Inquisition after they depart.” She fluffed her ruffles, sitting down as she spoke. “An Ambassador should ensure the tale is as complimentary as possible.” Josephine was proud of herself, "Even if that means wrangling you in from time to time."

“You’re responsible for coverin’ up me blunders?” Naomi laughed, "The worst job in Haven, I imagine."

“That would be correct.” The Antivan woman giggled, “Thedas’s politics have become...agitated, as of late. I hope to guide us down smoother paths. But, please excuse me. I’ve much more work to do before the move on the Breach is made tomorrow. Do try to not add to it?”

"No promises." The Captain winked, bidding the Ambassador farewell.

Josephine was a quiet sort, but time and time again, Naomi had seen her in action. She found herself savvy enough to handle a posh crowd, but Josephine was deadly, and without any visible weapon. That was something to be spoken for. Something that couldn't be touched without a mastery of the tongue.

Mother Giselle called out for the Herald as she passed.

“Yes, Mother Giselle?” She came without question.

“I was hoping to talk to you before you conclude the evening.”

“Gonna lecture me about walkin’ in on that?”

The Holy woman smiled, "Not quite. On something else, perhaps."
They walked along the sick and wounded. Naomi was saddened, as she wanted to heal them. However, she couldn’t risk the discovery of Consus.  
“I pray this Inquisition proves less brutal than its predecessor.”  
“Aye, the Inquisitions of my world have been less than favorable to the opposition.”  
“You are familiar with this idea, then?”  
“I am. Tell me about this former Inquisition of Thedas, then?”
  
Mother Giselle paused in front of a mural, waving a hand towards it as she spoke.  
The Inquisition was formed after the First Blight, well before the Chantry as we know it. The Inquisitors were hunters; zealots who tracked and killed cultists and dangerous mages. As Andraste the Prophet rose to power, the Inquisition came into her service. Instead of hunting those who would do harm, the Inquisition spread the Chant of Light by force.”  
She pointed to the sections that depicted a holy woman leading an army, an orb resting in her palm.  
“Is that an...”

“Once the chant of light had spread far and wide, there was less need for zealots. The Inquisitors became the Seekers of Truth, and eventually the Templars were formed among the ranks.”  
“The parallels of this world never cease to amaze me.” Naomi grunted.  
Perhaps one day, I will be educated enough to share that amazement.” The Chantry woman smiled humbly, “Do you know what impresses me most about the original Inquisition?” She asked the Captain.
  
“What would that be?”

“They fought horrific battles, killed and died for their cause…and when it was time, they put their swords away. It could be, that Divine Justinia’s message was just that: That when the Inquisition is needed, it will strike without mercy. But when its work is done, it will put its sword away.”

Naomi processed the statement. She reflected among the long journeys at sea, the hardships she faced in battle and the short glimpses of normalcy in between. There had been times where she’d spent a week on land, always being lured by the roll of the waves. But it hadn’t been time to set sail, not been the right time for liberation. Her cannons had been stilled, waiting to be summoned again.

“That may be true, Mother Giselle. I fear it will be a long while before we can put that notion to the test.” She heaved a heavy breath.  
“For the first time, I hope you are wrong, Lady Herald.” She bowed to Naomi, walking back to the sick and wounded.
  
She stood there, staring at the bloody images depicted on the mural, considering Mother Giselle’s words.  
“What will I do once all this is over?”

Naomi cursed herself for thinking as such.  
“It’s much too soon to consider…who knows if I’ll even be alive to entertain the thought.”
  
Her eyes continued to trace the mural, carefully comparing it to the ones she’d seen from home.

She traced the patterns leading up the woman’s arm, the beautiful Prophet that stood affront a massive army.  
The orb with light shattering from all sides, as if a holy weapon, a rite from God himself.  
"It's got to be. But how? This was...centuries ago, for these people. How..." She repeated, "How did 'Andraste' have an Apple of Eden?"
Confrontation Proclamation

Chapter Summary

"Dread wolves near death, but not dying."
-Unknown

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Captain had spent her night on the ship. They’d travel to the summit to seal the Breach tonight, and many of the preparations would have to be met…not all of which she’d make known.
“Back in the old rags, eh?” Adibas joked, sitting across from her desk.
“Don’t want to get me nice Mentor cape all tattered.” She joked, sipping her flask. She handed it to him.
“What is it you wanted to speak with me about, Captain?” He took a sip, graciously.
“I’ve made arrangements with Sera for the ship to set sail- effective immediately.”
He sprayed his drink on the floor.
“Without you?” He wiped his hand, “Are you daft?”
“Nay, tis not daftness. Adie, something’s coming, mate. Consus won’t shut up about it. I want you, the crew, and the ship as far away from here when it happens.”
“They will not stand for this.”
“Not even if their Captain demands it?” She crossed her arms, “I need you with me on this. You have to understand where I’m comin’ from…”
The Quartermaster opened his mouth in protest.
“Do not argue with me, please. Take the ship and all that’s on Her, and set sail to Val Chevin. I’ve marked it on Aquilla’s map. Do not return until Sera or one of her ‘Friends of Red Jenny’ contacts you. That’s an order, am I understood?”
“Aye, Captain,” he slurred the word, “But you’ll be the one to tell them. Not I.” He stood, angrily, and left the cabin.
Naomi sighed, leaning backwards. She wrote a long letter to him, intending on leaving it behind.

She stood ashore as she watched the sails unfurl, the ship cutting through the ice as She turned. Her sailors lined the edges, waving goodbye to Naomi while she sat on Dullahan’s back. The Captain waved solemnly, wondering if she’d ever see them again. Her heart was lightened to know that they would be safe should anything falter at the Breach. Even if they were angry with her, she believed they would forgive her in the end.
“Else the Dishonored’ll come back with a new Captain.” Her eyes fell to the dracolisk.
She pet him as he hummed underneath her.
Once the ship was out of view, she trotted him back to Haven. Blackwall stood near the stables as she secured Dullahan at his post. The Warden gawked at the Breach as would a child at a shop.
“Maker, look at it. So much easier to ignore when it’s far away. And to actually walk out of it, to
be that close…” He whispered under his breath.
“We’ll be right up its’ arse soon enough, mate.” She gazed to the green swell as she removed Dullahan’s saddle.
“I have to admit,” he huffed, “I thought you’d be…”
“Righteous? Not a pirate?” She joked.
“Yes.”
“Do you object to me n’ me crew?”
“Of course not. Didn’t meant to offend. It’s what you do, and how you do it, that’s important.”
“A fine sediment, mate.”

They continued to gaze at the monster swirling into the sky.
“Just one question then. How do you think you fit in with all this?” He looked to the Captain.
“Haven’t a clue, in truth.”
“I guess we’ll have to figure that out,” He frowned, “I’ll be satisfied so long as we find the bastards that killed the Divine. They owe us some answers.”
“We’ll have your justice, mate.” She patted him on the shoulder, “Just you wait.”

She left him, hoping that she could honor her word. She saw the Iron Bull in the short distance. He looked on to Cullen and the Chargers as they trained in the pit near the entrance of the village. Naomi admired the Qunari man. He was large, powerful, and anyone with a right mind would fear him.

However, he approached every situation with humor and wisdom- a combination that was hard to balance. She respected him greatly, despite how costly his company was.
“They’ve got good form. Cullen’s putting his Templar training to good use.” He spoke as he caught her staring at him.

Naomi was taken off guard, and did her best to play it off.
“He’s not a Templar anymore, ‘accord to him.”
“Might not be a Templar shield, but it’s still a Templar holding it. He angles the shield just a bit down, helps direct fire or acid away, so it doesn’t spray right in your face. Qunari learn the same thing when we train to fight Tevinter mages. Your Commander is doing good work.”

“My Commander, eh?” She grinned, “’Spose I’m impressed by what he’s accomplished in such short amount o’ time.”
“Damn right. It takes time to build a group into a team. But he’s got their loyalty. And your interest. I suppose that drives him to ignore the obstacles in his way.” A deep, rumbling laugh escaped the horned man’s throat.
“What’s all this accusation ‘bout? I haven’t seen a lick o’ that man.” She averted her eyes.
“Tell me you haven’t wanted to,” He prodded.
“Aye, aye, I concede. Jaysus…”
“What?”
“Nothin’.”

They continued to watch as Krem tripped up a Scout. He then helped the recruit to his feet, shaking his hand and giving him pointers.

“Biggest problem for the Inquisition right now isn’t on the front line. It’s at the top. You’ve got no leader. No Inquisitor.” Iron Bull broke the silence.
“Well, I’ve got enough titles under me belt. Have no interest in another.”
“From experience, my people don’t pick leaders from the strongest, or the smartest, or even the most talented. We pick the ones willing to make the hard decisions…and live with the consequences. That’s something you’ve been doing since you got here, hasn’t it?”
“Again, I say. No interest. None. I have enough peoples’ lives on me hands, needn’t add to it.”

She shuddered at the prospect.

“Ah, who knows? Maybe you seal The Breach, the Chantry gets off its ass, and all those soldiers go home and get fat. Then you and Cullen can go have Templar-Assassin-pirate babies.”
“Shut it, you bloody bastard!” She yelled jokingly.
“It could happen!”
“You think?”
“It won’t, but it could.”
“Good talk, Bull.” She said sarcastically, “You’re a right prick.”
“That’s what I’m here for. Now go talk to that nice piece of ass you’re chasing. He’s been glancing over here since you rode in.”
“Ugh!” She rolled her eyes, marching off.

Naomi could feel the Iron Bull watching her as she approached Cullen on the training grounds. Ignoring his scrutiny, she placed himself at the Commander’s side. His armor bounced any light on him, scattering it to the ground.

She loved how he barked orders, not scared to come off as crude. She’d never met a man more dedicated to his duty, and she couldn’t ignore that she felt something for him.

What it was, yet, she wasn’t sure.

“Are you still angry with me?” She looked up to him.

Her voice startled him. He’d been so involved in coaching his recruits, he didn’t notice her.

“What? Of course not,” He looked to her caringly, needing to get something off of his chest, “I want you know that I have no intention of endangering your alliance, but I must ensure the safety of those here. That concern extends to the mages. They are putting themselves at risk for the inquisition- as are you. Any precautions taken are meant to aid you- nothing more. I hope you accept them as such.”

“I do appreciate everything you do here. I acknowledge you know more about these matters than I. I hope that truth goes untarnished.”

They paused as they watched the men and women train. Naomi looked to the Breach; her worried face catching his attention.

“We receive recruits every day. None made quite the entrance you did, though.” He joked, trying to lighten the mood.

“Got everyone’s attention, did I?”

“That you did.” He blushed slightly.

“Does that include you?” She gave him a wry grin.

He yelled at a recruit losing form, pretended like he missed the comment.

“I was recruited to the Inquisition in Kirkwall. I was there during the mage uprising, I saw firsthand the devastation they caused. Cassandra sought a solution, and when she offered me a position, I left the Templars to join her cause. I vowed to never let anything under my watch get that out of control again.”

A scout approached him, requiring his attention. He paused the conversation for a moment, reading over a report and signing a parcel, handing it back to the man.

“The Chantry lost control of both Templars and mages. Now, they argue over a new Divine while the Breach remains. The Inquisition can act when the Chantry cannot. Our followers would be part of that. If we can just close the Breach, there’s so much we can…” He looked at her and couldn’t decipher if she was bored or intrigued.

“Forgive me, I doubt you came here for a lecture.” He laughed nervously.

“No, but if you have one prepared, I’d love to hear it.” She elbowed his arm, teasingly.

Another scout called for him, saying something about supply lines. Naomi cursed him under her breath.

“That reminds me,” Naomi spoke when he was done, “I sent The Dishonored to Val Chevin to get supplies from those who’d support us. Said something about lyrium; the not-red kind.”

“So…smugglers?” His brow furrowed.

“Oh, I don’t know. Sera set it up, and Adibas mentioned you said something about sea-faring routes, so…”

“So, smugglers?” He repeated himself.

“Aye, alright, damned it all. Whatever.” She crossed her arms, thinking of something to change the topic.
A rumbling chuckle escaped his chest.

“You lot are soldiers are the Chantry, yeah? Does that mean Templars take vows?” She raised an eyebrow.

“That’s a bit of a long-winded answer.” He grinned, his scarred lip lifting.

Her heart fluttered at the sight.

“I have time. Not like anyone can get going without me!” She wiggled her Marked hand.

“Very well,” he shifted his weight, “There’s a vigil first. You’re meant to be at peace during that time, but your life is about to change, so that’s near impossible. When it’s over, you give yourself to a life of service. That’s when you’re give a philter- your first draught of lyrium, and its power…” A pang of resentment arose in his voice, “As Templars, we are not to seek wealth or acknowledgement. Our lives belong to the Maker and the path we have chosen.” He finished.

She plotted in her devious mind.

“So…only wealth and acknowledgement? You don’t have to, you know, ‘not seek,’ let’s say…physical, temptations?”

His face blossomed into a bright red.

“Physical? Why…” He cleared his throat, looking around, “Why would you…”

“Well?”

“That’s…not expected. Some may…choose to give up more to prove their devotion,” he spoke quickly as to get the conversation over with, “but it’s, uhm, not required.” He avoided eye contact at all costs.

Naomi placed herself in front of him, regaining his wandering gaze.

“Have you?”

“Me?”

“Aye, I don’t see any other handsome, blonde Fereldan right in front of me, lest I be mad. So, have you?”

“I…um…No. I’ve taken no such vows.”

“Hm…I see. Good to know.” She purred, placing herself closer to him, “Should I survive the Breach, I’ll put that knowledge to good use.” Naomi whispered in his ear, tapping his nose.

Cullen began to sweat. She let out a sinister giggle as she skipped away. He stood there aghast, unsure if anyone heard their conversation.

“What did you do to him, boss?” Iron Bull called as she walked up the hill.

“Nothing…yet!”

The Commander ducked into his tent, hiding from any more comments.

Varric stood around a campfire, polishing Bianca and cleaning all of her parts. He was a curious little dwarf, and his sly demeanor intrigued her.

“Causing trouble, Spitfire?” He looked up to her, waving.

“What else I be good at, yeah?”

Naomi kneeled down to talk to him as he worked.

“Why Spitfire?”

“A fiery person with a fierce temper? You’re right, that doesn’t fit you-at all.”

His condescending sarcasm earned him an unimpressed look from the Captain.

“So, now that Cassandra is out of earshot, are you holding up all right? I mean, you go from being the most wanted Criminal in Thedas to joining the armies of the faithful. Most people would have spread that out over more than one day.” He chuckled.

“Everyone wants answers from me, and I haven’t a blasted fuckin’ clue.” She drank from her private flask, offering a drink to Varric.

“That makes two of us.” He took a sip, instantly regretting it, “For days now, we’ve been staring at the Breach, watching demons and Maker-knows-what fall out of it. I still can’t believe anyone was in there and lived. You’ve got balls.”

“Appreciated.” She nodded, “It’s pretty piss poor here, and Cassandra bid you freedom. Why’d you stay?”

“I’d like to think I’m as selfish and irresponsible as the next guy, but this… Thousands of people
died on that mountain. I was almost one of them, and now there’s a hole in the sky. Even I can’t walk away and just let that sort itself out.” He stopped working on his crossbow as they looked up to the sky together.

“A well put answer…Still can’t believe this nonsense is happenin’. I still expect to wake up in Nassau on me ship, sailin’ way out in to the warm waters of the Indies.”

He gave her a sad look.

“Well, if this is all just the Maker winding us up, I hope there’s a damn good punch line coming,” He scoffed, “You might want to consider running at the first opportunity.”

“Fraid it’s a bit too late for that, mate.”

“All I’m saying is that I’ve written enough tragedies to recognize where this is going. Heroes are everywhere. You’re one of them—I’ve seen that. But the hole in the sky? That’s beyond heroes. Beyond you. We’re going to need a miracle.”

“Haven’t yeh heard, mate?” She screwed the cap on her flask, standing up and brushing snow off of her bottom.

“What’s that?” He asked.

“I piss and shit miracles.”

Naomi left the dwarf, who was laughing in hysterics. She ducked into the tavern, looking for Sera. The city elf was sitting alone, staring out of the window in the farthest corner.

“Heard that druffalo-of-a-laugh our dwarfy friend has. Tell him a funny story or somethin’?”

“Aye, told him a funny story ’bout you.”

“Lies!”

“Caught me.” Naomi raised her hands theatrically.

The two of them sat, staring at the Breach swirling in the sky.

“So, this is it, huh?” She spoke as the Captain sat in front of her.

“So it is.”

“Thought it’d be bigger. Pfft, hear that?” Sera nearly lost her drink, “I meant the Breach, but it sounded like…well, it’s funny right?”

The Captain always appreciated her company.

“Stopping wars should earn more sovereigns than this. Need things back to normal for coins to be flowing again. Another reason the Templars and mages need to be sat down.”

“Most people have given up on that idea.”

“Most people are stupid. I stand in the middle, with everyone, or whatever.” She slammed her mug on the table after taking a swig, “You know what I hear about mages? Nothing until one goes all demony. You know what I hear about Templars? Nothing, until they take maybe-mages. They’re too busy to look where the real questions are.”

“Isn’t that what we’re here for?”

“The religious ones tell you that? That’s important, right, but don’t make it all about that. Seems like believing too hard is what got everyone here. And here, is stupid. And smells of horse. Really, what everyone needs is to get everything back to normal, and proper and profitable. Sound good to you, all chosen Lady Herald?” She twirled her words at the end.

“Aye, I’ll give it a go. It’s always the little fellow who gets skinned; let’s not let that be us, yeah?”

“Right. For what it’s worth, I’m in. It’s an investment. Better pay off, too. Stupid war and… everything. I had things to do! Speaking of which, your ship in the wind yet?”

“That it is, thanks to you. I’m indebted to you and yer ‘friends.’”

“No debt. Having a friend as high as you is plenty payment.” She gave Naomi a wink, “Go on, now. Get prepared for doing all the magicy things that you do.” Sera shooed her off.

The Herald made her way through the village, seeking the one she wanted to talk to most:

Solas.

She saw him standing alone in the distance, and began to march towards him. There was definitely something she wanted to confront him about.

“Just the person I was looking for!” Dorian’s crisp voice shattered the cold air, “Have you heard?
The Inquisition supports free mages! What’s next? Elves running Halamshiral? Cows milking farmers?”

Naomi silently sighed to herself.
“Give me time, I’ll come up with something creative yet, lad.” She gave him a wink, hiding her impatience, trying to escape.
“I suspect that’s untrue. Unless, you strip yourself naked, and allow the Chantry to flog you into repentance! Now, that would surprise me.”
“Or maybe you’re lookin’ for a sound excuse to see me naked.” She laughed, inching away.
“I’d hope it wouldn’t take a flogging for a man to get you undressed; sad story indeed. Don’t tell it to anyone else.” He raised a finger to his lips, silencing her.
“I do wonder if you’ve considered what the support of yours will do. For mages in general, I mean. The Inquisition is seen as an authority. You’ve given southern mages license to be, well….like mages back home.” Dorian continued.

She gave up.
“If they hold a candle to you, I’d find myself fortunate, given that outcome.”
“Hah! There aren’t many mages back home like me.”
“I believe that.” She jabbed.
“I never fit in. Blood stains are so difficult to clean, you see.”
“So we’re doomed to a future of blood magic, then?” Solas approached them from where he once stood.
“Not at first, but you’d be a fool not to see where this could lead.” He scolded the elf mage.
“Thing is, the Imperium was just like the South. Templars-proper circles, all that rot. Then it changed. By inches. Not that this is reason to oppress us. Still, my homeland should be a cautionary tale, not a sort of inspiration. You agree with that, don’t you, Solas?”
“It matters not what I believe. I am just thankful we have the Herald of Andraste; the blessed be hero sent to save us all.”

Naomi looked at him, confused by the sarcasm in his voice.
“This right arse doesn’t want me to catch him alone!”
“Sounds dashing.” Dorian smirked.
“Joke as you will, posturing is necessary. I’ve journeyed deep into the Fade and ancient ruins and battlefields to see the dreams of lost civilizations. I’ve watched as hosts of spirits clashed to reenact the bloody past of ancient wars both famous and forgotten. There’s one thing I’ve learned to be universally true,” He turned to the Breach, “Every Great War has its hero. I’m just curious as to what kind you’ll be.” His gaze returned to Naomi.
“That’s impressive.” Dorian studied the elf.
“Thank you. It’s not a common field of study for obvious reasons. Not so flashy as throwing fire or lightning. The thrill of finding remnants of an 1,000 year old dream? I would not trade it for anything.”
“No firebolts? No lightning storms? Something we finally agree on- that sounds bland.” Dorian made a disgusted face.
“I’m afraid you’ll be stuck with my boring company, at least until the Breach is closed- for good.”
“You won’t stay?” Naomi looked at him in confusion.
“I am an apostate mage surrounded by Chantry forces and unlike you, I do not have a divine mark protecting me. Cassandra has been accommodating, but you understand my caution.”
“You came here to help, Solas. I doubt our lovely Herald would let them use that against you.” Dorian chimed in.
“And how would she stop them?” Solas looked to Naomi.
“Ever hear someone tell me ‘No?’” She crossed her arms.
“I don’t think I have.” The elf answered.
“Exactly.”

Solas face was mixed of shock and gratitude.
“For now, let us hope that the mages have the power to seal the Breach.”
“Let’s.” Dorian agreed.

The three stood there, reflecting the events that had happened since she arrived there. “Listening to you two reminds me of a war that the Assassins had been sent to diffuse.” She smiled reminiscently, “The Yamasee War in the year 1716. The colonials, a refugee band of sorts who wanted to be free of their tyrannical nation, made settlements along the coasts of the Americas. However, the people native to those lands chose to wage war. The warring spread the lands so far and thin, the settlers in the area were forced to abandon their posts and flee to Charles Town. One city could not hold everyone comfortably, however, and starvation soon took hold.” She paused. “No offense, darling, but how does this remind you of Solas and I?” Dorian jested.

“Shortening it up, we reached out to our contacts in the tribe of Cherokee Native Americans. They were definitely one of the largest tribes, if not the largest, and they knew the land far better than the colonists. They too wanted the violence to stop. The colonists had much more advanced technology than the natives. Wanting peace, we negotiated a truce between the two. They set their differences aside, and put their knowledges together, setting an example for every faction around them.”

“Now I see the correlation.” The Apostate Elf grinned at the Tevinter Mage. “After some of the bloodiest battles recorded in our world's history, the combined forces of various tribesmen and colonists drove the opposing tribes from the settlements a year later.” “I can only hope we’ll be as successful.” Dorian exclaimed.

She’d make her point with Solas yet, even if he hid behind a façade of conversation. “I learned two very important things from my time in the colonies.” Naomi looked at the elf, “First, unity wins wars against those who’d rather be divided. The second was a legend of a wise, Cherokee Chieftain as he recited the verse to his grandchildren.” Her eyes narrowed at him. “Would you like to hear it?” She daringly asked.

“I believe he would.” Dorian encouraged.

Solas grunted at the sparkling man. “Goes a little something like this….” She cleared her throat, ready to recite the tale, “He looked to his grandson and explained to him, ‘A fight is going on inside me. It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves.’” The elf grew nervous from her gaze as she continued, “‘One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.’” Then she turned her attention to Dorian, “‘The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.’”

The two men stood in silence. Sweat beaded on Solas’s forehead. Dorian’s eyes were practically diamonds, excited for her to continue. “The grandson thought about it for a moment, and then asked his grandfather, ‘Which wolf will win?’”

“Oh, what did the grandfather say?” Dorian clapped his hand rapidly in excitement.

The Captain returned a toxic eye at the nervous elf, his racing heartbeat echoing in her Precursor-blessed ears, “The one you feed."

Chapter End Notes

Tale of the Two Wolves
Chapter Summary

"What does it mean to pierce the Veil, that which separates our world from the realm of dreams and demons?"
-Lady Seeker Alandra Vael

Naomi had been sent to Leliana’s tent as night fell. The final preparations had been put in place, and the troops, including the Mages, were ready to move out. A faint whisper stilled the Herald’s steps. “Blessed are the Peacekeepers, the Champions of the Just.” Leliana was crouched, her elbows resting on one knee. Her clasped, armored hands held her forehead in prayer. “Blessed are the Righteous, the Lights in the Shadow. In their blood, the Maker’s will is written.” The Nightingale’s head rose, delicate strands of red hair dangled aloft. Only the silhouette of her face was visible under her mauve hood. “Is that what you want from us? Blood? To die, so that your will is done? Is death your only blessing?” Leliana straightened herself, twisting to Naomi. “You speak for Andraste, no? What does the Maker’s prophet have to say about all this? What’s His game?” A level of uncertainty hung from her words. “I’d assume she wants us to kick the right piss out of the Breach tonight. I fail to see the game in this, lass.” “Do you see the sky? What about the temple ruins? The bones lying in the dust? You wouldn’t call this right, who could?” Her voice cracked with anger, “So many innocent lives- the faithful murdered where the holiest of holies once stood. If the Maker willed this, what is it if not some game or a cruel joke?” “Leliana, out of all the Gods of the different faiths combined in my land, one thing rings certain-they rule by fear. They scare us into doing the right thing, and threaten their wrath if we don’t. And yeh know what they tell us when we question the injustices in the world?” The Spymaster waited for her answer. “That ‘everything happens for a reason.’ That’s all the answer I’d have for you.” Naomi rest her hands on her hips. Leliana slung her bow and arrows, flipping the tent door. Together, they walked down the hill towards the army gathered at the front of Haven, “I used to believe I was chosen, just as some say you are. I thought I was fulfilling His purpose for me, working with the Divine, helping people. But now she’s dead. It was all for nothing. Serving the Maker meant nothing.” Sadness fell from the Spymaster’s mouth. “It wasn’t all for naught. Perhaps you haven’t found your right purpose yet. Maybe, the Inquisition can help you find that.” Naomi offered her support. “No, this is my burden. I regret that I even let you see me like this. It was a moment of weakness. It won’t happen again.” “Don’t keep these things to yourself- it’ll eat at you ‘till there’s nothing left. Believe me.” The two redheaded women met the rest of the group. Josephine hugged both of them simultaneously. “Be safe, you two. I pray to the Maker that I see you all return safe.” She choked on tears.
“Still yourself, lass. There will be no light in the sky save for the moon in stars once we’re through.” Naomi’s devious smile was illuminated by the torches. “I will keep Dullahan company until your return, then.” Josephine blew her nose into a handkerchief. “I’m sure he’d right appreciate that.”

Cullen came to them. “Everyone is in formation and ready to mobilize. Are you ready, Herald?” His words pained him. “Aye, Commander. Let’s go close this rift.”

The night sky glowed with an eerie green light, being swept into the mouth of the monster that loomed overhead. A gentle breeze pushed the delicate snow off of the mountains, shooting flakes playfully into the faces of the marchers. The soldiers walked side by side of the mages; the companions and advisers leading. “A beautiful night to quell the Breach, my dear.” Vivienne walked beside her. “Aye, I ‘spose it is.”

The stars twinkled overhead, the sound of hundreds of feet crunching the snow filled their ears. “Tonight is the night He will make his move. Be prepared, Child. You mustn’t fail now.”

Naomi’s breathing quickened. “Are you alright?” Cullen asked, concerned. “Did you calibrate the trebuchets?” She turned to look at him. “Only five times a day.” Varric grumbled. “We may need them, yet.” Her chest heaved. She whispered, “Don’t forget that promise you made me, Cullen.”

Their eyes met, and he knew something was wrong. An arm of lightning extended out of the sky as they grew closer, sending Naomi’s arm into a flurry. She ignored the pain and pressed on, the green lightning accentuating her features. She appeared as would a poison berry appear to a starving animal—beautiful and dangerous. “We cannot know how I will be effected.” Her voice was low with doubt. “Is it just hitting you know, darling?” Dorian’s sympathizing voice rang from behind. “That it is...No matter, what’s done is done, and what must be done will be done. That about wraps it up. Right?”

“A simple way of looking at it.” Solas’s words were low and harsh. “I want you to know something, should you...” Cassandra couldn’t put her thoughts to words, “None of this could have happened without you. I thank you for fighting a fight you had no choice in.”

“Cassandra, I appreciate the words of sentiment, but...” Naomi quoted the Seeker, “none of us had a choice.”

After an hour of travel, they finally arrived to the lost temple. Bones still swept away in the wind as they crumbled, and the smell of death remained thick in the mountain air. The energy hummed from its red lyrium walls that had doubled in size. “I never want to see that red shit again.”

Her marked hand held a sustained glow. She looked down upon it, twirling the light, playing with it as the Mages got into place. Various Templar recruits placed themselves behind them as a precaution to possession. Cullen’s soldiers lined the bottom of the cliffs, just in case of demons. Naomi looked up to the sky, squeezing her fist shut and temporarily smothering the light from within. With a snarl on her face, she leapt down to the crackling expanse before her. With precise and determined steps, she placed herself into the center of the explosion, directly under the writhing fissure.
It felt all too familiar.
She turned to her companions, giving them a nod.
“Maker be with you!” A soldier called from the ranks.
The men and women of the Inquisition held their weapons in the air—swords and staves alike, giving her a single, unified shout. The image of them stirred something from within the depths of the Captain’s heart.
These people believed in her.
Trusted her.
And she barely knew any of them.
“Mages!” Cassandra called, raising her decorated sword.
“Focus past the Herald! Let her will draw from you!” Solas instructed.
A feint cloud of green static surrounded the Herald, causing a strong gust of wind where she was standing. Lightning struck the ground around her, its’ frequency rapidly multiplying. It seemed she’d be stuck in a hurricane; her being the eye of the storm.
The surge traveled from her head to the ground until her entire body shimmered with the power of the rift. It took everything she had to stand strong as the energy surged and ripped through her as if she was nothing.

As Solas gave the motion to progress, Naomi heard a single grunt as the bottom of a mages’ staff it the ground, releasing magic into the world around him. Hundreds of similar sounds rang throughout the skeleton of a temple.

She felt it slither around her, and never had she felt stronger. Naomi knelt to one knee, swinging her marked hand backwards. Engaging every overcharged muscle in her body, she arched her back, stood strong, and disengaged her mark into the night’s sky. The cursed magic curled up towards the crystalline heart, blinking and waning in and out of existence. The mages poured more of their power into her-Naomi howled as she pushed her life’s essence into the streak until it finally made contact with the demonic gemstone overhead. The rift above it taunted the, with its’ winding, gaping mouth.

“Go back to Hell where you belong, yeh fuckin’ scourge!”

An explosion hurled itself in all direction after contact. Bodies flew through the air; no one remained standing.
Her ears were buzzing, the ringing muffling shouts of concern and disdain.
The dust began to clear as the Templars, Mages, and soldiers alike helped each other to their feet. Cassandra pushed everyone out of her way, clearing a path to the edge of the crater.
Naomi remained crouched on one knee, her marked fist to the ground where she’d caught herself. She rocked back on her feet, standing with her back to her followers.

A hush fell over the Inquisition.
“You did it…” The Seeker whispered.
The Captain drew the Sword of Eden, finally turning to face the crowd, raising it into the newly blackened sky—roaring in victory. The Inquisition followed suite; their hollering rolled down the mountainside into the lands below.
“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but,” Cassandra was truly happy, “I’ll kill someone if you pay for a single drink tonight.”
“Now that’s the kind of talk I like ta’ be hearin’ from ya!” Naomi put an arm around her, as she grasp the Seeker's shoulder in farce celebration.
“I don’t think we’re done, here.” She whispered, “The soldiers can't drink themselves blind. I think this Elder One is poking round. I just have a feelin'. Can't imagine he's pleased about this.”
“I pray that you are wrong.” Cassandra didn't argue, almost as if she wasn't surprised by the statement.
“Aye, me too, lass. Me too.” Naomi sighed in defeat, for she knew that she wasn't.
"You seem somewhat familiar. Have I threatened you before?"
-Captain Jack Sparrow

Music rang through the air as the villagers celebrated and danced into the deepness of the night. Hours went by, allowing them to readjust themselves to a normal, grey sky. Just as ordered, the forces of the Inquisition stood watch, enviously glaring at the civilians swinging and hollering merrily by the bonfire at the center of the village. Naomi stood at the edge of the hill just outside of the Chantry, peering off into the distance.

She found herself in Cassandra’s company.

“Solás confirms the Heavens are scarred, but calm. The Breach is sealed, Herald.” The Seeker stood attention, “We’ve reports of lingering rifts, and while many questions remain, this was a victory. We should not lose sight of that.” She smiled, “Word of your heroism has spread.”

“It wasn’t just I that sealed the beast. Luck simply had me at the center.” Naomi jested.

“A strange kind of luck. I’m not sure if we need more or less. But you’re right. This was a victory of alliance. One of the few in recent memory. With the Breach closed, that alliance will need a new focus.”


“It comes. Ready yourself.”

Naomi jerked forward.

“Cassandra, go get the others.” Her voice panicked, “Now!”

“What? What is happening?”

“Get the villagers to safety. Why are you just standin’ there, GO!” She yelled, causing alarm to those around her.

“Is something wrong, Herald?” A soldier approached her.

“Listen to me very carefully-“

Guard tower bells rung in the distance as hundreds of torches lit themselves on the mountainside.

“No…"

“Forces approaching! To arms!” Cullen yelled, sword and shield in hand. The lion’s helmet graced his shoulders.

Sounds of horror and panic shook the foundation of the village.

“Everyone- remain calm!” Her words fell on deaf ears as they scattered.

“What the…? We must get to the gates!” Cassandra drew her weapons, charging forward.

They ran blindly through the crowds who bumped into them, almost knocking them over.

“What threat could the ground hold? You’ve already conquered the sky.” Vivienne’s voice broke through the crowd as she joined their side.

The three of them approached the advisors at the gate.

“Cullen?” Cassandra’s Nevarran accent gave an added sense of urgency to his name.

“One watchguard reporting. It’s a massive force. The bulk over the mountain.” He pointed to the marching army in the distance.

“None.” Cullen turned his head.
“None?” The Ambassador could not accept this.
The group of them jumped back as red light came from beyond the gates. Dullahan’s shrieking cry could be heard from the other side.
“DULLAHAN! The horses!” Naomi charged for the gate, Cullen grabbing her waist and pulling her to him.
“I’m sorry, but it’s too dangerous! You can’t—“
A force began to barge against the wooden gates. A voice echoed against the chaos,
“I can’t come in unless you open!”
Naomi turned her head up to Cullen, who still held her tightly against him.
“Please…” She begged.
He let her go, following her to the gates. They opened them together.
A large soldier fell dead, a man with a strange hat being the center of a slew of dead bodies.
“I’m Cole. I came to warn you. To help. People are coming to hurt you. You probably already know.” He was frazzled, and spoke very oddly.
“Just what in the bloody Hell is going on, lad?”
“The Templars come to kill you.”
Naomi looked to her Commander, her face twisted in fear. Cullen didn’t respond well to the comment.
“Templars? Is this the Order’s response to our talks with the Mages? Attacking blindly?”
Cole shook his head.
“There!” He pointed to a cliff overshadowing the village.
Cullen’s eyes widened in the lion’s mouth.
“I know that man…but this Elder One…” His bellowing was reduced to a hush whisper.
Naomi saw the twisted demon stand next to a knight glowing red.
“I know him…where do I know that crow-demon from?” She growled.
“He’s very angry that you took his mages.” Cole’s face sank as he looked at Naomi.
Their attention shifted towards the sounds of scared animals as they watched Dennet release the Inquisition’s mounts. A few mounted men did their best to keep them in a line, herding them into the forests surrounding Haven. Dullahan whimpered, reluctant to leave.
“I will help him, I will protect him.” Cole pointed to the stables.
She gave him a silent thank you, “The dracolisk, he’s mine.”
“I understand.” Cole drew his daggers and disappeared to Dennet’s side.
The Captain rejoined her Commander in the midst of the madness.
“Cullen, give me a plan! Anything!” She pleaded.
“Haven is no fortress. If we are to withstand this monster, we must control the battle.” His voice lost all ounce of hope, “We must get out there and hit that force. We must use everything we can!”
Cullen drew his sword while his voice rallied the forces to charge.
“Mages! You—you have sanction to engage them! That is Samson. He will not make this easy!”
He stood in front of the soldiers who all yelled for him.
“Inquisition! With the Herald! For your lives! For ALL OF US!”
His body twisted violently towards the oncoming army as he raised the sword, signaling the men and women to stampede around him.
Naomi’s companions surrounded her off to the side.
“Vivienne, Iron Bull, Sera, Blackwall, Dorian, you five, defend the south trebuchet without mercy! Solas, Cassandra, Varric, on me!” She drew the Staff, and began the charge to the north trebuchet.
An arrow whistled passed her ear and buried itself into the skull of a man who’d been charging behind her.
Naomi looked up to see Leliana and Josephine on a guard post. Josephine gave her a thumbs up while Leliana loaded another arrow, smiling like a mad woman.

“Much appreciated!”

Heavily armored knights with red crystals jutting from their joints charged the group. Naomi twirled her Staff in both hands, deflecting incoming blows and sending arrows back towards the Red Templars who fired them. A barrier surrounded her, supplied by Solas. Varric unloaded Bianca’s chamber into all that crossed them.

Cassandra tore into the enemies like a tidal wave, bashing her shield against theirs, slicing heads off with ease.

The Captain began to glow as she gained momentum, caving in skulls and stabbing hearts with the blunt and blade end of the Staff alike. The Apple hummed as it was wiped through the air, blood seeping into its intricate carvings.

“Herald!” Solas yelled from behind her. A Red Templar stood before her, freezing from the bottom up.

“Pffft!” She pulled out a pistol, shooting the frozen statue-shattering her opponent into pieces.

“Let’s give that another go, Solas!”

Acknowledging, he sent walls of ice at his opponents, freezing all who passed in their tracks. She emptied her four pistols, shattering an entire squad.

Having a break in the attack, scouts poured in behind her to man the trebuchet. Naomi pushed through the crowd to direct the person at the lever.

“Aim it towards the mountainside!” She yelled, pointing overhead.

Knowing better than to question her, the soldier obliged.

Another wave of enemies came towards them, giving no quarter to the small band.

“Fire when ready, lads! Don’t wait on my command!” Naomi kicked a dead body off the Staff blade.

The enemies gave a brief pause, allowing Naomi to load her empty guns.

“I imagine they’d grow tired of seeing their friends die.” Naomi scoured, covered in blood just as her allies.

The cranking had stopped. A slumped body with an arrow protruding it hung over the lever of the trebuchet. Naomi approached it without hesitation, moving the body to the ground.

“Rest in peace, my loyal friend.” She whispered.

The other soldier’s bodies littered the platform.

“Hold them off!” Naomi yelled, placing the Staff on her back.

She wound the lever, aiming the best she could at the mountain,

“I don’t know how to work this blasted thing!” She swore.

“Is this aimed at the mountain?” She yelled over the fighting.

“Looks good enough to me!” Varric yelled, “Why are you aiming at the damned mountain?!”

She’d take that as a ‘Yes.’

The flaming heap of rock hurled through the air as the arms ached on the trebuchet, a steely sound ringing through the fighting. Naomi watched with hopeful eyes as she’d hit her mark, hitting high enough on the peak to hit the snow drift.

The earth beneath their feet shook. An avalanche was let loose, burying the Red Templars in their march. Snow hurled over their bodies as if was magnetized to them, their torches snuffed by plumes of white, frozen death.

“Did you know that would work?” Varric asked, unloading his crossbow into a grounded, wiggling Red Templar.

“Nay, but it worked for Mul…nevermind.”

The companions from the other trebuchet rejoined her.

“This is what I’m talking about!” The Iron Bull raised his axe into the air, his Chargers behind him.

“Gangs all here!” Dorian patted his red-stained hands together.

A roar rolled in from the valley. Naomi turned to Dorian, their faces both fell. It was
the same sound from the future.

Leliana and Josephine quickly descended their tower under the Spymaster’s command.

“MOVE!” Casssandra dove towards Naomi, tackling her off of the trebuchet platform and into the snow.

A red blast shattered the large weapon that had just bought them time.

“DOES THAT BE A BLOODY FUCKIN’ DRAGON?” Naomi screeched.

“A hasty retreat would be in order!” Vivienne demanded.

No one objected.

“Everyone to the gates!” Cassandra shouted across the battlefield.

The Herald’s eyes searched for Cullen as they ran, unable to locate him.

“He better well be alive…”

“Herald! Help me with this!” A man kicking a door blocked by debris called out.

It was Harritt, the blacksmith.

The group ran to his aid as the black dragon circled overhead, crying out in death and anger.

The door was finally barged free, and the man disappeared inside the burning hut.

“Just grabbin’ the essentials! And me family hammer…” He quickly returned to the group, running with them for protection.

She cursed the assault as she passed piles of dead Inquisition bodies, their limbs littered the area, their blood mixing with the Red Templars at their side.

“Poor bastards…”

“Move it!”

She looked up to find Cullen beckoning them inside the gates, holding the left side open.

“Cullen!” She called out unexpectedly.

“MOVE IT!” He shouted again as the dragon came toward them.

Once everyone was through, he slammed the gates, barring them.

“We need everyone back to the Chantry!” He ordered, “It’s the only building that might hold against…that beast!” He climbed the stairs, looking to the Captain, “At this point…just make them work for it.” His voice gave out as he finished.

She had never seen him so hopeless.

They followed him through the village, watching the dragon hurl its deadly red bursts into fragile buildings that crumbled on impact. Even her own cottage had been destroyed.

“Oversized fuckin’ gecko!” She spat.

“Haven must evacuate to the Chantry!” Cassandra yelled to scattered civilians.

A Templar recruit was being overrun to their right.

Naomi broke from the band, not having time to alert them. She drew the Sword of Eden, sending a large blast through the ground, shattering the Red Templar group into pieces.

Lysette, the Templar Lieutenant, stood there in awe.

“Move your arse to the Chantry, lass!” She shouted.

Cassandra bashed open a door to a burning building, hearing Seggrit’s voice behind it.

The merchant ran out, thanking the Seeker profoundly. The Iron Bull saved Flissa, the owner of the tavern from being trapped under debris that had fallen on her. Sera emptied her quiver defending Threnn, Haven’s quartermaster.

The band of refugees made it to the Chantry at last, dead bodies and burning buildings in their wake.

A wounded Chancellor Roderick limped through the doors as they opened.

“Move! Keep going! The Chantry is your shelter!” He choked on his own blood.

He collapsed into Cole’s arms.

Naomi wove behind them, shutting the building off as the young man helped Roderick to his feet, acting as a crutch.

“He tried to stop a Templar. The blade went deep. He’s going to die.” Cole murmured.

“Cheery fellow, aren’t you?”
Cullen ran to them, his helmet in his hand.

“Herald! Our position is not good. That dragon stole back any time you might have earned us.”

Regret rattled in the man’s throat.

“I’ve seen an Archdemon. I was in the Fade, but it looked like that.” The young blonde spoke
again as he sat Roderick in a chair, “The Elder One doesn’t care about the village. He only wants
the Herald.”

The young man’s words injured her.

“You’re meanin’ to say…he did all this, to get to me?” She shook her head, “All these people…”
She squeezed her fists, tears threatening to spill over her eyelids. “He wants me? That’s what he’ll
get, then.”

“He wants to kill you. No one else matters. But he’ll crush them, kill them anyway…I don’t like
him.” He looked to the ground.

“You don’t like…?” Cullen scolded, “Herald, there are no tactics to make this survivable. The
only thing that slowed them was the avalanche. We could turn the remaining trebuchets, cause one
last slide.”

“And bury Haven?”

Cullen’s face hardened, his jaw stiffening as he spoke.

“We’re dying.” He took her bloodied hands into his own, “But we can decide how. Many don’t
get that choice…”

Naomi looked up into the Commander’s eyes, only inches away from her own. They
were so beautiful up close, even at a time like this.

“Yes, that.” Cole protruded the moment, looking behind him, “Chancellor Roderick can help. He
wants to say it before he dies.”

“There is a path. You wouldn’t know it unless you’d made the summer pilgrimage, as I have. The
people can escape. She must have shown me. Andraste must have shown me so I could…tell
you.” The Chancellor was on his dying breath.

“Does that suite your fancy?” Naomi asked Cullen.

“Possibly. If he shows us the path. But what of your escape?”

Naomi turned, facing away from him.

“If you could all get a move on, I’d like a moment alone with our Commander.” Naomi kept her
eyes averted, not looking at them.

They started to say their goodbyes, but she cut them off.

“There’s not time to be had for all that! Get going, now!” She yelled at them.

Cole and the Chancellor lingered for just a moment longer.

“Herald…if you are meant for this, if the Inquisition is meant for this, I pray for you.”

“And I, you, Chancellor.” Naomi bowed her head to him respectfully.

They looked to her with pained hearts, helping Chancellor Roderick and the civilians as
they ran.

“Maker be with you…” Cassandra whispered as she passed.

“Inquisition! Follow Chancellor Roderick through the Chantry! Move!” Cullen ordered, turning
his attention to Naomi.

The two of them were the only bodies that remained at the gates.

“You haven’t answered my question.” He glared at her, the dragon roaring as he spoke.

Without speaking, she took her pendant from her neck and lowered it onto his.

“Of utmost importance…”

She untied the Shroud from her waist, wrapping it around the pole of the Staff as a grip.

“I know I’ve asked a lot of you as of late…But I need you to do me one, final favor.” She extended
her arms to him, “Find Adibas and give these to him.”

Cullen stood there, staring at her offering. He couldn’t believe it was coming down to
this.

He wouldn’t.

“Naomi-“
“Cullen, please.” She began to tremble, her face wet with sorrow. “These artifacts are so, so important. If they fell into the wrong hands…” She shook her head, “There’d be no chance for any of you. The Sword I can send somewhere, but not these. Protect them with your life, Commander. Sera knows where The Dishonored is.”

He took the Staff into his resistant hand. He pressed her head into his chest, giving her one, final embrace.

“This can’t be the only way…” His voice was quiet as his lips danced through her hair.

“That dragon won’t stop until he finds me- you know this to be true. I have to distract it, send the trebuchet…” She sobbed, “I have to go, now, Cullen.” She looked up to him, her emerald eyes lit by the candlelight.

“I won’t fail you.” He swore.

They pulled apart, his arms immediately feeling hollow.

“Take this and pull the trigger at the top of the mountain. It’ll rattle off a signal, letting me know you’re all at a safe place.”

He took the gun solemnly.

“Maybe you’ll find a way…even with Haven breached.” He whispered.

“Aye, if there’s a way, I’ll find it, love.” She winked at him. “Now go, before you end up dead. And ask that weird boy where he sent my bloody dracolisk…Dullahan doesn’t like to be alone…” She sighed.

Cullen turned away walking angrily down the hall, Staff and gun in hand.

“If we are to have a chance- if you are to have a chance- let that thing hear you.” Cullen shouted as he paused to look at her one more time.

“They will exact a heavy price, Commander.”

The Captain drew her pistol sword and the Sword of Eden; it hummed in her rage. She twirled the hilts in her hands, mentally preparing herself for what was on the other side of the large, reinforced doors.

“Alright, beastly. Is it me yeh want?” She glowered, “Well here I fuckin’ come.”
"I came into this world screaming and covered in someone else's blood, and let me tell you, I'm not afraid to leave it the same way."

-Charles Vane

The wounds of steel on flesh, senses dulled by the agony of war. Blood danced in the air, dousing the fire around her as the village burned to the ground. A steamy hiss escaped the ground as the two forces collided. Her swords spun in crisp form, the Sword of Eden leaving illuminous scars wherever it touched.

Dodge.
Cut.
Disappear.

This pattern was sown into the beings who would stand against her otherwise.

She came down on a Red Templar abomination, emptying her pistol sword into its vertebrae. The bullet dug a tunnel through the beast, emptying out on the other side in gory celebration.

A zig-zagged pattern was cut as she sliced and kicked off of the dead corpses of her opponents. Twisting in the air, she unloaded a pistol into an attacker affront, landing on him to break her fall. A large Red Templar brought down an axe. Before he climaxed his swing, she was behind him as he sliced his dead comrade by mistake. Releasing her hidden blades, Naomi slid them against his neck, separating his flesh and sending a red spray of vengeance.

Dirt encased Naomi’s skin as sweat poured out of her body. Blood wet her clothes, sticking them to her skin. Her strength waned, no longer being supported by the rejuvenation of Consus. The Captain’s nose bled profusely, her chest heaved with strain. The dragon circled above the graveyard of a village, growing curious to the movement on the mountain.

Forty Red Templars stormed the gates as she stood in the same place they celebrated only a moment ago. A ten-foot crystalline monster led the charge. She looked on to them, unable to arrange her thoughts. She thought she was scared; but the feeling was something she was unfamiliar with:

Defeat.

Her feet slowly backed away from the onslaught. Options were slim.

“Gotta make em’ work for it.” The Herald’s lips curled into a wicked smile.

“Never did like Templars.” She took her hilt in both hands.

With a mighty roar, she pierced the ground, burying half of the sacred blade.

“We fight in the dark…”

Fissures of holy light spiraled all across the ground, forming an exotic spider’s web of deadly measure.

“To serve the light.”

Dirt, limbs, innards, rock- a mixture of death and revenge rained down from the sky. The earth had failed them, an unholy explosion leveling the remnants of Haven. She was the epicenter of a catastrophe.

Nothing stood where the light had touched. Not a plant, nor structure, nor Red Templar. She used the Sword to stand, life leaving her. Without anything left to oppose her, the
soot-covered Assassin limped to the gates of once-Haven. Leaning against the door, swearing her weak legs, she caught sight of the remaining trebuchet. The dead bodies of her fallen Inquisition soldiers littered the platform before her. In their honor, she used the last strength in her possession to aim the trebuchet to the loose mountain.

She looked to the sky, awaiting the signal, leaning on the lever for support.

A shadowy figure circled around, the sounds of war beat under the creature’s wings, the sound of cannons rattling off beneath the wind echoed in the valley. With each, powerful, beat, it became more menacing.

The dragon broke off into a glide, charging the Captain.

“Oh, for the love of Christ…”

She pushed herself to the ground, shuffling the snow beneath her hands and feet to try and run.

The demon purged the ground of existence as a red trail of whispering red lyrium formed behind her, being sprayed from the dragon’s mouth. Naomi held her breath as the crystals roared to life, exploding as she covered her face.

As if flying, her body was flung into the air, bouncing and twirling as it slammed against the frozen dirt. A corpse broke her tumbling.

Her eyes stared at the sky, watching the empty clouds dance. She saw the scar of the Breach, a haunting reminder of what almost came to light. Images of horrendous creatures from the future flashed before her eyes, a stomach-purging reminder that she could not fail.

Naomi turned to her side, her clawed hand tearing at the red snow as she lifted herself on her elbow. Her shoulders hung limp as she raised her head.

A cross-shaped figure immerged from the flames-a ghostly demon, his limbs out of proportion with his skeleton-thin frame. The claws that were his hands stretched and curled as he drew near, each footstep becoming louder. His head wore a helmet of flesh, curled around his half-revealed face. It’s as if she looked into the eyes of Hades himself.

All she saw before her was a target- something that had to be done. She had no time to be scared, no time to hesitate, no time to worry about dying. There was far too many people counting on her success; their lives depended on it.

Lurching herself to her feet, she spat blood to the ground, now covered in the crimson blueprints of the dead around her.

A quivering growl escaped her as she ran towards the Satan incarnate.

An earth-shattering rumble caused her to fall, the Sword being cast from her hand. The black dragon had landed behind her. Its face resembled the souls of Hell as it galloped towards her, its head winding in the air as it released a menacing howl. Saliva drenched the back of her person; its breath stank like rotten meat. She pushed herself to her feet, ready to tangle the winged lizard.

“ENOUGH!” The Devil commanded as he summoned a gust of wind to null the dragon’s bloodlust, “Pretender. You toy with forces beyond your ken. No more.” He held the voice of an old and tired God.

“The Elder One, I presume?” She spat to the ground, “Thought you’d be taller.”

“Exalt the Elder One! The will that is Corypheus!” He snarled.

“Could you say that slower, mate? You see, I’m awfully tired from killin’ yer entire riot.” She extended her arm, her eyes giving a brief flash of light.

The Sword of Eden quickly flew to her hand.

“Let’s try this again, yeah? Cor-Corify-Corifypiss? I need to know so I can tell the world what kinda demon I rid them of.” Her eyes were daggers as any jest left her voice.

He curled his claw, extending one talon at her.

“You will kneel.”

“Like Hell I will!” Her hands tightened around the hilt.

“You will resist. You will always resist. It matters not.” The demon raised his other hand.

In its palm rested a round, metal orb.

“By God…that’s an Apple…” She furrowed her brow, “How did you-“
“Mortals beg for truth they cannot have. It is beyond what you are, what I was…Know me, know what you have pretended to be. I am here for the Anchor. The process of removing it beings now.”

The artifact crackled to life with a corrupted, red light. He shot a claw at her, releasing the same, tainted energy.

Naomi’s marked hand reminded her of its being, rumbling so violently that she thought it would be ripped from her.

“It is your fault, ‘Herald.’ You interrupted a ritual years in planning, and instead of dying, you stole its purpose.” He twisted his hand towards him, yanking at the Anchor.

The force pulled at her like someone was trying to rip her frame from her skin- all that pain concentrated in her one, screaming palm.

She grit her teeth, staring the undead in his evil eyes. It felt wrong, as if he’d suck her soul straight from her.

“I do not know how you survived, but what marks you as ‘touched,’ what you flail at rifts, I crafted to assault the very Heavens.” His lip twisted in anger, and he curled his hand into a shaking fist.

The hue on Naomi’s marked hand flickered from green to red and back, a shriek of pain escaping her lips. Her banshee cries became sustained as she fell to the ground, grasping her wrist with her other hand, the Sword laying patiently next to her.

“And you used the Anchor to undo my work! The gall!”

“What is the purpose of this mad ‘Anchor’?!” She roared, the two colors twisting and fading in front of her, fighting over which would have dominance. It was as if a star died right in her care, the remnants being devoured by the black hole that was her hand.

“It is meant to bring certainty where there is none. For you, the certainty that I would always come for it.”

“Well you can’t fuckin’ have it!” She yelled, sitting back on her knees. She squeezed her hand as tight as she could, yelling as his efforts were finally suppressed by raw willpower.

His hand broke her vision as his claws clamped down on her wrist, raising her failing body. He brought the returned-green Anchor level with his hatred-filled eyes.

“I once breached the Fade in the name of another, to serve the Old Gods of the empire in person. I found only chaos and corruption. Dead whispers. For a thousand years I was confused. No more.”

He lowered his head to hers, “I have gathered the will to return under no name but my own, to champion withered Tevinter and correct this blighted world.”

Naomi’s face twisted into a snarl, jabbing at him with a sprung hidden blade.

“Beg that I succeed, for I have seen the throne of the Gods, and it was EMPTY!” He wound her up, throwing her into the base of the trebuchet. She heard a devastating crack come from the base of her non-marked arm. The Anchor blinded her as she held her injured shoulder, crackling in her ears.

“The Anchor is permanent. You have spoiled it with your stumbling.”

“Good, you right piece of shit!” She roared.

She forced her broken limb to summon the Sword to her side one last time. She stumbled to her feet, pressing her back firmly against the wooden weapon behind her. The dragon and his master closed the distance between themselves and the Herald of Andraste.

“So be it. I will begin again, find another way to give this world and yours the nation-and God- it requires. And you. I will not suffer even an unknowing rival. You must die.”

Something she hadn’t felt since that fateful day she arrived to Thedas.

Yearning.

A yearning to live.

Cullen stood on the side of the trail, not having moved since the explosion. He and the companions behind him lined the edge of the cliff side, having witnessed Naomi’s power level the
settlement they worked so hard to build. They watched with pained hearts as the Elder One descended, and viewed on what they thought would be her final moments.

The last of the evacuees passed them, a foot-marked trail being all that remained. The Staff stood next to him regretfully, the blade well beneath the snow.

Tears stung his face as he lifted the pistol to the air, his hand shaking in the night. Its’ barrel rattled with delay and uncertainty.

“I’ll do it.” Cassandra whispered.

“No.”

Looking away from the sight, he pulled the trigger, his wrist flying backwards from the unexpected recoil.

The group of them watched as the red flare climbed to the sky, lighting the mountain’s delicate white surface as it arched into oblivion.

His looked at everyone one by one. Leliana, Josephine, Cassandra, Iron Bull, Blackwall, Solas, Dorian, Vivienne, Sera, Varric, and Cole.

“We asked for a hero.” The Commander shook, fixated on the stars, “And by Andraste’s grace, we were granted one.” Cullen’s voice wavered, “But no, that was not enough. Not by any means.” His words turned piercing, “Ungrateful as we are, we had to sacrifice Her Herald for a miracle.”

The Commander tossed the smoking gun in the snow. The heavy weapon jostled, landing with a hushed ‘thud.’ Using the foreign Staff as support, he climbed, following the last of the refugees.

Cassandra’s wet face stared on. She walked to the gun that blackened the snow around it, gently picking it up. The wet metal glistening from the hellfire below.

“Maker forgive us.” She croaked.


The last of the signal left the sky. The Captain shook her head at the demons, letting out a maddened, menacing cackle. She sheathed the Sword.

“Your arrogance’ll be yer downfall...quite well to find that out.” Her guffaw tempered into low barks of vexation, “When you remind yourself of your failure here, do me right and remember one thing.”

With a thunderous kick, she landed her foot on the lever of the trebuchet, sending it’s mechanisms into a heave. The large rock was thrust from its socket, hurling into the abused mountain.

“When I come back around, and by God, I will...” she murmured, “I’m goin’ta put you down.” Her Irish tongue drug the vowels with a harsh rumble.

She translocated away, running towards the avalanche. Two doors swung in the wind, the chains formally holding them shut rattling against the wood.

Her legs gave way to a slide, slipping into the dark space as snow covered the entrance, snuffing out any light but the green, cursed energy seeping from her fractured palm.

Naomi’s body bounced from one wooden support beam to the next, bending and warping over their narrow width.

She soon met the bottom of the abandoned ruin, tumbling down a snow drift onto cold, wet stone- her head bouncing off of the ice.

And there she lay silently, at the mercy of everything around her.
Aboard the Jackdaw

Chapter Summary

"You would see all of mankind corralled into a neatly furnished prison, safe and sober, yet dulled beyond reason and sapped of all spirit. So, aye... with everything I've seen and learned in these last years, I do believe it."

-Edward Kenway

Chapter Notes

*Meanwhile...*

He ship swayed above the water as the anchor buried itself in the sands below, sending puffs of grain to the bubbling surface. The Fragment of Eden was hushed, and the large sailing vessel lost its' golden glow.

“This’ll cause some attention, you're aware? Adéwalé frowned.

“Aye, but we have little choice-none the wiser."

“They've been gone for years. What makes you so sure she'll cooperate? What if this is a trap?” He’d been tortured since their disappearance. It was unexplained...unaccounted for. Maddening.

He felt his sanity slip every hour of ignorance that passed.

“If she can help us find a way to bring them back to us, it’s worth the risk, in my ledger.”

Adéwalé grabbed the railing in front of him, “Using the Fragment? Recovering the Armor? Speaking to that mad Crystal Ball? Working with the Templars? Are you so convinced?”

“Finding the Pieces- is that not our cause, no matter the means? What’s with you, Adey?”

“We’ve lost our crew and these hired hands grow restless, Kenway. We’re on the coast of Europe when we should be fighting for our freedom elsewhere. I know it’s been hard for you. It's been hard for all of us involved. But they're gone, in both allegiance and spirit, and you need to accept that.” The Trinidadian’s words reflected a truth that Edward would not entertain, "As far as the others, go...they're dead. It's time to move on from all of this."

“They're not dead... A ship, a crew, a Captain- they don’t just all go missing, damn it! Why am I the only one to see this?!” He roared, slamming his fist on the wheel of the Jackdaw.

“We cannot accept fault for not knowing what would happen. But skeletons should be given the respect to remain skeletons.”

Edward cringed from crippling guilt.

"Go. See what she has to say," the Quartermaster mumbled, "but after this, it's time to retire. Do you agree?"

The Captain thought back to a time where he and Naomi discussed their plans after the sea, what life would hold for them. He'd pictured her in it, never telling her so. She predicted he'd be dead by then, anyway.

However, it seemed that he'd be the one to outlive her.

"I do. You have my thanks." He swallowed.
"Do not thank me, Captain. I remain as vigilant only because I know that if Captain McNamara was here, and we were not, without explanation..." He sighed, "She'd be searching for us till the end of days."

"That she would." A saddened smile crept up on him.

The Armor of Eden shimmered in the sun; it’s engraved, metal plates twisting the light in all different shapes and patterns as it clung to Edward's body. His sandy-blonde hair dangled around his sea-torn face.

“I can’t let them go...God help me, I can’t let her go."
Her body rose and fell at a leisurely pace, the lungs inside struggling to remain active. A soft, howling of the winds above filled the chamber with threatening ambience. Her Precursor sight tore through the blackness, giving way to monotone shapes as she bled. A crack in the ceiling snapped the Captain alive, rolling to safety as a monstrous icicle impaled itself in the ice-adorned ground.

She pushed herself to her knees, her hands sliding. She fell three times before her feet allowed her to stand. Her coat and blouse were red with filthy patches of white breaking through. Blood trickled down from her head from where it slammed against the ground, forcing her left eye into a squint. Everything was numb.

Using her untamed Anchor as a light source, she held her hand as she would a torch. Her wet clothing gave her chills, her semi-frozen leathers grinding in protest to movement.

Naomi wrapped her arm against her body, her torso buckling from violent shivers. The green light guided her forward into the abandoned passage.

“I'd give anythin’ to have that blasted tarp of a Shroud right 'bout now…”

She walked through the tunnels, seemingly lost. Her senses were overwhelmed by the broken bones, gashes, all sorts of wounds-her broken shoulder screaming as it dangled.

Naomi leaned against a wall, resting her hand on her knees. She let out vicious gasps for breath, peering at the dripping trail behind her.

The Captain’s eyelids grew heavy.

“No, no, no! Can’t fall asleep.” She beat her head with base of her hand, “Wake up…” She whimpered.

A gust of wind blew through the chamber. Her head shot up out of its’ stupor.

“Wind?”

She pushed herself off of the wall, stumbling as she moved again. Her heavy feet pushed her forward, still using her illuminated hand as a torch. Her arm grew tired of fighting gravity.

As she approached a turn, a feint light illuminated the way around the bend. Another gust came through.

The pain she endured was enough to drive her to a brief moment of insanity. She let out a scream as her rib clenched under the weight of her limp body, falling to the ground.

Naomi lay there, staring at a rock in front of her, sobbing quietly.

“I don’t want to die…I can’t die…Not until I find them…”

Using large mineral deposits around her, she pulled herself to her feet despairingly.
“Keep on goin’ like I’m fuckin’ endless…” She growled as she turned the corner.

A wide expanse of snow opened itself before her. She limped outside, not being able to see anything short of two feet in front of her. A blizzard welcomed her as she drug her feet through the deep snow.

Her chest became congested as she pushed through the frozen wasteland. The wind carried the noises of the forest as she progressed. She thought she heard movement, but assumed it to just be the trees swaying in the ice storm.

The snow being up to her knees in the uphill slope became increasingly hard to traverse. Her entire body turned numb, her wet and blood-soaked clothes clinging to her with a frosty sheen. Her legs gave out from under her, landing her in the pillow of white frost below.

“So…tired…” The Anchor illuminated the ice and snow around her. She found it relaxing, and sleep became more tantalizing than ever before.

“Aye, I fancy takin’a quick kip yet…”

Wolves howling around her woke her up, interrupting her nap. She grew frustrated, wanting to sleep in peace. She heard the patting of paws against the snow.

She sat up, their yellow eyes in the distance, circling her. She looked down to her clothing.

“Shoulda expected this, all this red I’ve left behind…”

“Well, get on with it, then!” She yelled, as she stumbled to her feet.

She tried to move her broken arm, but it remained resistant to her will.

The Anchor flared as her adrenaline strengthened her weak body. Angrily, it spat and crackled, refusing to lie dormant. She yelled profanities at the hounds, baring her teeth. A wolf finally pounced.

Raising her hand out of reflex, a monstrous rift opened in front of it, sucking the beast into its bowels. It grew larger until one by one, they were pulled in and eaten by the vortex she’d summoned. The Anchor tingled with victory, calming itself after a short time.

“Would’ve been useful a-a…time…ago…” The Captain sank into the snow, sparks shooting from her side.

…

Cullen sat in his tent, rolling the Staff in his hands.

“Looks elven.” He studied it carefully.

A plethora of shouts and whistles came from outside. It startled him, the metal artifact landing on the ground with a ‘thud.’

He heard muffled summons from outside, “Commander, Commander!”

Master Dennet popped his head in.

“Commander, you’ve got to see this!” His face was gleeful.

A wave of cheers caught his attention. Grabbing the Shroud-encased-Staff, he lifted the cloth and ran outside with vigor, Naomi’s necklace clanking against his chest plate.

It was the first sign of happiness he’d seen since they left Haven.

“Please be her…”

He rushed out into the cold, finding his place among the crowd as they gathered towards the opposite end of which they traveled.

Cole ran up the slope, a stampede of horses and other mounts walking in line behind him. He held the reigns of a different beast.

“Dullahan!” Cullen yelled, high lifting his knees as he ran to the edge of their camp.

The dracolisk bucked his head, limping towards the Commander as Cole let go. His nostrils pushed steam as he approached his friend, his large jaws gasping for air as he slowed. He met Cullen with his horned head, pressing his muzzle to his armored chest as he greeted him. The Commander’s enthusiasm died as he realized the beast was walking on three legs.

“Are you hurt, boy?” He reached down for a curled limb.
Dullahan snorted in protest.  Cullen rested the Staff next to the dracolisk, grabbing his injured front leg with both of his hands to get a closer view.  The dracolisk bucked, pushing him backwards and slamming his injured limb on the Staff, tripping forward as it rolled beneath him.

The beast sat there—legs curled underneath his black and red body.  The Shroud had unraveled itself, glowing as it made contact with Dullahan’s scaly hide.  This made the beast uneasy.  After a few moments, the Shroud faded to darkness.  Dullahan stood to his feet, kicking and stammering in place, taking off towards Josephine.  She accepted his company joyfully as she and Leliana petted him.

“What? How—”

Cullen turned back to the red cloth laying in the snow.

“Did that heal his injured leg?”

Pondering his actions for a moment, he reflected similar occurrences that appeared unexplained.  He’d thought he was just rationalizing miracles.

He took the Shroud in his strong hands, gripping it in confusion.  Removing his glove, he drew his sword, gazing into the steel as he considered his decision to be somewhat unwise.  Gently, his teeth chattered as he ran the blade across his hand.

“Commander, what are you—Maker have mercy, have you lost your damned mind?” Cassandra knelt to him, taking the sword from his hand.

“No, you don’t understand,” He stammered, “Watch.”

He took the Shroud by his bleeding hand, holding it tightly.  The fabric lit the darkness around them, and within seconds, Cullen’s wound had been healed.

“Another Piece of Eden.” He whispered.

“This whole time…” She mumbled, “That’s how she—”

Cullen wrapped it around his hand, looping his glove through his belt.

“There were so many wounded, she could have—“ The Seeker shook her head, “On the beach, when Thaddeus was injured…” She growled, “Why didn’t she use it on our people?”

“There must have been a reason.  We can’t use it until we find out what that was.” He looked to the ground, “As much as I want to, we don’t know the consequences.  It could outweigh the benefits.” He sighed.

“So you’d keep it on your person?”

“To keep it safe, yes.”

“Ridiculous.” She spat, leaving him in a blind fury and throwing his sword to the ground.

She rejoined Vivienne, Dorian, Mother Giselle, and Solas— all who were working vigilantly to heal the wounded Inquisition members.

Cullen picked his sword from its snowy imprint, putting it back in its respective socket.

“She yet lives.”

He turned frantically, seeing no one behind him.  Looking around, he noticed he was the only one on the outskirts of the camp, save for the mounts Cole had retrieved.

“Do not make me regret speaking with you.  Use the Staff and find her—quickly.”

“Perhaps I had more exposure to those red lyrium Templars than I thought…”

“The Shroud speaks.  Make haste, before I find her myself.”

“The Shroud?”

He lifted his hand to see the patterns shifting on the fabric that encased his wrist.

“How—“

“My patience is a well that runs dry.”

The lines on the fabric shifted again, as if a moving picture had been stitched into its’ cloth.

Cullen took the Staff in his hand, the Apple glowing a feint purple.  He turned around to march back to camp, and the bulb burned hot.

He stared at it confused, waving it behind him again.
The light faded.
Swinging it in all different directions like a mad man, he noticed how the Apple grew brighter as it faced Haven.

“Follow the Light, it will guide you so.”

Without further delay, he ran to Dullahan, raising his fingers to let loose a summoning whistle.

The beast turned to him, running after he saw the Commander break out into a deep-snow-suppressed sprint. He lowered his horns as he charged. Cullen took one in his hand and swung, Dullahan scooping him up and gracefully placing him on his back as he did.

They ripped through the camp, knocking over a Healer in the process.

“Cullen!” Cassandra yelled hotly.
“Damn it...” She kicked an empty bucket next to her.

... His knees hit the snow at a sight he’s seen before.
Her body. Her blood.
There were no bullets to dodge, this time. Only the blizzard that made the journey near impossible, and his fear for the worst.

The Inquisitor’s arms dangled as he picked her waist up just enough to reinstate Consus to her leaking soul. Feeling her numbness, Cullen wrapped his coat around her, balancing her head in the fur.
With Dullahan’s help, he secured her on the beast, climbing up behind her and catching her unconscious body as she almost fell off. After finding a comfortable position in where she rested in front of him, her head cradled against his chest, Dullahan began the trek back to camp, the glowing Apple lighting the way.

“Wake up, Inquisitor…”

“Yes, sweet thing, it’s lovely.” Naomi looked at the young girl.
“I want you to take it with you so…” she blushed, “you won’t be lonely when you leave Dublin.” She frowned.

The Mentor took the atrocious, beaded, leather bracelet in her hands, placing it around her wrist.
“I helped make it, too.” The boy sneered.
“Alright, alright. Settle yourselves.” Naomi laughed, “I’ll never let it leave my person. Thank you both.”

They hugged her, their little white Assassin uniforms contrasting heavily with the Mentor’s black clothing.
“How long will you be gone?” The girl asked for the both of them- their delicate faces looked up to her in sadness.
“Only a few months. Have I ever been gone for longer?”
“Aye, but you only stay for a few days.” The boy responded.
Tears welled in their eyes as she knelt down to face them.
“Now, now, they’re’ll be none of that.” She let loose the most genuine smile she could muster.
It seemed to help them a bit.
“Tell you what. This time, I’ll even let you pick out what y’want me to bring back.” They were then gleeful, “So, what’ll it be, then?”
“I want a wee li’l bird!” The girl jumped excitedly, “Not a real one, though. Mentor O’Mailey says we have ’nough birds ’round with the pidgeons ’nd all…”
“A horse would be lovely.” The little boy said, hopeful, “I really do love horses.”
“I know you do, lad.” She giggled, “Strange children you are, indeed.”

A clock tower chimed in the distance.
“Run ‘long now, clean yourselves for supper.” She ordered. The two scampered off, playing as they went. Mentor O’Mailey slowly walked up the hall, not having wanted to interrupt them. “I’ve made contact with Mentor Ah Tabai in the West Indies. He always commends you for your quick rise within the ranks. Starts it off with every letter.” Her voice was less than enthusiastic, perhaps a tad envious. “‘Spose I should be honored hearin’ that from a Mentor, tenured as he is.” “Quite right you should. Outranks all of us here, m’fraid.” She gave pause. “Ah, you there! Did you really tell him you’d bring back a horse?” Edward's brow raised in suspicion as he rounded a corner. “A toy, yes.” “Poor lad seems convinced otherwise.”

“You cannot remain asleep.” Consus’s ghostly voice pried her from her dreams. “Stay...Naomi, you have to stay awake.”
Her muffled ears could barely process the voice that spoke to her. “Cullen?”
Her eyes opened slightly; a chunk of metal and fur reflected the Shroud’s soft, red glow. “C—She began to cough, her throat being bone dry.
“Thank the Maker—” His words still wavered in between her senses failing, “Mother…iselle. We…closer, now. You…sleep.”
“Sleep?” Naomi welcomed the thought, letting her eyes drift off.
“Wake up.”
A strong arm jostled her as she disobeyed.

...“What would you have me tell them? This isn’t what we asked them to do!” Cullen’s roaring voice echoed. They’d been arguing for hours. Mother Giselle sat next to her, not having left her side since she arrived. “We cannot simply ignore this! We must find a way!” The Seeker held a dark tone. “And who put you in charge? We need a consensus, or we have nothing!” He argued back. Naomi shook her head as she lay, grumbling. “Please, we must use reason! Without the infrastructure of the Inquisition, we’re hobbled!” Josephine pleaded. “That can’t come from nowhere!” Cullen turned his back to the Ambassador. “She didn’t say it could!” The Spymaster came to her defense. “ENOUGH! This is getting us nowhere!” Cassandra bellowed. “Well, we’re agreed on that much!” The Commander had the last word as the group separated into all corners of the refugee camp. The Captain began to stir, trying to stand up. “Shh, you need to rest.” Mother Giselle whispered. Naomi looked to her. “Try tellin’ them that, would yeh? Hours have passed and we haven’t had a lick of silence with their yappin’.” The Captain huffed a loose hair out of her face. “They have that luxury, thanks to you. The enemy could not follow, and with time to doubt, we turn to blame. Infighting may threaten us as much as this Corypheus you speak of in your dreams.” “You know of him?”
“You’ve repeated it multiple times as you faded out of consciousness. Varric…recognized the name.” She smiled gently.

“Either way,” Naomi pushed the blankets off her and forced herself to her feet—the world spinning as she did, “this behavior’s only good for a head pain. Another head pain.”

“They know. But our situation—your situation—is complicated. Our leaders struggle because of what we, *survivors*, witnessed. We saw our defender stand…and fall. And now, we have seen her return.” Mother Giselle stood next to her, “The more the enemy is beyond us, the more miraculous your actions appear. And the more our trials seem ordained. That is hard to accept, no? What “we” have been called to endure? What “we,” perhaps, must come to believe?”

“Belief,” Naomi scoffed, “All this is ‘cause of belief. Belief that Assassins could win an ancient war. Belief in fear of Mages. Belief in suppression by Templars,” She turned to the Mother, “And beliefs about the next world, when they should be believing in this one.”

The Herald pushed herself forward, leaning on a post after a short distance as her strength depleted. With a somber gaze, she looked to those who once gave her peace of mind. Cassandra shook her head hopelessly at a map, unable to form a plan. Leliana and Josephine sat with their knees wrapped to heir chest, staring into the flames. Cullen rubbed his head with his fingertips, staring at the ground. Her companions stood around the camp, all eyes trained on her. The sky was red with premature sunlight.

*“Shadows fall, and hope has fled,”* Mother Giselle’s harmonic voice filled the crisp air. She walked toward them, hands clasp to her front.

*“Steel your heart,”* The Chantry woman’s eyes met Leliana’s dead stare.

*“The dawn will come.”*

Naomi’s chest grew heavy- her brow furrowed in an attempt to reel her spilt emotions.

*“The night is long, and the path is dark. Look to the sky, for one day soon…”*  
A tear lapped over the Herald’s full lids as Mother Giselle stood next to her.

*“The dawn will come.”*  
Leliana joined the Mother, looking to her as she stood next to the Herald.

*“The Shepard’s lost, and his home is far. Keep to the stars,”*  
The Spymaster’s delicate voice moved the soldiers, as they began to circle the campfire, adding voices to the holy song.

*“The dawn will come.”*  
The remaining forces of the Inquisition gathered around Naomi and Mother Giselle.

*“The night is long,”* Cullen’s voice filled the air with a gentle hum, *“And the path is dark, look to the sky, for one day soon…”*  
The Herald met his eyes across the camp, his amber eyes teeming with life again.

*“The dawn will come.”*  
One by one, the soldiers took to one knee, bowing to their Herald of Andraste. They saluted her with fist over heart. She’d never witnessed anything like it—it almost made her uncomfortable. On her ship, she was the true authority, but only at the mercy of her crew’s approval. These people, however…they swore fealty.

*“Bare your blade, and raise it high! Stand your ground,”*  
Her gaze wandered to the outskirts of the camp. Cole attended Chancellor Roderick’s dead body. Her hand instinctively touched the Shroud around her waist, feeling guilt seep into her already doubtful mind.

*“The dawn will come.”*  
She then saw Solas standing behind the gathered crowd, nodding at her in approval. He had a determined grin on his face, and for the first time since meeting him, she felt like he was truly on her side. His aura had changed, his demeanor no longer indifferent.

*“The night is long, and the path is dark. Look to the sky, for one day soon,”*  
Their faces lifted up to look at her as they finished the verse.

*“The dawn will come.”*  
The soldiers around her stood to their feet, fists still held to their now-uplifted hearts.
“All praise the Herald of Andraste!” An admiral cried.
Short bursts of shouts came from their lungs.
“It’s all one world, Herald. All that changes is our place in it.” Mother Giselle nodded to Naomi as the crowd began to disperse, leaving to attend the wounded.
Naomi limped towards the Commander, but was interrupted by Solas.
“A word?” He whispered into her ear as he walked passed her.
She sighed, meeting Cullen’s longing eyes before turning around to follow the elf. He led her to a snowy bank, far away from the others and peering off into the mountains. With a majestic wave of his hand, he lit a strange torch that jutted from the ground. Watching him cast the magic was beautiful.
They stood with the awkward flame between them.
“A wise woman, worth heeding. Her kind understand the moments that unify a cause. Or fracture it.” He began, “The orb Corypheus carried, the power he used against you. It is elven.”
“Is that a fact?” She cocked her head to him, “Because I stood less than a foot from the demon, and I found that Corypheus wields a corrupted Piece of Eden.”
Solas frowned.
“I’m afraid they are one in the same.”
She shook her head disbelievingly,
“Solas, how-“
“Corypheus used the orb to open the Breach. Unlocking it must have caused the explosion that destroyed the Conclave. I do not yet know how Corypheus survived…nor am I certain how people will react when they learn of the orbs’s origin.” He lifted his gaze from the ground to meet hers,
“Just know that, when they inevitably do, you will be questioned, as will the elves.”
She grunted.
“They can question me all they’d like. Me weapons are far from elven. You know elves don’t exist where I’m from, yeah? Didn’t I make that clear?”
“They have vanished from your world because of the weapons…” He trailed off, “You have to keep their similarities in mind when having them in view of the public eye. If not for you, then for the elves.”
“Because it’d make them an easy target?”
Solas nodded his head,
“There are steps we can take to prevent such a distraction.”
She crossed her arms, looking at him.
“You’ve changed, Solas.”
The elf grunted.
“By attacking the Inquisition, Corypheus changed all of us- changed it; changed you.”
He waved his hand over the green veilfire. The flames thinned into a small view of mountains, high and mighty with snowy peaks.
“Scout to the north, be their guide.” More mountains came into view, “There is a place that waits for a force to hold it. There is a place where the Inquisition can build, can grow.”
The green embers danced underneath his fingertips as he twisted them into an image of great mystery. A glorious structure came to view, a castle of such size that it would humble even the greatest fortress on Earth. The sight of it filled her stomach with fluttering butterflies.
“Skyhold.”
He snapped his fingers, releasing the flames to their free-flowing form; crossing his hands behind his back. The sunrise came over the mountains, illuminating the valley by the break of dawn.
“I know you have questions. In time, I will do my best to answer them.”
She observed him in her weak state. Naomi decided it best to not press too hard now.
She wished to avoid making ill with perhaps the only person aside from Corypheus that knew why she’d been brought here.
“If you could just answer me this, at present…” Her voice fell, “Why confide in me now?”
Solas smiled wishfully at the fading stars above.
"I chose which wolf to feed."
"The question isn't 'is it special?' The question is 'how special?' We found relics, but there are always relics. Elves ranged far before their empire was crushed, but rarely did they return where they did not build. This place, they visited again and again. I see it in the fragments—clays from different nations, not just craftsmen. Styles from different centuries, not just clans. And yet no record of a ruin. The structures here are all Fereldan, with stone ferried up by a typical madman. Whatever was here, whatever natural spire, it was flattened for a floor. But I know the common shapes, and I will erect them as was custom. And we shall see what the elves wished to see."

-Enchanter's Journal

The sun was high in the sky as the refugees pushed on, climbing the Frostbacks with newly struck hope. Leading the troop with the elf at her side, she turned to look at those who'd follow. Stragglers in the back began to stagger, holding on to each other as they stumbled forth. The situation turned grim, and she feared for their lives.

“Solas, how far out are we?” She asked.

“About half way, Herald.”

She observed tired eyes on the faces of the ambitious.

“We should rest here for a moment. Eat, drink, that sort of thing. We are losing some of our people to fatigue.”

The elf mage gave her an approving nod, placing his pack on the ground and sitting. He dug through it and removed some elfroot.

Naomi left the elf alone, walking towards the Commander who followed with a watchful eye.

“We’re resting here. Too many off in the distance,” She repeated to him, pointing at the back line to the stragglers, “See me when you’re done giving the order, would you?”

“Of course, Lady Herald.” He gave her a quick nod.

It wasn’t long before his booming voice barked the command to halt. The Captain stood there, watching the crowd as they opened up wrapped meat they’d scrounged together, as well as any other resources. The mages conjured fires, allowing the food to be cooked and the snow purified for drink. Varric and Sera split bread, while Dorian and Vivienne declined any of the “rubbish” anyone had to offer.

“I’d rather starve.” The Tevinter mage sneered.

“Agreed.” The Lady of Iron raised her lip in disdain.

The Iron Bull and his chargers sat in a circle, drinking from a single cask they’d saved.

“Exchanging hands isn’t going to cut it. Lugging this thing through the mountains is growing tiresome, Chief.” Krem joked.

“You aren’t suggesting we abandoned 15 year-aged Antivan drink?” He joked, “Let’s lighten it up a bit.” He turned the faucet.

Dorian and Vivienne looked to each other, overhearing the conversation.

“What’s this about finely aged wine?” Dorian leaned over the Bull, snagging the cup from his hand, “Don’t mind if I do!” He chimed.

“You do intend to share, don’t you, my dear?” Vivenne took a seat next to the Chief, his Chargers
laughing hysterically.

Blackwall and Cole attended to the horses, much under Master Dennet’s supervision. “Frightened. They don’t like the dracolisk much. He’s scary to them.” Cole pet a horse on his nose.

“Use your fancy powers to tell the horses to grow some balls, then.” Blackwall scoffed.

“I don’t see you cozying up to the beast either, Warden.” Master Dennet retorted, defending his beasts.

Crunching in the hard snow snapped the Captain out of her observation.

“You and I need to talk.” Cassandra snarled, “That thing on your waist— it heals wounds.”

Naomi sighed.

“Aye, lass, that it does.”

The Seeker glowered at her in disgust.

“You’d just let us all die without remorse? You could have saved hundreds of our people—“

“It’s a parasite and I’m the host, you see. The effects of using this thing…” Naomi shook her head, “Unspeakable.”

“Try.” Cassandra demanded.

“I have seen deep into history using my artifacts,” The Captain crossed her arms, “I have seen entire nations erased from history fightin’ over this particular Shroud. So aye, I keep it to the members of the Brotherhood. Not out of spite, but safety. It allows us to keep goin’ and we protect it.” Her words unsettled the Seeker.

A fresh scar traced Naomi’s hairline, passed her ear, and ended at her jawline on the left side of her face. The intersection with the previous mark of battle was right at her cheekbone, above which her eye remained all but swollen shut. A new, permanent reminder of Haven, crossed with the memory of her duel with the Sage. She sighed, wondering how she could nicely ask her enemies to stop carving into her flesh.

Her still-swollen eye was bruised and displeasing to look at.

“Is it that horrific?” Naomi jested at the Seeker’s gawk.

Cullen walked back to them, engaging in the conversation.

“The troops welcome rest after half a day of climbing.”

The two women fell silent.

“Am I interrupting something?” He asked nervously.

“Cassandra was just makin’ note of how mangled me face is.” She joked.

Cullen shot a harsh glare to the Nevarran warrior, who then claimed innocence.

“I just want to understand, Herald. I need to understand.” Cassandra frowned.

“The Seeker of Truth comin’ out in you, eh?”

“Perhaps.”

Naomi rolled her eyes.

“How did you come to knowledge of it, anyhow?”

“He sliced his hand on his own blade and held the stupid thing.” Cassandra spat.

“After I watched it heal Dullahan’s leg, on accident.” He defended himself.

“Most curious…” The Herald’s voice trailed off, “Aye, alright, the Shrouds can heal wounds. Happy?” She crossed her arms defensively, “E’rrytime someone outside of the Brotherhood has learned of this, the death toll starts a’climbin’. Ironic, isn’t it?”

“Shrouds? As in there’s more than one?” The Seeker asked.

“The exact number is unknown, but aye, there’s more than one. This one’s just…special.”

“I can guess as to why.” Cullen rested his hand on his hilt in a relaxed fashion, switching weight to his other leg.

“Can you, now?”

“That voice that comes out of it. Nearly thought I’d been possessed.” He rubbed the back of his neck.

The Captain’s arms unraveled in surprise.

“He spoke to you?” She grabbed his forearms, “What did he say?”
“Told me you were alive, told me how to find you.” His eyes softened, a gentle, crooked smile lifting from his lips. His eyes were smoldering. Cassandra snapped her fingers between them three times.

“Focus- why does the Shroud speak?” She put her hands on her hips, irritated.

Naomi pulled away from the Commander.

“It holds the consciousness of its original creator, the best of the Isu scientists by the name of Consus.”

“A consciousness named Consus?” Cassandra laughed, “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“That’s where the word comes from, lass. His name…in my world, anyway. Listen, this story is not of short length. It’d be best to discuss this when we get to…” She sighed.

“To where?” Cullen asked her.

“Do not change the subject.” The Seeker growled.

“Cassandra, I’ll answer any questions that you might have after there aren’t so many ears around us that might overhear.” Naomi stood her ground, “In the meantime, keep it to yourself. I don’t recommend compromising a secret that I’ve dedicated a decade of my life to protect.” She threatened, her hand reflexively wrapping around her sacred hilt.

The Seeker did not respond well to it, and left them in silence. Leliana tried to speak with her, and the angry Nevarran stormed passed her, waving her hand.

“She’ll come around. We’ve all been through a lot, I fear all our minds are strained.” He comforted her, “Do not worry yourself.”

She smiled, rubbing her now-healed shoulder.

“Since I’ve got here, you’ve been watchin’ over me.” She grunted, “And all I’ve done is piss you off and tried to kill you.”

“My temper isn’t a hard one to provoke.” He chuckled, “Although, the attempts on my life might be something I could have lived without.”

“Aye, you’re standin’, yeah? Seemed like you’ve lived well just fine with ‘em, too.” She jokingly punched his chest plate.

His face lifted.

“That’s not all you’ve done for me. You’ve also been the one to make the hard decisions when our reasoning has failed. You confronted an evil Magister who’d call himself a god- for us, for people who accused you of heinous acts.” He blushed slightly.

She felt saddened, looking on to his ashamed demeanor. She didn’t want anyone to feel as though they owed her a debt.

“I took vows, and oaths- just as you, once.” Her fingers curled around the hilt of the Sword reminiscently.

“I swore myself into a war that was fought in the shadows of society. We fought for all who’d brand themselves as innocent.” Her gaze left him, facing the pool of refugees, “I see no difference in duty, here-in Thedas. And though me ‘nd me crew may disagree on many’a things, they, too, are blind to where we fulfill those duties and oaths.”

The wind twirled her delicate strands of hair, sending it across her thick, black eyelashes. The bruises and marks littered her face, and dark circles encompassed her green eyes. They lifted up to him.

“I seek no praise, Commander. We’ve all played our part in the last two weeks, God help us…”

Cullen lifted the pendant he still wore from his shoulders. He gently held the loop around her head, bringing it down carefully, balancing the strap from his fingertips as it caressed her neck.

His hands lingered for a moment as he looked down to her in awe, his mouth slightly ajar, his hair tumbling just as hers.

“Just the same, you’re a hero to us-to me.” He held an enthraling, amber gaze that lit Naomi’s belly aflame.

“You’re tall, know that? Lot taller than me- than anyone I’ve met, in truth.” She sputtered, giving off an awkward laugh.
His eyes darted in perplexity as she stumbled backwards.
“Uh..thanks?” He cleared his throat, “I, uhm...I should…” He rubbed the crook of his neck, extending it as he turned his head away from her.

Naomi looked to the spot where she’d kissed him only nights before. She remembered the way he smelled, tasted, and how his body felt against hers. He turned his head to the ground, lifting his eyes.
“Are you alright, Herald?”

Sweat beaded her forehead as her mind wondered into feverish desires.
“Aye, I’ll be quite ‘right. Let’s get going after an hour.” She turned on her heel, her heart pounding in her chest. She all but ran from him.

He stood there, watching her use the Staff to balance herself as she made her way to Dullahan.
“Maker have mercy on me.” He released stale air from his lungs, having held his breath with anxiety.

Giggling caught him off guard. He turned behind him, seeing Josephine and Leliana wave to him.
“Come here!” The Ambassador shouted.
“No!” He responded.
“Don’t make me come over there!” Leliana challenged.
“Andraste preserve us…” he grumbled angrily, marching over to the two women.
“You still owe us an apology.” They crossed their arms, looking at him diligently.

He sighed in defeat.
“I’m sorry for...yelling at you two.”
“And?”
“And?” He repeated Leliana’s question.
“Not being honest with us!” The Ambassador shouted.

Cullen lowered his hands in a gesture, suggesting they keep their voices down.
“What have I not been honest about?” He crossed his muscular arms.

“Having interest in the Herald?”
“This again?”

“Lying to the one they call ‘Lady Nightingale’ is not very becoming of you, Commander.” Josephine rolled her tongue.

“I don’t have time for this.” He growled.
“We’re stuck in a valley in the Frostback Mountains with half a days’ journey ahead of us. You have nothing but time.” Leliana grabbed his elbow, pulling him down beside her on small, wooden bench set in the temporary camp.

Naomi and Solas lead the Inquisition through the valley until the sun began to set behind the stone guardians looming to their sides.
They came to a rounded path, bending to the right and sloping downwards.
“I believe we have arrived.” He walked passed her, using the blade of his staff to help him climb a boulderous slope to their flank, leading up to a tiny break in the large mountains. Drawing her own Staff, she followed suite.

The light broke through the small clearing casting a shadow below. Solas stood there looking pleased with himself as he gazed towards the setting sun.
“Quite fancy yourself, huh?” She grunted as she climbed- the nimble elf being much quicker than she.
“What’s got you all-“

There it stood, out in the distance, paling everything around it. A medieval lift tower gave way to the winding arches supporting the bridge to its’ monstrous gates. Guard towers
littered the perimeter. It stood a league from the base of the mountain, high above anything that could ever dream of assaulting it. A small, semi-frozen sea surrounded the hushed mountains, bottlenecking into the ocean down below. A fortress capable of harboring a force of their size and on-capable of defending such a people as theirs—yearning for someone to fill its’ empty halls, for someone to drape banners down its’ impermeable sides.

Skyhold.
The Inquisitor

Chapter Summary

"Whatever we were before, we are now the Inquisition."
-Inquisitor McNamara

He Inquisition took turns using the lift, loading their caravans one at a time. Naomi walked through the gates of Skyhold, the first feet to grace its grounds in what was thought to be hundreds of years. As glorious as it was, she couldn’t help but notice the place was in shambles.

But there was room. Room to improve, room to grow- Solas had delivered his word.

The soldiers poured in around her, carrying crates and supplies across the courtyard. The mages did their best to provide light, igniting ancient torches as they walked. Their flames revealed the tired faces of her followers. None of them had slept within the last forty-eight hours.

Vivienne approached her side, speaking tactfully.

“What a fascinating life you lead, my dear.” She folded her hands behind her back, “First, you fall out of the Fade, then you’re attacked by an Archdemon. If you wanted more public attention, you could have just held a ball.”

“Answer me something, Lady of Iron,” Naomi jested, “Do I strike you as the dancin’ type?”

“No, I suppose you don’t. Though, you didn’t strike me as the type to leave oneself vulnerable to attack, either.” She turned to the Captain, “It was a miscalculation, one that I’m sure you won’t repeat.” Vivienne snickered, “But the enemy struck a serious blow against you and the Inquisition.” Her eyes narrowed, “We must recognize that. You must.”

Naomi couldn’t tell if Vivienne was thanking her or scolding her like a child.

“I did what I had to in order to secure the lives of our people,” She furrowed her brow, “That is not something I’ll find me readily apologzin’ for.”

“Death is a part of war, my dear, and a part of life. We cannot escape it. Those who die for the Inquisition give their lives willingly. The alternative is to forfeit all they cherish to these horrors from the sky.” Her silver horns sparkled as they walked through a line of lit torches, “Act first, and teach them to fear us. You can become the leader the faithful require, but you must do it soon.”

“Leader?” Naomi panicked, “Who said anything ‘bout me bein’ a leader?”

“No lectures.” He chuckled.

They made their way to a guard tower, the soldiers setting up a makeshift barracks under the Commander’s order.

“Wait outside, and listen.” Iron Bull instructed as he walked inside, leaving the door open.

The Captain’s Precursor senses came to life as she eavesdropped the conversation. “Tanner,” The man gripped Iron Bull’s handshake, “I’m from Jader. Well, near Jader.” He had a strange accent.

“Mira. I was Guard-Captain for Lady Pendell. Signed on after shit blew up at the Conclave.” An Orlesian woman introduced herself in her thick, French-sounding tongue.

Iron Bull helped them unpack as they spoke, lifting up the heaviest items. “So, you ready to kill some demons or Venatori…or whatever that Corypheus asshole is?” The Qunari man spoke.

“This isn’t just about killing. We’re helping the Inquisition save the world and build the next empire.” Mira rebutted.

“I just couldn’t spend my whole life on a farm. Needed to live a little, you know?” Tanner admitted with a hopeful tone.

“Well, long as I get paid, I’m happy. That’s why I signed up.” Iron Bull huffed as he lifted something extra heavy onto an iron shelf. “Costin’ me a right fortune.” Naomi thought to herself.

The three of them unpacked in silence for a short while.

“I saw what happened at Haven,” Mira began, “The Herald of Andraste staring down that monster and his Archdemon…I don’t sing the Chant of Light as much as I should, but you can’t see something like that and not believe.”

The words pulled at Naomi’s heart. These people put so much faith in her, and the pressure was crumbling. What if she was leading them all to their deaths? What if she pissed off some snotty politician and caused a war?

“Well, I should go find myself a quiet tent, now that we’re done.” Iron Bull’s voice cut her thoughts.

“Thank you for the help, ser.” Tanner saluted him.

“Yes, thank you. I may be a good fighter but my old back is of consequence of such.” Mira joked, stretching.

“Anytime.” Iron Bull left the small room, walking down the ramparts with Naomi to his side. “I can’t see something like that and not believe.” The words echoed in her head.

“I know every soldier under my command.” He began, “I’d bet money that pretty soon, you won’t have that option…”

“I don’t want to be yer stinkin’ Inquisitor.” She growled.

“It doesn’t matter what you want. You were given that mark. You’ve made the tough calls. You’re already doing it— you just don’t have the title.”

As they continued to walk, she looked on to the soldiers below her. She couldn’t fathom being in charge of so many lives—her crew and once Bureau were stressful enough as it was. “Sounds like we could use an easy win for boys like Tanner,” He chuckled, “And vets like Mira have seen enough to be wary.”

She looked up to the Bull’s eyes. “Are you trying to tell me something, here?”

“You’ve got a good army coming along. Remember that, no matter what comes next.”

…”What do you mean you don’t know where it is?” Josephine scolded Sera in her office just outside the newly established war room.

The two women had agreed to speak privately in the morning, well after some much deserved rest. “I sent word last night with those little raven shits, just as you asked. Had a friend meet me outside the gates this morning. Sacrificed an hour of sleep or two for that tid bit.”
“Mistress Sera, I require solid information if I am to help you fix this matter.” The Ambassador sighed.

“Okay, fine. Here’s how it went. I sent a little birdy to Val Chevin, telling my friends to tell them how to get here.” She puffed hair out of her face, “Then this morning I find a note in my tent to meet with someone outside the gates. I snuck out, talked to the fellow, and found out the ship had left Val Chevin. They don’t know where it is. That high enough for you?”

“And you don’t have any idea where they might have gone?”

“Nope. Could ask the Qunari though. Some merchant found a blown up Dreadnaught all washed up. Can’t see anyone else doing that.” The Red Jenny sat at the chair in front of Lady Montilyet’s desk, kicking her feet up next to a lit candle. “My advice? Let me and my friends and the Ben-Hassrath figure this out while you tell our Lady Glowyhand everything’s alright.” Sera pulled an apple from her shirt, crunching it as she spoke.

“You want me to lie to the Herald of Andraste about the whereabouts of her ship? Have you lost your sanity?” Josephine leaned forward, whispering as angrily as she could.

“Right, then. You gonna’ tell her? Cause’ I’m sure not.” She looked at the Ambassador, waiting for her to speak.

Josephine thought for a moment, relaxing and slouching in her chair.

“Fine.”

“Good girl. I’ll keep you in the loop, yeah?” Sera winked as she pushed herself up, looping her bow around her shoulder and skipping out of the room. “See you at the big announcement!”

The Captain climbed the spiraling stairs, her knees cracking from the repeated motion.

“Why does there have to be so many?” She swore under her breath.

Nearing the top, she buckled over, gasping for air.

“I’m sorry.” The Nightingale’s voice broke her heaving.

“So am I.” Cullen whispered.

Naomi leaned around the corner, curiously. She startled Cullen as he almost ran into her on his way back down.

“Your Worship…” He bowed his head slightly, his eyes stuck to the ground as he walked around her.

Still looking backwards, she trotted up to the Spymaster.

“What’s that about?” Her head whipped around.

The woman was definitely not in high spirits. Naomi lowered her energy level just a tad.

“The names of those we lost…” Leliana rolled a small, metal encased scroll in her hand, “You must blame me for this.” She clenched her fist, turning her back to the Herald.

“Blame you? Why would I blame you for anything?”

“I am your Spymaster. I should have seen this coming!” She slammed the desk in front of her, “The Red Templars are like nothing I’ve seen, and the Venatori hide their tracks well. I keep wondering if I could’ve done something different.” Leliana shook her head, eyes staring out the window, “When the first of my lookouts went missing, I pulled the rest back, awaiting more information. If they’d stayed in the field, they could’ve brought us more time.” A regretful sigh pushed through her gritted teeth, “I was afraid to lose my agents, and instead, we lost Haven.”

Naomi walked next to her, resting a hand on her shoulder.

“Nay. They’ve just been out in the field, dead now, and Haven would still be a flaming heap.”

“You don’t know that.” Leliana shook her shoulder free of the Herald’s comforting grip, “Their lives could’ve bought Haven a small chance. My people know their duty. They know the risks. They understand that the Inquisition may call upon them to give their lives. The same mentality is applied to your Brotherhood of Assassins, no?”

The Captain cocked her head to the side, almost disappointed by the Spymaster’s careless words.
“Aye, my Brothers ‘nd Sisters would gladly give their lives for the Cause. But as a Mentor-as a Captain-not once did I use my men and women as tools to be tossed about after use. Your instincts weren’t off, lass. Their lives matter.”

Leliana shook her head angrily.

“Can we afford such sentimentality? What if Corypheus--”

“We are better than Corypheus.”

The Herald of Andraste’s voice shattered the Spymaster. She took a deep breath, slowly exhaling, resting the scroll on her desk.

“I’m glad we were right about you.”

Leliana descended the stairs in a delicate trot, leaving the Captain to think.

She didn’t expect to find Cullen in the stairwell.

“Eavesdropping? I would not have expected that from you.” She followed him down.

Naomi descended to the inner balcony in the banquet hall, looking at the piles of debris as the sun came through the stained-glassed windows. She leaned against the railing, folding her hands as they dangled. The place was in absolute disarray.

“This is gonna’ take some heavy lifting, for sure.” She sighed, listening to some Orlesians complain about the smell.

She raised her brow in confusion as she saw Sera run out of Josephine’s office, shouting, “See you at the big announcement!” Her thoughts were interrupted.

“Something clicked in my mind the other day- quick witted as it is.” Dorian leaned next to her.

“The two wolf heads on the big sails of your ship- did you put those there because of that legend?”

He grinned, his chin resting in his palms.

“Aye, that I did. The good and evil wolves staring down each other’s barrels.”

“So, what’s with the swords in the middle? I don’t remember your tale ending with sword-wielding wolves.”

“The sword that divides their stare represents the war between them. I spend—spent—most of my time out on the ocean. Thought it’d be a good reminder to me and me crew to keep ourselves in check.”

“You are a big softy underneath all that leather and metal, aren’t you?” He poked her.

“Not one ounce.” She growled.

The Tevinter mage cackled at her embarrassment, sitting up as he did. They watched as a band of soldiers hulled a wagon of caged ravens into the chamber below, cursing the stairs as they rounded the corner.

“Brilliant, isn’t it?” Dorian chimed.

“What’s that?” She wasn’t sure if he was referring to the castle or the birds.

“One moment you’re trying to restore order in a world gone mad. That should be enough for anyone to handle, yes? Then, out of nowhere, an Archdemon appears and kicks you in the head.”

He clapped his hands together and then proceeded to entice himself with a one-sided, very sarcastic conversation. He mocked Corypheus’s voice, “‘What? You thought that would be easy?’” Dorian pretended to be Naomi responding, ‘I was just hoping you wouldn’t crush my village like an anthill!’”

He turned to face her, shrugging.

“‘Sorry about that! Archdemons like to crush, you know. Can’t be helped.’” He paused, “Am I speaking too quickly for you?” He asked as he noticed her increasingly widening smile.

“Distracted is all.”

“Distracted? By my wit and charm? I have plenty of both. What can I say? I’m a man of many talents.”

He linked her arm with his as he walked through the door, taking her around the library as he spoke.

“I always assumed the ‘Elder One’ behind the Venatori was a Magister…but this, this is something else completely. In Tevinter, they say the Chantry’s tales of Magisters starting the Blight are just that: Tales. But here we are- one of those very Magisters…a Darkspawn.” His voice had fallen
“And this upsets you because you’re from Tevinter?” She looked up to him, feeling bad for the sparkling man.

“Reluctant as they are to admit they shit the bed…Yes, Tevinter remains my home. I knew what I was taught couldn’t be the whole truth, but I assumed there had to be a kernel of it, somewhere.”

His head swayed, “But no. It was us all along. **We destroyed the world.**” They spoke in front of his personal rotunda-style library.

“The blame can’t be put on Tevinter alone. Especially because the events in question were, according the Ambassador, one-thousand years ago, right?” She did her best to sound positive.

“True, except that one of them is up and walking around right now. Not to mention that I have idiot countrymen who would happily follow him down that path again.” He sighed, “No one will thank me, whatever happens. No one will thank you, either. You know that, yes?”

“I don’t need thanks. I just need to right kick this Magister’s arse, and that’s exactly what we’re goin’ta do.” She huffed.

“An optimist! Such a rare breed. I’ve stumbled upon a unicorn!” Dorian clapped his hands, bowing.

Naomi put a finger to her forehead, pointing it forward and letting a horse’s sound escape her as she spouted more uplifting propaganda:

“They won’t take us without a fight! He’ll regret the day he crossed us! This’ll be a cake walk!”

This sent Dorian into a fit of laughter.

They hollered together, wiping tears away from their eyelids.

Hesettled, still smiling.

“Men like Corypheus ruined my homeland. If you’re up for stopping him, so am I. I won’t stand by and let him ruin the world, too.” He turned to leave, pausing.

“Oh, and congratulations on that whole leading-the-Inquisition-thing, by the way.”

The Captain’s heart sank to her chest.

“What did you just say to me?”

“All the mountains, of course. Leading the Inquisition **through the mountains**. Sorry, should have specified.” He fumbled as he shuffled away.

“**Why is everyone acting so weird?**” She asked herself.

As Dorian ran down the stairs, she noticed Cullen and Leliana walk into Josephine’s office. Moments later, the three of them left the small room, stepping over rotted wood and fallen chandelier pieces as they exited the banquet hall. The Spymaster carried a long object wrapped in linen. Naomi descended the stairs to the lower level, intent on following them.

Cassandra intercepted her, having basically ran out in the middle of the room.

“Not now, Seeker.” She grumbled, walking around her.

The Nevarran’s face hardened as she stopped the Herald with a strong hand.

“I deserved that. I am sorry for how I acted in the valley.”

Naomi relaxed, looking to her companion.

“Apologies for bein’ harsh. You’ve been here for me since the beginning, too, eh? Hard to believe we’ve come this far in but fourteen-or-so days.”

They wondered why the chamber was beginning to clear out.

“What can I do for yeh?” Naomi asked her.

Cassandra racked her brain.

“Josephine says we’ve made contact with The Dishonored. We sent them directions to our stronghold- I thought you’d be pleased to hear of this.”

The Captain’s face lit up.

“Oh, right I am! Can’t **wait** to take Her out on the water again. Miss me crew, too, I ‘spose.” She joked.

A nervous and awkward smile rose on the Seeker’s scared face. She had to keep the Herald stalled.

“Word has spread of our plight to every settlement in the region. Skyhold will become a
pilgrimage in little time.” She shifted, crossing her arms, “If word has reached these people, it will have reached the Elder One. We have the walls and numbers to put up a fight here, but this threat is far beyond the war we anticipated.”

The Captain swallowed.

“Least we know how to give em’ what for, yeah?” She looked to the Anchor.

“The mark has power, but it’s not why you’re still standing here. Your decisions let us heal the sky. Your determination brought us out of Haven.” The Seeker cleared her throat, struggling with her sentimental words.

“What’s got you all choked up, lass?”

She answered quietly, “You are that creature’s rival because of what you did. And we know it. All of us.”

“Cassandra, you’re makin’ me right nervous with all that whisperin’ and sappy shite...I guess you’ve always been rather sentimental…” her mind veered, “Anyhow—“

“Come. Let me show you.”

“Nuh-uh, last time I heard you say that you walked me out all chained up and pointed to a hole in the sky.” Naomi remained planted, crossing her arms in return.

Cassandra let loose a loud laugh at the snarky comment.

“It is nothing like that, I assure you.” She extended her hands to the door, pressing them open.

The light temporarily blinded the Herald, the suns’ brightness casting shadows on the fixtures in the grand hall. She watched Cassandra walk to the top of the stairs, pausing at the edge of the platform, beckoning her to come outside.

Naomi walked carefully, as if a rabbit trying to sneak by a predator.

Hundreds of faces had gathered before them, staring up to her and the Seeker in anticipation. The Herald finally took her place next to Cassandra. She noticed Leliana standing off to the side, a large, dragon-hilted blade resting in her hands.

“The Inquisition requires a leader: the one who has already been leading it.” Cassandra continued.

The Captain’s terrified gaze shifted to Josephine and Cullen who stood in the front of the crowd. Dorian, Sera, Vivienne, Solas, Iron Bull, Blackwall, Varric, and Cole stood behind her two advisors. She expected one of them to ascend the stairs, taking the blade from the Spymaster’s hand.

“You.” The word hung in the air as it left Cassandra’s mouth.

No one else was coming to take this burden. They stood there, watching her- the entire Inquisition in the courtyard and beyond.

A memory surfaced within the Captain’s mind-when she first met Adibas and his followers upon liberating the Santiano. The Inquisition had the same look to them- freed slaves of those who would do them wrong. The tired, war-abused faces of those who had followed her into lands unknown.

The faces of the grateful.

The faces of the inspired.

It seemed as if the moment lasted a lifetime. It felt surreal.

“Are you sure about this?” Naomi whispered, the words delicately floating into the air.

“There is no faith without doubt, yet I believe this is the right path before us.” Leliana’s arms extended, offering the dragon sword gracefully.

“There would be no Inquisition without you. How it will serve, how you will lead: that must be yours to decide, -” Cassandra’s words clung to the Captain as she approached the Nightingale.

Her breath was stilled. Her heartbeat filled her ears. She could feel her neck pulsing beneath her quivering jaw. With great apprehension, she grabbed the hilt, staring into Leliana’s assaulting eyes.

Leliana lowered her hands, forcing Naomi to wield the weapon on her own.

“-wherever you lead us.” The Seeker finished her speech.

The Captain held the ancient blade close to her face, admiring the sharp edges that jutted out from the dragon’s mouth; its tongue slithering out of its menacing jaws.
Cassandra and Leliana stood on either side of her, now.

“Ambassador!” The Seeker shouted, “Have our people been told?”

“They have. And soon, the world!” Josephine yelled, the crowd roaring to life behind her.

Naomi’s stomach became knotted at the sight of her supporters.

“Commander, will they follow?” Cassandra cried.

Cullen turned to face the crowd, raising his hand into the air.

“Inquisition! Will you follow?” He bellowed.

A war cry rippled through the gathered Inquisition.

“Will you fight?!” He encouraged them, curling his hand into a fist, shaking it vigorously.

The soldiers drew their swords, hoisting them into the air over their voices.

“Will we triumph?” Cullen drew his own sword, directing the roaring crowd to Naomi.

“Your leader! Your Herald!“ His lively eyes locked to hers,

“Your Inquisitor!”
The weather was fair in Val Chevin, especially now that the Breach had been sealed. The city was in celebration—fireworks lit the dawning sky as the guards allowed the people to drink freely in the streets. Adibas and the Officers sat at a table while the sailors were inside the establishment.

“Nice of the Jennies to keep watch on the ship for a while, eh?” Kilean leaned back.

“Nice of ‘em to pay fer’d’a food, too.” Kit stuffed his face.

“And da’ drink.” Thaddeus raised his mug.

Aquilla and Adibas remained quiet, staring.

“Apologies, Quar’ermaster. Just tryin’ to keep ourselves occupied.” Tad’s face was torn.

“She’d want us to not be worryin’ ‘bout her. Save yer apology.” Aquilla sat up, straightening his spectacles and scribbling in his journal.

“We should be there right now. Somethin’ ain’t right.” Adibas’s gaze remained locked to the scar in the sky.

“We’re under direct orders— you heard her yourself.” Kilean sighed, “I’d have rather been at the Breach than deal with an angry Captain McNamara. See what I’m saying?”

“I do right hate yer dreadful English accent, yeh know ‘dat?”

“Kit, you sound like a bitch being fucked by a mongrel every time you run that trap of yours.” She snorted.

“Harpy…” He scoffed.

“That’s a woman I’d love to tangle with!” A woman’s voice caught the Quartermaster’s attention.

He turned to her with hesitation.

A sun-tanned woman stood before him, her hair black as the hull of the ship; a large, gold collar gracing her neck. A stud pierced her lower lip, and a blue bandanna graced her skull. Kit dropped the food out of his hand, staring at her large and mostly exposed bosom.

“I really should have gone to the privy before coming here.” She shifted uncomfortably, “So, that’s your big girl out on the water?”

She sat next to the Quartermaster, ignoring the gawking eyes of the men. Kilean rolled her eyes, scolding.

“What’s wrong with you? Need a stiff one…and a drink?” She huffed at the Sea Apprentice.

“And just who do you think you are, tart?” Kilean spat.

“Aye, who are you?” Adibas leaned in.

“Name’s Isabela, and you are ‘Temporarily Captainless.’”

The Officers looked to each other.

“What would you know of our Captain?” He raised his brow.

“Nothing, except that Haven was flattened and a massive immigration was seen moving north in the Frostbacks. Luckily for you, I know a quaint little spot we might meet them at.”

“Are you kidding? We’re now letting strangers tell us of Captain McNamara’s fate?” Kilean slammed her fists on the table.
“Don’t believe me, then. But you’ll never know if she’s alive if you don’t look. And I happen to be a bit curious, myself. Or perhaps you’d wait to hear word of it a week later?”

Kilean growled.

“Look, do you want to find her- and the rest of the Inquisition- or not? All you need is 50 sovereigns, a good navigator, and room for me aboard. Do we have a deal?”

As if to exemplify her point, a servant-elf ran through the streets.

“Haven attacked by an Archdemon! Herald of Andraste falls! Inquisition flees to the mountains!”

He ran through the streets, waving parchment in the air, collecting coin as a crowd flocked.

Adibas looked to Kit, Quill, and Tad. They gave him approving nods unanimously.

“Gather the others and get back to The Dishonored. We’re lifting anchor.”

Kit stood next to Adibas at the Helm. The Quartermaster steered the ship easily through the calm waters of Orlais.

“Nothing like the sting of salt water to remind you where home is!” Isabela walked out of the Navigator’s Quarters, “That Apprentice of yours is a sharp knife, isn’t she?” She turned to Aquilla before leaving.

The door slammed in her face.

“Don’t pay mind to ‘er, lass. She doesn’t get well ‘long wit others.” Tad skipped to her side, “Name’ Tad.” He extended a hand.

“Well met, sweet heart.” Her dual-bladed daggers glistened behind her as she shook his hand.

Adibas looked down upon the exchange.

“Strange one, she is.”

“Aye. Best keep eyes on ‘er.” The First Mate agreed.

“Think we’ll find the Captain?”

The Quartermaster laughed at the question.

“Not finding her would imply that she’s dead, Kit. Have you ever known her to lose?”

“Forget I asked.” Christopher grinned, “Still…”

“Don’t give the thoughts an audience, mate. We’ll find ‘er, we always do.”

Thaddeus jumped on the rope ladder, swinging over the water, his feet planted on the railing of the ship.

“Look ahead, look a-stern.
Look the weather in the lee!” The Shantyman started.

Kit and Adibas lost their grim moods, crackling hysterically. Thaddeus’s less than orthodox method of cheering everyone up never failed. He was definitely and integral part of the crew

“Blow high! Blow low! And so sailed we!
I see a wreck to windward,
And a lofty ship to lee!
A-sailin’ down along The Coast of High Barbary!”

Isabela giddily looked to the singing men and women around her. She'd never see such uniformity in sailors. These men and women weren't just hired hands- they were a family.
‘O, are you a pirate, or a Man-O-War?’ cried we,
*Blow high! Blow low! And so sailed we!*
‘O no! I’m not a pirate, but a Man-O-War.’ cried he,
*A-sailin’ down along The Coast of High Barbary!*

Adibas adjusted the wheel of *The Dishonored* as a strong gust of wind knocked Her off course. The sun had just come over the horizon, illuminating the water around them. The sailors swabbed and doused the lanterns as they sang.

“We’ll back up our topsails,
And heave our vessel to.
*Blow high! Blow low! And so sailed we!*
For we have got some letters,
To be carried home by you!
*A-sailin’ down along The Coast of High Barbary!*

Kit extended his spyglass with practiced speed. He looked to see a blur out in the distance, and couldn’t tell what it was.

“What can yeh see?” He asked him.

“Nothing as of yet.”

“For broadside, for broadside,
They fought all on the main.
*Blow high! Blow low! And so sailed we!*
Until at last the frigate shot the pirates’ mast away,
*A-sailin’ down along The Coast of High Barbary!*

He extended the lens and adjusted it, trying to make out the object.

“What can yeh see?” He asked him.

“Nothing as of yet.”

“With cutlass and gun,
O we fought for hours three!
*Blow high! Blow low! And so sailed we!*
The ship it was their coffin,
And their grave it was the sea!
*A-sailin’ down along The Coast of High Barbary!*

The men and women cheered with Thaddeus as he finished, Isabel included.

“Oh, that was *lovely*!” She exclaimed.

“Quartermaster, large ship forward, ser!” A shout from the Crow’s Nest echoed down against the wave.

Adibas tuned Kit’s spyglass yet again.

“You’re daft, mate! It has no sails!”
Isabela’s neck snapped to the Quartermaster.

“No sails, you say?”

She ran to his side.

“Give me that.”

The scantily clad woman grabbed the tool from his hand, peering onward.

“Do you have no respect for this ship and Her crew?” He roared.

She retracted the device, handing it to Adibas.

“Brace yourselves! Here comes the storm!” She shouted.

The crew looked to her confusedly.

“What’s the meaning of this?” The Quartermaster argued.

“That, sweet thing, is a Dreadnought. A *Quanari* Dreadnought,” her voice shook, “I’ll *never* understand why I constantly find myself mixed up with these beast-people.”

“Quanari? Those fellows wit’ da horns?” Christopher looked to her.

“Right. And they’ve got gaatlok that hurls *huge* balls of metal through…well, things that look like that, actually.” She looked to *The Dishonored*’s cannons, “Andraste’s ass, I do hope She can take a beating.”

Adibas dismissed her warning with a scruff chuckle.

“Gunmen, to arms! Cannons, mortars, swivels, we’ve got a live one!” Adibas’ thundering voice boomed over the once-mellow deck.

Half the sailors dropped below deck, shoving the cannons through their respective windows, the shutter blinds flipping up over their metal noses. Pairs of two lined up at the sets above. The swivel shot men took their posts, as did the women near the mortars. Strong nets were cast to prevent lose cannons.

“Release all sails!” The riggers dropped the crimson sailcloth, the wolves howling once again.

*The Dishonored* broke into a charge, the aching wood yearning to gain speed. Adibas gripped the wheel from Kit, positioning it into a flanking position.

Quill and Kilean ran out from the Navigator’s Quarters.

“What’s this I hear?” She yelled.

“Hostile ship in the distance!” Thaddeus yelled, gripping the swivel as the wind picked up.

She smirked, staring onward.

“I really don’t like her.” Isabela frowned.

“She’s been part o’ this crew for 11 years now- you’ve been’er for an’hour!” The First Mate spat.

“Steel yourself, Kit.” Adibas straightened the ship.

The Dreadnought flew towards them, its’ massive oars stroking in unison.

“Are we sure it to be hostile?” He asked Isabela, “Needn’t make war where need lacks.”

“A friendly Dreadnought?” She let out a nervous bark, “It’s called a *Dreadnought*. Watch your masts and don’t get too close to it- should you manage to defeat it, which I highly doubt, it’ll surely explode before sinking.”

“How do you know all of this?” He asked her.

“Because I do- now get to it!”

Adibas aligned the front of the ship with the oncoming warship. It fired a warning shot at them.

“’Spose you’d be right.”

Their range was short as the Quartermaster watched the cannonball arch and fall in the distance.

“Are the mortars armed?!” He yelled.

“Aye, aye, Ser!” The sailors responded.

“On my mark!” He ordered.

They scurried to the sides, stuffing a cube of linen-wrapped gunpowder into the chamber. Adibas waited until they came down on the other side of a small roll.

“*Fire the mortars*!” He shouted.

The bombs fired high into the sky, arching and raining upon the Dreadnought.
“What in the bloody piss is that?!” Isabela roared.

_The Dishonored_ bowed gracefully as the strong firepower pushed Her deck down. Adibas rounded Her again, aiming the broadside cannons at the Qunari warship.

“Heavy shot away!” Adibas ordered.

The side of the ship growled as it released 23 cannonballs into the air that connected with their target.

The Qunari vessel lost speed, floating aloft as if it’d lost control. Acting as a grand firework, the Dreadnought burst into flames, exploding as it plowed into the shoreline.

It hadn’t even come into firing range of _The Dishonored_, Her range far superior.

“D-did you just…” Isabela peaked over the edge of the ship, “They didn’t even…”

_The Dishonored_ had just leveled a Dreadnought it two well-placed shots.

“So much for being the baddest beast on the sea…” Kilean crossed her arms, looking at the flaming heap as they sailed by.

“Almost too easy…” Adibas grew distrusting of the situation, fearful for where they might end up.
**Jaded in Jader**

Chapter Summary

“There are men who struggle against destiny, and yet achieve only an early grave. There are men who flee destiny, only to have it swallow them whole. And there are men who embrace destiny, and do not show their fear. These are the ones that change the world forever.”

-Flemeth

The Dishonored came to a crawl, laying anchor near the city of Jader. Leaving the crew onboard, the Officers left the ship and headed into the crowded port.

“Stick with me, and everything will be alright.” Isabela promised.

“Assuring.” Adibas huffed.

“What’s all this fancy shite spinnin’ round?” Kit and Tad looked at the open markets as they passed.

“Keep your voice down, would you?” Kilean rolled her eyes.

“Youre constant bickering draws us attention that we wouldn’t have otherwise.” Aquilla scolded.

The Sea Artist Apprentice minded her place.

“This place doesn’t seem welcoming to refugees.” Adibas observed his surroundings.

“Quickly, in here.” She dove into a saloon, the swinging doors slapping against themselves as she entered.

She passed the tables and the bar, walking up the steps to the rooms upstairs. The Officers followed her- the looks from the wealthy citizens making them uncomfortable.

“What is the meaning of this?” The Quartermaster whispered harshly.

Isabela ignored him, knocking on a door labeled “201” in a very precise pattern. As soon as it opened, she stuck a dagger in between the frame and the door, preventing it from being slammed shut. Kicking the door with one of her enlarged, muscular thighs, a man in the room stumbled into a side table, his cloak falling to the floor.

He grabbed a staff from next to his bed, aiming at her with haste. The orb at the end began to glow hot- and then quickly faded back to nothing. His face unraveled from a wreckage of anger.

“Isabela…?” He muttered.

“That wouldn’t have been much of a surprise. What do you think I am? Practical?” She rolled her eyes at him, “I’m here with the Inquisition to take you to Varric.”

“You’re with the Inquisition, now, are you?” Kilean shook her head in disbelief.

“I seem to recall you agreeing to stay in Estwatch and Llomerryn until I was done investigating…” The mage hushed himself, looking to the Officers. He quickly changed the topic. “You tricked me! Again! Varric’s letter said he’d be the one coming to take me to Skyhold.” He face palmed, “I can’t believe I was so stupid.”

“I can. And that’s why I love you.” She walked over to him, pressing a firm, tongue-filled kiss on his mouth as she yanked him towards her.

Adibas shifted uncomfortably, looking away from the public display of affection.
“My men intercepted his letter. I simply made a few adjustments. He really does want to see you, and, well-you know the rest.” She grinned, pulling away from her lover.

“You’re victim to her scheming as well, I take it?” He asked the Officers.

“50 sovereigns says we all are.” Adibas crossed his arms as he answered.

The mage let out a nonchalant chuckle.

“Well, you all wreak of the sea and have the look of sailors about you. I do hope you have a ship capable of getting to- well, here.” He handed Adibas a marked map, who passed it off to Aquilla.

“Aye, we have a ship.” The Quartermaster paused, “If Varric is at this ‘Skyhold’, does this mean our Captain is, as well?” Adibas stared hotly at Isabela.

“He has arranged for me to meet with the Herald of Andraste. Assuming they’re the same person, the answer would be, ‘yes.’” The man answered for her, extending his arm. “Name’s Garrett.” He shook the Quartermaster’s hand, “Garrett Hawke.”
Warrior Poet

Chapter Summary

"Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another heart whispers back. Those who wish to sing always find a song. At the touch of a lover, everyone becomes a poet."
-Plato, Athens, 404 BCE

The crowd before them was dismissed, the celebration being a short one. Naomi twirled the hilt in the air, catching it in small bursts, “Where in the HELL am I goin’ to put this thing?”

She looked down to see Cullen at his work bench, moving towards him unsuspiciously.

“Just gonna’ check on him, seemed distraught handing that list to Leliana.” The Captain lied to herself.

She walked down the stairs, doing her best to not stare at him as she did.

“Send men to the area. We need to know what’s out there.” He ordered the scout to his right.

“Yes, ser!”

“Commander, soldiers have been assigned temporary quarters.” Another scout trotted to him.

“Very good, I’ll need an update on the armory as well.” He commanded.

The scout lingered, scratching his chest.

“Now!” Cullen growled.

Naomi’s lust burned hot at his instructive demeanor. The Commander turned to her, his dark circles highlighting the golden gems above them.

“I-Inquisitor.” He gently lowered his head in respect.

"Not quite used to that one, yeah?” She sat on a blank spot of his desk.

His eyes saddened as he looked to her fresh scar, her eye no longer swollen shut, but still bruised.

“We set up as best we could at Haven, but could never prepare for an Archdemon—or whatever it was. With some warning, we might have…” He looked away from her.

Naomi let her legs dangle, leaning forward, listening to him.

“Work on Skyhold is underway, guard rotations established. We should have everything on course within the week. We will not run from here…” His face mirrored the exhaustion in his words.

She took the report, reading it thoroughly.

“You do a fine job.” She softened her gaze, looking to him intently, “How many were lost?”

Naomi gently rested the parcel on her lap.

He shifted his weight towards her.

“Most of our people made it to Skyhold. It could have been worse. Morale was low, but has already improved greatly since you accepted the role of Inquisitor a few moments ago.” He cleared his throat, “It’s an honor to serve under you, Inquisitor.”

A sharp laugh pushed through the air.

“You haven’t served under me yet, Commander.” She winked.

He rolled his eyes, a gentle smile lifting into the corner of his mouth with a slight shaking of his head. A tender blush lightened his paleness.
"What's that, you're gettin' use to my crudeness?" She leaned on one elbow, her Inquisitor’s sword hanging below. “Guess that’s not proper for an ‘Inquisitor.’"

“I don’t know if I’d enjoy talking with you as much if you were a ‘proper’ Inquisitor.” He jested. Her heart fluttered, making her uncomfortable.

“Thank you, Cul-er, Commander.” She rocked her hips, adjusting herself, “I intend to do a fine job at it.”

“We needed a leader, and you have proven yourself-despite your ‘crudeness.’ I’m confident you'll great.” He beamed with warm features, closer to her now.

She wanted to reach out and touch him again, to feel his warm skin…Naomi paused for a moment, looking to the ground, solemnly.

“We almost didn’t make it, eh? I’m glad you—we made it out of there alive.”

“As am I.” A breeze carried his scent across her nose, his gentle voice tickling her.

Naomi swallowed, standing herself up. She brushed against him as she turned to leave.

“Sorry- eh, I should, uh…”

As their shoulders passed, he placed his hand on the crook of her elbow, giving her pause. He turned his head to look down to her, his height giving him the advantage.

“You stayed behind. You could have…“ Never had she seen his face more pained, “I will not allow the events at Haven to happen again, you have my word.”

Images of their kiss tore through her mind. He was the man who’d constantly protected her, ran to her side, and more importantly understood the burdens that she held.

Her heart pounded in her chest, interrupted by a disturbance. An argument broke out nearby, giving her an out. She looked to see Vivienne, Solas, and Cassandra standing in a circle of heated debate.

“I should probably…” She nodded to the debacle.

“Right.” He agreed, rubbing his neck.

His attention turned back to his desk, casting a guilty glimpse at her as she walked away.

Madame de Fer’s voice rattled Naomi’s flushed face, “This thing is not a stray puppy you can make into a pet. It has no business being here.”

“Is she talking about Cole?” Cullen thought to himself, eavesdropping.

“Wouldn’t you say the same of an apostate?” Solas rebutted, “Inquisitor, I wondered if Cole was perhaps a mage, given his unusual abilities.”

The Captain stabilized, “And?”

“He can cause people to forget him, or even fail entirely to notice him. These are not the abilities of a mage. It seems that Cole is a spirit.” Solas explained.

“It is a demon.” Vivienne slurred.

“I can already tell this is going to turn into a headache for us. Mages can never find agreement amongst themselves.” Cullen leaned up, now blatantly watching.

“Spirits and demons cross over from the Fade by attaching themselves to something in this world. He has possessed nothing and no one, and yet he appears human in all respects.” Solas crossed his arms, challenging the horned Enchanter, “Cole is unique, Inquisitor. More than that, he wishes to help. I suggest you allow him to do so.”

“He may call it what he likes, but it is still a threat.” Vivienne spat.

Naomi stuck the dirt with the new sword, holding her hands out to silence them.

“Did he come through the Breach, Solas?”

“Cole predates the Breach. From what we can tell, he has lived here for months, perhaps years. He looks like a young man. For all intents and purposes, he is a young man. It is remarkable.” He looked to the spirit in wonder.

The Inquisitor rubbed the sides of her head.

“And has anyone let the poor lad speak for himself? Where is he?”

“He was right—Cassandra turned behind her, dumbfounded.

Naomi caught him at the makeshift nursery. She also noticed Cullen watching, who hurriedly got back to his work, pretending to have not been.
“Nosey.” She walked passed him.

Cole was fixated on a dying man, lain out on a sheet.

“Haven. So many soldiers fought to protect the pilgrims so they could escape.” He walked over to him, crouching, “Choking fear, can’t think from the medicine but the cuts wrack me with every heartbeat. Hot, white pain, everything burns. I can’t, I can’t, I’m going to…I’m dying, I’m…dead.” The man stopped breathing.

She shifted hesitantly.

“You’re…in their minds, yeah?”

His large hat swayed.

“They’re in mine.” He stood, circling the small camp. He paused at another soldier.

“Every breath slower, like lying in a warm bath. Sliding away, smell of my daughter’s hair when I kiss her goodnight.”

Naomi’s heart grew heavy.

“Gone.” Cole’s voice became progressively morose as another soldier ceased to live.

He leaped to the side of a woman.

“Cracked brown pain, dry, scraping. Thirsty. Here.” He gently lifted a cup of water to her lips, grasping her head gently to help her drink.

“T-thank y-you.” She could barely speak.

Cole lay her back down to rest.

“It’s alright. She won’t remember me.” He looked up to the Inquisitor.

He had long, matted blonde hair that draped over his steely grey eyes. He was dressed in tattered clothing with pointy shoes. A large, cumbersome hat extended passed the radius of his shoulders- held in place by a helmet on top with a strap lifting its’ bill from his face.

“Yes. I used to think I was a ghost. I didn’t know. I made mistakes…but I made friends, too. Then a Templar proved I wasn’t real.”

Cullen pursed his lips as he listened.

“I lost my friends. I lost everything. I learned how to be more like what I am. It made me different, but stronger. I can feel more. I can help.” Cole looked to her, “I can help you, too. I can help you forget.”

“What do you mean, lad?”

“A harsh man- an evil man. Made you do things. Horrible things. You didn’t want to die. You didn’t want your friends to die, so you did those things. Captain Abbey was an evil man- I don’t like him. I can help you forget, so you can move on .”

“Cole!” Naomi interrupted desperately, “Enough!”

The disparity in her voice sent the Commander on alert.

“You can stay with the Inquisition but only if you abide by whatever Solas tells you. Do you understand?” Her lip quivered.

“I’m sorry, I-“

“And stay the fuck out my thoughts.”

The rattled Inquisitor put her hood up, walking passed anyone who tried to talk to her. She hurried inside the main hall, seeking her private room for solace.

…

The warm wind graced her skin as she sat along the railing of her ship. The men and women of her crew hummed in the background as Adibas sailed. She was in casual clothing, her armor and weapons stashed safely in her Quarters.

“You continue to surprise me.” Solas came next to her, joining her in sitting, “I sat beside you
while you slept, studying the Anchor. You were a mystery. You still are.” His eyes warmed as they met hers, “I ran every test I could imagine. I searched the Fade, yet found nothing. Cassandra suspected duplicity. She threatened to have me executed as an apostate if I didn’t produce results.”

The Inquisitor chuckled.

“Of course she did.”

“Yes.” He happily agreed, viewing the waves with her, “You were never going to wake up. How could you, a mortal sent physically through the Fade? I was frustrated, frightened. The spirits I might have consulted had been driven away by the Breach. Although I wished to help, I had no faith in Cassandra…or she in me. I was ready to flee.”

“With the Breach in the sky? Where’d you intend to go?”

“Some place far away where I might research a way to repair the Breach before its effects reached me.”

She slapped her knee mockingly, removing the flask from her belt. She took a swig, gasping in approval as she capped it again.

“I never said it was a good plan.” He huffed at himself, “I told myself, one more attempt to seal the rifts.” The elf longingly cast his hand into the distance, “I tried and failed. No ordinary magic would affect them.” His arm fell, and Naomi offered the solemn man a drink.

“I watched the rifts expand and grow, resigned myself to flee, and then…you woke up.” He took a sip, handing it back to her, “The first time you sealed it…only with a single gesture. Right then, I felt the whole world change.”

Her red hair danced in the wind, her arm and chest tattoos told tales of her sea faring adventures, both grim and glorious. Palm trees and islands skipped through their vision as the waves played on either side of The Dishonored.

“I have explored the Fade more than anyone alive, but even I can only visit in dreams. But you…you might have been able to visit me here while awake.”

“Awake?” She chimed, with her heart-breaking green eyes trained on the elf, “What do you mean, ‘awake?’”

He extended his hands, referring to where they were.

“Where do you think we are?”

She realized they were in the West Indies as sun set in the distance behind Nassau’s port.

“This…this isn’t real…” Her carefree posture faded.

“That’s a matter of debate…probably best discussed after you…” He hoarsely whispered in her ear, “Wake up.”

Naomi’s head shot up from the base of her desk in Skyhold, wiping drool from her mouth as she darted down the stairs. Sprinting passed Josephine and Leliana, she rounded the corner to Solas’s chambers. He sat at his desk, reading a large tome.

“Sleep well?” He gleamed.

“That—that was incredible,” She tiredly stumbled to his side, “Is that something you do often?”

“No. Consider that one more rule you have effortlessly broken in your rise to power.” He teased, “I had no idea that the Anchor would allow you to dream with such focus. You are—” He coughed, rubbing his throat, “It is truly remarkable.”

A light hearted guffaw left her chest.

“So you say the mark is…” She leaned into his ear, “Re-mark-able?”

He looked to her, their faces closer than ever before.

“You are horrible with jokes.” He raised his brow, “But I am reasonably certain we are awake now.”

“A bit too many ears around for the questions I’d have for the likes of you.” She gently tapped his nose with her finger, “Perhaps next time? Well, tonight, when I…you know.”

“I look forward to it, Inquisitor.” He nodded.

She rolled her eyes at her title as she left the room.
The Inquisitor walked among the courtyard during the late afternoon, taking in the sights and sounds of the soldiers working. They’d made a dent; setting up the stables, a few merchant shops, cleaning up debris. It was certainly going to take more time, but they had a good start to them.

Off in the distance, she saw Dullahan giving Blackwall problems, as he wouldn’t eat from a trough. She came to the beasts’ rescue.

“He likes to play, Warden.” She suggested.

“I don’t have time to play, Inquisitor.”

She looked at him unimpressed, whipping the food into the air. The dracolisk ate without a second thought.

Blackwall looked to her, chagrined.

“So,” he changed the subject, “this is Skyhold.”

“Aye, a grand old castle, isn’t she?”

He let a rumble escape him, “We will see. Come, let’s walk the ramparts. I want to examine our fortifications. We want to be able to see Corypheus coming from miles away.”

The two of them walked up a set of stone steps, observing the walls as they did. They walked half way around before they stood upon a section of the walls that had collapsed.

“Hopefully we can have this place patched up before Coryphy-fuck comes to the realization we’re alive.” She crossed her arms, looking out into the semi-frozen lake that surrounded them. “I know soldiers. I know our soldiers. Corypheus made a hundred enemies when he kicked down our door.” The Warden’s eyes grew dark, “Let him come. I swear I’ll take the twisted bastard down, even if I have to die to do it.”

As they began to walk back, the winds rolled off of the grandiose mountains, giving them a chill.

“I’ll do everything in my power to make sure it don’t come to that, mate.” The Inquisitor spoke quietly.

He paused on the battlements.

“The people flock to your banner, eager to fight for the Herald of Andraste. Their faith is a leash, and your Inquisition has taken hold of it.”

“That’s not something I readily forget, lad.” She grew worrisome, “Not by a long shot.”

“What I mean is… Tell me honestly: are you what they say you are?”

Naomi looked at him, confused.

“Andraste’s chosen?” He clarified.

The Inquisitor mulled his question, staring at the tents of her troops in the distance.

“For their sakes, I best learn how to believe for certain…” Her gaze shifted to the Anchor. “We all need to believe in something. I, for one, believe you are the chosen one. And so do they.”

Warden Blackwall pointed out in the distance and left her to contemplate his heavy words.

She marveled at the sight, not sure how to process it. They thought of her as more than them, as an inspiration and role model. It was the complete opposite of how the public perceived her back home. Even fighting for a noble cause, all they saw were pirates who blundered upon the riches of wealthy men- not Assassins fighting the Templars in defense of all free will.

The sun broke into set as she reflected, watching a camp fire swirl in the distance.

“Gloat all you like, I have this one.”

“Are you sassing me, Commander? I didn’t know you had it in you.” Dorian’s voice pulled her from her thoughts.

The Captain turned to see the two men playing a game.

“What in Heaven’s name…”

“You better go break that up,” Blackwall grinned, “I hear Dorian has quite the temper… and he has
a tendency to throw fireballs.”
“Ah, fireballs. Yes, quite. Seems to be a common worry these days.”
“Until next time, Inquisitor.” With a slight nod, Blackwall dismissed himself, heading back towards the stables.

Naomi mischievously crept up behind her favorite blonde knight.

“Why do I even…“ Cullen began in argue; Dorian’s perfect grin and wandering eyes giving away her presence. “Inquisitor!” The Commander’s head shot around, shuffling to his feet.

“Leaving, are you? Does this mean I win?” The Tevinter Mage taunted, crossing his fingers.

He sat back down, nervous as to being reprimanded.

“Playing nice, Dorian?” She jested.

“I’m _always_ nice.” He twirled his mustache, focusing on his opponent, “You need to come to terms with my inevitable victory. You’ll feel much better.”

The Commander looked at him in dismay, letting a cocky chuckle escape.

“Really?” He moved a piece on the board, “Because I just won. And I feel fine.”

Cullen crossed his hands, resting his elbows on the table. He matched Dorian’s defeated gaze.

“Don’t get smug…” The mage rose from his chair, snickering, “There will be no living with you.”

Naomi twirled her fingers at him as he left, earning her a bow from the beautiful man.

“She set the board, Commander. She challenged.

“What’s this? The Inquisitor is a chess player?” He proclaimed.

“Aye, that she is. Lest you’re scared of being beat by a woman.”

“Not quite…” He spoke as he reset the board, “As a child, I played this with my sister. She would get this stuck-up grin whenever she one- which was _all_ the time. My brother and I practiced together for weeks. The look on her face the day I finally won…”

“You have siblings, then?”

“Two sisters and a brother. They moved to South Reach after the Blight.” His face twisted, saddening at the mention of the tragedy, “Between serving the Templars and the Inquisition, I haven’t seen them in years. I do not write them as often as I should.”

Noticing his sad demeanor, she did her best to cheer him up.

“Guess we’ll have to keep you sharp for when you play ‘gainst her again, eh?” The Captain took her turn first, moving a piece. Her Precursor vision allowed her to see the board from all angles, calculating all possible outcomes.

“As in…playing multiple times, Inquisitor?” He took his turn, “To be honest, I’d appreciate the distraction.”

She knew what she wanted to say, but had a hard time opening up about it.

“Then perhaps we…” She fumbled, “Should spend more time…”

A searing head pain came on. She tilted her had to the ceiling as a reflex, retrieving a cloth from her pocket from experience.

“Wonderful.”

Cullen leaned back, looking at her with sympathy.

“I’ve seen you come down with something unexpectedly many times before. Is because of the Pieces of Eden?” He confronted her about his suspicions.

Naomi looked to him, surprised.

“Aye.” Was all she said, moving a piece on the board.

“Why?”

“Because they do.”

Cullen glared at her.

“If they exert you so, perhaps you should stop using them.” He took his turn.

“You’ve been spendin’ too much time with Adie…” She observed the game, “It’s not so easy, Commander.” The pain subsided, and she put the stained cloth away, “The Order of the Knights Templar would see all of the Assassins dead for the sake of usin’ the Pieces to further their agenda.
Not a moment goes by where they aren’t at my side…” She moved her piece on the board, “Here, in Thedas, I’d be defenseless without them…I don’t have magic, I don’t take lyrium…” “Lyrium is a blessing and a curse,” He warned, “I’d stay as far away from it as possibly if I were you.” “Don’t you take lyrium? Bein’ an ex-Templar ‘nd all?” Cullen froze. She could tell she struck a nerve. “Sorry, I didn’t realize…It’s just, what we talked about at Haven was—“ “Don’t apologize. I can see the similarities. I just hadn’t thought of it that way.” He confessed. “What does lyrium do to you?” Her eyes fell into worry. He seemed distant, lost, even. “You needn’t burden yourself with concern, Inquisitor. My focus remains strong on the Inquisition’s forces. That’s all that matters.” Naomi didn’t know if she meant to do it or if her body had given in on its own. Her hand shot across the board, resting on his. She took it in a strong embrace. “Far be it from a burden, Cullen…if the side effects are long-term, you should…weigh your options.” The Captain pleaded. He was touched by her worry, no matter how guilty it made him feel. He tightened his hand in response. “I’ll do my best to find a solution. I can promise you that much.” Bells rang in the distance as cheering and shouting soldiers gathering along the shore. She looked on to see red sails in the distance. “Looks like that’d be my signal.” She withdrew from him regretfully, pushing off the chair to stand up, “Oh, and…” Naomi took a piece into her hand, moving it into position. “Check mate.” “What?!” He analyzed the board in disbelief, “How?!” She wagged her finger at him. “Never take your eyes off the board, Commander.” She purred. His infamous crooked grin graced his mouth as he leaned into his chair. “I suppose we’ll have to play more, then.” His scarred lip gave her chills, “It seems you have a lot to teach me.” “Aye, that I do. Much more than you realize.” Naomi’s voice grew seductive, rolling the taunt off of her tongue. Cullen did his best to remain cool and collected, wavering as he was. He stood as she lefted him. “Inquisitor…” He addressed her quietly. She turned to face him, “Yes, Commander?” “I would…advise…you to weigh your options, as well.” Naomi was shocked by his courage…and his pity. “I will do my best just as well, Lion.”
The Captain greeted her ship whole-heartedly, running on board as soon as the bridge dropped.
“Captain on deck!” Kit cheered.
Her presence was celebrated by all…minus one.
“So you’re Her Captain?” Isabela walked down the stairs she should have never ascended.
“And just who in the right fuck’er you?” Naomi challenged.
“The woman who brought your ship to Skyhold.”
“I don’t fancy your tone, lass.” She rest her hand on her hilt.
“Now, now, ladies-as much as I’d love to watch two women claw at one another-I suggest…well, not to.” Hawke walked in between them, “Isabela, my love, that thing we talked about- where you come off as…you? You’re doing it again.”
“Adibas, was it you who let these strangers on my ship?” Naomi’s voice was stern.
“I’m afraid it’s more…complicated, than that.” Adibas answered nervously.
“Complicated?”
“Perhaps we should discuss this somewhere more…secluded.” Hawke suggested.
A soldier on the mainland broke into a shout, “Oy! It’s the Champion of Kirkwall!”
“And that’s why…” He rolled his eyes, “Damn it, Varric…”
“You are a hero, my sweet thing.” Isabela shrugged, “Should have stayed with me in Llomerryn.”
“Come, Captain. Let us gather the others and…review.”

“You knew where Hawke was all along!” Cassandra swung at Varric in the war room, the dwarf dodging in fear.
“You’re damned right I did!” He glowered.
“You conniving little shit!” She tried to backhand him.
Varric ran behind Hawke.
“You kidnapped me! You interrogated me! What did you expect?!”
“ENOUGH!” The Inquisitor demanded, slamming the table.
“You’re taking his side?!” The Seeker scolded.
“Don’t make me repeat myself…” The Captain snarled.
Hawke and Isabela relaxed, ready to have fought in their friend’s defense.
“Lady Seeker,” Garrett began, “Why were you looking for me?”
“We needed someone to lead this Inquisition…First, Leliana and I tried to make contact with the Hero of Fereldan, but she had vanished before she returned to the royal court. Then we looked for you. But you were gone, too…we thought it all connected, but no. It was just you,” Her face contorted with rage at the dwarf, “You kept him from us.”
“And what if he didn’t want to be found?” Isabela came to her lover’s defense.
“Seems like you did alright without me.” Hawke crossed his armor-clawed hand.
“Right. The Inquisition has a leader.” Varric reasoned.
“Hawke would have been at the conclave. If anyone could have saved Most Holy…” Cassandra shook her head upsettingly.
“I was protecting my friend!” Hawke and Varric exchanged nods.
“Varric is a liar, Inquisitor. A snake.” She waved her hand through the air, “Even after the Conclave, when we needed Hawke most, Varric kept him secret.”
“I am with you now, Seeker. We are all on the same side, here.” Garrett defused.
“I’ll not stand idly while you hurl insults at my friend.” Isabela growled.
“Squarin’ off in here won’t fix anything, lass.” Naomi tried to calm the quarrel, “And you better not be holdin’ out anything else.”
“I understand.” Varric spat.
Cassandra lowered her temper, turning her back to them. She heaved a great sigh, cocking her chin as she spoke, “I must not think of what could have been. We have so much at stake…” Her voice was quiet.
“You know what I think? If Hawke had been at the temple, he’d be dead, too.” Varric prodded, “You people have done enough to him…"
“You can say that again.” Isabela huffed.
Cassandra turned to them, sorrow in her eyes.
“I believed you. You spun a story for me, and I swallowed it. If I’d just explained what was at stake…if I’d just made you understand…But I didn’t, did I?” She looked to Hawke,” I didn’t explain to him why we needed you. I am such a fool.”
“And what if you had found me?” Hawke stood straight, “Who’s to say I would have become your Inquisitor? I’m a mage- who supported the rebellion in Kirkwall. I wouldn’t have trusted you more than I trust the Raiders…”
Isabela nudged him in his side.
“I just…I should have been more careful. I should have been smarter. I don’t deserve to be here.” The Seeker did her best to still her emotions.
“We all need to be more careful. We all need to be smarter. That’s war, lass. It’s not caused by perfect people-it’s caused by people fighting over their imperfections, denying they exist in the first place.” Naomi rested a hand on her shoulder, “You are far from the only one. And you deserve to be here more than any of us…all of us- bunch of idiots.”
Cassandra let out a feint laugh.
“Is that supposed to make me feel better?”
“More at home, probably.” Varric said.
“Maybe if we’d found Hawke or the Hero of Ferelden, the Maker wouldn’t have needed to send you. But he did.” A wide smile eased her pained features, “You’re…not what I’d pictured. But if I’ve learned anything, it’s that I know less than nothing.”
“Nothing is true.” Naomi grinned.
“Varric, I think you can take your hand off your crossbow now.” Hawke cackled.
He removed his hand from Bianca’s arms. Varric looked the Seeker in the eye, “I wasn’t trying to keep secrets. I told the Inquisition everything that seemed important…at the time. If I knew Corypheus was behind this…”
“I know, Varric. You never would’ve kept quiet about this.” Cassandra comforted the guilt-struck dwarf.
“I just keep hoping…none of this is real.” He grumbled in response, “Maybe it’s all some bullshit from the Fade, and it’ll just disappear…I know I need to do better. I’m sorry.”
“Varric? Apologizing? What have you Inquisition fellows done to him?” Isabela squealed, “While we’re on the topic of wishing things to disappear, perhaps it would be a good time to talk about the-”
Hawke covered her mouth.
“OUCH!” He yelled, his finger having newly carved bite mark.
“Your Quartermaster defeated a Dreadnaught!” She wiped her mouth, glaring at the Champion as
she spoke to Naomi.

"That, Qunari...war ship, thing?"

"That's the one." Isabela grinned.

The Captain took a deep breath, “Fuck.”

“Yea.” Hawke crossed his arms, agreeing. The Inquisitor turned to the door behind her, opening it slightly. Her companions and Advisors stood anxious outside. They looked as if they’d been caught doing something bad.

“Cullen, Leliana, Josephine, Bull…and you.” She pointed a finger to Adibas. They trickled in, her terrified Quartermaster the last one to scurry around the large door. “On to pressing matters, then.” She clasped her hands, shaking them in sarcastic excitement, “Hope you all have your affairs in order, ’cause The Dishonored sunk a Dreadnaught.”

Josephine dropped her board on the table, covering her mouth. Leliana and Cullen looked like they’d just witnessed a murder.

The Iron Bull let out a boisterous holler.

“This is going to get a whole lot more interesting, boss.” He wiped the tears of laughter, “Did it explode, you mean?”

"Ask him." Naomi pointed her chin to Adibas.

"Aye..."

"How’d you pull that off?"

“When Isabela convinced us to leave Val Chevin-“

“Wait, Josephine didn’t contact you?” The Inquisitor’s brow furrowed at Josephine.

The Ambassador started to sweat.

“My doing.” Isabela raised her hand, “I instructed my men to keep an ear to the floor, looking for this one. When Varric sent word to come to Skyhold, they intercepted the letters and told him to rendezvous in Jader, instead. Couldn’t you imagine my surprise, then, to see the same ship in Val Chevin as the one who caused such a ruckus in Val Royeaux?”

“How did you know the Captain was alive when you…approached us?” Adibas scoffed.

“I didn’t,” Isabela admitted, “Thought I’d get to see for myself and then convince you to let me have her ship if she was dead.”

“When will you listen...” Hawke shook his head.

Naomi held a harsh stare on Josephine, “Cassandra told me you made contact with The Dishonored.”

“Inquisitor-I-uh-...” She looked to Leliana nervously, “When we went to bring them home, they were nowhere to be found...Sera and I only wished to keep you satisfied, Your Worship...”

She crossed her arms, scouring under her breath. She looked to her Quartermaster, “Continue.”

“A Dreadnaught challenged us as we set sail for Jader...We...defeated it.”

“How did you defeat a Dreadnaught?” The Spymaster sought the Qunari man’s advice, “I thought that it couldn’t be done?”

“On a normal ship? No. But The Dishonored isn’t a normal ship, is She, boss?” He crossed his blue-toned arms.

“Indeed. She has cannons. Lots of them. And blackpowder, something I’ve tried to figure out my entire sea-faring life.” Isabela stepped forward.

“So, you’re Isabela, then?” Naomi snickered, “Was told you wouldn’t appreciate the likes of me.”

“I don’t.”

“Good.”
“Ladies...” Hawke interjected.
“It’s called gunpowder. It’s the same combustible shite we use in our flintlocks.” Naomi withdrew
a gun from her chest, “We load it behind a ball of lead, and this trigger sets a spark. It ignites, and
the lead flies-tearing a hole through whatever it can. The cannons work the same.”
“Except a lot bigger. And you have all different types, don’t you darling?”
Adidas cut the conversation before they started arguing again.
“It’s true. We have cannons for long ranges, vertical shots, precise shots, and different type of
ammunition to boot. It is not finite, though. We would have had to tell them eventually, Captain.”
His face was apologetic.
“Why did you keep this from us?” Cullen looked to the Inquisitor.
“Because you lot don’t have the technology, here. You don’t know what kind of repercussions
come from this type of work leakin’ out into the world...” She shook her head, “It’s just like
magic, yeah? Imagine what Thedas would be like if every single person were a mage.” Naomi
began to pace as she explained, “Sure, it might seem fair. You’d think a hot second before shooting
a fireball at someone you knew could shoot one right back. But after a while, some fancy arse in a
seat of power would send a whole lot of people that were better at throwing fireballs after yer wee
li’l village. Why? He wants a farm to supply his city- a city that’s also armed by mages better at
throwing fireballs.” She clapped her hands, “Then, before you know it, all these countries are
sending their expertly-trained-fireball-throwing-mages to lay siege on their neighbors. Why?
Because they can, because they feel strong enough.” Her hand made a fist, “Add a quick
disagreement into the mix and you have yourself a war.”
Her listeners nodded in acknowledgement.
“Imagine the fortune that would come about from selling this...gunpowder. Not to mention, the
cannons...” Isabela plotted.
Naomi drew her Sword, pointing it at her.
“Try me.”
The Pirate Queen drew her daggers, the blades longer than her forearm. Varric and
Hawke did her best to talk her down.
Cullen rest his hand on Naomi’s arm, lowering it.
“Perhaps we should discuss this later, when tempers have...cooled.” He suggested.
The Captain sheathed her sword.
“Bull, have your Ben-Hassrath see what information they have on us. And you,” She walked to her
Quartermaster, “I apologize for comin’ off as cross. Thank you for defending the ship and Her
men.” They grabbed each other’s hands fiercely, pulling each other into a one-armed embrace,
“Tell Quill to burn the blueprints.” She whispered, patting his back.
“Aye.” He confirmed.
“Sure thing, Boss.” The Bull and Leliana left the room. She’d be checking his reports before
sending them.
“Commander, if we could talk alone?” The Inquisitor asked him.
“ Alone?” His voice held too much enthusiasm, “I mean, of course.” Cullen reeled himself in.
Hawke, Isabela, and Varric followed Cassandra and Josephine out of the war room. The
door clicked, signaling privacy. Naomi placed herself closer to the knight. The sunlight cast large
shadows as they stood in front of the windows. The drafty winds gave them a slight chill.
“I know this’ll be a lot to ask, but if you could...” She paused.
“What is it, Inquisitor?” He rubbed his neck, looking at her eagerly.
“Would you be able to post more men at The Dishonored’s side?”
Cullen became stressed.
“We’re stretched so thin, as it is...rotating thirty at a time has already proven costly, I’m afraid.”
He hated that he had to give her disappointing news, “I will do what I can to work something out.”
“If it’s not possible, it’s not possible.” She sighed, walking to the glass, crossing her arms ankles as
she leaned, “Must seem silly to you, eh? Worrying to much about a blasted ship...”
He placed himself across from her, admiring the view both in front of him and beyond. "Not at all. She is a grand ship, Inquisitor." They peered out into the range, "What you said, about cannons and wars...Is that how it is where you’re from?"

"Aye, that it is. Too many times have I seen the tide shifted in favor of an army with more guns and ships than their enemy, no matter how unjust their cause. I can’t let that happen here. I don’t discourage the use of Her or our guns...I discourage letting ‘em fall into the wrong hands. I’ve seen the aftermath of that." She remembered the future she’d seen, when Bull told her the land had been torn apart with gunpowder.

"We won’t let that happen." He placed a comforting hand on the side of her arm. She smiled up to him, pushing herself off of the wall with her hips. "I admire your confidence, Commander. Perhaps that’s why I find myself..." Her throat closed, "preferring your company."

He closed the distance between them, resting a loving hand on the side of her freshly-wounded face- a haunting reminder of Haven. "You’re the Inquisitor. We’re at war. And you..." He struggled to speak just as she. Naomi flushed at his touch, embracing his wrist as he spoke. Her cheek fit perfectly in his palm. "I didn’t think it was possible." She admitted, "But here we are."

A smile gave way to her fluttering heart. "So we are..." Cullen’s thumb caressed her skin, "It seems too much to ask..." He gently pulled her face to his, their breathing ragged. "But I want to."

She couldn’t believe this was happening. Her body tightened in preparation, her eyes closed as their noses brushed in passing. "Commander!" A scout knocked at the door. Cullen’s face twisted into defeat, his brow furrowing as his eyes slammed shut. "What?" He demanded through grit teeth. The Commander turned to face the scout menacingly as he entered. "You wanted a copy of Sister Leliana’s report? You said you wanted it ‘without delay.’"

The scout looked behind the towering man, seeing Naomi shielding her face from embarrassment. Cullen took a step toward the messenger, his gloves wrinkling as his fists tightened. A blood vessel made itself visible on his neck as his wrath loomed. His eyebrows formed a harsh crevice. "Or...to your office...right." The Inquisition scout backed away sheepishly, stepping out of the room with haste. The Commander turned to the beautiful woman awaiting him. He rushed to her. She began to console him, "If you need to-"

His hand met the back of her neck, pulling her lips to his hungry mouth. Her body surrendered to him as his fingers drifted to her lower back, molding her around him. Naomi’s arms draped around his neck as their lips danced and glided among themselves- their tongues ever so gently tickling each other. The kiss grew deeper, her temperature rising. Blood swelled between her legs as he explored her body freely. "Cullen..." The Captain whispered in his ear as he picked her up. She grew weak as her back met a wall, her legs wrapping around his armored waist. She pushed his face aside, grazing his neck with her teeth as he took in the scent of her fiery locks. A sound of pleasure escaped him. The Inquisitor ran her fingers through his luscious blonde hair, tightening her grip as he kissed from her neck down to her chest. She arched her back, rocking her hips against his, a defined grinding motion that excited him. He noticed the Apple of Eden behind her, mounted on the Staff.
“Naughty Lion, this one…” The words echoed in his head.
He swiftly took her wrists into his hands, pinning them above her and pulling his face away.

She looked to him out of confusion.

“Aren’t you adventurous?” Her legs tightened around him, pulling him closer to her.

“Not quite how I pictured our first dance, but I do appreciate your enthusiasm.” The flashback shot through his mind, leaving him gasping for air.

“It was real…” His jaw tightened at the revelation.

The Captain fell victim to his anger.

“What are you talking about?” Naomi struggled, trying to free her wrists.

“This happened before…this same…” Cullen shook his head, frustrated at his haziness, “We’ve…you’ve…Why can’t I remember?” His voice hardened as he let her go.

The bliss of the previous moments faded. She reached out to him in regret.

He backed away defensively.

“All this time I thought my memory was failing because of the lyrium. But that night- the reason I can’t remember, the reason I thought it to be a dream…it was you, wasn’t it? You and that thing. You let me…” Cullen bit his lower lip.

She reached for him again, grabbing his hand before he could escape.

“I thought you were a Templar. One from my world, like I was accustomed to—“

“Seducing?” He accused, “Is that how you deal with them? Has this all been part of your accusation that I’m some—“His rage caught up with him as he shoved passed her, unable to finish his thought.

Naomi grabbed the fur of his coat, pulling him backwards and sending him onto a chair.

Using the Sword, she translocated herself onto him, straddling his thighs as she held him down.

“I believe we did this, too!” He yelled at her.

“God damn it, Cullen! Just fuckin’ hear me out, mate!” She yelled in response, finally getting him to settle down.

“My world isn’t like yours,” She growled, “Women there…We aren’t allowed to be warriors, sailors, Clerics, Divine…” Her lip quivered.

“We’re expected to cook, clean, act all proper- marry some rich pig twice our age so we can birth all sorts of babes to keep the family lineage wealthy—”

Her tale only angered him more.

“Do you expect me to believe that when you captain a ship bigger than any other in Thedas?” He retorted.

“I spent seventeen years of my life living in a brothel under the name of ‘Nathan McNamara’,” She spat, “Me mum was a smart lass, she was. Wanted a better life for me than her. So, what did she do? Bound me tits and got me a job on the Medusa’s Scorn as a cabin boy when I was thirteen, that’s what.” She hissed, “I told you that already.”

“You left the brothel part out of it,” He huffed.

“Judge all you will, but these tactics of deceit…they’re’ve what kept me alive ‘and well all this time. I’ll have no shame come from it.”

"And what has that got to do with me?"

"I just…I didn't...I didn't know you were different, Cullen. I thought you were like them. Like the men who'd try to hurt me, oppress me..."

He still wasn't buying her excuses.

“And then what? One day you just woke up and told the world you were a woman?”

“Nay, I had someone else do that for me.” A ripple ran through her.

He reflected her words, wondering how it must feel to be so oppressed that you’d lie about your gender. His anger began to quell, looking into her saturated eyes.

“Captain Abbey. Was he the one?”

Naomi’s eyes narrowed.
“Where did you hear that name?” She quaked.
“I overheard Cole in the courtyard.”

After giving pause, The Herald hung her head, standing up slowly.

“Apologies.”
“No…no, you say that right before you run off.” Cullen grabbed her hand, “Talk to me.”
“And what do you care?” She glowered, “You’ve known me for maybe a month, all during the heat of war…”

“Really? What was all that, then?” He pulled her forcefully, “I care for you, Naomi, and I just wish you’d let me.”

Her name rolled off of his gentle tongue.
“Weren’t you just ready to rip my throat out?” She sighed.
“I still am.”

Cullen lay his hand on the back of her head, pushing her gently into his chest as if shielding her from the world around them.
“No more trying to kill me, either.”
“No promises.” Naomi slid her face up from under his palm, leaning up to give him a final, maddening kiss.
Admissions of Guilt

Chapter Summary

"When a lovely woman stoops to folly, and finds too late that men betray, what charm can soothe her melancholy, what art can wash her guilt away?"

-Oliver Goldsmith

Naomi cursed herself as she marched through the banquet hall long after Cullen, “What am I doing?”

She was the Inquisitor, they were at war—he was her Commander. The last time she mixed pleasure with someone under her authority didn’t end so well. Why would she do this again?

She kept her gaze to the floor, bumping into Mother Giselle.

“Apologies, I-I didn’t see you—“

“It is alright, Inquisitor. I was hoping to speak with you, regardless.” The Chantry woman chuckled.

“What’s this you needed to talk to me about?” Naomi fidgeted.

“I have news regarding one of your…companions.”

Naomi’s eyes widened as she thought she’d been discovered.

“Ah, I see. Which, uh…which one?” She gulped.

“The Tevinter.”

The Herald was washed with a sense of relief.

“My beloved Dorian? What has he gotten himself into, now?”

Mother Giselle sighed, scolding under her breath.

“I have been in contact with his family: House Pavus, out of Qarinus.”

“His family? The one he swears at every chance he gets?”

“Yes, I believe you’re correct.” The Chantry woman pulled a note from her sleeve, “The family sent a letter describing the estrangement from their son and pleading for my aid. They’ve asked to arrange a meeting. Quietly, without telling him. They fear it’s the only way he’ll come. Since you appear to be on good terms with the man, I’d hoped…”

Naomi was taken aback.

“You’d have me lie…to Dorian?”

“I only wish to help. It behooves us to act on these matters, being an authority figure. Please, consider my words, Inquisitor.” Mother Giselle bowed her head, dismissing herself from the conversation.

She shook her head, unable to come to terms with how ridiculous this was. She held the letter in her hand, wondering what it said. She could read it, and lie to Dorian, or…

He deserved to know, at least. The decision would be his to make.

The Herald immediately walked to the door that led to the stairs where the Tevinter mage made himself comfortable. She burst in, startling Solas, who was reading at his desk.

“Inquisitor.” He mumbled.

“Solas.”

She wound up the stairs, her knees pumping as she all but ran. Naomi reached the top, taking a deep breath after completing the climb.

“Dorian! I have something to discuss with yeh, me harty.” She skipped over to him, covering her
frayed nerves.

“For the second time, Inquisitor, I will not father your children.” His voice echoed around them.

“Why not?” She whined, feeding into his joke.

Dorian clapped his hands daintily in approval as the people around them shot the
Inquisitor unimpressed looks.

“What can I do for you, my dear? Nice title, by the way. Sorry about almost ruining the surprise.”

He smirked.

She shot him a pursed look.

“Yes, well…thanks for the ‘warning.’” She rolled her eyes.

“Come now, what’s a surprise get together with the entire Inquisition at your feet, looking on as
you take their lives into your hands if with a ‘warning?’ Not much of a surprise at all, if you must
know!”

Naomi shook her head.

“I have a letter for you. Well, for Mother Giselle, about you.”

“A letter? Is it a naughty letter? Does the Chantry hen have a secret infatuation with the handsome
Tevinter scoundrel in her midst?”

“Pfft! You wouldn’t be so lucky.” She paused her laughter, clearing her throat, “It’s eh…from you
father.”

Dorian’s face hardened.

“From my father, I see.” He shifted his weight, “And what does Magister Halward want, pray
tell?”

“I haven’t opened it yet, mate.”

The mage’s eyes squinted.

“Show me this letter.”

She handed him the parcel as he snatched it angrily. He read it out loud to her.

“Your Reverence,

I understand that you feel inadequate to the task of bringing Dorian to a secret meeting. Even in
asking, I find it difficult to believe myself. Considering my son has rebuffed all contact, this is the
only way. I know my son; he would be too proud to come if he knew—even just to talk. This is all
we wish to do. The thought of Dorian in the South, placing himself in the path of such danger,
alarms us more than I can express.

If this somehow succeeds, we have a family retainer at the Vandral Hills watching for Dorian’s
arrival. He will bring the boy to us, somewhere private. If Dorian utterly refuses to go with him, it
ends there…and there is nothing we can do. We are at our wit’s end.

Graciously Yours,
Magister Halward of House Pavus”

Dorian crinkled the paper.

“I know my son?” What my father knows of me would barely fill a thimble.” He tossed the paper
in a basket, “This is so typical.” He rested his hand on his chin, “I’m even willing to bet this
‘retainer’ is a henchman, hired to knock me on the head and drag me back to Tevinter.”

“Come now, laddie- as if I’d let them take you away.” She nudged him, “So? What’ll it be?”

He raised a brow at her.

“Let’s meet this so-called ‘family retainer.’ If it’s a trap, we escape, and kill everyone!” He grew
excited at the prospect, “You’re good at that.” His perfectly white grin stretched across his face,
“If it’s not, I send the man back to my father with the message that he can stick his ‘alarm’ in his
‘wit’s end.’”

The Inquisitor wore a sad smile, thinking back to her time in Ireland has a young ‘boy.’

“I wish I would’ve been able to bid my father farewell…I didn’t know who he was until much
later. After he was…” She struggled with her words, “I’d go in there with a fresh mind, Dorian-
not one filled to the brim with hate and bias.”

“I didn’t ask what you thought, did I?” He spat venomously.

Naomi’s brow furrowed, obviously hurt by the comment.

“That…was unworthy. I apologize.” Dorian groaned, “I can’t believe my father’s gall. Of course he couldn’t come here to Skyhold! No, that would be too much. But contacting some Southern cleric on the sly? Much wiser. If this is some Venatori conniving, I will be utterly disappointed.”

“Disappointed?” She questioned, “I’d never found you disappointed at the prospect of killing off these Venatori.”

“Point made.” He waved her off, “Run along now, Inquisitor. Go get permission from your…well, advisors.”

“You’re lucky you’re so handsome, Dorian. I’d not take this from you if you weren’t.” She grunted, walking away.

“It is indeed a curse, at times.” He stretched his muscles, raising an eyebrow at her, “And…Inquisitor. I’m sorry about your father.”

Naomi waved him off, slouching down the steps.

Cassandra waited for her, patiently speaking with Solas to pass the time. It seemed to be a light-hearted conversation, as the two were laughing. It was strange to observe them getting along so well.

“Inquisitor,” The Seeker addressed her, “Good of you to arrive. I have something for you.”

She closed the gap between them.

“And let me guess, it would be ‘easier to show me.’ Look, lass, one of these days, yer goin’ta have to learn how to keep all these things to yourself.”

Cassandra fidgeted nervously.

“Well…Sort of.” She held out a wrapped item to Naomi.

The Captain took it in her hands, feeling the familiar weight.

“I’ve been waiting for a good time to give it back to you.” The Seeker smiled.

Naomi looked to her, curiously. Cassandra nodded to it, urging her to unwrap it. The Herald cautiously lifted one corner of the wrap, peering into her hand calmly. Her face lifted in joy as she realized what it was. Her missing pistol- the one she’d gave to Cullen once loaded with a flare.

“You kept it safe…all this time?” She took one of her late Mentor’s golden flintlock into a trembling grasp, “Thank you…thank you with everything that I am, lass.” The Inquisitor embraced Cassandra, hugging her tightly in gratitude.

The Seeker was stunned for a moment, breaking a smile across her face and patting Naomi on the back hesitantly.

“You are welcome, Your Worship.”

She pulled away, looking the warrior in the face.

“These four pistols…they belonged to someone who meant a great deal to me. They’re more than mindless weapons.” She balanced it in her hands, admiring the light shifting within its great detail, “They were a part of him…Captain McGrath, my Mentor, and, just…Thank you.”

“Inquisitor,” A scout approached them from the doorway, “Sister Leliana, Lady Montilyet, and Commander Cullen request your presence at the war room, ser.” The woman saluted.

Naomi exhaled.

“What I wouldn’t give for a day off, eh?” She shrugged to Solas.

“That’s not what you signed up for, Inquisitor.” He joked to her.

She shot him a bland look.

“Well, then. Off I go…” The Inquisitor shook Cassandra’s hand, expressing her happiness one last time.

Josephine’s desk was empty, and the corridor between the two rooms was cold from the small, collapsed section of the wall. She begrudgingly walked to the room she’d grown to hate.

Her heart sunk as they grew closer to the doors, knowing Cullen would be on the other
side. She rested her hand hesitantly on the handle, inhaling sharply as she pushed it open.

Her eyes were like magnets to him, and he to her. The minute she saw his face, her heart skipped- her chest became warm. Naomi’s face reddened in anxiety, her chest flushed; she began to sweat. She took her place across from them, doing her best to remain composed.

“Thank you for joining us, Inquisitor.” Josephine bowed her head slightly.

“Are you well, Your Worship? You appear…ill.” Leliana walked to her, placing her wrist on the Captain’s forehead. She waved it way.

“I’m fine, lass…” Naomi released a held breath, “What’s this about?”

“Our Commander would share word of the lands south of the Hinterlands.” Josephine scribbled away.

Cullen looked to her, his jaw relaxed in wonder. His eyes melted at the sight of the Captain; her eyes echoed the color of the greenest of fields- her hair the color of the fire that could burn them. Her delicate freckled skin-

“Commander?” Josephine repeated herself.

His eyes widened as he looked away, as if caught doing something wrong.

“Ah, yes-right.” The Commander picked up a board with a report clipped to the top, “*Missing Inquisition soldiers have been found in a bog called the Fallow Mire. They are being held hostage by Avaar who demand to meet the Herald of Andraste if the Inquisition wishes to see its people alive again.*”

He gulped as he saw the Inquisitor’s twisted face.

“What?” Naomi growled, “Who are these Avaar?”

“They are the primitive tribes that inhabit the Frostback Mountains. This tribe, in particular, finds themselves quite fascinated with you. Their leader, addressed as the ‘Hand of Korth,’ specifically challenges you to a duel, claiming their Mountain-Father wills it so.” The Ambassador explained.

“Korth is the Mountain-Father, their most powerful and eldest God,” Leliana added, “I’m afraid my agents have declared this is no bluff, Inquisitor.”

“No need to be afraid, lass. I’ll go smash this lousy heathen into the dirt with’a heel of my boot.” “It’s a bit more…complicated.” Cullen rubbed the back of his neck, “The rogue tribesman have taken control of Hargrave Keep. There’s been an…accumulation of these outlaws. I believe they lie in wait. More than likely an ambush.”

“Hah!” Naomi held her hands out, “It would be rude of us to keep em’ waitin’ for much longer, wouldn’t it, now?” She beckoned to Josephine, “What is the Inquisition if not courteous to those who long for our attention, eh?”

The Antivan woman chuckled.

“I agree with that sentiment, Inquisitor.” She held her quill in approval.

“I will have my agents settle camp in a strategic position, Your Worship.” Leliana bowed her head gracefully as she left.

Naomi made sure to leave alongside her, not being left alone with the Commander. He hustled out of the door, doing his best not to come across as suspicious as he trailed her down the hall. She took a sharp turn to the left, her tailcoat fluttering as she rounded the corner. He jogged to the door that lead to the undercroft, only to be greeted by a blinding white light, and no Inquisitor.

Cullen sighed, shutting the door in defeat.

“AHH!” He yelled, shielding himself from Cole, who appeared behind him, “Why must you DO that?!”

“You’re angry and you don’t want to be. I came to help.” He twitched a smile.

“W-what are you talking about?” The Commander lowered his voice, as the eyes in the room were focused on them.

“You understand why she did it, but you’re still angry. You aim to stop taking it for her, to prove that it can be done. You want to feel betrayed, but you can’t, and you don’t know why.”

“Cole, enough…” He scolded, “I know you’re trying to help, but you can’t just…invade other people’s minds.” Cullen crossed his arms.
“How can I tell you what she’s thinking if I don’t listen?”
“Wait, you…you know what she’s—” He looked around, “What is she thinking?”
“Is it not ‘invading’ anymore?” Cole’s expression remained blank, no matter how sarcastic his words might seem to a non-spirit.
“It is, but—if it’s dire…or causing the Inquisitor ailments…”
“The evil man broke her, wounded her. Her prisoner put her back together. And then he broke her, too—over, and over. She never told him about—”
“Cole!” Solas stormed over from his study, grabbing his arm and pulling him away from Cullen, “Commander, you should be ashamed of yourself.”
Cullen’s face burned hot in embarrassment as the apostate slammed the door behind him, shuffling Cole into his rotunda while lecturing him.
“Every time I turn a corner, you’re being yelled at by another Mage. You sure you’re not a Templar?” Varric joked, having observed the conflict from down the dining hall.
Cullen rolled his eyes.
“Been meaning to talk to you, old friend.” Hawke came up from behind him, wrapping his arm around the Commander’s shoulders, “No hard feelings about Kirkwall?”
“Right, no hard feelings about aiding and abiding Anders blowing up the Chantry, after lying about being a smuggler and planting Aveline as the Captain of the city guard.” Cullen peeled the Champion’s embrace off of him, “No, no hard feelings at all.”
“We all ended up on the same side in the end, and that’s all that matters.” He held his arms up in golly.
“We didn’t know what Anders was planning.” Isabela interjected, meeting her lover at his side, “I may not be the most selfless fish in the sea, but I wouldn’t help someone kill hundreds of innocent people.”
“Well, you’re right about not being selfless.” Varric hummed, inserting himself in the "Kirkwall reunion circle."
Hawke shot his friend a challenging look. The dwarf eased his hands in jest.
“Why’d you come here, after all that’s happened?” The Commander furrowed his brow.
“I’m…awaiting news from an old contact. Once we hear from them, I’ll make sure I explain every little gripping detail to that big beautiful Templar brain of yours.” Hawke sarcastically punched Cullen’s shoulder.
Cullen waited for them to leave before rubbing the sides of his head. This was turning out to be a very taxing evening.

The Captain stumbled in place as she regained her wit, falling backwards onto her bed upon The Dishonored. It was connected to the wall behind her desk, making it a cozy spot with lots of corners for her to rest in. She piled up pillows behind her and plopped backwards, her legs crossed on her chair in front of her. She twisted and twirled her father’s pendant in her twitching hands, anxious about what had occurred.
Naomi couldn’t get the Commander out of her head. They’d only known each other for a month- but there was something about him she couldn’t describe. Perhaps it was because of the parallels in their past, or the fact that she’d be dead without his constant heroism. But there was one other part to this picture…
“Am I even suited to fancy someone again?”
Edward had left her a ruined mess, more than once. In her last ten years, she’d loved him and only him, even when he hurt her and pushed her away through scandalous means. It changed her, jaded her, made her numb to love altogether.
Until now.
Maybe.
The tavern was crawling with pirates by the fall of the night. Naomi had spent the rest of the afternoon with her crew on her ship, catching up with them and explaining everything the next day had in store for her. They weren’t happy about her frequent expeditions, but understood why she had to make them. They decided to stay in Skyhold under Adibas’ temporary command. If the Inquisition should find a need for them, they’d sail otherwise, however reluctant to do so without their Captain.

Naomi had been deep into her fourth pint of ale before Iron Bull officially won their drinking contest.

“Yeh only one ‘cause you have dem horns on yer…” She hiccupped.

“I don’t think they have anything to do with my drinking, boss.” He swayed, “Dorian!”

The mage made a scoured face, “What now?”

“You’re…” Iron Bull face planted onto the bar.

The Tevinter rolled his eyes.

“Thaddeus!” Naomi stumbled over to her Shantyman, who caught her laughingly.

“Aye, Cap’n?”

“It’s…it’s…” She stood herself up straight, even if only for a moment, “It’s-“

She hiccupped, swaying to the right. Adibas grabbed her waist, allowing her to fall into him.

“I’ve got you, Captain.” He slurred, having drank too much himself.

“We’re a messy bunch, aren’t we, Quartermaster?”

“Aye, that we are.” He caught a gasp for air.

She leaned her chin on his shoulder, noticing the Commander who’d just arrived in a loose shirt and breeches. It was one of the rare moments he’d appear without his armor on.

“Oh for fuck’s sake!” She swore at Cullen’s inviting neck muscles and collar bones that were visible under his shirt line, “Why does he have to be so ravishing…?” She tried to stand, leaning against the wall in support.

Adibas looked behind him, realizing who she was talking about. He snickered, shaking his head.

“I am not a pirate, but I long to be.
Sailing by the stars across the Seven Seas,
Living with no earthly cares, my mates and me—
The envy of all worldly men, who are not free.”

Aquilla’s whistling filled the air as he sang, having snatched the drunken guitar from the
Shantyman. Naomi’s face lit up with excitement, linking arms with her Quartermaster.
“Didn’t realize you fancied him so, Captain.” He jested.
“Hush now, the Sea Artist’s singin’!”

The sailors began to clap their hands and feet, singing in unison. The Captain joined
them, having rarely sang with them in the past.

“A song to sing for beggars, a song to sing for saints,
A song to sing for wealthy men all wrapped and bound in chains!
Our treasure's not in gold, or in our piety.
Our wealth is in an answered call, the longing of the sea!”

Kilean took to the lap drums in the corner as the men and women of The Dishonored all
sang, their voices shaking the buildings foundation down to the core. They gathered on the floor,
their mugs in hand at the bartender’s dismay. Naomi sang as loud as she could, arms draped over
the shoulders of Adibas and Thaddeus.

"Stormy oceans carry us to lands we've never known,
To mysteries and buried secrets from the tales of old!
So hoist the sail and raise the flag, we do not stop for night.
We'll ride the wild winds and waves until the morning's light!"

A drunken Christopher stumbled into Cullen, swearing and dropping his mug. It
shattered on the floor, but not after spilling its’ contents on the Commander’s shirt. His white cloth
turned transparent, clinging to his muscles. Naomi couldn’t tear herself away from the view.

"In smuggler's caves and tavern halls, we live by no man's rules.
We fly the colors of the living, free and proud and true!
We set out on the ocean blue to escape tyranny.
We'll keep our merry hearts alive so long we roam the sea."

The natives of Thedas listened to the tale of the sailors, always wondering what
adventure they’d hear of at their night in the tavern. The Captain imagined her and her crew,
sailing along the coasts of home. She remembered how free they’d felt once they first banded,
similar to what they felt when they banded together like this night. The entire singing crew then
turned their attention to her, Adibas lifting her up on his shoulders where she sat, barely able to
keep herself upright.

"A woman once walked along the shore, and called she out to me,"

“Ahoy!” Christopher called.

"'I see you are a fisherman, a lover of the sea!'"

“Aye-aye!” Thaddeus cheered.

"'I know this world's a wretched place, but if you'll follow me..."
I’ll take all of your burdens...''

The sailors let out a dramatic sigh in unison.

“‘And pirates we shall be!’”

They saluted her in unison, reminiscing of how inspiring their Captain had been to them.

“Yo ho, yo ho!
Yo ho, yo ho!
Yo ho, yo ho!”

Cullen admired not only her beauty, but the love she had from her crew—them fearing her all the same. He could only imagine what she was like on the open waters upon *The Dishonored*, to witness one of these epic tales that they sang of. He secretly hoped that one day he’d be able to.

“Hope is now before us, and misery at aft.
We could not care the lesser for the men who say, 'You're daft!'
So let the howling winds blow in and take hold of the mast.
Release the wheel and all your sins, for you are free at last!”

Thaddeus linked arms with Naomi, rushing to Aquilla’s side. She and the Shantyman sang the verse that was inspired by her. Together, they did their best not to laugh at each other’s failure as they slurred.

“’Swab the deck, my clever lad, and listen close to me.
Learn my ways, and soon one day a Captain you shall be!
Climb the rigging, mount the nest, and say, what can you see?’”

Aquilla gently stroke the guitar as he sang.

“’A fleet upon the starboard side...’”

Naomi and Thaddeus roared,

“‘In battle we shall meet!’”

The Captain jumped onto the table in front of her, holding her hands out and yelling the song at the top of her lungs as her men rose their drinks to her as they cried out loud. She moved her hands and arms as if directing the orders theatrically.

“’Load the cannons, raise the flag, and take hold of your heart!
A proper man of courage does not flee before the start.
Do not fear when death is near, when doom is night at hand.
Your end marks the beginning of a life in fairer lands!’”

Her hands made a fist as she shook it to her men, cheering as they emphasized alongside her. Her Thedas companions were astounded by the vigor the crew displayed tonight, as they weren’t normally this loud. An entirely different side of Naomi shone through her liquor-induced, transparent hide.
"All day the battle rages, and on into the night.
With clashing swords and pistol shots, upon the decks we fight!
We match our wits and cannonballs with the finest of their fleet.
Their admiral walks the plank in the shame of his defeat."

Thaddeus made a falling, whistling nose as would a descending cannon shot as he fell himself into the pile of men who were almost too drunk to catch him. Naomi grabbed another pint of ale, lifting it into the air as she hopped down, putting Adibaas in a teasing headlock. He wrestled himself free, wrapping his arm around her shoulder as they sang together.

“So raise a drink to plunder, and lift a toast for spoils.
Cheer good men - in bravery, the enemy we've foiled!
Pour another round and we will sing a song of joy.
When next we make our port the folk will say, 'Victors—ahoy!!!'

The Quartermaster spun his Captain around until she could no longer stand it. She hadn’t realize he guided her to Cullen’s table, where she stumbled and caught herself not inches away from him.

“We moor upon an isle of wealthy fools and knaves
Who drink all night and sleep all day on the labor of their slaves!
When the sun has set, we break off all their chains,
And share with them our plunder, and now free men they are made!"

Adibaas and Thaddeus locked hands, shoulder checking each other as they continued. The Quartermaster ended up next to his prized Seeker. In his drunken state, he lifted her to her feet, spinning her in place with sloppy coordination. She found him astoundingly charming, even when he wasn’t sober.

The sailors directed their song at the companions, who were enthralled by the tale. The Chargers were most impressed.

“We hole up in the tavern with our new crewmen and mates.
Soon those rich folks come a calling for their run aways!
The barman sends them off with ale, saying, "Go, drink your sway!"
But when the rest have gone, one aging wealthy man does stay."

Naomi’s hearing swayed as she lost her balance, falling about at the Commander’s side. “Enjoying yerself?” She asked, tugging on his arm to drag him away. He’d downed but a drink before she captured him. Cullen’s eyes lost themselves in her, his lips creasing up. “Where are you taking me, now?” He hushed.

Christopher did his best old man’s impression. The Captain used the distraction to stumble her and Cullen through the crowd.

"'I was once a young lad, sailing by the charts.
I did not savor wind, nor water, nor admire the stars.
Now I have grown old and frail, and do not journey far.
I only long to sail the seas once more to find my heart.'"
They’d almost made it out before they began the next part. Cullen turned his head, listening to the uplifting end as she guided him.

“**Well, come aboard and voyage long, we make for unmapped shores.**
Ride the stormy seas with us, you’ll find that soul of yourn.
Leave your wealth behind you, and your bitter scorn.
Make your home with slaves and sinners—then you’ll be reborn!”

Naomi and the Commander had snuck out of the building, leaving the festivities to conclude themselves without them. She leaned her back against the wall, pulling Cullen to her, seeking his mouth for a blood-rushing kiss.

“**Yo ho, yo ho!**
**Yo ho, yo ho!**
**Yo ho, yo ho!**
**Yo ho, yo ho!**
**Yo ho, yo ho!”**

She looked to her balcony in Skyhold, not being too far from the tavern itself. With her normal protocols numbed by the effects of heavy drinking, Naomi gripped the Sword...and her Commander. The two appeared on the balcony, she stumbled backwards hiccuping slightly as she clung to him for balance.

“Inquisitor…“He grew hesitant, observing his new surroundings.

Naomi sloshed to the window-styled doors, opening them with vigor.

“Oh, don’t ‘Inquisitor,’ me…” She pulled him in her room, shutting the large doors behind her once again. Dropping her weapons and holsters to the floor at her sides, she grinned, “I much prefer it when you say my name…” She took her coat off, whipping it onto the ground with determination.

“In-Naomi, what are you-“

Cullen felt the edge of her bed on the back of his knees. Naomi took the opportunity to strike.

She pushed him onto his back, laughing as he got comfortable, sliding further up. Or running from her.

The Captain sat on his waist, untying her short corset with one well-placed pull. It soon found its own spot on the side of her bed.

“You’re drunk,” He gripped her biceps, stopping her as she began to lift her blouse, “Stop this…”

He gulped as she disobeyed, her shirt raising higher. Tattoos of all kinds littered her sides and her arms, even up the underside of her breasts…he wanted to see where they led—“I can’t-not while you’re…Please…” The moonlight highlighted his soft, tortured eyes.

She twisted her arms from his grasp. Her blouse had come off, dangling from her fingertip as she dropped it next to them. His blushing face looked away, giving her privacy.

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She tugged on him, watching his eyes roll to the ceiling. His jaw hung limp and the rest of him-anything but. A low moan escaped his lips; her grip tightening around his girth.

Naomi leaned up to hug him, pressing her bare skin against his muscular body as she
worked. She brought him in for a kiss, the taste of liquor coating her tongue. He shook his head, pulling back from her as if she’d burnt him.
“I…I can’t.” Cullen grabbed her wrist, removing it from himself, “Not like this.”

He took his damp shirt off, covering her with it.
“Let’s get you to sleep.” He said lovingly, wrapping her in a cocoon as she tried to struggle her way out.
Her eyelids grew heavy as she continued writhing.
“But, it’s-“ She started.
Cullen leaned over her, giving her a gentle kiss to her forehead, then her lips.
“It’s just sex- doesn’t mean anythin’. No matter how hard I try, it never means anythin’.” The dozing Captain murmured in her drunken stupor.
“It does to me.” He laid next to her, holding her close to him. “Good night, Inquisitor.” He whispered as she snuggled up next to him.
“Whatever…” She tiredly spoke, passing out only moments later as he pulled a blanket over them.

... 

Small puffs of air blew on the her hair. It was irritating. Her brow furrowed in confusion. Naomi’s eyes parted, a pounding headache blurring her vision as her eyes adjusted to the darkness. Looking up, she realized it was Cullen’s gentle breathing that tickled her, as his chin rested on a pillow just above her aching head. His arm kept her close in a protected embrace, his muscles balancing on her waist as her back fell in line with his chest.
She rolled on her side and watched him sleep, admiring his features. He had such a serene look about him- his mouth open slightly as his hair graced the clothed pillow beneath his tired head. He slept on a folded arm, his elbow jutting out passed her gaze. The Captain hesitated, though, not unwelcoming to the company. She pressed her lips against his temple, curling up to him and drifting off into her dreams.
Deliverance

Chapter Summary

"Acceptance of one’s life has nothing to do with resignation; it does not mean running away from the struggle. On the contrary, it means accepting it as it comes, with all the handicaps of heredity, of suffering, of psychological complexes and injustices."
-Paul Tournier

Naomi slouched on the back of Dullahan as she and three others made their way to Redcliffe. She wore her hood, hating the sun with every fiber in her being. With each step of the dracolisk, she became closer to vomiting.

“Got a little carried away, did we?” Dorian chuckled.

The Captain returned a groan.

“I do not think our Inquisitor was the only one enjoying herself.” Solas raised a brow to Cassandra, “I did not peg you for the dancing type.”

“I am not.”

“Then why is it every time I see you, you’re in the arms of the Captain’s Quartermaster? Fancy the pirate yourself, hm?” The Tevinter taunted.

“Ugh.” The Seeker rolled her eyes, “I’d prefer to speak on a different topic. Like this meeting with your ‘family retainer.’”

He shifted, not appreciating the reversal.

“As would anyone, my family regrets letting my company escape them. And so, they’re trying to reconcile while they still can. Honestly, I don’t know how they’ve held out for this long.”

“I could take a guess.” The Seeker spat.

Naomi laid down, shielding her eyes from the sun as her head balanced on Dullahan’s scales. It wasn’t comfortable, but it relieved her stomach for a moment.

“So, where are the others?” Solas asked.

“Varric is with Hawke, Vivienne is helping the Templars keep track of the mages, Blackwall is assisting Dennet in organizing the horses, Cole is still helping…everyone, Iron Bull was dealing with something, and Sera, well, we couldn’t find her this morning.” Cassandra shook her head.

“Speaking of going missing… where did you run off to last night?” Dorian looked to Naomi.

She still returned only a groan.

“That’s not much of an answer, my dear Lady. Or is it? Juicy details?”

“Keep talkin’ to me nd’ you’ll get all the ‘juicy’ details…” She rubbed her stomach.

The group made foul motions at her. She sat upright as they approached the main gates, addressing the soldiers that greeted them.

The citizens of Redcliffe saluted and bowed as they trotted along. The Inquisitor did her best to remain postured, as hard as it was. They stopped before the “Gull and Lantern” inn.

“To be honest…” Naomi whispered, “I’d hoped to never see this place again. Especially not with you.”

“My sediment exactly.” Dorian dismounted, “Let’s get this over with.”

She and the mage walked in, the others standing guard.

The tavern was dark and empty, again.

“Uh-oh. Nobody’s here. This doesn’t bode well.” Dorian cast his shadow on a wall as a torch
flickered behind him.

A man stepped from the shadows, causing Naomi to withdraw her blade.

“Dorian.” A deep, pained voice escaped the man’s lips. He was dressed in robes of nobility, with markings like those of her Tevinter friend.

Fists curled Dorian’s side as he turned his head, readying himself for the utterance of what the man was to him.

“Their story about the ‘family retainers’ was just…” He looked around, seeing no other person in their presence.

“Then, you were told.” His father did his best to speak calmly. He looked to Naomi directly, “I apologize for the deception, Inquisitor. I never intended for you to be involved.”

Perhaps I shan’t be the one you honor with your apology, ser.” Naomi shifted her weight, unsure of whether or not she should have interjected.

Dorian’s voice weighed with poison, “Apologize to me? Of course not. Just like he couldn’t come to Skyhold and be seen with the dread Inquisitor. What would people think?” The shadows gave him a sinister look, “What is ‘this’ exactly, Father? Ambush? Kidnapping? Warm family reunion?”

The Magister remained speaking to the Inquisitor, “This is how it has always been…”

“If he’s goin’ to keep talking to me, I’ll sure as well give him an answer.” She smirked.

The Herald responded all too eagerly, “Well, time to settle it, then. Speak your mind quickly, I reckon. Doubt Dorian’ll entertain this for longer if you’re intent on speakin’ with me.”

“Yes, Father. Talk to me. Let me hear how mystified you are by my anger.” Dorian’s teeth chattered in anger, “Quite a trivial matter, I’m afraid. His biggest concern is not of a dire one, I assure you.”

“A matter of progressing the Pavus lineage is no trivial matter, Dorian.” His father’s eyes hardened.

“Why wouldn’t you be able to…” Naomi asked her friend, confused.

“I prefer the company of men. My father disapproves.” Dorian rest his hands on his hips, glaring at his father.

“’Prefers,’ as in-“ She asked.


“I’ve more than heard of it, actually.” Naomi chuckled, “I’ve preferred the company of quite a many men in my lifetime. Lots of sex involved there.” She gave Dorian a wink.

It seemed to lighten him up. Perhaps not because she told him she’d lain with a few men, but rather she hadn’t made a spectacle of him being a man who preferred other men. She did not judge Dorian, but rather, she related to him. That’s wasn’t something the Tevinter outcast was accustomed to.

“No! The Herald of Andraste fails to be a virgin?” Dorian responded sarcastically, “I am shocked and scandalized.”

“So, when you say ‘prefer,’ does that mean there’s still hope for all the sorry tarts hurling themselves at your delicately jeweled feet, Dorian?” The Inquisitor laughed.

“Oh, Lady Inquisitor…” He shook his head.

“This display is uncalled for!” Dorian’s father declared.

“No, it is called for. You called for it by luring us here!” Dorian rebutted.

“This is not what I wanted.” His father glowered.

Dorian became something aggressive, “I’m never what you wanted, Father, or had you forgotten?”

Naomi squinted, trying to rack her brain for memories of information she may have picked up about Tevinter. Regarding this issue, she found none.

“Is it blasphemous to lay with the same sex in Tevinter?” She asked.

“It’s ‘blasphemous to lay with’ anyone who your father would deem unworthy in Tevinter.”
Dorian’s mustache moved with the quickness of his words. “That doesn’t give much room to live, does it?” The Inquisitor yawned.

“Only if you’re trying to live up to an impossible standard. Every Tevinter family is intermarrying to distill the perfect mage, perfect body, perfect mind. The perfect leader.” Dorian’s voice darkened, “It means every perceived flaw is deviant and shameful. It must be hidden.”

Dorian’s father looked to the floor in shame, “Dorian, please, if you’ll only listen to me…” The proud man begged.

No matter how hard Naomi tried to make light of the situation, her friend was Hell-bent on making it difficult for his father. Maybe this was rightfully so, but if the man was trying to make amends, she felt Dorian should let him try. If not just to make her hung-over journey worth taking.

Dorian took threatening steps towards his father, “Why should I listen to you? So you can spout more convenient lies?” Dorian stood only a few feet from his father, now. “He taught me to hate blood magic. ‘The resort of the weak mind.’ Those are his words! But what was the first thing you did when your precious heir refused to play pretend for the rest of his life?” His eyes grew saddened, the façade being broken, “You tried to…change me!” He fought back tears.

“I only wanted what was best for you!” His father pleaded, reaching out for him.

Dorian’s sadness evolved into hatred, “You wanted the best for you! For your fucking legacy! Anything for that.” He growled, jabbing a finger in his father’s chest.

Naomi put a hand on Dorian’s shoulder, “Maybe…listen to what he has to say? You listen to all of us rattle on ‘bout stupid shite, what’s one more person, eh? No one knows what tomorrow’ll bring, mate. Put this to bed now, ‘cause you might not have the chance later.”

He considered her words, staring at her. The fire flickered behind them, filling the room with warm crackles and wisps. She nodded to him, giving him the reassurance he needed. “Tell me why you came.” Dorian demanded.

His father folded his arms in front of him, lifting his gaze from the floor, “If I knew I would drive you to the Inquisition…”

“You didn’t. I joined the Inquisition because it’s the right thing to do!” Dorian’s voice quieted, almost to a sympathetic level, “Once, I had a father who would have known that.”

“Once, I had a son who trusted me. A trust that I betrayed.”

Dorian’s father took him by surprise. The shock was visible at his hinged mouth, his creased brow, his eyes that sought for a reason to be angry at the comment. He found none. “I only wanted to talk to him. To hear his voice again. To ask him to forgive me.” His father continued.

Naomi met Dorian’s gaze, nodding to his father in an urge to speak with him farther. “Inquisitor, if you’ll give us a moment.” Dorian asked.

“Of course, mate.” She nodded to Dorian’s father, “A pleasure meetin’ you.”

“Likewise, Inquisitor.” He answered.

She left the small tavern, shutting the door behind her. Cassandra shot up, hiding something behind her back. She nodded to him, giving him the reassurance he needed.

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“Nothing, exactly!” She sputtered. Naomi giggled.

“Heated conversation, I hear.” The Seeker stumbled.

“Aye. Interesting, too.” The Inquisitor walked up to her, trying to look behind her. Cassandra moved so that item remained hidden.

“My magical Assassin tinglies are tellin’ me you’re hidin’ something, Seeker.”

“Ugh!” She let loose one of her infamous scowls, “It’s…a book.” The fierce woman brought it
into view, “It’s…one of Varric’s tales. Swords & Shields. The latest chapter.”

Naomi froze.

“Wait, wait- wait one bloody second.” She did her best to hold in her smart-witted comments, “Meaning…you’ve read them all?”

“She’s read this one three times.” Solas returned, holding a small satchel of herbs in his hands.

“You!” She swore at the elf.

“I hear you read it out loud certain scenes to Cole. He’s not a fan of the Captain, either, for the record.” Solas smirked.

“I never did that!” Cassandra’s voice broke, “its literature!” She went on the defense.

“Smutty literature.” Solas added.

The Herald could contain it no more, “Aye, well, in the dry spout I find myself in, maybe I should be reading it!” She slapped her knee, buckling over.

Solas looked at her curiously, mumbling, “There are other ways to remedy that.”

“They’re terrible. And magnificent. And this one ends in a cliffhanger.” She looked up excitedly, “I know Varric is working on the next, he must be!” Her voice held an innocence that Naomi had never heard in her before.

“You!” Cassandra stepped towards the Inquisitor, “You could ask him to finish it, command him to…”

Naomi and Solas crossed their arms, observing Cassandra with a smile.

The Seeker’s voice fell back into its harsh reality.

“Pretend you don’t know this about me.” She returned the book to the saddle bag of her horse.

After an hour of them shopping around Redcliffe, Naomi had negotiated the price of a steady supply of iron to Skyhold, something the dwarf she spoke to grew irritated from.

“You’re the Inquisition, you can afford it!” He’d complain.

“We can afford it because our vendors give us competitive prices, mate. If we’d pay the full price for all our lots, we’d be broke- no doubt. You don’t want the Inquisition to go broke, do you? Seems like a right bad time for Redcliffe, being under our protection, and all.” She convinced him.

The Tevinter mage rejoined them and seemed to be in a hurry to leave.

“Corporal Vale reports one rift left in the area.” Dorian started, “It’s a bit complicated, however.”

Naomi frowned at him, “When is it not complicated? What now?”

“There is a…cult, inhabiting Lornan’s Exile to the south. The rift in a clearing. It’ll be no surprise that they ask for you- for a sign to show that the Veil can be controlled.”

“They’d doubt the Inquisitor, still? Even after the Breach?” Solas shook his head, “Unbelievable.”

“Come now, Solas. The world would be bland without idiots.”Dorian scoffed.

Cassandra and Solas chattered to her right as they prepared to leave. Naomi stayed disengaged, falling back to ride next to Dorian. He rode by himself, keeping his gaze to the ground below them as their mounts trotted on.

She did her best to break the tension.

“You alright, mate?”

“No. Not really.”

She shifted in her saddle, “Want to talk about it?”

Dorian looked to her with saddened eyes, something he wore infrequently. He’d barely shown any emotion before, actually. Just witty comments and that perfect mustache.

“He says him and I are alike. Too much pride… Once, I would have been overjoyed to hear him say that. Now, I’m not certain.” He shuddered, “I don’t know if I can forgive him.”

“What did he do, exactly? I know you said he tried to change you, but…” She sighed, “Apologies. My ignorance to the world around me never ceases to be a burden.”

“I wouldn’t put on the show- marry the girl, keep everything unsavory private and locked away. Selfish, I suppose, not to want to spend my entire life screaming on the inside.” Dorian lowered his voice, “He was going to do a blood magic ritual. Alter my mind. Make me…acceptable. I found out, I left.”

“So…this blood magic, thing. Really bad?”

Dorian nodded, “Forbidden in most places, even.”
“Could it…actually have changed you?”

“Maybe. It could have also left me a drooling vegetable.” The mage huffed, “It crushed me to think he found that absurd risk preferable to scandal. Part of me has always hoped he didn’t really want to go through with it. If he had…I can’t even imagine the person I would be right now. I wouldn’t like that Dorian.” He looked away, nervously, “Maker knows what you must think of me now, after that whole display.”

She furrowed her brow at him.

“I think of you as a brave and dedicated man, Dorian. We need more people like you ‘round here…and elsewhere.” She chuckled at the thought of him in the Indies.

“Brave?” He was stuck on the word.

“Breaking tradition-following your own path. It’s not an easy thing to do, yeah?”

“You make it look easy. You do it every day.”

“And ‘every day’, it terrifies me.” She confessed, “I came of age under the guise as a man. The men at the Dublin Port docks- they saw me employed as a thirteen-year-old cabin boy, watched me set sail halfway across the world as a seventeen-year-old Rigger, and witnessed my return as a Captain; a Captain that was a very young woman. It was unheard of. No one knew what to do with me.” Her fists tightened, “We took our human rights back, and we were shamed for it…That’s how we got our ship’s name, The Dishonored.”

Dorian gazed to the Inquisitor, his eyes gleaming.

“The things you say- you understand….” He whispered, “My father never understood. Living a lie…it festered inside of you, like poison. You have to fight for what’s in your heart- like independence.”

“Aye. And he was wrong for neglectin’ that.”

“I think he knows that. It’s just hard for him to admit.” The Tevinter exhaled, “It’s a start, at least. He’s a good man, my father. Deep down. He taught me principle is important. He cares for me, in his way, but he won’t ever change.”

“You’on’t know for certain. I’ve seen people change for the worse ‘nd the better.”

“You’re very optimistic. It’s a charming trait.” His white teeth wore themselves a smile, “Thank you for bringing me out there. It wasn’t what I expected, but…it’s something.”

“No need to thank me. What are mates for if not interjecting in each other’s private affairs?”

“Jacking each other’s ale, I’ve been told.”

Naomi bellowed, “Quite right, lad.” She jestingly punched his arm, “Quite right.”

“At any rate, I’d imagine drinking myself into a stupor when we get back. Join me, if you’ve a mind.”

“I’ve every mind to drink, ‘specially in good company, mate.” She winked at him.

“From what I conclude, you drank in quite good company last night.”

The Captain blushed, caught off guard, “And this conversation ends, here.”

Hours later, a woman by the name Speaker Anais, as self-addressed in the letter requesting aid, hurriedly welcomed them at the gate of a small commune. Her followers slurred and doubted Naomi’s abilities in front of the other cultists. They’d argued for a good while, the Captain almost storming off, wanting to leave the idiots to fend for themselves. The rift was an unsafe distance away from them, being right in a small clearing visible from the main entrance. How they haven’t been attacked already, she didn’t know.

Lornan’s Exile resembled a decrepit castle of sorts, but with elven architecture. Solas reminisced, making note of the thin Veil that surrounded them.

“I’m starting to think that closing the rift is less about helping this sorry bunch and more about you proving them wrong.” Dorian observed.

“If you’re just figurin’ that out mate, I don’t know what to tell yeh.” Naomi marched towards the rift.
“A noble cause.” Solas was unimpressed.

“Results are what matter, now.” Cassandra took her shield in sword in her hands, charging into the clearing with a roar as small wraiths appeared before them.

Naomi followed her eagerly, blades in hand, translocating from one slaughtered ghost to another. Solas covered the party with barriers, aiding in damaging the frequently spawning enemies when he could.

A Revenant appeared before them, its cold presence chilling Dorian as he took control over the dead body of a Skeleton soldier.

“Didn’t we just kill that thing?” Naomi shouted at the Tevinter mage.

“Did no one tell you, darling?” He thrust his staff forward, issuing a command, “Surprise! I’m a Necromancer!”

“Lovely!” She dodged a hooked chain shot at her by the menacing undead that faced them.

Cassandra unleashed her Seeker abilities in an attempt to weaken the enraged spirit, Solas hurling fire at it.

Naomi unloaded two pistols into the back of the monster, earning her his full attention. He commanded some newly spawned Skeleton archers to fire a volley in her direction. Translocating above him, she brought her Sword of Eden and pistol sword down, meeting only but his shield. He redirected her, shoving her off to the side. The arrows fell a short distance away from her, seemingly halting in midair.

“There that goes again…” The ring beneath her glove glowed a blue color.

She pushed herself to her feet, watching Cassandra spar with the large sword the Revenant swung effortlessly. Their shields collided, and the cold spirit stumbled backwards. Dorian cast a static cage around the demon, sundering it to its knees.

“Now!” Solas shouted.

Naomi reactively held her hand to the rift as it lit her arm aflame, traveling down her spine and into her knees. She yanked it, closing the tear and disintegrating the Revenant demon.

The crowd that had formed in the entryway to the small clearing, surrounded by mountainous cliffs.

“Eat it!” The Inquisitor yelled, holding the flickering Anchor into the air at them.

“Graceful.” Dorian clapped.

The crowd began to disperse in defeat. They wanted her to succeed, but it’s almost as if they wish she hadn’t, just on the sole purpose of them being right. Their stupidity and misplaced pride could not be rationalized by the Captain.

Solas put his hand on her shoulder, “Inquisitor, that cave…there’s something inside that could help us.” He pointed his chin in its general direction. “We should have a look.”

She hadn’t noticed a small den that rested to their right, “More caves and secrets, eh?”

“That tunnel has been sealed for safety purposes.” Speaker Anais stepped forward, walking down the stairs and towards them.

“So unseal it.” Naomi crossed her arms.

“It can’t be ‘unsealed.’” She argued.

“We’ll see ‘bout that, lest you try and stop us.” The Captain spat, taking the elf by the arm and pulling him.

“Is she always so brash?” The Speaker addressed Cassandra.

The Seeker put her weapons away, “Only when provoked. Which in this case means, when she’s told ‘no.’”

The Inquisitor and the apostate elf reached a glowing, red barrier. He barred her chest, urging her to step back. She complied, checking her pendant and then tucking it away secretly.

He cast a continuous flow of ice into the shimmering door, freezing it into oblivion. He scoffed, lighting a veillfire torch and taking it from the wall.

“Cocky, aren’t you?”

“Confident.”

She followed him through a winding tunnel, leading to an antechamber deep below
Lornan’s Exile. It was an abandoned basement of sorts.

A stone, orb structure stood alone on a stand.

“These elven artifacts…these ‘Precursor,’ artifacts,” he sighed, “are designed to strengthen the Veil within a large radius around them. If you were to charge it with the Anchor, it could prevent any more tears from opening within the area.”

“Ah, more helpful information pulled seemingly out of nowhere from my good friend Solas.”

“Not exactly.” He motioned his hand towards the orb, “Look familiar?”

Naomi’s eyes squinted as she took the torch from him, growing closer to the object.

“This…this is…” Her hand brushed against the dusty ball, giving way to intricate markings that were filled with dirt, “This is an Apple of Eden.”

“When I first found one, it showed me things…told me what it could do. I’ve been able to sense them nearby ever since.” He walked next to her, “Perhaps if you were to activate this one, you would acquire this sense, as well.”

“I-I already do, that’s why I’m…why couldn’t I feel this one?” She looked to him, “I have the Sense…”

“Where you’re from, yes.” He finished, “But in Thedas, perhaps it is different?”

“Or maybe they don’t want to be found.”

She pinched her temple, focusing. The Sight she’d been gifted by her ancestors did not give any hint as to the Apple being there. However, she did notice something strange about Solas's aura...

Unable to resist temptation, she bit her lip, turning her attention back to the ancient artifact. Naomi placed the Anchor on the metal surface, watching the green light travel from her and into the ball. Images flashed through her eyes- similar to those after finding her own Apple.

*Jupiter stood before her, his holy armor matching that of Minerva’s. The room was filled with images of a world set asunder by a green flame- burning people, buildings of great structure and advanced technology being leveled within seconds.

‘The Earth shook for days. The fires burned for weeks. And when the ash had settled, less than five thousand of your kind still lived…and far fewer than ours. But we carried on, together. To rebuild. To renew.’

The Precursor God waved his hands, showing Isu and Humans working side by side without the use of any Pieces of Eden.

“You have spoken with my beloved on these matters. She guided you to the Sword of Eden just as she now guides you through the Sorrows. Bend to her will, and she will respond with benevolence.”

Naomi looked around her, finding themselves in darkness. Nothing stood around them. She tried to speak, but her throat swelled shut.

“Our time runs short. You must find the Eluvian and pave the way for their return.” His voice tapered off, as if someone was interfering with the projected world around them, “We are guiding the Adam to your Eve. He will bring them, if you will only allow it so. Together, you must stop the Dread Wolf. You must triumph where we have failed. He cannot be allowed to repeat the past.”

Naomi woke from her trance to a pair of white-hot glowing eyes.

“Inquisitor!?” Solas shook her, holding her as her body lay on the ground.

“Solas-your eyes…” Her mouth was wet from blood, “Goddamn nose bleeds…”

Cassandra and Dorian ran down the slope, startled by a glowing green orb behind them.

“What did you do?” The Seeker growled at the apostate.

“Nothing, I-“

“The glowing green ball says otherwise.” Dorian scolded, wiping Naomi’s face off with a rag.

“Come, let us get her back to Skyhold.”

“No,” Naomi choked, rolling over and out of everyone’s caring clutches, “The Fallow Mire, we
have to get to the Fallow Mire…”

She held her hand out, summoning the Sword from across the room. It flew to her as she bent to pick up her fallen pistol sword.

“Now.”

The Captain stumbled up the trail, ignoring the headache coming on as the sun began to set.

“*Do not trust Fen’Harel; Do not trust the Dread Wolf.*” Consus warned.

“*Yeh, mate, I get it.*”
Chapter Summary

“Humor is tragedy plus time.”
-Mark Twain

Chapter Notes

***Some non-con themes apply***

Cullen rolled over, the sun glaring down on him. A cool breeze caressed his skin, wishing him good morning. He reached his hand next to him, pawing for the Captain. He felt nothing.

His eyes shot open, startled by her absence. What was even more puzzling— he was in his own room.

“Was that—? No…” The Commander rubbed his eyes, brushing his hair back into place. He looked to his armor, waiting for him on its’ stand. A small letter sat on his end table.

He lurched forward to snatch it, tiredly sitting down again to read it.

“It wasn’t a dream.
-N’

That’s all it said.

“How thoughtful…” he grumbled.

After getting himself ready for the day, he slid down the ladder that led to his office. Cullen was greeted by a man with a report from Leliana.

“Commander.” He nodded.

“Good morning, soldier.” The Commander adjusted a loosened strap on his gauntlet, “What news do you bring me, today?”

“Sister Leliana wished me to give you the itinerary for the Inquisitor’s trip to the Fallow Mire. They are slated to return in four days’ time.”

“Return?” Cullen looked up from his wrist, “As in they’ve left already?”

“Yes ser.”

He sighed.

“Very well. Send word to the supply chain to upkeep their stock. They must remain well-supplied if they are to support our Inquisitor and her companions.”

The soldier saluted, leaving him.

A pounding headache made his teeth lock.

“Day two…”

…
Cullen sat angrily at his desk, crumpling up a piece of paper and throwing it into a pile. A mountain of paper balls stacked in the corner of the room.

“No, no, no...Maker, why must this be so difficult?” He dropped his quill, taking his head into his hands. The pain shattered him, his eyes bulging from the pressure amassing in his skull.

“Cassandra needs to prepare, in case-“

A knock echoed throughout the room. Cullen shuffled his desk around, slapping a report on top of his half scribbled parcel.

“You may enter.” He addressed.

The door creaked open, giving way to the torchlight outside.

“Commander.” Adibas nodded his head.

“Quartermaster.” Cullen cupped his hands. “A rarity seeing you so far from the shoreline.”

Adibas man chuckled, “The drink flows stronger inland after the sun has set.” He took a chair from the corner, noticing the pile of poorly worded letters.

“Writer’s block?” He questioned as he pulled the chair in front of Cullen’s desk.

“Something like that.”

Adibas positioned the chair so that he sat in it backwards, crossing his arms on the top, “Are you well?”

Cullen shifted in his seat, “I’m fine.”

“You’re a horrible liar,” The Quartermaster pulled a large flask from his belt and a small vessel from his pocket, “If you’re going to be in the company of my Captain, we’ll have to work on that.”

He poured a shot, sliding it over to Cullen.

“I’m not sure what you’re referring to.”

“Yes, you are. I see everything.” Adibas raised his flask in a toast, “Now, drink with me.” He took a mighty swig. The Quartermaster grinned, wiggling his head as the burn escaped his lips.

Having been spent from the day, the Commander did not argue. Cullen gripped his own mouth, chuckling under his now-rum-infused breath, “That is horrid stuff.”

The men shared a second shot.

“It seems everywhere I turn there’s a pirate trying to drug me or get me drunk.” He slid the empty horn-carved vessel back to the Quartermaster.

“Such is our way...which is why I came to talk to you tonight. If you have the time, of course.”

“I do.” Cullen leaned back, leaning his chin on his fist, his elbow balanced on the arm of his chair.

The hole in the roof howled as wind blew over it, the cold night whisking through the air.

“I met her on a slaver’s vessel when I was seventeen. My wife and newborn never made the journey. My village had been burned, and my neighbors enslaved...” Adibas took a harsh swig, “And there she came- blowing the door off the hinges, kicking in a pile of dead bodies, and offering us freedom; under her flag or otherwise.” Adibas set his flask on the desk, “There we were-two people of different origins, but the same age. Me, a farmer with a former family. She- a woman that had already seen more of the world than most men twice her age.”

Cullen smirked.

“Sounds like her.” He swallowed, “I’m sorry for what fell upon you and your fellow countrymen.”

“It was eleven years ago, Commander. I have come to terms with it, much to her credit.” He poured Cullen a third round, “She’d been going through some...unfortunate circumstances, beforehand. We worked through them together, friends as we were.”

He held the shot in his hand, “Oh?”

The Quartermaster mulled over his thoughts, unable to organize them into words, “Has she told you of ‘Nathan?’”

“Yes, she’s mentioned her alias-although briefly.”

Adibas’s mouth fell slightly, rubbing his scarred forehead.

“She’s probably going to skin me alive for telling you this...” He drank some more, “Well, let’s start there, then. Did she mention her mother was a whore in brothel?”
Cullen choked as he took his drink.
“A…what?” He coughed.
“A prostitute. A woman who trades sex for money.” Adibas poured a fourth shot.
The Commander waved his hand, signaling he’d had enough to drink. The Quartermaster ignored him.
“Naomi lived in that brothel.” He shifted, “When she was thirteen, Maeve—that was her mother’s name—got her a job as a cabin boy on Captain McGrath’s ship—"
“The Medusa’s Scorn.” Cullen finished.
A warm smile met Adibas’s mouth.
“She always did like to tell that story…It shouldn’t surprise me she’s done so.” He slid the unwanted shot to Cullen, “Three years in, she made herself a Rigger—the, uh, the ones who climb up to release the sails…and jump down to furl them.”
“So, the most dangerous job.”
“Hah, quite.” Adibas paused, “Maeve fell ill when Naomi was seventeen. The British had all but seized Ireland’s resources; Dublin felt it the worst. Because of their tight grip, no medicine or doctors could be summoned. Her mother confided the truth to Naomi—that the brothel was owned by the Assassins. She’d been born into the brotherhood without knowing it, Johnny McGrath, also being an Assassin, being her Mentor. All that truth in such a short amount of time—it drove her mad, drove her to vengeance.”
“Vengeance?”
“Maeve died a week later.” The Quartermaster swallowed, “Unable to accompany her, Captain McGrath instructed Naomi to sail to Kingston to seek Mentor Antó. She joined a private company where she met Thaddeus, Aquilla, and Christopher. They…” He struggled, “They were employed by the HMS Zealând. ‘Her Majesty’s Ship,’ A British vessel bound for the West Indies. The Indies be a group of islands and coastal cities, and a place known for its ship-plundering pirates. You can see why the British would need hired help sailing into such waters.”
The Quartermaster pointed to the map of Thedas that sat on Cullen’s desk.
“She sailed a distance from either end of this world. The voyage was slated to be…oh, what did she say…six weeks, I believe?” Adibas picked up the still-full shot vessel and placed it firmly in front of the Commander.
“With all due respect, I’ve already drank my fill.”
“Drink.”
Adibas chugged more rum out of his massive flask. Cullen sighed, doing as ordered, “At least it’s helping with the head pain…"
“Four weeks in…” the Quartermaster choked, “Apologies. This is harder than I thought it would be.” He twitched, “The deranged Captain of that ship was…his name was…”
“Was it Abbey Captain Abbey?” Cullen hiccup, a fist covering a slight burp.
“Has she…did she tell you?” Adibas whispered.
“I may have…overheard, the name in a less than inspiring manner. Cole offered to help her ‘forget.’ I was just nearby.” He rubbed the back of his neck, “I asked her about it. I knew I shouldn’t have… We were arguing, and it just slipped out.” Cullen stammered, “She didn’t take it well.”

The Quartermaster poured a fifth shot.
“About four weeks in…” The flask shook in his hand, “Tad, Kit, and Quill were there, I wasn’t…A few sailors noticed a red stain on her breeches as she worked. Rumors started to circulate.”
“A small red—"Cullen’s face blushed, “Oh.”
Adibas nodded to him, “That thing women get.”
“Right.”
The Quartermaster heaved.
“Captain Abbey confronted her. You can imagine what happened when he found out…” Adibas slid the shot.
Cullen’s face was puzzled.
“She was a virgin on a ship with a dastardly Captain, out alone on the middle of the ocean.” His mahogany hand trembled as he drank.

“Was?” His eyes began to burn.

Adibas’s jaw locked, a vein on the side of his head about to burst.

No words were exchanged.

The Commander took the shot, slid it back to Adibas, who quickly served a sixth round. Cullen slammed the now-empty vessel on the desk, reeling in anger.

“Her Irishmen tried to save her. Most of them died in the onslaught, save for the three you’ve met. Two weeks went by. Fourteen days of…” He shook his head, moving on, “They made port to Kingston. Abbey imprisoned the now-Officers and tried to sell Captain McNamara to another brothel. She was too damaged for them—her hands had blisters, her skin bruised. So he sold her at a slaver’s convention. Antó bid her the highest, to her luck. Together, they freed the remaining Irishmen and hired a crew with a ship. The Kingston Bureau had been tracking a slaver’s ship by the name of Santiano. They found Her and…well, aside from what I just told you, Kilean sang of that tale.”

The two men sat in silence, both drunken and deflated.

“I was with her when she found out the same man who’d taken advantage of her and beat her, was also the same man who later killed her beloved Mentor Johnny McGrath.”

The Commander froze at the revelation.

“…I stood by her when we sank the HMS Zealand and killed the Captain Rodger Abbey. Blew his skull clear to bits, firing a pistol in his mouth.” Adibas smirked, “I was with her when she was dubbed Mentor of the Dublin Bureau. And I was with her when she fell in love for the first time.”

Cullen’s face twisted, the alcohol getting to him, “Why tell me all of this…” His throat swelled shut.

“Because she’ll never tell you. She’ll push you away and try to make you hate her like she’s done with any other man she’s grown accustomed to. All because of him.”

Adibas emptied his flask into another shot, giving it to Cullen.

“Abbey?” The Commander asked, drinking.

“No.”  He screwed the cap on, “Edward Kenway.”

The name hung in the air for a long while.

“The man from the…projection?”

The Quartermaster nodded.

“We’d served Ireland for six years by that time. Word came out of Nassau that a member of the Brotherhood sold information to the Templars…information about the Assassin Headquarters in Tulum, Mexico. The Dishonored set sail back to the West Indies to address the incoming threat. Mentor Ah Tabai required her special…talents.”

“Her abilities?”

“Aye. She has the Sense, the Precursor vision. It allows her to see the true intentions of those around her. He thought it’d be useful in rooting out the traitor. However, they found Edward before she got there.”

“Edward was the traitorous Assassin?” Cullen’s words were slurred.

“To this day, he claims that he stumbled upon Assassin Duncan Walpole’s body. He says he stole his uniform and found a letter in his pocket, claiming to pay a large sum in exchange for the ‘Piece of Eden.’ Finding a strange item in Walpole’s personal belongings, he assumed that to be the Piece, and sold it to the Templars. So, no, Edward wasn’t the original traitor. Just a pirate seeking fortune, much like the rest of ’em.” Adibas shook his head. “When the two of ’em met at the Bureau, I knew he’d be trouble…”

“What happened next?” Cullen lurched forward onto his desk, sloppily holding his chin.

“They defended the Bureau and Edward faced execution. Captain McNamara negotiated his life, telling Mentor Ah Tabai that he had the Sense as well, and that she could use him to her benefit. She was instructed to never let him leave her sight.” The Quartermaster scoured, “And for the next five years, he didn’t. They practically took over the West Indies together with their ships, crew,
and pirate associates. Hunting the artifacts became an obsession they shared. *The Dishonored* and the *Jackdaw*, Captain McNamara and Captain Kenway- their names were fear incarnate.”

“But he wasn’t good for her?”

Adibas chuckled at the slurring Commander, jealousy enveloping his speech.

“Nay. He toyed with her. Told her he loved her, all that good mess. We all believed it at first.”

Adibas snickered, “Until we found that he left a wife in Whales, the country from which he hailed.”

“He was married?”

“Aye, and set sail for the Indies in a quest to get rich so they could properly raise a family.”

“And he took the Inquisitor during this little ‘quest’ of his?”

“Aye.”

“Deplorable.” Cullen sneered.

Adibas nodded.

“Told whores, too. Always came back to the Captain, though…Claiming he still loved her and he’d do better. Long story short, most of their pirating friends fell to the war for Nassau.

Kenway’s wife left him. Save for the Assassins and their respective crews, those two were all each other had left. And she was still responsible for him. Even so, I was more than relieved when she broke it off with him a year ago.”

“She left him?”

“In a sense. Don’t know if you could right say they were ever officially together.”

Adibas leaned up, addressing the drunken Cullen directly.

“So, you can understand why romance has been skewered to her, between Kenway and—“

“I do. Don’t repeat it, please.” Cullen begged.

The Quartermaster shared his pain in discussing the tragedy.

“We’ve been sailin’ for eleven years together, and we wouldn’t part each other’s company, no matter what the situation. That doesn’t mean we’ll be on a ship forever, though.” He looked to the ground, “There’s very little I know for certain, Commander. One thing rings true on all occasions, however. I see it in her eyes, even though she’d never admit it…she’s tired, Cullen.”

Adibas looked into the Lion’s eyes, “Tired of the journey. And I can’t say I’m not, as well. God willing we survive all this… The Brotherhood needs rebuilt; sailors need trained…Retirement is comin,’ lad.”

The Quartermaster released a heave, “And I need to make sure she’s in good hands when that time comes.”
Chapter Summary

“Is that not the Promethean fable, that the fire stolen from the gods will light men their way, even while it burns their hands?”
-Zia Haider Rahmen

The Captain rolled a corpse with her boot.

“Think that’s the last of ‘em?”

Blood smeared her face, splattered on everything around her. The group had made a small detour after hearing bandits overtook a large fortress in the southern Hinterlands.

“Most likely. He’s the only one wearing that fancy helmet.” Dorian swatted at his pants, brushing the dirt off.

“This helmet…” Cassandra bent over, lifting it from the dead man’s head, “This is a Grey Warden helmet. He is not a Warden.”

“Looks like he found himself one.” Naomi whispered solemnly, “Don’t know how else he’d end up with that.”

“Perhaps we should take it to Blackwall?” Solas suggested.

The group agreed that would be the most appropriate course of action.

“Let’s get on, then. Gotta’ tell the Inquisition this lot’s free before other squatters come through.”

The Inquisitor walked over the dead bodies, making for the exit.

“You never like to stay in one place for too long, do you?” The Seeker stretched, appreciating not being on the back of her horse.

“ Nope,” Naomi scoffed, “Never have, never will.”

... 

The group packed up after camping at an Inquisition outpost location. A foul smell encased the air around them as they approached the border leading into the Fallow Mire. It began to rain not too long after entering, making the humidity almost unbearable.

“Fields of mud. Ugh.” Dorian looked down in disgust as his horses’ hooves sank into the ground, “I do not believe our beasts will fare well here.”

“Speak for yourselves.” Dullahan’s clawed, webbed, and padded feet easily traversed the murky environment, “Who’s a good boy?” Naomi pet the dracolisk, earning her a hum from his belly.

The drizzle evolved into a torrential downpour.

“Wonderful.” Cassandra growled.

The group passed an abandoned building close to the wet cobblestone road. The rain gave way to a pile of charred bodies, lightly covered in a muddied pit.

“Signs of a plague.” The Seeker noted.

“A cheerful addition to any decent…what do they call this? A bog? Lovely word.” Dorian rolled his eyes, his mustache sagging, “At least in the city, you can find a healer. Out here you have, what? Roots and berries?” He asked Solas.

The apostate elf glared at him, “We will have to launder our clothes later. Or burn them.”

They passed crooked Inquisition banners, their poles leaning from the mud no longer
supporting them upright. They saw a swirling smoke stack climbing into the sky.

“An Inquisition camp?” Naomi asked.

“More than likely. We should stop for more supplies and information.” Cassandra suggested.

Taking a detour, they veered from the path into the bog and towards a makeshift bridge that took them to a huddled circle of tents, a fire burning hot in the middle of them. They were immediately greeted with a familiar face- Scout Harding.

“Scout Harding, nice to see you again.” Solas smiled.

“And you as well, Inquisition. Lady Montilyet has secured resources she found useful for your expedition into the Fallow Mire. Lady Nightingale dispatched us alongside the Commander’s supply line to bring them as close to the front as possible.”

“I really do need to tell them ‘thank you’ more often.” Naomi hopped down from Dullahan’s back.

“If you need help ‘expressing your gratitude’ to Cullen, let me know.” Dorian winked.

“Oh, what was it that you said…’There will be no living with you?’” The Captain shot.

Scout Harding smirked at the banter, “Well, now that you’re here, maybe you can solve this mess.” She took the band over to the requisitions table, “Our missing patrols are being held hostage by Avaar- the barbarians from the mountains.”

“And their leader requests a pissing contest ‘cause I’m the ‘Herald of Andraste.’”

“Right…they’re a brawny brunch.” The dwarf woman seemed doubtful, “Getting to our troops won’t be easy, though. You’ll have to fight your way through undead—”

“And let me guess: the locals claim this place is haunted.” Dorian swiped his wet hair from his forehead.

Scout Harding looked to the Tevinter mage, “You’re not squeamish about undead, are you?”

“On the contrary. I’d be quite useless without them.” Dorian crossed his arms, grunting, “All I’m saying is that the Veil is thin here. I bet demons are seeping into every corpse and tree they can.”

Naomi turned to her companions, “Are we talking about actual…undead?”

“Corpses possessed by spirits- yes.” Cassandra raised her brow, “Does that unsettle you?”

The Captain laughed, “No! Of course not. Why would it? Gives me the fuzzies, actually.”

“The Avaar are holed up in a castle on the other side of the Fallow Mire.” Scout Harding placed her finger on the opposite end of the map, “Maker willing, the Inquisition’s people are still alive.”

“For the Avaar’s sake, they better well be.” Naomi cracked her knuckles, “Let’s post the mounts up and get movin’. Dullahan, boy, keep Scout Harding and the others company, yeah?” She turned to her beast, petting him on the nose.

“If he can walk through the bog, why not take him with us?” Solas challenged.

“Wouldn’t be very fair to you all, would it? Don’t get snippy ‘cause you chose a deer with fancy antlers.” Naomi cocked her head at the snarky rebuttal.

Dorian sneezed, glowering angrily as they stomped through the swamp. They were soaking wet and their boots were covered in mud. Naomi was used to such conditions; albeit sand over dirt- but she wasn’t too bothered.

“Reminds me of the jungles in the Indies.” She sighed.

“Then I never want to visit where you are from.” Cassandra sneered.

“Agreed.” The Tevinter sneezed again.

“It could be worse. Western Approach-kind-of worse.” Solas huffed.

Naomi looked behind her to the elf, “ ‘Western Approach?’”

“A desert.” He clarified.

“Ah.”

They continued down the cobblestone path lit by eerie torches barely staying aflame. A weathered structure marked a split in the road, a wrought-iron bracket jutting from the side of it. The Anchor began to glow and flicker in her hand. She observed her surroundings suspiciously.

“I don’t see a rift anywhere.” Naomi looked to Solas, “Why’s it all glowy?”

“May I see?” He took her hand in his.
He caressed her palm with his thumbs, giving her a slight blush.
“Incredible…” The green light became brighter, accentuating his exotic features.
“Is everything… alright?”
“Come.” He folded his fingers through hers, pulling her behind him.

The elf guided the Inquisitor to the ruin, holding their intertwined hands to the torch. He stood behind her, speaking in her ear and resting his other hand on her waist.

“Do you remember the green flame from the Frostback Mountains? When I showed you Skyhold during our discussion?” His breath tickled her neck.

She nodded.

“I want you to do something for me.” He let go of her hand, sliding his fingers down her arm and cupping her elbow, “Close your eyes, focus on the energy in the Anchor…”

The Inquisitor listened, somewhat stimulated by his touch.

“Imagine the torch being lit. Envision the energy leaving your hand, and bringing the fire into being.”

Focusing on the Mark, she imagined herself channeling the tingling sensation onto the iron bracket. Nothing happened. Naomi turned her head slightly to look at him, discouraged.

“Try again.” He smiled.

She sighed, closing her eyes.

The Captain used the rain to drown out her thoughts, focusing solely on the Anchor and the pain it caused her. It reminded her of the time she’d been sailing just before she came to Thedas through the band of a hurricane. The water had been stinging, trying even.

Her memory shifted to a ship battle they’d fought on the coast of Jamaica in a similar storm. She fired the swivel gun at the enemies’ gunpowder stocks while her crew reeled the grappling-hooked ship within boarding distance. She remembered how beautiful it was to see the small explosions shimmer in the night’s ocean, like red and orange flowers blooming to life amongst the waves.

The Herald’s eyes shot open as the sound of ignition broke her rain-induced trance. The veilfire had sprung to life, burning a hot teal against the murky air. The water began to shift around them.

“Inquisitor…” Solas’s voice was gentle, his accented words delicate and foreign, “You… you’re-“

“About to get overrun by demons!” Dorian slammed his staff to the ground, electrifying the wet ground.

The undead crawled to the shore, emerging from all directions. Solas ran to Cassandra’s aid, who’d been surrounded by foes. The Captain’s hand grew brighter, just as untamed as it was in the aftermath of Haven. She gazed into the crackling light, the electricity dancing around her fingertips.

“I could use a little help over here, Inquisitor!” Dorian echoed.

His voice brought her attention into the fight. The undead that challenged them were horrifying- their jaws, if they had any, hung slack. Their water-logged flesh dangled, rotten on their bones, their eyes glowing a hateful red. She froze as one of the larger enemies let out a roar, rallying his underlings. The high-pitched sound reminded her of something.

“The wolves…”

The Inquisitor held her hand into the sky, focusing on the power. Her eyes bore to the sky, a small field of static forming in front of her. The vortex she’d previously summoned came to mind, and she pushed every ounce of herself into creating it again. An enemy charged her, the Captain unmoving.

A crackle of emerald light expanded, sucking all of her enemies inside. The sounds of searing flames engulfed the small clearing as the undead disappeared. They were pulled to the center and devoured by the raging beast. Naomi gazed upon the tear in wonder.

It was glorious- untamed, powerful, wild, unstoppable; and she created it.

Just as sudden as it appeared, the rift faded into nothing. The battle had concluded.

Naomi looked to each of her companions, scared of how they might react. They returned
a critical stare until Dorian broke the silence with a slow clap, “You did that, Inquisitor. Do you know what this means?”

Cassandra looked to her feet with her hands on her hips, scolding under her breath, “Maker have mercy on us all…”

Solas and Dorian exchanged glances. The Tevinter mage sarcastically bowed the Apostate elf, “By all means, my Dalish friend. The honor is yours.”

The Captain stomped her foot, shaking her fist at them.

“One of you tell me what you’re all goin’ on about!”

The elf walked to her, calming her panicked demeanor. His voice was shaking, like a swiftly flowing river after a strong rain.

“You’re a mage.”

The rain drizzled around them on the leaves and trees. Solas’s words hung in the air, incomprehensible, “A Rift mage, to be exact.”

“The Rift magic and the Anchor being bound to the…rifts, can’t be a coincidence.” Dorian twirled his wet mustache, lost in thought.

Another silence fell upon the group.

“This will cause serious implications.” Cassandra spoke quietly, “We’ll need to convince everyone around us—all of the weary Inquisition supporters—that you are a grown woman who had no idea she could harbor magic. That you weren’t an apostate. That you haven’t been lying about who you are…this entire time.”

Naomi looked to Seeker Pentaghast in disdain.

“That include you too, lass? Cause’ it sure right sounds like it.”

“No, Inquisitor. Just those less open-minded.”

Dorian interrupted their conversation, “Has anything like this happened to you before?”

Naomi retained silence.

“Inquisitor?” Solas asked her.

She flushed, choking the word out, “Once.”

“When?” Dorian crossed his arms, irritated.

The Herald averted her eyes in embarrassment, “After Haven, in the mountains…wolves were circlin’ me, and the Anchor had been on fire since my shuffle with Coryphie-whatever. And the rift just…opened.”

Solas scolded, “And you didn’t tell anyone, because…?”

“There was a lot going on, a’right, ‘Ser Heres-A-Castle?”

Naomi snatched the veilfire torch, following Cassandra as she began to walk farther down the path.

“You once said there was no magic in your world,” She spoke as she led them, “and that deity in your projection called you ‘Child of Isu.’ Perhaps your connection with them is more than you think.”

Solas looked to her, impressed, “That’s quite insightful of you, Seeker.”

“Or perhaps’ the Inquisitor’s magic has lie dormant, only to be manifested in Thedas, where there is magic.” Dorian took his thinking pose, resting his chin on a fist as a finger extended to his cheek.

They continued to debate and discuss the issue as if she wasn’t present.

“What are the…repercussions, of being a Rift mage?” Naomi whispered.

“None that are known of, just as there are no ‘repercussions’ to being any other type of mage, save for the stupid Templars," The Tevinter muttered under his breath, then going back to his point, "Then again, there aren’t any scholars on the topic. Quite the enigma.”

“You’re concerned it’ll be too much.”

The Inquisitor looked at Solas, “The Anchor, the Pieces of Eden, and now this…Aye, I believe I have cause for swift concern. Don’t know how much more abuse I’d put myself through before this vessel of mine calls it quits.”

“It may work to your benefit, Inquisitor. Mages are resistant to certain…” He searched for the
right word.
“Maladies.” Dorian aided.
“Thank you.” The mages exchanged nods.
“Meaning?”
“If your body is learning how to properly conduct magic, it may indirectly power the Pieces of Eden. A similar instance occurs when typical mages channel their energy through staves. Without having to worry about controlling raw power on sheer willpower, the mage is less drained by the art of casting. As an added benefit, you have the extraordinarily rare ability to draw directly from the Fade.” The elf began.
“Ah, I see what you’re getting at. Being a Rift mage, if her body is now harnessing the Fade, the Pieces of Eden will feed off of that instead of, well…her?” Dorian became excited.
“Exactly.”
“All speculation,” Cassandra interjected, “We will have to monitor you until we know for sure, Inquisitor. For your own safety, and those around you.”
Naomi exhaled in frustration.
“The Isu were a technology based civilization in a world without magic. Following logic, none of their descendants should be able to use it.”
“Unless all of them can, and simply don’t know it because it’s not available.” Dorian racked his own brain, “But that would imply that they knew it existed or at least came into contact with it at one point, and that seems like something you’re more than unwilling to accept.”
She marched ahead of the rest of them, veilfire torch still in hand.
“I haven’t a right fuckin’ clue as to what to believe anymore, lad.”
They’d light two more beacons, fighting off waves of enemies as they neared Hargrave Keep. The trail had been blazed, and the only thing left to do was to face this leader of the Avaar. Her hand remained glowing under the torchlight, and the pain began to subside. It felt more like a tingle than an ailment.
Approaching the gates of the stone castle, they were shocked to see the man prepared and waiting for them. He had body paint on his skin that held a strong odor, and he wielded a large, stone, hammer.
“Herald of Andraste! Face me! I am the hand of Korth himself!”
“Aye, mate! Let’s do this, then!” She drew her swords.
Without any conversation, the Avaar charged her. The Anchor spiraled out of control, the light connecting with the tip of the Sword of Eden. She bent backwards to dodge a swing of the towering man’s hammer, only to slice him with her blades as she regained balance. The wound the Sword had left burned, the smoke rising off of his charred skin. The small orb in the hilt began to swirl violently, something that hadn’t happened before.
She looked into it, recognizing a small Apple-like presence.
Naomi back stepped as the boulder-hammer came down, crushing the ground she once stood on.
“Hm…”
The Herald translocated into the air, coming down onto the ground with her blade. Light desecrated the earth, shattering it just as it had done in Haven.
But there was something different- The Sword required no charge; it was instant. She didn’t feel tired.
She couldn’t stop it, either.
“Focus! You must focus, Inquisitor!” Solas ran, kneeling beside her, “You can do this. I know you can.”
Naomi screamed through gripped teeth, her body shaking as the green fissures extended well beyond where she’d intended. She focused on the surging in her arm, and did her best to redirect it- but to where?
“The Apple.” Consus answered.
Using her other hand, she gripped the Staff behind her, the Apple then twisting and
waning green on her back. Within seconds, the flaring dissipated. The Apple hummed for only a few moments later, returning to its silent state thereafter.

She panted as she looked into Solas’s beaming eyes. He held both sides of her face, looking at her in amazement.

“You did it…”

Her lips creased up as she broke into an adrenaline-high fit of laughter.

“By God, Solas. You could have been killed runnin’ out here like that!”

The elf hugged her, chuckling on her shoulder.

“I did not know what would happen, falon.” He admitted, “Only that I wanted to help.”

“Falon?” She asked.

“Friend.” He smiled at her, pulling away.

Dorian whistled.

“Yes, yes, friends and such. Can we get going, now? We have a crisis to manage, you know.” Dorian crossed his arms.

Solas stood, helping the Inquisitor to her feet.

“The Inquisitor being a Mage?” He asked.

“Whatever she is, whatever is going on, I’d rather get this discussion with Cullen out of the way as soon as possible. Unless, of course, you’d rather have it.”

"It's not Cullen you have to worry about so much as Quartermaster Lacroix." Cassandra smirked.

Naomi missed the exchange of heated stares among her companions, trotting off to save the cheering, captured soldiers. Two familiar faces pushed to the front.

“Herald of Andraste!” Tanner called out.

“I dealt with the Avaar the best I could, Your Worship.” Mira spoke with her coarse Orlesian accent.

“I have no doubt about that, Lady Mira.” Naomi cut the ropes around the woman’s wrists. The seasoned soldier stood, extending her hand in gratitude, “I am honored that you would know of me.”

Naomi shook her hand with promise.

“I am honored to have yourselves fight under the Inquisition banner.” She turned her attention to the man next to her, “Tanner, Is everyone alright?”

“Y-yes, Your Worship. The injured need some rest, but should survive.”

“Good. We will follow the beacons, as they will protect us from the demons aloft.”

Mira helped Tanner to his feet, who still mumbled in disbelief, “I can’t believe the Herald came for us…”

“I told you she wouldn’t leave us.” The Orlesian veteran assured.

“Spose’ I owe Iron Bull a few drinks.” Naomi sighed to herself.
A Tranquil Mind

Chapter Summary

"Though I ask my brothers now to abandon their rituals, I do not ask that they abandon the Creed. THIS is what makes us Assassins. Not the removal of a finger. Not a false promise of paradise. Not the prohibition of poison. Our duty is to the people, not to custom."
—Altaïr's Codex, Page 6

he room spun as Cullen waited for Leliana to join them in the war room. His hands were clammy, the paper in them shaking like a leaf.

“Are the symptoms getting any better, Commander?” Josephine frowned.

He looked to her, startled by her voice.

“It’s just a headache.” The circles under his eyes grew increasingly darker.

Leliana entered the room, seeing Cullen jump at the sound of the latch. The Spymaster looked to him caringly, “Cullen, you look terrible.”

“Thank you.” He spat, pale and sickly.

“You’re doing the right thing.” She walked up next to him, inspecting him further, “But you’re not sleeping.”

“Enough…” he growled, “What did you need? I have work to do and men to train.”

The Commander wore an unusually short temper.

Leliana pursed her lips and passed him a report.

“I only wished to inform you both that the Inquisition has acquired new agents at Lornan’s Exile, as well as the Grand Forest Villa previously overrun by mercenary bandits. I believe we should discuss how these new resources will best serve us.”

“An entire fortress?” Josephine questioned, “The Fereldan army just let a mercenary band overrun a fortress?”

“I had the same suspicions. They’ve been too preoccupied with the Mage-Templar war, they did not have the means to drive these criminals from the ruin. It’s in a very strategic position, however.”

“How so?” Cullen asked, rubbing his head.

“The Inquisitor states that it’s close to the main road, allowing soldiers to monitor traffic coming into and leaving the Hinterlands from the south. We may be able to leverage such information in our favor regarding Redcliffe, and thus Fereldan.”

“The Inquisitor?” He lifted his gaze.

“Our Lady Inquisitor established an iron supply route from Redcliffe to Skyhold. Also, the Grand Forest Villa remains unclaimed, even by Fereldan nobles, and it’s located near a quarry. These newly found resources in conjunction with the newly established line will aid the Inquisition greatly in terms of raw materials. She’s doing great work while she’s away. We should all be very proud of her and the Inquisition's forces.” Josephine wore her best Game face.

“Ah, well…good. I’ll send a troop of soldiers to secure the building. I’m sure we have plenty that would welcome a change of pace, and I have just the officer in mind to oversee the fortifications…” His words were sporadic and undefined, as if he was mumbling to himself. “As for these new agents, I’m sure either one of you can put them to good use."

“I intend will put them to work, Commander.” Josephine promised, “We need as much Fereldan
support we can get, operating out of Orlais as we are.”
“Anything else?” His tired eyes began to flutter.
“Yes, regrettably.” Leliana sighed, “Alexius has yet to be sentenced.”
“A matter of great import. However,” Josephine turned a page on her board, “judging from Seeker Pentaghast’s last report, I fear our Lady Inquisitor will not be in the best state of mind to do so upon their arrival.”

The Spymaster looked to the Ambassador, “Were the missing soldiers…?”
“They are alive and well.” Lady Montilyet lowered her voice, “Did you not read what I left on your desk?” She scolded.
“There’s quite a bit of paper on my desk, Josie. And the birds—“
“As you were saying?” Cullen interrupted impatiently, “What happened to her?”
Josephine switched her weight to her other leg.
“Seeker Pentaghast did not say. She simply requested Imperial Enchanter Vivienne’s immediate attention be brought to the Inquisitor this afternoon upon their return, as well as a philter of…”
“Lyrium?” Cullen placed his hands on the table, leaning against it.
The Antivan woman fidgeted, clearly uncomfortable.
“My deepest apologies, Commander. I know the last four days have been hard for you. I should have addressed this matter privately.”
“Do not apologize,” His harsh tone softened, “I am still the Commander of the Inquisition’s forces. I must stay informed, and I thank you for that.” Cullen sighed, “I will have the order placed at once.”
“Please, allow me.” Leliana placed her hand over his, “I will not have you suffer any more than needed, Commander.”
A twisted version of his crooked smile broke his ill features, “Thank you, Sister Leliana.”

... 

It had been an hour since the rescued soldiers arrived in Skyhold. Everyone was on edge, considering they’d arrived with Dullahan, Cassandra’s horse, and Solas’s halla. They assured everyone that the exchange was only to get the injured to safety in a quick manner. Still, Cullen couldn’t help but worry.
The Commander leaned against the wall in his office, wishing the cold breeze of the open window to ease his nausea. He peered on to the mountains, and the soldier tent-city below them. His temples throbbed, his nightmares haunted him. Four days. Four insanity-driving days since his last lick of lyrium. Was this really the right thing to do?
A single horse broke into his line of view, darting out from the lift.
The hooves chattered along the bridge to Skyhold, second only to Dorian’s desperate call.
“Open the gates!” He cried, his voice carrying across the expanse.
He was alone. No Solas, Cassandra…no Inquisitor.
Cullen ran outside, skipping stairs and ignoring beckons for his attention as he descended from the armaments. Grooming a horse at the stables, Blackwall looked over his shoulder, puzzled by the Commander’s urgency. The Warden rest the brush down and hastily walked over to the gate to join him, whipping his hands clean on his pants.
Dorian barreled through the entrance, charging to the main hall and halting the beast abruptly.
“Lady Vivienne!” He called to her balcony.
The First Enchantress marched out, the doors flying open vigorously. She did not appreciate being summoned, especially in such a publicly humiliating magnitude.
“What is this display of madness about?” She gripped the stone railing, her horns glistening in the sun.
The horse bucked and played underneath Dorian, causing him to spin his head to maintain eye contact, “The Inquisitor! Cassandra needs you and whatever that sneaky Seeker sent word for. You’re supposed to know what that means, so I really hope you do…damn it, silly beast! Calm down!” He cursed the horse, who settled as soon Blackwall grabbed its reigns, pulling its’ long nose at eye level.

“What’s this about the Inquisitor?” He demanded.

“None of your business, Grey Warden.”

“I don’t care whose business it is. Answer the question.” Cullen commanded.

Vivienne held a small box, giving it to Dorian as she climbed onto the saddle behind him, her white robes fluttering behind her.

“No time, I’m afraid! Now, let go of my horse!” Dorian gave a mighty pluck to Blackwall’s wrist.

The two darted towards the exit, meeting the bridge again in a blur.

The swearing Warden retrieved the bridle of a horse closest to the opening of the stables, Cullen close behind. He handed him the reigns of a Ferelden purebred of unwavering loyalty.

"Still geared from an expedition concluded not long ago," Blackwall was coarse in tone, "Tired, but she'll get you there. Go, Commander!"

Cullen mounted, giving chase to the cryptic Necromancer and the Imperial Enchanter.

The Inquisitor clawed at the snow as the Fade tore through her, Cassandra and Solas at her side. The Seeker used her abilities in an attempt to subdue the wild magic, and the elf doing everything he could to prevent it from ripping the Captain’s soul from her body.

“It’s not working like before,” The Herald gasped, “I can’t- it won’t go in the Pieces.”

“You must keep trying.” Solas pleaded, “If you don’t channel it somewhere-“

“We all die.” Seeker Pentaghast silenced them, closing her eyes to focus.

The snow chilled her knees as she screamed aloud in frustration. The Anchor was trying to pull her essence from her, and she was losing the battle. Her heart stammered, threatening to stop at a moment’s notice.

Naomi pushed the two off of her, standing to her feet as the Mark grew brighter. She pulled the Staff from her back, jabbing the blade end into the snow. The green magic encased the artifact, bleeding into the Apple of Eden. A tower of Rift magic shot to the sky as if a cursed beacon. Her hand calmed to a soft glow, the Apple now fervently sparking.

Cassandra was able to null the Anchor temporarily.

“Here they come.” The Seeker noted as Dorian and Vivienne rounded the corner. The horse grew weary climbing the slope, carrying two people. The Enchanter jumped off, running the rest of the way- Dorian holding the reigns in his hand as he followed. A second horse rounded the corner only minutes later.

“That nosey Ferelden…Here, my Lady Seeker. As you asked for.” Vivienne handed Cassandra the box she so hastily left Skyhold with.

The Seeker took it in her hands, looking at Naomi with a saddened face.

“I must confess something to you, Inquisitor. I wish I did not have to.” Cassandra said.

Naomi gripped the bottom of the Staff, kneeling on one knee, too tired to stand, “What is it, lass?”

“What we talked about-“

“Inquisitor!” Cullen’s horse slid to a halt as he jumped from the saddle, running towards her.

Solas and Dorian grabbed either one of his arms, holding him at a distance as he struggled.

“Tell me what’s happening, now!” The Commander roared.

Naomi’s swelling eyes looked to him, hopelessly. The Seeker’s torn gaze was shifted back to the Herald of Andraste, “The Harrowing…It is not your only option in calming this. I would honor you with a choice.”
“A Harrowing?” Cullen’s mind was drawn to the time he’d spent as a Templar in the Circle of Magi.

Vivienne walked next to the Seeker, resting a hand on her shoulder.

“I’m so sorry this is happening to you, my dear.” The First Enchanter spoke solemnly to the Inquisitor, “The Rite of Tranquility can permanently remove your connection to the Fade. Seeker Pentaghast has kept me informed during your travels.”

“Why? How?” Cullen broke free of the two men, who stood next to him in equal dissatisfaction.

“Seeker, you can’t. You mustn’t. This is not what we discussed.” Solas’s voice shuttered at the prospect.

“I’ll not sit here and let you make her a Tranquil.” Dorian removed his staff from his back.

The Captain used the Staff to stand up, her legs resistant to movement.

“You’ve told me of all the Harrowing entails, but...what is this Rite of Tranquility?” Naomi’s tired words pained those around her, “I can’t take much more of this...It’s only been a few hours, and...I-I feel like...like I’m dying.”

“You are. The Rite will take your magic from you- forever. You won’t have to follow through with the Harrowing if you see it unfit.” Cassandra admitted, “If I am to be transparent, should you go through with the Rite, you will also lose most of your ability to feel emotion.”

“Most?” Cullen yelled, “You’ll become a hollow shell of who you are.”

“There is no guarantee the Harrowing will help her control the magic, Commander. What if she gets possessed? Turned into an abomination?” Vivienne glowered, “Have you been away from the Order so long that you have forgotten what must be done should a mage fail her Harrowing?”

His lip quivered, his eyes were stone-cast.

“Would you be the one to put her down, Commander?” The Lady of Iron swore.

Cullen met Naomi’s eyes in regret.

“Something in the Fallow Mire triggered an adverse reaction.” Solas looked to Cullen, “I know it’s hard to accept, but she possesses the powers of a Rift mage. She summoned a Fade rift from the Anchor.”

“She’s been blowing up things on accident ever since.” Dorian crossed his arms, “Cassandra and Solas could barely keep her in one piece.”

A roaring green light rose from her palm, flaring up into an uncontrollable substance in another attempt to break free of her body.

“I’ll not...be made into some mindless slave.” She griped, clenching her teeth.

“And if you fall? What of the Inquisition?” Vivienne spoke as Cassandra took the Lyrium Brand in her hand, “The Rite of Tranquility would be the safest option- for you, and everyone else involved.”

Naomi thought about the future she’d seen, the one where she died. Corypheus was still a threat, and if she fell here, now, there would be no one that could stop him.

She was an Assassin, charged with insuring the freedom of all innocent people. No matter how she may not like the paths paved for her, it was her sworn duty, “The Rite, then.” Naomi affirmed.

"No!" Cullen bellowed, Dorian and Solas releasing him. They had a mind to disagree with her decision, as well.

“Stay your blade from the flesh of the innocent.” Naomi whispered in a daze, “Hide in plain sight,” She held her marked hand out, “Never compromise the Brotherhood. These are the three tenets of our Creed.”

Cassandra took Naomi’s hand in her own.

Cullen and the other mages were frozen in place with a snap of Lady Vivienne’s fingers.

“Nothing is true,” The Seeker charged the Brand with her unique abilities as the Captain said her final words, “Everything is permitted.”

The Mentor watched as a single tear rolled down the Commander’s cheek. She smiled at him assuredly, wishing she could have spent more time with him. Naomi closed her eyes, ready to accept her fate as being made Tranquil. Whatever she would lose to this Rite would be nothing
compared to the losses amassed by her death.

“No.”

A burst of energy flung everyone around her through the air- sending them skidding in the snow and ice. The men were snapped out of Vivienne’s control, being able to move freely about. Ignoring a few bruised ribs, Cullen pulled himself up, ready to run for the Inquisitor in an attempt to escape. What he saw made him stop.

She was covered with a gold shimmer- her eyes nothing but light themselves. She stood with a Lyrium Philter in one hand, the now empty box in the other.

The Shroud that graced her hips hummed and shone vibrantly as the possessed being spoke to him, “We meet again, Friend.”

“Consus?” He recognized the voice.

“Consus? I go by many names: Prometheus. He who stole fire from Zeus to give to the Humans. Dirthamen. He who gave the Elves the gift of knowledge. Consus. He who served the Isu through science.”

The trembling hand that shook- Cullen could not tell if it was Naomi’s reaction or Consus as “they” continued, “I was old. I wanted more time. Through the Messenger’s Betrayal, I came to see bodies for what they are. Constructs. I saw minds for what they are. Programs. Uploaded my program into the Shroud, to cheat death. Succeeded. Failed. Trapped in my prototype.”

The other followers remained dormant.

“Juno. Schemer. Three centuries after my death, she found me. Usurped my work. Used it for her own ends.”

Their glowing body raised the ritual potion to their lips, their eyes still burning.

“The Herald must enter the Nexus.”

The liquid ran down her throat. The Inquisitor fell to her knees, commencing her "Harrowing."
In Harrowing Times

Chapter Summary

"You are...gods."
"No. Not gods. We simply came...before."

-Minerva to Ezio Auditore da Firenze

Nothing could be felt on her skin. Not warmth, nor chill, nor wind. Naomi awoke in a dark space. Black. Static electricity illuminated the air, crackling like the energy of those who have passed. The light twirled around the floor underneath heavy footsteps. A figure walked before her, offering a hand in assistance.

“Hello, Guardian.”

The Inquisitor was bewildered at the recognition of his voice.

“Consus…?”

“Yes. No. I am a projection, but alive.”

He pulled her to her feet, allowing her to observe him. He wore little to cover his chest, revealing a strong build with muscular shoulders. A white cloth draped from his right shoulder, down to his waist. A red sash spiraled with gold and connected to a breastplate that fastened to a brace on his left bicep. A Precursor circlet graced his forehead, extending down to his jaw, giving way to dark brown hair and an aged beard.

“Consciousness gathered here. Probability. Calculations. And at one point, the future.”

It was full of…nothing. The wisps that flitted about them was the only indication of existence.

“The Nexus. They now call it the 'Void'. The 'Abyss.'”

Naomi remained silent.

“We shall begin our review before the Manna fades from you.”

The celestial being waved his hand to the air above him. The longing energy converged at his beckoned call, piecing together a faint replica of a timeless land. A beautiful castle rippled against the black, its’ spirals were crystal, its’ accents were gold. Water flowed freely between mighty arches from the front.

It was a palace of majesties; of kings and Gods.

“The original Eden.”

The images shimmered into a vast sea of people in similar cloth.

"The First Civilization..." She whispered in revelation.

“The Isu people of Thedas. We were small in numbers, a population of less than one-thousand, a curse brought on by a slow sixteen month reproduction rate. Despite this, we had a desire to build. Create. Grow.”

The field of view opened into the outskirts of the city. Bones of incomplete ideas held fast in the distance, being supported by scaffolding beyond Naomi's time.

"We could not keep up with our own ambition. We needed a workforce.”

Nine of what seemed to be the leading Isu stood around a circle, compiling elements in a strange, glowing vessel. Humans with blue, glowing markings etched into their skin emerged. And then another. One male, one female.

"The original Adam and..." Consus swallowed hard as his emotionless demeanor
wavered, "Eve."

They worked alongside hundreds of other humans in fields, construction, irrigation, and any other labor involved with maintaining a metropolis.

"We created the Humans from the grounds of Eden in our image. We harvested the Manna, or Lyrium, as they say, from the very elements of Thedas herself. Infused them with it for prolonged energy and little need to rest. We implanted neurotransmitters in their brains."

"The implants for the Pieces' control, no doubt." Naomi was consumed with the prospect of knowledge.

The dwarven “Anvil of the Void” ripped the projection away from the slaving Humans from their vision.

"Hephaestus created the Anvil of Eden. He and Lord Jupiter crafted the Pieces to control the Humans."

Sparks flew as an empowered hammer slammed shapes into weapons. The Apple of Eden glistened in Hephaestus's hands. "Juno pushed them harder than any of us."

The image morphed into Juno's palm, showing her giving command to a small army's worth of Humans.

"Decades passed. We had sated our hunger for progression."

Eden had doubled in both size and merit; its arches extending passed where they were before- the buildings in front of the looming castle now reaching farther to the east and west. "However, so did the gene pool."

An image of an Elf faded overcame the city.

“The Humans in the Manna mines and factories developed certain genetic defects from their prolonged exposure. They grew thin. Their ears grew long. They no longer aged as quickly. Their already short nine month reproductive rate simmered to six. Their offspring even held the same defects."

A delicate face of a child branded with a facial tattoo peered up to them.

“These beings, the Elves, were closer to the Isu than their predecessors. They could not be controlled by the Pieces, as they were born without neurotransmitters. From the blood of our sovereign Lady Minerva, we developed the Glyphs, the 'Vallaslin,' as the Dalish now call it. Blood Writing. We forced the arcane markings upon the Elves. They fell under our control through these Glyphs.”

“Elves are just Humans with genetic wish-wash?” Consus nodded his head, snapping his fingers. A rotunda council room transitioned into the Nexus. The Council of the Isu argued with fervor.

“We grew curious, just as you are, now. Envious, even. How could these beings maintain our immortality, and reproduce so much more efficiently? The laws defied science. Reason. We saw no external environmental factors that would have prompted their genes to develop such a sought after trait."

Juno could be seen arguing with Lord Jupiter, opting for the Elves' demise.

"In a short span of a few years, their population equaled both the Isu and Humans combined."

The streets of Eden were populated with Elven citizens, their tattooed faces standing out among the crowds.

“The wheels of evolution continued to turn outside our borders. The Dwarves were underneath the surface, worshipping the Stone. The Qunari were out in the distance, plotting their various invasions.”

He showed her a picture of a Qunari woman and a Dwarf man.

“So distracted by these developments uninfluenced by us, we were. Our insecurities. We
failed to notice seemingly normal Humans being born without our beloved neurotransmitters. We failed to acknowledge the Elves that became immune to the Vallaslin. The two races feigned obedience to remain concealed. For a time.”

Violent pictures of kidnapping and slaughter lit the dark space.

“We discovered them one at a time with the development of the Sight, a tool developed to see the true intentions of the Humans and Elves around us. The Council would not soil their hands, and so it was left to the Isu Sentinels to carry out the dark deed. They stalked their prey. Studied their families. Used anything they could as leverage. And then...they were killed in secrecy.”

Consus turned to look at Naomi, his face longing and torn.

"The Precursor vision I was born with. The same vision used to kill innocents of your time?" She looked to him in disappointment.

“Yes, and I...I felt the same as you. I couldn’t watch it any longer.”

Images of Consus, Elves, and magic poured from the lively sparks that narrated his tale with their images.

“During the First Era, the Fade was a closely guarded secret to the Isu. It was the Original Resource, the origin of the Pieces. We drew much of our power and abilities from it, such as the ability to bond with our sacred beasts- Dragons. And even perhaps more importantly...by delving into the secrets of the Fade, our technology-driven society discovered magic.”

Secret meetings and training sessions between the two races revealed themselves.

"I predicted the war. And so, I taught the Elves. Their Manna-infused blood reacted well with the Fade. They learned quickly. Putting animosity aside, the Elves then passed this knowledge down to the Humans. They were a bit slower to learn. The Manna hadn’t manifested itself quite in the same way for them.”

Another angry Council meeting wiped away the previous vision. They were in the same rotunda as before. The nine of them sat, an Apple of Eden projecting images to aid their conversations as they debated.

“Various displays of disobedience made the Isu weary. Jealousy and uncertainty tore us apart. Most of us failed to think logically with clear, unjaded minds. Our intelligence and emotional intelligence alike was all we had to show for. Without that, some of us feared the end was neigh.”

Consus extended his hands out, presenting the incomplete world around them.

“And so, on my own accord, I created the Nexus. A realm that stores the capability to calculate probabilities. Statistics. The future. And to communicate with those in the future. It was a failsafe. A fallback. Meant to seek a way out of even the most complicated gridlock. I could not stand for any more arguing amongst those of us who were never meant to argue.”

Naomi looked at him curiously.

“Talkin’ to people in the future?”

"Allow me to finish."

The Isu Council in the projection screamed at each other, belligerently calling for the death of all those who worked under them.

“When the Humans and Elves banded together in rebellion, the Council showed little restraint. History would remember us divided. ‘The Forgotten Ones,’ the Elves would later call those of us who wished to purge the land of all life outside of our own race. ‘The Creators’ is what they scribed those who wished to relocate and start anew- and voted that the suppressed be enabled to ‘create’ a new life for themselves. These were accurate depictions of the two sides of the Council.”

A single man stood in the center circle. He spoke passionately, waving his hands and
meeting eyes with everyone around him. He pleaded for reasoning, and begged his fellow Isu to process the information with due diligence.

“But then there was Hermes Trismegistus. The Messenger. The only tranquil mind during those harrowing times. He volunteered to negotiate between the Isu and those who would see us fall from grace. As advanced as we were, we were outnumbered. That was a fact that no one could deny.”

A Human, Elf, and Hermes stood beneath at the base large, glowing spire. Large crystalline gems hung in the air above them, forming a small hut of raw and primal energy.

“After speaking with the leaders of each side and deliberation among the Council...It was decided that they were to be freed. Both Elves and Humans.”

Eden appeared different. It withdrew from its artificial look, and had gained a nature-based theme. Trees grew from the rooftops. The accents were dawned in gold. Statues of various animals were carved and placed into the entryway. The magnificent crystal remained anywhere it had previously existed, reflecting the sun’s light in all directions.

“‘Arlathan.’ That is what the Elves renamed Eden upon…inheriting it.”

Naomi crossed her arms, leaning her weight to one leg. “You lot just gave the Elves your city?”

“They had the largest population of the three of us. They needed room to expand. It was only logical, no matter how much we wished it otherwise.”

He showed her images from within Arlathan. Large statues were constructed inside a temple, giving a feint resemblance to the Isu Council.

“They appointed their own leader, Sentinel Abelas. They created their own language. Their own culture. They purged their faces of the ‘Vallaslin.’ However, they held no grudges against the Isu, for they still respected us and thanked us as their creators. The Elves even went so far as to bless the Council with Elven names to honor us in their history. Aphrodite became Sylaise, the Hearthkeeper. Durga became Andruil, the Goddess of the Hunt. Osiris became Falon’Din, the Friend of the Dead. Hephaestus became June, the God of the Craft. Juno became Ghilan’nain, the Mother of the Hallah. Hermes Trismegistus became known as Fen’Harel, the Savior. They named me Dirthamen, the Keeper of Secrets. Our Queen and King did not have their titles changed until later.”

“Hold a moment,” Naomi’s brow furrowed, “This Messenger, ‘Hermes Trismegistus.’ He’s Fen’Harel? The one you’all keep blabbin’ on about?” She scoffed.

“Allow me to finish.” He repeated, and looked at her disapprovingly.

“Go on, then.”

“When they expanded into an empire, the one they called ‘Elvhenan,’ they started to find their own source of power- nature. Symbols of the elements littered the streets of the capital city of Arlathan. They worshiped and respected the flora and fauna around them in the purest form of gratitude this world has ever known. They had a genuine appreciation for everything that was included within Elvhenan. They had a hunger for knowledge that I admired. I do not deny that I favored them.”

Various mages could be seen practicing in shrines and places of peace among beautiful gardens of flowers. The atmosphere seemed warm and inviting as the sun shone brightly on the glistening lands.

"Nature did, indeed, answer them. As did the Fade. Gifted Hedge mages who twisted powers of the Fade to their will sprung within the temples. Keepers who would master the art of nature could send conjured boulders through the air, or entrap their enemies in roots from the very trees themselves."

The passion bled from Consus's eyes.

"They flourished...but I fear the Humans did not have this luxury."
The images faded to the migrating Humans, traveling in much harsher conditions. The snow brought to life their bleeding and blistered feet. Walking sticks left gaping scars next to the ground near the corpses of the starved.

“The Humans were granted the lands to the north. Their migration was not forgiven...nor were they. They cursed us at what they felt was a banishment. Most of the migration who survived remained in the center of the northern lands where the Manna deposits were aplenty, and they immediately began the construction of the Tevinter Imperium.”

Consus showed Naomi the faces of hungering mages scrying into their old homes with crystal and water.

“Tevinter became maddened with hate, the previously known comforts of Eden still fresh in their minds.”

Large buildings stood before them, similar to the watch fortresses Naomi had encountered in the West Indies.

“The Magisters, those of the Tevinter mages most dedicated to Human supremacy, rose in ranks. They were Elite among their peers. Through force, the Magisteriums became the ruling government in the Imperium.”

Humans being used as experiments in magical trials horrified the area around them.

“Wanting what was once had, the Magisters began trials to develop a form of slavery. As the Isu before them, they wanted a mindless workforce to build the Imperium to be just as grand as Eden. They could not replicate our neurotransmitters, nor our Pieces of Eden. Desperate, they tried to recreate the Blood Writing of Minerva, the 'Vallaslin.'”

A Tevinter mage began to cackle and laugh barbarically, slaughtering someone in front of him with power drawn from his own severed limb.

"Through the failed Vallaslin Trials, Imperial Archon Thalsian discovered Blood Magic in plunder. This was dark magic that could be used as a weapon at the sacrifice of life force, being your own blood or from another around you. However, he would not accredit this discovery to his attempt to mimic the Glyphs of Eden, especially when word had reached Tevinter that the Elvhen had mastered the Glyphs for the sake of reversing them. Instead, he told the Magisters that Dumat, the Dragon bonded with Juno, taught him alone out of his worthiness to the 'Old God.'"

A man lay dead on the floor in a pool of blood.

“Wanting what was once had, the Magisters began trials to develop a form of slavery. As the Isu before them, they wanted a mindless workforce to build the Imperium to be just as grand as Eden. They could not replicate our neurotransmitters, nor our Pieces of Eden. Desperate, they tried to recreate the Blood Writing of Minerva, the 'Vallaslin.'”

Statues of dragons and temples expanded far beyond the towers, spires, and towns within the Tevinter Imperium.

"Thus was the beginning of the worship of Dragons within Tevinter. The Dragon became a symbol of power to them.”

A small island with a large, stone wall surrounding it was the next projection he cast.

"When one of Archon Thalsian's greatest disciples fell victim to a misuse of Blood Magic within the Shrine of Dumat, the great Magister sought to revive him. This is how he would soon discover Necromancy.”

Consus sighed to himself, “I like to tell myself that, if we knew what was happening-if I had paid less attention to the Nexus and more to the world around us- we would have intervened.”

A small island with a large, stone wall surrounding it was the next projection he cast.

“Those who once wished to slaughter our subjects were appeased. We who desired peace were relieved. Hermes Trismegistus was revered and cherished by the Council as a whole. We claimed this island in the oceans between the shores of the Tevinter Imperium and Elvhenan. This was a land much more manageable to a race of our size. The Isu citizens lived in peace, free to study; free to build. We remained a neutral party, staying far away
from external affairs. Years went by without Elvhen or Human contact.”

A conversation between Consus and Osiris grew dark.

“Osiris came to me late one night long after the gears of war began to churn. He expressed concerns over the visions brought on by the spirits of the Fade, as they purposefully interrupted his dreams.”

Consus's chest heaved as he became reminiscent.

"My dear brother had never believed the peace would last, and he was vocal about it. Many of the Council dismissed his warnings as biased. He confided in me, knowing that I would see reason through the mathematical probability of a violent outbreak.”

Hephaestus glistened to life before them as a projection. It was a memory recorded by Consus, and he was sharing it with Naomi.

“I withdrew to the Nexus and turned to my most trusted friend, Hephaestus. I projected my consciousness to the future to find him. He warned me of an impending catastrophe. Gave me blueprints to deliver to his present-day consciousness. Weapons. Armor. Those that would defend the Isu.”

The Anvil made a second appearance as the fabled Aegis armor of Minerva being cast in a mold.

“I held so much guilt for the events that surrounded us. It was me who had shown the Elvhen the way of the Fade. I wanted them to be freed from a cruel world. I swore to do everything in my power to reverse it.”

Juno burst into the forge, yelling at the two as they worked.

“She found us. Told them. ‘Why forge these items in a time of peace?’ They asked. I could not let them find the Nexus. I lied. I told them the Fade spoke to me in my dreams. Osiris, Hephaestus, and I were imprisoned, branded traitors. Their frayed and paranoid minds thought us all to be accomplices in ideology, plotting to bring about the End Times- a war that would leave the Isu extinct. We were faced with execution. The judge?”

“Fen”Harel.” Naomi guessed.

“Yes. Hermes Trismegistus. The Savior. He bargained our lives. Convinced them that there were so few of us, that we needed to cherish the great, scientific minds that we had in order to preserve our way of life.”

The Council room now had three empty seats.

“Despite the Messenger deeming us innocent, we were cast from the Council. Even when Imperial Archon Thalsian appeared on our northern shores, and Sentinel Abelas to our southern; we were no longer consulted.”

Visual memories of the Nexus haunted them as Consus continued his heated tale.

“Without a lick of explanation, I took Hephaestus and Osiris with me into the Nexus while the Council was occupied with a meeting, our unconscious bodies slumbering soundly. They marveled at the constructed universe. Together, we sought to contact our future selves. We found no one. This was cause for a most reasonable alarm.”

A bleeding Human sank to the ground, holding a gaping wound sprouting from his chest.

“It was always assumed that the Elvhen struck the first blow- the first Human casualty to the war. There was much evidence to speculate that it was, and just as much to speculate that it wasn’t.”

Lady Minerva and Lord Jupiter fought in the Council chamber vigorously, circling the seated members as they did.

“Our Queen and King had opposing views- something that had rarely occurred in the centuries of our existence. It was different, this time. I could feel it through the echoed screams down the hall. They argued with something more than opinion- they argued with
ideals. Morals. Duty.”

The King presented himself to the Tevinter Imperium, being welcomed graciously by Archon Thalsian.

“The following morning, Jupiter pledged himself to Tevinter, finding their plight more agreeable than the Elvhen. It was this notion that caused him to be scribed in the Isu-inspired Elvhen Pantheon as Elgar’nan, the God of Vengeance.”

The Queen walked through the halls of Arlathan, the Elvhen bowing to her feet as she did. Sentinel Abelas greeted her most graciously. “During those exact, crucial, hours, Minerva swore her allegiance to the Elvhen. From then on, they called her Mythal, the Great Protector. She did not blame the Elvhen for the capabilities they possessed. The Queen felt responsible for their ailments, as her blood was etched into their faces, and the faces of the Elves that came before them, once upon a time.”

The Council room was even emptier than before, housing only Juno, Durga, Aphrodite, and Hermes Trismegistus.

“Durga and Aphrodite denied Juno leadership, claiming that Hermes Trismegistus, the Savior and the Messenger, would be best fit to lead. Juno claimed him to be weak, and she, too, was soon cast from their ranks. The three of them allowed myself, Hephaestus, and Osiris into the Council once again. Together, we decided that we should not abandon our quarreling Leaders.”

The Anvil of Eden burned hot as a blade was forged upon its’ head.

“Hephaestus and I designed the Sword of Eden. It was perhaps the most deadly of the Pieces of Eden, not only because of it’s honed edges and abilities, but because it was capable of granting its’ wielder the charisma necessary to be history’s greatest leader. It was what the Tevinter Magisters sought after-a way to influence others without the need of previously established framework or substance. We gifted it to the Savior, imploring him to use it to sway the Humans, Elvhen, and Isu alike.”

Projections rotated between Minerva addressing the Elvhen, and Jupiter speaking privately with the Magisters.

“However, it was too late. Juno, conniving and bloodthirsty as she, unknowingly told both sides of the Sword and its’ power, and that it could end the war. She communed with Sentinel Abelas, warning him that the Tevinter Magisters held the blade, denying peace from within their walls. The snake then convinced the Archon that the blade resided in Arlathan, locked away in a vault.”

Hermes Trismegistus did his best to diffuse the situation, showing each Leader the blade and the power it possessed. The Isu believed him, however, Archon Thalsian and Sentinel Abelas did not.

“During the time of Hermes Trismegistus’s plight for peace, the Elvhen rewrote him as Fen’Harel, the Dread Wolf. He was no longer the Savior. He was the harbinger of war. Deceit. Lies. He who tempted the Great Mythal with a false ceasefire.”

Blood splattered the grounds of the Isu island.

“The Humans and Elvhen clashed on our island, destroying our home in the process. The warrior Isu, the Sentinels, or ’Emerald Knights,’ who saw the light-who saw our Leaders for the fallen wisdom-bearing Isu they were-they did their best to defend our walls. Our race was split into three- Followers of the King to defend the Humans, followers of the Queen to defend the Elvhen, or those who fought both factions with the Savior to preserve the Isu.”

The slumped body of Minerva silenced everything around them.

“When Minerva fell to the blade of Jupiter…Mythal to the hands of Elgar’nan…Andraste-leader of the Exalted March-to the wit of her jealous husband…” He sighed, “History always
has a way of losing names.”

Consus shook his head, unable to finish the thought. "Rushing on to the battlefield, I was able to pry her body from his hands and cast her consciousness to the Nexus in an attempt to save her brilliant mind.”

Naomi looked around in the darkness, “Where is she now, then?”

“I…I do not know.”

He waved his hand, the images disappearing completely.

The Nexus hummed and flickered around them, spiraling in and out of existence.

“I’m afraid we have run out of time. We will continue our lessons at a later date. The Manna-“

“The lyrium?” She affirmed.

Consus nodded.

“It has almost left you. We must conclude this meeting with what little guidance I can offer you.”

The Nexus growled at them.

“The voices that you have heard from me, from Minerva, from Jupiter- all previously recorded messages sent through time from the past. Or the future? Perhaps the present. I am unsure. I do not remember what we warn you of. I do not recall where they reside, now.”

The Nexus began to implode, one inch at a time.

“Naomi Elizabeth McNamara, Guardian of the Isu-you are no Mage. You suffer from the Bleeding Effect- the gaining of our ancient abilities through the use of the Pieces in the Fade-tied lands of Thedas.”

“What would you have me do?” She fumbled, her words slurring.

“You must help me decipher the Isu prophecy. You must cease any and all operations Corypheus may find himself plotting. You must thwart the Dread Wolf. You must lead the Inquisition to victory.”

Consus looked to her determinedly.

"We did not breed with the Humans, here. You are the first Hybrid to walk these lands… combine this with the unlikely circumstances of the Anchor, I do not believe this to be a coincidence. The statistics are...unlikely.”

“Alone, then. Or not? The Lion, the Eagle, the Eluvian, whatever Jupiter rambled on about…” Naomi’s thoughts were scattered. She tried desperately to collect them.

He stared at her blankly.

“I cannot remember. I referred to Cullen as ‘Friend.’ I do not know why. I do recall, though, when he held the Shroud…I felt something familiar from within the Nexus.”

“When did you call him 'friend?'”

“When I possessed your vessel. You would not remember. I did everything I could to avoid such measures, and you have my apology.”

Naomi looked at him, growing tired. She was losing herself.

“There is something else.”

The Captain swayed in anticipation. The Nexus crumbled behind them, the sounds of waning energy muffling his speech.

“For you to reach the Nexus in Thedas, you must consume Manna, allowing it to react to your Isu ancestry. The repercussions are unpleasant, and will kill you if used too frequently. On Earth, you may have used the Piece of Eden known as the Crystal Ball. I would tell you that Edward Kenway has found one of these artifacts. I have spoken with him on multiple occasions during the last fifteen years.”

“Fifteen…years? That time has passed at home?” Her head slouched, "You've spoke with
Edward?"
"I will continue to observe you from the Nexus, and to listen on my own warnings and those from my peers. In the mean time, hone whatever Fade abilities you were granted from the Anchor. You will surely need them in the future."

She could speak no more. The Nexus faded to white around her, shards of glass falling into nothing. Naomi tumbled into the Void, falling back into her body.

The Captain had bought a small sliver of truth, but at what cost remained unknown.
tremor shot through her sweat-soaked body as a low grumble shattered the silence around her.  A man sat slumped, sleeping uncomfortably in a chair with his head resting on crossed arms next to her.  She leapt to her feet in escape.  The chair fell from beneath her captor as he responded with speed. Her breathing intensified, her heart pounded in her throat. She could hear a voice, muffled as it were.  Her eyes darted to the Pieces of Eden in the corner of the room.  Lunging toward them, the strong arms threw her back onto the bed.

“You can’t right now, you have to rest-”

“No!” She screeched, “Let go of me!”

“You’re awake now. You’re safe. I won’t hurt you…Try to calm down. Everything is okay.” He held his patience, “I won’t let anything happen to you.”

He remained strong for her, but inside, his gut was wrenched.  Slowly, her body relaxed.  He let her go as she slowly turned towards him, peering into his eyes.

“Cullen,” She choked his name between gasps for air.

“Yes, it’s me, Inquisitor.” He squeezed her hand, “Do you know where you are?”

She observed the stone room, trying to calm the panic that flooded her senses.

“Skyhold.”

“Very good.” He encouraged.

Gently taking the crook of her elbow into his palm, he directed her to the bed suggesting she sit. He picked up his chair, sitting down while lifting a rag from a bucket of water, “May I?”

Naomi looked at the dripping cloth in his hand, giving him a hesitant nod. He dabbed the cold water on her forehead.

She shook beneath his touch.

Her eyes slammed shut every time he made contact, as would an abused pup.

He replaced the cloth back in the bucket, moving it aside as he stood to his feet. Her hand shot out to his arm, “Don’t g-go!” She begged, her voice shrill.

“I just need something from my desk,” He rest his hand on hers, “I’m not going anywhere. I promise.”

He retrieved a strange root, breaking it off into small pieces as he placed them in a bowl.

“This is Felandaris. Solas asked me to ensure that you ate it upon waking. Will you, please?”
The plant made her weary.

“It’s fine, really.” He took a piece to his mouth, crunching off a bit as an example. His face twisted at the poor taste, but did his best to make it seem appealing, “See?”

She returned a blank stare.

“Eat.” Consus instructed.

Naomi extended an untrusting hand, taking the piece of herb between her fingers. She lifted the foul-smelling plant to her lips, eating it without reaction.

Cullen looked at her unexpectedly. The Felandaris was truly disgusting, he didn’t know how she could stand it. The Inquisitor popped another piece into her mouth, then two at a time, and soon- the vessel was empty.

“Thank you.” She whispered.

He moved the bowl to the floor, standing up and walking to a desk lined with flickering candles.

“Of course, Inquisitor.”

The two of them lingered in the room awkwardly.

“The things I saw… the things I’ve learned,” her emerald met his amber, “Cullen, this changes everything.”

“Tomorrow.”

With a strong “Huff,” the candles went mute.

“You’ll tell me after you’ve rested tomorrow.”

She felt his muscles constrict around her waist before she could argue.

“For now, just… I feared… I thought that maybe-” He nestled his face into her saffron hair as he pushed her head into his chest, “Thank the Maker you’re alright.” His voice was shaking.

His gentle words brought the memories of their night together. Where he held her, embraced her, made her feel safe- even after she had made a drunken fool out of herself. She remembered when she woke in the middle of the night, when she looked up to see him looming over her, his arms draped on her side.

Her shaking hand ran through his hair, making him jump. She pulled back, fragile. “I’m sorry, I just…”

Cullen reached out for her hand, gently returning it to his head as they lay back together. She smiled at him, running her trembling fingers about his blonde mane, losing herself in its wondrous color.

“Cullen?” She whispered, still petting him.

“Yes, my Lady Inquisitor?” He tiredly responded.

“Will you sleep with me?” She froze, “Not like, you know… but… like before, after I- “

“Drove me to the brink of insanity?” He chuckled, leaning up, “I would love nothing more.”

The Commander scooped her up in his arms and pulled her close to him. Her shaking ceased at his embrace. The Shroud glowed between them, giving the two a warm, comforting sensation. She swallowed nervously, feeling embarrassed by her frail display. Cullen kissed the back of her head lovingly, resting his cheek in her hair.

“Sleep sweet, Naomi.”

Naomi and Edward fell on their backs, landing in the sand on a secluded, uninhabited shore of Havana.

“Can you believe we outran them? Half the city watch?” She jested, “And how they got lost in that mangrove!”

Their chests heaved from sprinting across the rooftops, up the buildings, and down the lifts.

“Aye, after the things we find ourselves in, I can.” He smiled at her, leaning up on one elbow.

He admired her captivating beauty against the powder-white snow. There had been
something he wanted to say to her, and never found the right time to say it.

“You ever think about...What happens after this? After we’re too old to be Captains, too old to be Assassins?”

Her grin faded when she saw the serious expression stretched across his scarred face.

“No,” She sat up, embracing her knees, “I don’t believe you’re ever done bein’ a Captain; bein’ an Assassin.”

“You know what I meant, don’t get clever.” Kenway smirked.

She leaned her head on his shoulder as he wrapped an arm around her. The Dishonored and the Jackdaw lay anchored in the distance, out passed the mangrove bush they found themselves behind. They inhaled the moment of peace among the hectic pace they’d grown accustomed to.

Naomi thought about what came next quite often. She knew one day she’d have to tell Edward the truth.

“Aye. Sometimes.” She admitted to him, “It usually ends up with me bein’ alone in Dublin as some old, jaded Mentor in the Bureau.”

“Alone? You tryin’ to tell me something?”

“You’re reckless. And daft. I doubt you’ll live alive long enough to see me retire.” She teased him, gleaming into his sapphires.

He chuckled, not denying the claim. Her face was a constant reminder of the truth of her words. Edward’s hand reached to Naomi’s face, tracing her scar with his thumb.

“Come now, I made a promise to you...the day the Sage split your face because of my foolishness. Does your memory fail you so easily?”

“I reckon’ you’re askin’ ‘cause you don’t remember?”

“Nay, I mighty do-clear as day.” He pressed his lips against hers, his tongue sinking into her mouth as it slithered in passion.

She nibbled at him, falling into ecstasy at his kiss.

“I promised you...” Edward grabbed a handful of her hair, pulling her head back to caress her neck with his mouth, “...to follow you to the ends of this Earth, and the next.”

The buttons below her waist became undone as his kisses trailed down to her chest.

“Edward.” She moaned in delight, “What about the-”

He turned her over, resting his hands on her hips, his mouth returning to the back of her neck. Naomi laughed as he pulled her pants below her thighs.

She closed her eyes as his hips rocked against her gently, giving short and quick sighs of pleasure. His ragged breathing quickened in her ear as she arched her back. The adrenaline-ridden Assassins made love amidst the chaos, the waves behind them crashing into the sand.

“We made a deal, girl.” The words echoed, forcing her eyes open as she was violently rolled onto her back. Her wrists were pressed firmly against a wooden floor.

The Anchor flared, her anger trifled. The light gave way to Captain Abbey’s Quarters on the H.M.S. Zealand.

“This isn’t real,” She told herself, her voice was maddening as if losing her sanity, “You’re not real. You’re dead. I killed you—I blew your brains onto the splinters’o this very floor!”

She felt blood drip down her thigh as she placed the glowing hand the side of his head, “And I’ll right fuckin’ kill you again, demon!”

“Wake UP!”

Green light rippled around them, concentrated around the Anchor pressed to her suitor’s face.

“Naomi, you have to-“

The hands gripping her tightened.
“I-I didn’t mean’ta hurt you, I-“She began to shake violently, “I almost-“
“It’s alright, sh…” Naomi was immediately pulled into his bare chest, “You must calm yourself.”
The Anchor retreated into the innards of her palm.
Her face went flush when colliding with him, her cheek lay nestled under his chin. A warmth spread through her as his hug tightened.
“Do you trust me?”
Cullen’s sweet voice interrupted her processing thoughts.
“A-aye.” She choked, her voice muffled by the mess of limbs it sprang from. Tears stung her cheeks and her eyes were sore, as if she’d been crying for a while.
Still embracing one another, they gently fell backwards onto the bed.
“There’s somethin’ bout you that…soothes me…” She sniffled as her finger traced a scared, muscular patch of skin around his heart as his naked arms cradled her.
His eyes locked with hers as she looked to him for security in her vulnerable state.
“I will always be here for you any way that I can.” His scared lip raised into a gentle smile, touched by her frailness. His usual professional tone melted away, revealing care and love.
“Rough as it sounds…how unlucky of you.” She returned a nervous grin.
“’Unlucky?’ You do yourself great injustice.”
Naomi blushed across her cheeks.
“Ah, right, well…” She cleared her throat, “Off to sleep we go, then.”
She rolled over to face away from him, taken aback by his intimate words.
“Good night, Cullen.”
He pulled her close to him as he whispered softly into the dry, winter air. She didn't object.
“Good night, my lady.”

The sun lit all corners of the room, waking the Captain from her peaceful sleep. Her arm was hooked to Cullen’s side; her leg wrapped on his waist. Her ears were filled with the sound of his heartbeat as his chest rose and fell beneath her head. She inhaled sharply as her eyes parted, blinking tiredly as her breath left her.
“Good morning…” Cullen rubbed her shoulder as he spoke, “How are you feeling?”
As Naomi leaned up on her elbow to face him, his coddling touch slid to her side, not letting her go.
“Better.” Her face was pained. She held his hand with her shaking palm, “Don’t make ill with me, I didn’t-“
“I know. I’m only glad you returned to me-er…us.”
She chuckled, resting her head back down on him. Cullen held Naomi close to him, as if someone might take her from his possession.
“During my time in the Circles, I’ve seen more than one Harrowing turn sour.”
“Did they all end with you in bed with a woman?” She laughed, brushing her nose against his slacked jaw as she cuddled into the crook of his neck.
“Only yours.” He sighed, “I am...glad you did not undergo the Rite of Tranquility.”
“I…I didn’t want to risk losing the Inquisition to Corypheus. I felt it just, putting the risk to bed. It seems Consus would have it another way.”
“I can’t say I disagree with him.”
She looked up, sensing hesitation, “What is it?”
“He…spoke to me. Before you drank the Lyrium Philter.”
“What did he say?”
“He told me his names- Prometheus, Dirthamen, Consus.”
“Aye, they’re a package deal, Consus and the Shroud. History has given him many’a names.”
Cullen paused for a moment. “If my memory serves me well, ‘Dirthamen’ is an Elven god. Some of the Magi in the Circle studied him...I do not remember what he represents, but I found it...alarming. More alarming than him calling me ‘Friend.’”

Bells tolled from the main hall, awakening the Inquisition to the dawn. They echoed across the mountains, giving the valley a sense of serenity.

“The others only know you changed your mind and took the Philter. When they woke up and tried to drag you away, I demanded you be placed under my care. Alone.” He smiled mischievously, crossing his arms beneath his head.

“How dreadfully devious.” Naomi jokingly bopped him on the nose, “I’ll make a right proper scoundrel out of you, yet.”

“Right.” He agreed.

The Commander slowly rose, walking to his armor stand. He began strapping the metal pieces into place. Naomi studied him patiently.

“What?” His face flushed as he strapped his chest piece on.

“Oh, nothing.”

“Something.” He argued.

“Admiring you from afar, I suppose. Shame, really.”

He blushed brighter, smiling and rolling his eyes to the ceiling, “How ‘dreadfully devious.’”

Naomi removed her tunic, tossing it onto the chair. She flipped through the pile of folded clothes and armor, looking for her blouse.

“So,” she began, “Who changed me into your clothes?”

“Cass-” He looked to her as he began the conversation, his eyes widening at her naked back.

Black ink covered it wholly- a perfect depiction of The Dishonored stretching between each of her shoulder blades. Two wolves howled from the base of her hip, as if the ship were the moon. A compass rose planted itself in the center of her lower back. He had seen her arms before, but hadn’t noticed the two large Assassin insignia’s emblazoned on the back of her biceps where skulls sat firmly where the symbols split at the bottom.

She put her blouse on, blocking his view. He shook himself out of his daze, focusing on what he was saying, “Cassandra.”

Turning to face him, she slipped her bodice over her shoulders, pulling it down and tucking away her sizeable breasts into their cups. The collar on her shirt opened ever so slightly, showing him familiar tentacles that extended lower than her collarbone.

“A wasted opportunity!” She jested, tucking the white shirt into her breeches and securing her belt.

“You’ve got to know me better than that, by now.” He sat on the edge of the bed, buckling his plate armor to his legs.

“Oh, I know.” She snapped her gloves on, slipping her fingers through the sockets on her hidden blade bracers, “I simply enjoy the chase.” Naomi extended a blade, observing it in the sun.

“The chase?” He worked on his other leg.

Naomi extended her arms into her Captain's coat one arm at a time, buttoning it as she spoke, “Makin’ underhanded comments, takin’ advantage of a right gentleman as you are, watching you squirm—that sort of thing.” She sat, dragging her boots passed her calves and up to her knees.

“You know what I think, Inquisitor?” He grinned, looking up to her as he fondled a strap at his ankle.

“What’s that?” Naomi slung her pistol holsters over her shoulder, and around her waist, placing them in their slots one by one.

“I think you’re not used to being the one doing the chasing, and that makes you squirm.”
Her eyebrows raised themselves.

“You, I-“She huffed, “No.” She slung the Staff’s sleeve on her back, “I’ve chased plenty of men.”

“Uh-huh.”

“What?” Her brow furrowed, placing the belt with the sword sheaths around her waist.

“You’ve never been told ‘no’ to sex before.”

She shook her head, placing her swords at her side.

“Well…I-“Naomi blushed. The Captain strapped her utility belt, tying Consus over it with haste.

“Have you ever been properly courted, Inquisitor?” Cullen was fully clad in his armor, putting his coat on as he taunted her.

She looked to the side, grabbing the Staff and swinging it into the sleeve.

“Well?” He asked again.

She scoffed, smiling at their bickering.

"Now is hardly the time for this." Naomi tried to shut him down, tried to change the subject.

"Ah. I see." Cullen smirked.

The Inquisitor climbed the wall, using cracks and iron-clad lantern hooks for grips. The calmness had begun to fade as she remembered the anxiety and darkness of the previous night.

"Until next time, Lion." Her voice was quieter, the humor leaving her to be cold and empty. The Commander was saddened to see her leave.

"Of course, Inquisitor." He answered.

She had already slipped through the opening in his roof, leaving Cullen to reflect upon his own experiences of the night.
"Though the specific symptoms may vary from subject to subject, the end result is the same: they lose their minds."
-Lucy Stillman

“ou haven’t seen her?” Cullen sighed.

Blackwall and Adibas looked to each other.

“We’ve rotated watch on that blasted tower of yours all night.” The Quartermaster growled.

“I did everything I could, it’s not like I’ve ever done this before.” Cullen defended himself,

“Harrowings are always a somewhat secured event with more than one Templar. I’ve never done
this by myself, let alone…” His voice trailed off.

“What?” Blackwall stroked his beard.

“As a Templar I’ve seen many Harrowings fail, and many of them succeed. But she…she was
different.” He rubbed the back of his neck.

“That’s because it wasn’t a blasted ‘Harrowing!’ My Captain is no mage, and God only knows
what treating her as such as done to her.” The Creole man growled through his thick accent, “I
trusted you with her. I won’t be makin’ that mistake again any time soon.”

“Now, now, that’s a bit harsh.” Blackwall interjected, “We were responsible for making sure
nothing like this happened, as well. That’s why we watched the tower.”

Adibas huffed, “Did you keep her away from the artifacts, at least?”

Cullen lifted his gaze from the ground, giving him a nod.

“Good.” He replied.

“You boys better get your act together. Guard coming this way.” Blackwall turned his attention
back to the horse behind him.

“Afternoon.” Cullen addressed the approaching guard, “What is it?”

The soldier saluted his Commander.

“Afternoon, ser. I was dispatched by Lady Montilyet to fetch you to the war room and to ‘be swift’
in doing so.” He panted, trying to regain his breath.

“You left your post?” Cullen towered over him.

“I objected, ser. She insisted. I will escort you and take my post thereafter, immediately.” He fell
into a hastened sweat.

“Oh, will you?”

“Be easy on him, Commander. Have you ever tried telling Lady Montilyet ‘no’?” Blackwall
defended the young man as he brushed the spoiled mount.

“I suppose.” He rested his hand on his hilt, “Let us go, then.” Cullen sighed, “I’ll let you know if I
find anything.”

“Likewise.” Adibas crossed his arms, waiting for them to be out of hearing range.

“I’m Her Quartermaster. I should not be sitting idly waiting for secondhand information.” He
growled to himself.

“So don’t.” Blackwall fed the horse a sugar cube, “Go to them. It’s that simple.”

The pirate looked to the Grey Warden.

“Is it?”

“Yeah.”
“I know how they fell from history in my world. I know how they fell from history in Thedas...but what in between? Where’s the missing link? How did they get from here to there?”

Naomi’s fingers were laced as her chin rested firmly on her metal-reinforced knuckles. The Advisors argued in circles.

“I can’t tell them- I can’t tell anyone- or...can I? Can I trust Cullen? Consus made it clear...”

Her vision blurred in thought, eyes fixed on a ship-shaped map marker Josephine had paid an artisan to carve to represent *The Dishonored*, “And to find that he’s been a recording playing at predicted occasions makes this venture a tad bit lonelier.”

“We had a deal, girl.”

Captain Abbey’s voice from behind pulled her out of her chair, twisting her body to face the door. Her hand rested on the top of it, her palms sweating underneath her gloves. There was no one.

“Inquisitor?” Leliana gained her attention.

“Are you alright?” Josephine was sympathetic.

Naomi looked to them, carefully skipping over Cullen in embarrassment.

“Aye...I thought I heard somethin’ startling, is all.” The Inquisitor slowly lowered herself back into the chair, “As you were.”

Josephine gave her a nod as she continued.

“The Champion has threatened to leave. Keeping Solas, Dorian, or Vivienne less than a mile from each other proves to be catastrophic. Cassandra has hardly said a word to anyone. The Qunari are demanding an audience with those who sank the Dreadnought.” Josephine’s demeanor grew soft, and her eyes became glassy, “And let’s not forget the most difficult trial from these past two nights...Waiting to hear if our dear Lady Inquisitor was alive and well.”

The eyes in the room were fixed on her, caringly.

Naomi waved a hand in dismissal, feeling uncomfortable.

“When the raven came with news of her awakening, we were overjoyed to hear from you, Commander.” The Spymaster grinned, “even the bird seemed quite pleased with himself.”

“He is a fine bird, indeed.” Cullen put the best smile on that he could muster, “I see him so frequently.”

“Perhaps you should give him a proper name, then, no? I send only him to your quarters.” Leliana giggled.

“The Inquisitor is barely mobile, the Inner Circle is falling apart, and Corypheus plots our demise with every second that goes by...and we, the Advisors of the Inquisition, are discussing the ownership and naming privileges of a common delivery raven.” Josephine rolled her eyes, “When I wished for simpler times, I do not recall wishing them to be this simple.”

“Any suggestions?” Cullen jested.

The Commander realized the Captain in front of him was lost. He cleared his throat,

“Perhaps we should review the reports from the Storm Coast.”

Leliana caught on to the distant Naomi, remaining silent while Josephine relayed the information.

“Right! Sorry.” Josephine returned a nervous smile, “The Qunari are waiting to meet with you, Inquisitor, on the Storm Coast. Iron Bull has...arranged a meeting of sorts involving the-well...”
“The Venatori.” The Nightingale finished.

Naomi stiffened.

Cullen voiced his half, “We believe these smuggling operations are a direct supplier for the Red Templar foothold in the north of the Storm Coast. It needs to be disbanded- soon. While you’re there meeting the Ben Hassrath-”

“We take the port back. Lost a few ports in my day. Gained more.” Naomi rolled a quill in her hand, focusing on how the feathers twirled and less on the black figures and hazy voices that reared every so often. “Very well. Have the Iron Bull prepare a briefing. At the break of dawn, we’ll be sailin’ through to the Storm Coast.”

“Absolutely not!” Cullen argued, “You’re in no condition to-“

“Be sittin’ on me arse while there’s tasks to be done, aye.”

“Inquisitor-“

“I’ll be fine by mornin’ ‘cause of Consus and you right well know it.” She left him little room for argument, “And let’s keep this little operation to ourselves. I’m in no mood to counsel.” Naomi pinched the bridge of her nose, rubbing her sinuses from a brewing headache.

“Of course, Inquisitor.” Josephine nodded on account of the defiant Commander.

Eyeing the map, the Captain carefully picked up the crafted marker she’d previously focused on. When Josephine gave it to her, Naomi appreciated it more than she felt she communicated to her sweet Ambassador.

With a soft thud, the marker dropped firmly over the Storm Coast.

“It’s settled, then. I’ll be liftin’ anchor in the mornin.’ Sure Iron Bull will brief me on the way.” Silence followed until her eyes slowly drifted to Cullen.

“Nathan.” A whisper from her right.

The Captain flipped a pistol in her hand, holding it to Captain Rodger Abbey’s mouth.

He was gone in an instant.

The Advisors stood there, watching her holding a pistol into the empty air.

“Inquisitor…what’s wrong?” Josephine asked meekly.

The pistol rattled in her shaking hand.

“I just…I just need sleep. Sleep without relentless dreams.” The Captain’s face remained drained of happiness. She dismissed herself before anyone could interject, gripping the hilt of the Sword and embracing the thought of her Captain’s Quarters.

The three of them looked to each other for guidance once she’d disappeared.

“It was hard enough getting her into Skyhold unnoticed, much less a ship out into the ocean.” Josephine gently lay her writing board on the table.

“Something is clearly off. I don’t know why we’re letting her go off on these…adventures.” Cullen crossed his arms.

“We’re not letting her, Commander. She is the Inquisitor and she will operate as she sees fit.” Leliana’s eyes narrowed at the ship marker, “And it is still our job to support her.”

The Commander huffed, meandering his way to the window.

“We still haven’t figured out what happened before you got there, Commander.” The Spymaster joined him.

“Perhaps we should hold a meeting to find out…and distract them. During that meeting, the Iron Bull, his associates, and the Inquisitor could set sail.” Josephine’s eyes glinted with plot.

“A fine plan.”

Josephine, Leliana, and Cullen jumped. The voice was not of their own.

A whistle directed their confusion to the rafters above them. Adibas let loose a friendly wave, his fingers wiggling.

“Maker help me, what are you-“ The Commander’s temper was lit aflame.

“I’ll let her know at once.” The Quartermaster winked as he hoisted himself up, slipping out of view through the path whence he came.
Her nose was a spout, further snaking down her lips. The quill scribbled so violently that the fabric tore beneath the tip.

Drip.

A drop of blood spread through the grain, shattering the word she’d just wrote, sending the ink into places where it did not belong. The feather ceased to write, tearing more fervent holes into the parcel. The ink swirled around in the pot as the copper chirped against its glass. She continued.

It was a mist of symbols and markings that clouded her vision. Only when they were transferred onto the parchment did she see again. One by one, her bloodshot eyes danced through the pattern in which they appeared. A plethora of sheets accumulated before the Captain, covered in the images that haunted her. Her palm met the paper as she whisked it away, slamming a fresh, blank canvas in front of her.

Her breathing was frantic.

“Have to get this all down…I have to…I have to…I have to…”

They finally began to thin, allowing her to see more of her surroundings.

“Captain-“

Adibas’s voice broke the silence. She looked in front of her to see the door to her Quarters still locked. The Inquisitor was still alone.

She kept writing.

The quill was dry, and the pot that she depended on so hotly was empty. There was no more ink to be found as she angrily pawed through her drawers. Naomi untied Consus in a flurry, tossing the Shroud to the ground alongside a glove. Her hidden blade ejected from one of her Assassin’s gauntlets. As the sharp edge grew closer to her palm, her breathing quickened to a pace that made her heart qualm. Naomi’s skin divided in two as it met the steel of the traditional weapon, and her new medium began to flow uncontrollably.

She clenched a fist, turning it on its side as it hovered over the empty pot. A steady stream of blood escaped her, clouding the glass vessel as it began to fill. Tying the Shroud around her open wound, she let her severed flesh rest next to her as she dipped her feathered writing instrument.

Naomi continued to tear the quill into the fabric paper, tuning out the voices and figures that danced in the shadows of the flickering lamp above.
Blood Ties

Chapter Summary

“Life’s hardest choices are the ones that force you to question your own moral code. My choice has led me here, standing against those I once called brothers. History may brand me 'traitor', 'rebel', or 'renegade.' But in the end, it doesn’t matter how history remembers me. What matters, is that I follow my own Creed.”

- Shay Patrick Cormac

Chapter Notes

Paris, France, 1736...fifteen years after the disappearance of The Dishonored.

“...” The woman was cautious.
“...” Edward responded plainly.
“Seems you’ve been busy.” She stirred her espresso, careful not to ding the fragile porcelain cup.

The energy and conversation of the café surrounded them.

“Tracking down your brother and that Devil's box, aye.” Edward’s hood shielded his face from those who’d sit beside them.

“Best of luck.” The red-headed woman sighed, resting the small sugar spoon next to her piping-hot beverage, “He’s killed most of my allies and has intimidated the rest into silence. I’m no closer now than I was a year ago.”

Kenway shifted, “I’ve seen him.”

Immediately, the woman grew anxious. She was hungry for information, her ears thirsty for knowledge.

“What? When? Where can I find him?” She leaned in closer in anticipation.

“What? You want to protect me?” She scoffed, “How noble.”

“I want to help you. The Brotherhood has resources, manpower-“

She rolled her eyes at him, “You cannot be serious. I don’t trust the Assassins, obviously.”

Edward’s face was pained, regretting the way the last fifteen years had played themselves. Even though she was raised under the Insignia, the Templars had filled her head with so many lies that he wasn’t sure what she truly believed.

“Would you place trust in me?” He removed his hood, regrettably showing his face.

The blue-eyed woman was hesitant to answer.

“Forgive me. One can’t be too careful. Not after what happened to my father.” She immediately grew saddened.

“...‘father,’ had more than one face, Elizabeth.” Edward was grim.

“Élise.” She corrected, “And I know exactly who my father was, Edward. He was a Grand Master Templar. The Assassins kidnapped my brother and I, hid us in the Dublin Bureau. It was only a matter of time before the Templars reclaimed us.” She snapped.
“Is that fairy fantasy they spun?” He snickered, “And have they declared the real man behind this crime to you?”

Her face hardened, "It was a bloody Assassin who met his end."

“A harsh ‘No,’ then. Shay was the one. He assassinated Grand Master de la Serre and made out with the Precursor box.”

His words knocked the breath out of her, an audible gust escaping her chest. She began shaking her head furiously, “Is this why you asked me to meet with you in public? To spew these lies with such cowardice that I could not react?”

“The harshness must be-”

“Haven’t you done enough? Those letters you delivered to the Templars so long ago- all this was your doing. It’s your fault the Bureau fell. It’s your fault Mentor McNamara and her crew disappeared. It’s your fault Shay and I were separated after you ‘rescued’ him from my father’s men. You let the Assassins kill my father, and now you’d come here and-“

“I swear to you, I had nothing to do with his death.” Edward pleaded.

“But you did.” She failed to fight back tears that would force themselves over her eyelids, “I suppose it was inevitable. You an Assassin. Me, a Templar. Him, a Templar. When I heard he killed the man who murdered my father and stole that blasted box I was glad. Glad, the Assassin was dead, Edward.” Her face grew red and splotchy at her attempt to keep her composure, the cup rattling as she lifted it to her lips to take a sip.

Edward reached into his coat, pulling out a Templar-stamped parcel.

“A letter intended for Grand Master de la Serre the day his life was robbed. Read it.” Offended and void of any further empathy, he tossed the note across the table, the envelope torn where he had opened it.

“Where…where did you find this?” She growled, recognizing the official Templar seal.

“That’s not of import. Read it, 'Élise.’” He repeated, crossing his arms and leaning back in his chair.

She conceded.

"Grand Master de la Serre, I have learned through my agents that an individual within our Order plots against you. I beg you to be on your guard at the initiation tonight. Trust no one. Not even those you call friends. May the Father of Understanding guide you. -K.J.”

Her eyes bounced from Edward to the letter.

“Who is this 'K.J.?' Are you telling me you and another knew this was going to happen and neither of you did anything to stop it?” She caught herself raising her voice, lowering it when she realized she’d gained the attention of the people sitting around them.

“I found this after his corpse became common news. I swear it upon my life, it was unopened.” He begged her to believe him, “Help me find Shay. If the box met with the Koh-i-Noor, we could…”

He choked, “I need your help. We must locate your brother and return him here- alive.”

Her eyes widened at his request, “You’d have me steal the Koh-i-Noor from the Templars?”

“Before Shay steals it from the same blasted Templars that forced you into this life of falsehood, aye.” His face contorted in anger, sadness, and guilt all at once.

“Allow me to sort this out for myself. The Templars infiltrated the Dublin Bureau, kidnapped Shay and I, lied to me about our ancestry, and just after Shay defected from the Brotherhood and found his way home to the Templars, he’d turn around to murder my father to steal the Precursor box? And now you say he's after the Koh-i-Noor? Do you take me for a fool?”

“What I speak is true. Don’t believe me, but the Brotherhood has odds that you don’t. They are your best chance to find him. I am your best chance of finding him.” Edward stared her down in contempt.

Élise considered his words for a moment.

“Do any of them remember me?” She asked quietly, placing the cup down on the small plate in front of her.

“Aye. Bellec…he was the only one to make it out of the siege in Dublin. You were far gone by
the time we knew who took you. It haunted him. When I found you recently-I couldn’t hide the truth, and by telling him, I told the Brotherhood.”

"How did you find me?" She asked.

"Time and place."

The two remained silent, reflecting the young woman’s childhood.

“I have something for you, a show of good faith, if you will.” Edward reached into his pouch, his fingers brushing against his pistols. Élise immediately went to grab hers, “Watch it, Kenway.”

“Relax, mate. What do you think I’m goin’ to do, shoot you in the middle of a Parisian café? Hardly.” He removed a small, wrapped figurine, placing it on the table in between them.

“What’s this?” She hissed.

“Unwrap it. Must I direct everything?” He sighed, crossing his legs and resting his elbow on his knee.

Her eyes darted between the gift and the man in front of her without trust. She swiped it up in her resistant palm, moving too quickly for Edward to remain relaxed.

Carefully, she peeled away the linen harboring the figure within.

It was a small, wooden bird.

“Is this…?” Élise traced the intricate feathers with her finger.

“Naomi’s gift from Havana.”

“Where did you-“

“Among the wreckage.” His stare was locked to the ground, “That box your brother has…it could lead us to her. To all of them. It's my belief that he knows that, too.” Edward's jaw locked in an attempt to wrestle his sadness, "Please. The last decade has been sod but unanswered questions and loose ends...This is the only chance we'll find to learn what really happened."

Élise swallowed, her lower lip quivering at the prospect.

“Alright.”

She broke the tension between them with a single word.

“You’ll do it?"

The young Templar’s voice trembled, “I’ll retrieve the gem. Then, you’ll take me to the Brotherhood. I will discover the truth, and not just about what happened to McNamara and her crew.”

"Aye, I wouldn't place a bet against you on that." Edward sighed.

"You'd be a poor man if you did." Élise smirked, still brushing the carved raven with her thumb.

"A very poor man, indeed..." He thought to himself.
“It’s from your father, child. He was…he is a good man. You should have something to remember him by.” Maeve dropped the pendant around the young girl’s neck, “He gave this to me the night you were born.”

Silk curtains in the windows reflected dramatic colors as the moon shone through them. The woman and her daughter sat before the fire, speaking quietly as to not wake their neighbors through the thin walls.

“Will I ever get to meet him, mum?” She crawled into her mother’s lap.

“One day, I believe it.”

“If his family name McNamara, like ours?”

Maeve laughed, “Officially, that’d be true. He doesn’t go by it nowadays, though.”

“Does…does that make me a bastard, like the other children say?”

The young mother sighed, “It’s a bit more complicated than that, love.” Maeve pet her daughter’s head as she curled up to her, playing with her gift, “His real name is Shane. Shane Patrick McNamara. And don’t doubt for a second that he loves you very, very much, Naomi.”

“Why isn’t he here with us, then? Does he not love you?”

“Nonsense! That man loves me more than the ship under his feet, I swear it. And it’s because he loves us so much that’s not here.” Maeve’s smile fell, “He’s fightin’ for our freedom, out there in the world. Everything he does, all the time he’s spent away- it’s so that we can stay safe.”

“Safe from what? All those mean men that pay you to talk to them for hours?” Naomi huffed, “He’s not doin’ a very good job of it, mum.”

Maeve caught her breath.

“He can’t scare all of them away, love. Those… conversations they pay me for- it’s the only thing keepin’ us off the streets and out of those blasted corrupt churches.” She looked to her daughter, “Your father keeps us safe from evil men givin’ even meaner men their orders.”

“I wish they’d just leave us all alone so he could be with us…”

“Me too, love. Me too.” She gave her daughter a squeeze, “Do you want to see a picture of him? From his younger days? I fancy you’re old enough, now.”

“Really? Yes, of course, please!” Naomi all but sprang from her lap, standing anxiously as her mom moved across the room, selecting a very well-hidden journal.

Once she returned to her cushioned chair, Naomi climbed in her lap, resuming her post. The fire crackled in the background, illuminating the aged pages as Maeve opened to a bookmark.

The man in the faded sketch was in tattered leathers with a piece of sugar cane dangling from his mouth.

“Your father always chewed on those damned sweet twigs.”

“Was he a sailor? He looks like those men from the docks we pass going to market.”

“Aye. Still is, in fact. I commissioned this sketch right before he sailed to Cuba.” Maeve’s finger delicately traced the drawing, her eyes began to swell, “He had the most beautiful eyes I’ve ever seen, ‘side from yours. One green, one blue..."
Naomi took the book in her tiny hands, barely able to keep it from closing on her fingers once her mother let go.
“Careful, Naomi.” Her mother cleared her throat.
“Mum, you said he doesn’t go by our family name no more—“
“Any more.”

The young girl rolled her eyes.
“What’s his name, now, then? Why change it?” Naomi remained fixated on the sketch as she asked more questions.
“As I said, it’s complicated—“
“And what’s this mean?”
“What?”
“This.” Naomi pointed to the small text written under the sketch.
“If a man’s philosophy does not let him protect his people, his home, and his family...what good can it do for the world?” Maeve read aloud, “It’s something your father—“
“Mum, don’t cry.” Naomi hugged her, “It’s alright.”

The sound of shuddering paper between two fingertips. The crinkle invaded the room as the foundation of the words sprawled upon its face folded under pressure.
“Don’t cry...” Naomi rolled to her side, facing the lantern that flickered from the ceiling.
Slam.
“Inquisitor.”
That harsh voice.
“Cassandra.” She glowered.
They were in her Captain’s Quarters. The first thing she noticed was that her weapons were missing.
“Where are the Pieces?” Naomi was frantic.
“Calm yourself. They are with me, over here. Your Quartermaster told me you sleep better without them.”

The Captain rolled her neck, stretching her shoulder.
“Seems ‘bout right.”
Naomi let her feet dangle off the inlaid bed. They sat in silence for a while, the waves crashing against them.
“Watch’ya readin’?” The Inquisitor perked up.
“Really?” Cassandra smiled, “That’s what you’re curious about?”
“Aye. What is it?” She lifted her chin and stretched her back, trying to peer over the desk that blocked Cassandra’s lap.
“A book I found on one of your shelves. I hope you don’t mind. It’s quite boring, being your babysitter.” The Seeker yawned.
“Ah, you really are spending too much time with Quartermaster Lacroix, aren’t you?” She laughed, “‘Babysitter...’” Naomi shook her head at the quote.
“Your, oh, what did they refer it to as... ‘family name?’ It’s very interesting. Fitting, too. McNamara, ‘Son of the Hound of the Sea.’” Cassandra said.
“That the one ‘bout Knappogue Castle and the Earls of West Clancullen?”
“It is. I am not surprised your lineage is linked to sailors and rebellion starters.”

The nostalgia of the dream Naomi had lingered as she remembered the day her mother gave her that book.
“The name in the front cover, ‘Maeve Elizabeth McNamara.’ Is that your mother?” Cassandra was quiet.
“Aye. Was.” Her eyebrows creased.
“My condolences.”
The Captain sulked, losing herself in the water they sailed upon.
“I lost someone close to me. My brother. It never gets easier, does it?” She huffed.
“Nay, it does not. Makes you stronger, though, yeah?” Naomi leaned her elbows on her knees and folded her hands.

The bell rang above them.
“We’re an hour away from…wherever we’re goin’.” Naomi smiled at Adibas’s muffled voice shouting a command.
“The Storm Coast. To address the Ben-Hassrath. Bull can fill you in.”
“Ah. Right.”
“When Adibas found you-“
“First names, now?” Naomi asked mischievously.

She earned herself a famous Cassandra scowl.

Those pages were scattered all around the room. Seemingly written in blood.” The Seeker pointed to a neat stack on Naomi’s desk.
“Aye, ’спose I went a bit mad in my endeavor. Ever get an idea that drives you to insanity if yeh can’t get it out of your head?”
“Not that would warrant scripture of my own blood, no. I cannot say that I have.” Cassandra smirked.

“Is that why you’re here? To make sure I don’t go cuttin’ meself up and scribblin’ on the walls?”
“Among other things. The magic you wield from the Anchor was still unstable, last I checked.”

Naomi rolled her eyes, “It’s not magic.”
“How do you know? Are you an expert of Thedas, now?” The Seeker asked.

The Captain squinted.

“’Want, is a strong word. You had a right to know there was a second option, and a right to choose which path to take.’ She looked to the Inquisitor, apologetic, “It was an impulsive decision. Political, at best. If you truly would have lost connection to the Fade, you would not be able to close the remaining rifts.” Cassandra shook her head, “I can’t believe we acted so brash.”
“Ey, now, lass. Don’t go beatin’ yerself up, again. If I would’ve died, I wouldn’t be able to close the rifts, either. Don’t apologize for doing what you thought was right, even if it went sour.”
Naomi huffed through her nose and cocked her head, “If you don’t stand up for something, you’ll fall for anything.”

“What?”

“Think about it.” The Inquisitor stood up to stretch further, clenching and releasing her still-sore palm.

“Wise words.” The Seeker admitted, “Is that something the Assassins taught you?”
“One of ‘em. Meant a great deal to me.”
“McGrath?”
“Aye, how did you-“
“You spoke of him when I returned your pistol to you.” The Seeker seemed proud of herself for remembering. “For what it’s worth, I believe he did a fine job.”
“Right. Thanks, lass,” Naomi’s eyelids became heavy in her sadness. “I avenged you, Captain, but I only hope I’ve been makin’ you proud, too.”

“You thought I heard the old man say,
‘Leave her Johnny, leave her.’
Tomorrow ye will get your pay,
And it’s time for us,
To leave her.”

Naomi snarled as she opened the doors, giving way to the storm that bombarded The Dishonored. Her tired face did not welcome the wetness, like a cat who’d been awoken by a spilt bucket of water.
“Fancy our company at last, Cap’n?” Kit smiled, tying down a crate of sorts.
“Aye, I suppose so, eh?”

“Leave her, Johnny,
Leave her!
Oh leave her Johnny,
Leave her!
For the voyage is long,
And the winds don’t blow,
And it’s time for us to leave her.”

She scratched her head and rubbed her eyes as she approached Bull and Adibas on the Captain’s deck. Cassandra trailed behind.
“Captain.” Adibas nodded to her.
“How ya feelin’ boss?” The Iron Bull sat on a barrel with his arms crossed on the railing in front of him.
“Piss n’ shit.” She grunted.
“Thought you liked sailing through ‘mucked luck weather?’” The Quartermaster taunted.
“Ah, shut it, Adie.”

“Oh the wind was foul and the sea ran high,
‘Leave her Johnny, leave her.’
She shipped it green and none went by,
And it’s time for us,
To leave her.”

“I hope you don’t mind that I invited Lady Pentaghast to join us on this voyage.”
“Oh, I know right well why you invited her, Quartermaster.” Naomi smirked.
“Maker preserve me, I—” Cassandra started.
“Getting defensive, there, Seeker?” Bull’s laugh rumbled those around him.

The shore came into view, flickering between the thick raindrops that clouded the sky.

“Leave her, Johnny,
Leave her!
Oh leave her Johnny,
Leave her!

For the voyage is long,
And the winds don’t blow,
And it’s time for us to leave her.”

“You gonna tell me what’s goin’ on, or what?” Naomi leaned on the railing next to Bull.
“I got a letter from my contacts in the Ben-Hassrath. Verified it with Red before we did anything with it, just so you know.” He smirked, “Anyway, the Ben-Hassrath letter…they don’t like Corypheus or his Venatori. And they really don’t like red lyrium. Because of your show of strength involving their Dreadnought, they’re ready to work with us. With you, boss.”
“And we should let them? You know, work with us?” The Captain asked.
“The Qunari and the Inquisition, joining forces. My people have never made a full-blown alliance with a foreign power before. This would be a big step.”

“I hate to sail on this rotten tub,
‘Leave her Johnny, leave her.’
No grog allowed and rotten grub,
And it’s time for us to leave her.”

“They found a massive red lyrium shipping operation out on the coast. They wanted us to hit it together. Talked about sending a Dreadnought to redeem their honor, or something.” Bull continued.
“You don’t seem entirely happy about this.” Adibas commented.
“No, I’m good. It’s, uh…I’m used to them being over there. It’s been awhile.”

“Leave her, Johnny,
Leave her!
Oh leave her Johnny,
Leave her!
For the voyage is long,
And the winds don’t blow,
And it’s time for us to leave her.”

Her attention drifted as Bull dismissed himself to address the Chargers before they made land fall. Cassandra went to the Navigation deck to speak with Aquilla and Kilean about… something.
Naomi hadn’t been listening.
“Douse the sails!” A male voice came from her left.
It wasn’t Adibas. It wasn’t even her ship anymore.
It was Johnny McGrath’s voice. The ship was the Medusa’s Scorn.
“Layin’ anchor soon, boys!” He shouted.
His traditional Captain’s hat danced in the wind, his eye patch covered his right eye, revealing one, green pupil as it scanned horizon. A twig of sugar cane hung from his mouth, the frayed ends getting stuck in his teeth. She’d always made fun of him for looking like the fictional pirates the scholars wrote about.
The riggers hoisted up the cloth, slowing the ship to a steady pace. It was sunny and clear, with a gentle breeze cascading the deck. It smelled of sugar and salt and fish.
“Ireland.” She thought.

“We swear by the rote for want of more,
‘Leave her Johnny, leave her.’
But now we’re through so we’ll go on shore,
And it’s time for us to leave her.”

She blinked.
Her ship had returned to her, and the dark, stormy weather with it.
“Captain?”
“What’s that? Apologies.” Naomi shook her head.
“My question. If you’re angry because Cassandra is with us.” Adibas repeated himself for the third time.
“Nay, mate. She’s a good one.” The docks were swiftly approaching, “’Spose I should outfit myself, yeah?”
“Aye.”

She walked passed Thaddeus who continued to sing the shanty that became very solemn, very quickly.

“Leave her, Johnny,
Leave her!
Oh leave her Johnny,
Leave her!
For the voyage is long,
And the winds don’t blow,
And it’s time for us to leave her.”

Chapter End Notes

Knappogue Castle
Clash in the Castle

Chapter Summary

"No one ever listens, not until it's far too late."
-Cullen Stanton Rutherford

“...ell, someone’s gotta do somethin’ other than yell ‘round in circles, right?” Sera jumped up.
“I always want to help.” Cole was more than willing to assist the Inquisitor.
“She found help, alright. The issue is you’re all pissed it wasn’t you.” Isabela laughed.
“Hardly the true cause for concern, here.” Solas muttered.

Vivienne scoffed with distaste, “Says the apostate that would rather pump the Inquisitor full of lyrium.”
“Not all of us who wield magic enjoy quaint little Circles and tea parties.” Hawke said.
“Did Anders feel the same?”

Isabela had to restrain the Champion from leaping across the table and strangling the Orlesian enchantress.

“Mages are dangerous and their power makes them feared. The Circles protected us.” The First Enchanter did not ease off the argument so easily.
“Inquisitor McNamara left with those three because they have personal interests. There’s no reason to take it ill to heart.” Blackwall’s gruff voice tried to diffuse the argument, “Or argue about Circles that no longer exist- for a reason, might I add.”

They continued to argue, circling themselves.

“She should we-“ Josephine whispered to Leliana.
“No,” The Spymaster sighed, “Let them get it out.”

Cullen pinched his temples. The migraine was becoming too much to bare. Between the nightmares, the lack of sleep, and the general sickness that came and went from the lyrium withdraw…

He disagreed.

The words dug into his skull, the high-pitched screech of each voice rising louder and louder over the last. The lack of authority- lack of mutual respect. The indecency from those who’d been called into these halls under the command of his beloved to serve so nobly…

“And for them to come in this room, of all rooms, with this verbal desecration...”

He snapped.

“You will all CEASE this bickering or you will LEAVE this meeting. Andraste guide me to not toss you all out myself.” The walls of the war room cowered at the Commander’s reprimand, “Lady Montilyet, if you will.”

The Ambassador swallowed deeply, diverting her nervousness to her board.

“First letter of business, addressed to the Commander from Lieutenant Esthiel,” She cleared her throat, “’We have verified Sera’s claims about Verchiel. Several displacements of refugees were deliberate in what appears to be an attempt to destabilize land claims. While there would be no direct gain for involving the Inquisition, increasing our presence could have unexpected results. In any case, it is a trivial matter to divert troops to march through the city.’” Her voice quieted as she read the insult.

“Trivial?!?” Sera screeched, “Those people believe in us, how could-“

Cullen raised his hand to silence her.
“A retinue of our best will make an impression. I will send them at once.” Sera was quieted at his disposition. “Next.”

“In response to a matter brought up the Inquisition’s own Lady Vivienne,” Josephine flipped the page, “Your scholar friend from Orlais responds as follows, ‘The war and the Venatori have claimed many experts, but we have located an ‘arcanist,’ with great skill and a reputation for humbling first enchanters in both Andrastian and Imperial Circles. Two assassination attempts-and at least one explosion- have made landholders reluctant to allow her passage through their territory. It will take significant effort to bring her from Tantervale, but this arcanist would be invaluable to the Inquisition.’”

“Interesting. If he speaks of who I assumes he does, she would indeed be ‘invaluable.’” Vivienne looked to Leliana, “Perhaps you can resolve this dilemma we face, my dear?”

“To bar passage, they must know she’s there.” Leliana smirked, “Rest assured, Lady Vivienne. They will not.”

“Splendid.”

Cole detected the Warden’s impatience.

“She’ll speak on it next. Do not fret.” The spirit whispered.

The bearded man shifted, shuddering at the young boy.

“Warden Blackwall, I have reviewed your Grey Warden treaties. It could work. The Blight is but ten years past, and Thedas remembers how we were saved,” Josephine smiled graciously, “I can use the treaties, leverage the goodwill owed the Wardens and use it for the Inquisition.”

“Thank you, Lady Montilyet.” Blackwall smiled.

“Of course.” Her rolled “r” sent a chill down the Warden’s spine.

“On to more Warden business, then.” Hawke stretched, as if he’d cramped up waiting for his turn, “Made contact with my er- Warden friend. Wants the Inquisitor and us from the old Kirkwall brigade to meet with ‘em in Crestwood. Problem is: it’s completely silent. No one out, no one in-not since the Breach. Don’t know why they’d pick that particular place of all places, but after my dear Isabela’s letter interception, I’m a tad pinch paranoid.”

Isabela shrugged.

“Any way to make sure it’s not a trap waiting to spring on us?” Garrett raised his brow at the Advisors.

“I will send what scouts I can to Crestwood, Champion.” Leliana sighed, knowing her agents would respond more quickly than the Inquisition’s forces.

“Wonderful.” Hawke was satisfied.

The ten of them stood there uncomfortably for a bit.

“On the subject of the Empress…” Josephine began, “we must discuss the upcoming ball at the Winter Palace.”

“We have to reach the her before Corypheus.” Cullen affirmed, “The only question is: How?”

“We know how.” Josephine sounded irritated, “I have our way in, as much as you do not like it. The real question we must ask ourselves is: ‘Where is the enemy hiding?’”

“What are you three goin’ on about? What ball?” Sera made a pouty face.

“At the urging of Grand Duchess Florianne, the Empress is holding a ball at the Winter Palace. Absolutely everyone will be there. During the festivities, Celene will be meeting for peace talks with the usurper Duke Gaspard and Ambassador Briala.” Josephine explained.

“Celene is surrounded at all times by countless guards, courtiers, servants, and vassals. What better place for an assassin to hide than the Empress’s own household?” Leliana traced the edge of the table with her fingertip, “The assassin must be hiding within one of these factions.”

“Do we absolutely need to go to the peace talks? The Empress must have personal guards. We could just warn her she’s in danger.” Solas tried to rationalize the attendance to the charade.

“We’ve made the attempt, but…” The Ambassador looked to her hooded friend.

“It seems that our messages never reached her. Someone intercepted them.” Leliana finished.

“See? See!” Hawke pointed at Isabela, “Interception is deception.”

“Shut your mouth.” The pirate responded under her breath.
“As much as I wish we didn’t have to attend, it’s better that we don’t leave this to chance. If Orlais falls to Corypheus, no land is safe.” Cullen interrupted the couple’s banter, “With Gaspard and Celene’s armies entrenched, we cannot openly march troops to the palace.”

“My agents will ensure your soldiers get inside, but it must be a few at a time to avoid attention.” Leliana assured.

“Understood.” The Commander nodded to her.

“Those agents of yours need a raise.” Blackwall huffed.

“I believe that’s all we had for this afternoon.” Josephine placed her tablet on the table, “Does anyone have any questions?”

“I do.” Cullen rested his hand on the hilt of his sword, his sunken eyes focusing on the faces in front of him, “And I want clear, concise answers this time.”

The glare was, ironically, silencing.

“Commander, perhaps this is a conversation you’d like to have in private.” Solas pleaded, predicting their next topic.

“Why? Would that make it easier to paint me the villain?” Vivienne scoffed.

“Do not misplace your guilt on me, Imperial Enchanter.” The elf’s patience ran thin.

“You test me.” Cullen’s grip tightened, “More so than when I was stilled using lyrium.”

The argument was put to rest.

“She lit a veilfire torch during our operation. This attracted a few demons to our location. The Inquisitor dispatched of them through…peculiar, means, to say the least.” Solas seemed genuinely confused, “She opened a Rift and it engulfed them.”

“She opened a Rift? To the Fade?” Hawke seemed interested.

“Yes. After further examination of the Anchor, it became apparent to me that it was beginning to lose its stability. I predicted that the Inquisitor’s connection to the Fade might be harnessed with the weapons she holds so dear. My theory was correct.”

“Seems to be a trend these days. Your theories. Their correctness.” Blackwall stroked his beard.

“Her touch sent fire through you, a flame that became ignited- flesh on flesh.” Cole’s eyes were glazed, as if being transported into a different realm, “A beautiful conduit to a world that once was-“

“Cole.” Solas’s face turned slightly red, “Enough.”

A pang of jealousy gripped the Commander, “Continue.”

Cole opened his mouth, beginning to speak.

“Not you…” Cullen sighed.

“Through turbulent discussion, we came to an agreement. Or, so I thought.” Solas did his best to avoid confrontation, but his sharp words had other plans.

“You are so quick to forget, my dear. The letter Seeker Pentaghast sent me merely asked for both options, so that the Inquisitor may choose herself. Is that not more than most apostates receive?” Vivienne defended herself.

“You speak like it’s a favor to us,” Hawke’s anger rose from his belly, “Like giving us a choice between potentially becoming an abomination of the Fade versus an emotionless abomination of society is a show of-of-“ His anger blinded him in his quest to find the right words.

“It’s not much of a choice.” Isabela took her lover’s hand.

“She’s not a mage. Not like us. She wasn’t born with an inherent ability to twist the Fade to her will, but it seems this Anchor allows her passage. Without further practice and examination, it’s impossible to say how far those abilities will go.” Solas explained.

“How do you know all of this?” Leliana’s harsh words derailed the elf’s sincerity, “How did you know about the weapons? The Fade magic? All of it? How do you know?” Her tongue was a dagger aimed at his jugular.

“He doesn’t.” Vivienne sneered, “I only hope lives aren’t lost in the process of proving that.”

“This is why I hate magic. Elves. The Fade. Chantry bullshit. All of it,” Sera snorted, “Can’t even decide what you are much less anyone else.”

“Answer the question.” Cullen pressed.
“I have dreamt among many Elvhen ruins and have seen countless battles history will never remember among my time in the Fade. I have seen relics similar to those of hers before- and one thing is consistent. They feed off of their host. They are parasitic. However, there are those who have cheated death by tying these weapons to the Fade, an infinite amount of power.” Solas looked to Vivienne, “Is that not so different than channeling your magic through a staff? Through a spectral sword, such as you prefer, Knight Enchanter?”

The Iron Lady could not argue the similarities.

“She claims she is not from Thedas, and I have never seen anything like the weapons she wields. If what you’re saying is true, how does she show any similarities?” Leliana wasn’t convinced.

Not yet.

“The fact that she’s here proves the two worlds are connected. I would think that to be common knowledge, Spymaster.” Solas was exasperated, “How, though, yet remains unseen.”

“Obviously.” Blackwall commented.

“I only mean to reinforce that anything is possible. Let me study her, teach her to use the Anchor to defend herself. Make her less dependent on the weapons that would otherwise void her body of life.” The apostate elf begged.

“Does she not get a say in this?” Hawke cocked his head to the side, “Just banishing her to a circular room with an elf teacher and calling it a different name?”

“You are not the only mage here, Solas. Perhaps she would learn better under my supervision.” Vivienne’s eyes narrowed.

“Then let us all help her discover this talent that she possesses. Is that not why we are all here- to serve the Inquisition and its Inquisitor? To stop Corypheus, no matter what the cost? What will happen if she falls, if we fail? No, a question not worth asking. We know. You all know. She’s already showed us that fate.” Solas would not let his point of view be so easily squandered.

“He’s right, you know. With all of the resources we have, you mages, specifically…You could figure out what she has in that hand of hers.” Blackwall agreed.

“Thank you.” Solas thanked the Warden.

“It’s settled, then.” Cullen rubbed his temples, “We should all get back to work. You three would do well to start planning safe, secure, practices and where to execute them.” He instructed Vivienne, Solas, and Hawke, then looked back to the others “The rest of you have other things to attend to, and should return to them immediately.”

“Meeting adjourned.” Josephine whispered.

The Advisors remained, waiting until the clasp of the door to hitch before providing their own conversation.

“I will compare Solas’s tale to that of Cassandra’s upon their return,” Leliana’s face darkened, “Something is off about him. I’ve felt it since his arrival. An investigation is necessary.”

“I have to admit, his knowledge of obscurity is a bit too…convenient.” Josephine agreed, “What say you, Commander?”

Cullen’s skin was pale, and the knight swayed.

“Commander Rutherford?” The Lady Nightingale was a touch concerned.

“I’m fine.” His voice was grit.

“Perhaps you should sit down.” Josephine frowned.

“Perhaps,” He repeated, fumbling with the chair before properly seating himself, “Perhaps I am unfit for this venture of mine.”

“Nonsense.”

“Leliana speaks the truth. Of course you are.”

“It doesn’t feel like it.” His sunken eyes lifted to both of them, the Spymaster’s worry reminiscent of his older sister, Mia.

“You must remain strong, Cullen. Strong for the Inquisition. Strong for the Inquisitor. Strong for yourself.” She smiled, “I know she’d agree with me.”

A touch of happiness lifted his face at the thought of the Captain.

“I’d like to think so.” He admitted.
“Speak with her about it, Commander. She cares a great deal for you.” Josephine sat on the other side of him, “Love is the remedy for the deepest ailments.”
“L-love? Who said anything about-“
“I’d be a poor Spymaster if I did not know all of the affairs of Skyhold.” Leliana grinned, “You two have been at this game for quite some time, now. Are you not ready to tell her how you feel?”

The Commander’s face regained its color- a bit more red than before.
“I don’t see what this has to do with my cessation of lyrium intake.”
“I only mean to say that the support from a lover makes the hardest obstacles that much more bearable.” Josephine smiled, resting a hand on Cullen’s shoulder.
“And I should say that the longer you wait to tell her, the more she thinks you aren’t interested.” Leliana chuckled.

Cullen sighed to himself.
“I should have been a farmer.”
The mud curled around their feet as the Inquisition and their Chargers marched towards a sloppy slope. They’d embarked from the pier they’d once found, reinforced by Inquisition requisitions. The rain was heavy, and the visibility was sparse. The fog rolled and danced around bare trees who’s leaves had fallen victim to the downpour, their boney branches poking holes in the vapor blanket.

The Captain’s hood grew heavy with saturation as the rain began to quicken.

“‘The Storm Coast?’ You southerners think of cheery names for these places, don’t you?” Dorian hissed.

“Coastlines are always named for melodrama,” Varric snickered, “‘The Storm Coast.’ ‘The Wounded Coast.’ ‘The Morose Coast.’ It’s just water.”

“‘It’s just water…’” Naomi shook her head, “Right, I’ll remember those words once a giant wave’s got the ship arse over tit.”

The dwarf grinned at the witty rebuttal, opening his mouth to respond.

He was interrupted.

“They call these waters the ‘Waking Sea’ because it’s said that here, the Maker’s wrath was awakened.” Cassandra killed the humor with fact.

“Reminds me of Seheron, only colder.” Iron Bull interjected to lighten the mood, albeit shivering. “Lovely. Shall I fetch you a blanket?” Dorian offered.

“I think there’s another way you can warm me up, Vint.” Bull winked.

“Pardon me, Inquisitor. You’ll find me on the ship when you’re done.” The Tevinter runaway theatrically held his stomach.

“Relax, Sparkler. I hear Qunari are real gentle in their…endeavors.” Varric reassured.

“Must you encourage him, Varric?” Dorian skewered the dwarf with a glare.

“Did you two bicker this much when you hid in the Galley like a pair’o goddamn stowaways?” Naomi cast them a dark stare over her shoulder.

They had little else to say.

The group stopped at the base of the incline where Bull faced his Chargers. Brown water pooled at the crevice where the hill met flatter land, the stones shifting in the soft ground as he turned.

“Alright, our Qunari contact should be up there to meet us. You guys stay down here, I’ll come find you when we’re ready for…whatever.”

“Sounds good, Chief.” Krem responded.

They stood in waiting as the Inquisition party trudged onward.

“Why did you two feel so fervently as to flee Skyhold on this quest of ours?” Naomi looked behind her.

Clearly, the fact that they’d come unannounced was bothering her.

“I have a personal vendetta against red lyrium.” Varric didn’t seem to want to talk about the “why” behind that statement.

“The Venatori are Tevinter’s mess. It’s only right one of us should bear the burden of mopping
them up.” Dorian tried to spruce his soaked mustache.

“Something we agree on, Sparkler.” The dwarf prodded.

“Varric, I want a new nickname.” The mage’s eyebrows folded.

The rain thudded the sparse grass around them. Naomi thought the uphill trek would never end.

“Here we go again…” Cassandra sighed under her tired breath.

“What’s wrong with Sparkler? Not color enough for you?” Varric’s antagonizing forced a smile out of the less-than-enthusiastic Seeker as she continued to listen.

“You must know me better now. Or does the moniker you gave me five minutes after we met still apply?” Dorian defended himself.

“I have the eyes of a story teller. It’s a gift.”

“So, I’m a bit of light you stick in a window sill to impress passerby? All flash, no heat?” The Tevinter mage seemed to linger on the prospect, “Hmm…that’s actually pretty clever.”

“See? Embrace your place in the universe, Sparkler.”

Naomi nor Cassandra could hold in their laughter. The Inquisitor had gone off in a fit, unable to stop herself. It was music in the solemn atmosphere. Bull joined them with his earth-shattering, unexpected, laugh that made the Captain jump.

“Now, there’s a laugh I haven’t heard in quite some time.”

A voice came from over the curve, out of their direct view. They had reached the top of the hill with a few more steps, and Bull held his arms out as if surprised.

“Gat! Last I heard, you were still in Seheron!” A touch of nervousness glinted his voice.

“They finally decided I’d calmed down enough to go back out into the world.” The man answered, his tiny frame falling into Bull’s shadow, “Good to see you again.”

Naomi stayed behind the Iron Bull, swiping a clump of mud from the heel of her boot, observing their new acquaintance without obviosity.

Gat was an elf- shorter than the rest of them. He wore Vallaslin on his face, suggesting Dalish roots. He was dressed like a scout, and smelled of someone who’d been on the Storm Coast for weeks.

Naomi huffed a breath at a wet, frizzled lock of red hair that stuck to her face in annoyance.

It didn’t move.

Perhaps she missed tropical, sticky weather a lot less than she thought.

“Boss, this is Gat. We worked together in Seheron.”

The Captain smiled awkwardly, sidetracked by her wandering mind. That, and she wasn’t exactly sure how to act in front of this Ben-Hassrath agent.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Inquisitor.” Gat addressed her by title.

Naomi’s uncharacteristic concern over formalities quickly dissipated.

“Aye, you as well.” She wiped her hand on her long coat in a failed attempt to dry it, extending it to the Ben-Hassrath agent. Her iron knuckles glistened as lightning ripped above them, and her hidden blade lurked within the gesture.

Gat cautiously embraced her glove in a handshake, “Hisrad’s reports say you’re doing good work.”

“Hisrad?” The Inquisitor giggled, retracting her hand and relaxing it on the hilt of her pistol sword, “Your name is Hisrad? That’s a strange one, indeed.” She mocked Bull.

The Qunari man adjusted his wet eyepatch as he spoke, “We don’t use names under the Qun. Just titles. Mine was ‘Hisrad,’ because I was assigned to secret work. You can translate it as ‘keeper of illusions,’ or-”


“Well, you don’t have to say it like that.” Iron Bull rolled his free eye.

“Nonetheless, it’s a tad refreshing to hear you’re saying nice things about me in your little secret reports.” The Inquisitor smirked.

“Obviously not so secret.” The elf looked to Iron Bull, “What with the Inquisition’s Spymaster
screening said reports, and such.”

His shift in attitude made Naomi nervous. Something felt “off” about this meeting. Friendly, but hostile. Tense, but casual.

Perhaps this was just the way of the Qun?

“*Best let Bull deal with this little snag.*” She concluded.

“Look, Gat-” Bull began.

“Unlike our superiors, I know how it works out here. They’re pacified with reason, for now…if not only because the threat lingers.” Gat shifted his weight, “The Tevinter Imperium is bad enough without the influence of this Venatori cult. If this new form of lyrium helps them seize power in Tevinter, the war with Qunadar could get worse.”

Unpredictably, Dorian would be the one to speak out of turn.

“Yes. Filthy, decadent brutes, the lot of them. I’m certain life would be better for all of us under the Qun.” Dorian raised his hands to the sky in melodrama.

“It is for me, after the Qunari rescued me from slavery in *Tevinter*. I was eight.” Gat’s voice was grave, “The Qun isn’t perfect, but it gave me a better life, and the same can be said for others.”

The Inquisitor wasn’t a fan of slavery, and often, perhaps biasedly, forgot the lands her friend Dorian hailed from still practiced it.

“Yes, a life free from all that pointless free will and independent thought. Such an improvement.” Dorian glowered.

That’s something she could agree with, however, she wondered how slavery provided either.

“The Imperium and the Qunari both have their problems. Just as the Chantry and any other religious faction in Thedas.” Cassandra diffused the poorly-timed debate in lifestyle choices.

Naomi took a deep breath, “In truth, if you folks just wanna rid the area of red lyrium- do it, already. Less problems for me. I have yet to see the reason behind this audience you’ve requested.”

Bull cleared his throat, as if reminding her to let him do the talking.

“*Your* Inquisition sunk a Dreadnought, Inquisitor. The Qunari aren’t happy about it, but they respect you enough to not invade the Frostbacks in an attempt to redeem themselves.” Gat snickered, “They want to impress you. Fan their feathers.”

“Seems a tad unnecessary.”

“Should I have them turn their attention elsewhere?”

Naomi’s neck snapped as her head turned to the side, her eyes narrowing as she nodded at the frail elf, “Is that a threat, mate?”

“No-“

“Sounded like a threat to me.” The buttoned strap that secured her sword unclicked under her thumb. “Whoa, there, boss. Relax. Alliance, remember?” Bull held a pausing hand to her.

Gat exhaled, as if he’d been holding his breath in anticipation, “Rest assured, Inquisitor, all I care about is stopping this red lyrium from reaching Minrathous.”

“A that’s what we need to keep our focus on. Together.” Bull raised a brow to Naomi, “With this stuff, the Vints could make their slaves into an army of magical freaks. We could lose Seheron… and see a giant Tevinter army come marching back down here. That’s not good for anyone.” Bull looked to the raging ocean over the cliff side.

“No, not really. One red-lyrium-army-march and an avalanche later, and we lost Haven.” Varric sighed, “That…can’t happen again. To anyone.”

The rain sheeted over them as they conversed. Naomi shifted her feet onto a spot on the ground with a bit more grass to keep the ground from devouring her boots. She didn’t want to remember Haven- not like that, “What’s the plan, then?”

“Our Dreadnought is safely out of view, and out of range of any Venatori mages on shore. We’ll need to eliminate them first, then signal the Dreadnought so it can come in and take out the smuggler ship when it comes through there.” Gat pointed to a cove a short distance away from them.
“And how’re we goin’ to do that?” The Captain yawned, stretching.

“Split up into two groups to hit two camps of Venatori mages at once.” The elf instructed, “Then, we give the signal.”

“That a sound plan, Bull?” The Inquisitor looked up to her companion.

“Don’t know. I’ve never liked covering a Dreadnought run. Too many ways for crap to go wrong. If our scouts underestmate enemy numbers, we’re dead. If we can’t lock down the Venatori mages, the ship is dead. It’s risky.” He admitted.

“Riskier than letting red lyrium into Minrathous?” Gat asked.

That seemed to interrupted Bull’s thought process.

“Point taken. Let’s go let the Chargers know what’s going on.” Bull directed the party back down the slope.

Instead of leading the descent, Naomi tailed behind them. A familiar, yet foreign pain stretched across her forehead. Her mind still felt as if it was not her own.

“Not now…” She groaned to herself.

Various figures danced in the shadows of the rain. McGrath’s voice hung heavy behind her ears. Whatever her trip into the Nexus had done to her, she feared it was permanent. There was something different about the Storm Coast that prevented her from being at ease. Something looming.

Something dangerous.

She noticed the group ahead of her, stopped and gathered around the Chargers. The Captain caught up with them just to hear the last of Bull’s orders to his mercenary company.

“Once they’re down, send up your signal. That’ll let the Dreadnought know it’s safe to come in.”

“Understood, chief.” Krem saluted.

“Remember, you’re gonna want a volley to start, but don’t get suckered into fighting at range. They’ve got mages.” Bull didn’t do a very good job of hiding the worry in his voice.

“It’s alright. We’ve got a mage of our own.” Krem winked.

“I’m not a mage!” The Dalish elf in the group scolded.

“Get in close and take their enchanter down before he takes over the battlefield.” Iron Bull continued his lecture.

“He’ll be dead before he knows it.” A harsh Orlesian voice purred through the mercenary group.

“Just…pay attention, alright? The Vints want this red lyrium shipment. Bad.” Bull sighed.

“Yes, I know. Thanks, mother.” Krem laughed.

“Alright, Chargers. Horns up! Hit ‘em hard and hit ‘em fast. When this is over, drinks are on me!” Bull raised his axe in the air with strength…and anxiety.

“You got it, chief! Chargers, double time! Let’s move!” Krem and the Chargers began their march to the spot marked on the map, towards the secondary Venatori camp.

The Inquisition and their new Ben-Hassrath escort started for the primary target. Cassandra noted Naomi’s demeanor as she walked besides her, not quite sure how to address it or soothe the ailing Captain. She chose not to say anything. Her attention was drawn to the conversation between Gat and Bull in front of them.

“You gave your Chargers the easier target.” Gat taunted.

Naomi wasn’t fond of the elf agent. He came off as too dedicated, almost. A radical. Arrogant. Above the rest because he was part of the Qun.

“You think?” Bull seemed irritated, as well.

“Lower and farther away from the smugglers ship? It’s much less likely to be heavily defended.”

“Is it so wrong to take the harder job, bein’ in charge of a company, ‘nd all?” Naomi called to the front, her voice ringing much hotter than she intended— as usual.

“If your company can’t handle a challenge, maybe.” Gat’s initial politeness seemed to have worn off.

“Suppose we’ll do the heavily lifting, then. Just like old times, huh?” The Iron Bull put a rest to the conversation before the Inquisitor’s temper took the best of her.

Gat made it difficult.
“You wish you were back in Tevinter, mage? No soldiers to guard you here, no slaves to wait on you...” He asked Dorian.

The Inquisitor’s hands rolled into balls, her teeth clenched to remove the bite from words she’d swallow instead of spew.

“It’s the lack of fashion that really strikes fear into my heart.” Dorian deflected the insult with tact.

“You know nothing of fear.” Gat mumbled under his breath.

Naomi rolled her eyes, sick of the prick-elf running his mouth.

“And do you intend to teach me?” Dorian almost sounded like he wanted to fight.

“No. You serve the Inquisition, and the Ben-Hassrath wish an alliance. For now, that is enough.”

“Thank the Lord almighty that you deem it so, lest I soil the ground you walk on.” Naomi growled.

“Easy, there, Spitfire. We’re almost done here.” Varric winked at her.

Gat responded with a warning regarding their mission, “Get ready, we’re close.”

The argument would have to wait.

Naomi felt a knot tighten in her stomach. She’d dealt with magic before, but she never knew what to expect. She had a disadvantage not shared among those who’d travel with her-ignorance.

Alienage.

Cassandra held a strong arm in front of her, her shield in hand.

“Allow me to go ahead, Inquisitor.”

“Alright, then.” Was she could muster out of her depressed lungs.

A heated voice dismantled any time for strategy.

“Ah, my fellow countrymen. Hello!” Dorian had already engaged with the smuggler’s camp.

The mages responded with fire in their hands, the others around them drawing their swords.

“I don’t think they’re in the mood for a homecoming, Sparkler.” Varric took his crossbow into his hands, taking aim to the farthest mage, “I’m thinking...a monologue?”

A bolt whistled toward their combatant, being blocked by a large Venatori warrior’s tower shield. Cassandra rushed the man, shield-bashing him off balance, cutting at the opening it provided. Varric took another shot at the mage behind the clash, just missing the Seeker’s skull.

“Varric!” She shouted behind her, dodging her foe affront.

The mage Venatori fell to her side, Bianca’s bolt buried deep into his eye socket.

“Sorry, Seeker. He was going to fry you!”

Dorian reanimated the dead mage at his command, the body glowing a haunting purple. The necromancy puppet cast a wintry spell upon his once-ally, freezing a secondary enemy mage mid-cast. As if inspired by the frozen statue, Varric shot another bolt at the sculpture, shattering it to bits.

“For good measure.” He reloaded the crossbow.

“But it was so pretty,” Dorian pouted, “It would have made a fine decoration for the dining hall.”

Naomi, engaged with a female rogue of sorts, leaned backward as a dagger skirled above her field of vision. The Inquisitor barely got an attack off before Bull cleaved the agile attacker in half, her torso sliding gruesomely to the Captain’s feet.

She gave Bull the most disgusted face she could muster, “That’s just...”

“Fucking awesome?”

Naomi rolled her eyes, scowling as she tip-toed over the messy splotch of entrails. Bull turned, assisting Cassandra with the heavily-armored Venatori knight. The man’s rectangular shield was something to be reckoned with, but Bull’s bloodthirsty Reaver axe quickly claimed his life with the help of the Seeker as a distraction.

“ Took care of the archers.” Gat reported, rejoining the blood-infused camp, “The smuggler’s ship is pulling into the cove.” He pointed down to the ocean as he stood next to a previously existing bonfire on the edge of the cliff.

The Inquisitor sighed, “Bunch’a daft twats. Think they’d learnt by now.” She wiped her hand across her face, ridding her skin of mess that had clung to it.
She hadn’t done much, yet she still found herself uncomfortably dirtied with the crusting blood of combat. “Learning would imply that these cretins had any ounce of sense, mind you. Clearly, that’s not the case.” Dorian snorted.

Gat looked to Bull, who responded with a shrug, “He’s one of the good ones.” “A good Tevinter.’ Right…signaling the Dreadnought.” The elf Ben-Hassrath knelt to the fire, fumbling with something before a red light shot up into the sky. “A flare, of sorts? Interesting.” Naomi observed as it ascended.

“Chargers already sent theirs up. See ‘em down there?” Iron Bull pointed to the Chargers on the nearby shore.

Krem returned a wave. “I knew you gave them the easier job.” The elf rolled his eyes. “Christ mate, must you comment on everything?” Naomi looked to Gat. “Inquisitor.” Cassandra hushed her.

Naomi pinched her temple, “Devil take me if this lad isn’t just acting the maggot…” “There’s the Dreadnought. That brings back memories.” Iron Bull changed the subject.

A signaling bell rang as a huge ship lurched through the clouds of rain as would a summoned demon through a hex. It was one of the largest structures Naomi had ever seen on the water, a floating fortress as it were. The curled spikes of the stern were ominous, the length of the vessel—physical feat. Just as she’d taken in just how big it was, the Dreadnought launched a fatal shot against the smuggler’s ship.

The shot told her a lot about the technology behind the ship. She processed the information with a precision. “One shot. Huge bang, bright flash. Heavy, large ammunition—big enough to disable a small ship. Weights them down. Requires a lot of gunpowder to shoot something that big. Wouldn’t be hard to blow Her up if we shot to the proper storage bay. The Qunari race have big hands—can they even make small ammunition bits? Do they trust humans or elves within the Qun with their ‘secret’ war tactic?” “Nice one.” Iron Bull laughed, interrupting her analysis.

The Captain remained silent. “Are you not pleased to have a fleet of them behind your Inquisition?” Gat asked the silent Inquisitor.

Naomi considered his words. “’Spose it’s better than no naval support, save for me ship, aye.” “Crap.” Iron Bull moaned.

The intel was wrong. There were more than a “few” mages onboard the smugglers ship who now walked ashore where the Chargers remained. It was at least six that had evacuated their vessel in time. “Whelp, an almost alliance, it would seem. Better luck next time. Sound the retreat.” Naomi rested her hand on the Sword. “Your men need to hold that position, Bull.” The Inquisitor looked to Gat, not believing the words he’d just disgraced their ears with. “They do that, they’re dead.” The Iron Bull’s brows creased.

“And if they don’t, the Venatori retake it and the Dreadnought is dead. You’d be throwing away an alliance between the Inquisition and the Qunari! And you…” Gat was almost pleading, “You’d be declaring yourself Tal-Vashoth! If they die, it’d be for a noble cause, Hissrad.” “Sod your alliance, you mouthy prick!” Naomi spat on the ground in front of him, “I’ve had ‘nough of you and your venomous shite!”

Cassandra took the Inquisitor’s wrist into her hand, shaking her head, “No,” as she pulled for a gun, “I question your methods of rationalization.” She whispered to Naomi.

Gat gave the Captain a look without responding, still yelling at Bull for his lapse in honoring the Qun, “With all you’ve given the Inquisition, half the Ben-Hassrath think you’ve
betrayed us already! I stood up for you, Hisssrad. I told them you would never become Tal-Vashoth!” Gat swiped the air, “You need to do what’s right. For this alliance, and for the Qun.”
“What in the blazes is this Tal-Va-whatever?” Naomi demanded answers.
“Disowned by the Qun. Dead to everyone.” Dorian clarified, “Punishable by execution, no trial necessary!”
“They’re my men.” Bull ignored the side conversations, locked in his argument with Gat.
“If we willingly sacrifice our forces for a greater Inquisition, ask yourself: How different are we from Corypheus or the Venatori?” Cassandra reasoned with Iron Bull.
“Seeker has a point.” Varric grimaced as he watched the Venatori quickly approaching the Chargers. Naomi’s infamous smile stretched across her face, “No mages, no threat, it would seem.” Her hand gripped the Sword, “Not to the Chargers, the ship, or this blasted alliance.”
“No! It’s too far of a distance, you can’t!” Cassandra grabbed arm by the crook of her elbow, “Adibas told me what that thing does to you. You must stop being so careless with your life. Thedas depends on—”
“Shall I sit in Skyhold, then? Never to see battle, never to take a risk? Shall I have a servant to shuffle my papers in fear of a cut on my finger?” Naomi snatched her elbow away from the Seeker, “You forget so easily that before I was the Inquisitor, I was an Assassin. I took oaths, I swore by a Creed, Cassandra, a Creed that I intend to follow until the very end of my days.”
A fight broke out beneath them, the mages unleashing their attack on the Chargers. Naomi watched for a moment, turning back to Seeker Pentaghast, “I’m going to help them. You can help me, or you can lecture me afterward. That decision is yours to make, but not this one, lass.”
The Captain stepped backwards, dematerializing before protest, leaving shimmering specks of light rocking to the ground before those that would tell her to remain unengaged.
“Damn it!” Cassandra almost slipped as she turned on her heel, running as fast as she could down the slope, stumbling and swearing as the ground slid and betrayed her feet.

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Blurred vision, a ringing in her ears, and a green glow that became quiet within the orb of the Sword of Eden.
Exhaustion.
Raw instinct.
These were what greeted the Inquisitor as she joined the Chargers in the quarrel.
The water trickled from her blade as Naomi released an arch of light towards the pursuers, sending them to their backs for a moment. Already, she panted heavy in the cold, wet air.
“Stay behind me.” She ordered, sheathing the Sword.
She took the Staff from her back, swinging it wildly to deflect a flung boulder at her charge. The pointed end protruded from under her arm as if a scorpion ready to strike. Arching her back and launching the spear, she watched it pierce the heart of the nearest Venatori.
Naomi translocated to the Staff, placing her feet on the dead man’s chest as he fell. With a mighty push into a flip, she pulled the spear from his corpse, landing just in time to swing the weapon ferociously.
An arrow impaled the Venatori closest to her, the Dalish Charger cheering in victory.
Utterings in tongues began to escape the farthest Venatori. His voice was low and poison, rattling her gut that told her to run.
But she couldn’t.
The Apple at the end of the Staff was covered in red as the heavy, blunt weapon broke bones and skin around her. The mages were all but worthless at close range, or taken by surprise. A shaky hand pulled a pistol from her vested holster, shooting a mage who’d almost caught her with a lightning strike.
“Two more,” she choked to herself.

Naomi’s free hand unsheathed her pistol sword just in time to parry a staff coming down on her, the wood scraping along the blade that aligned with her spine. She stumbled forward from the break in momentum as the Venatori’s staff met the sword’s end. With a familiar jab, the Captain’s blade protruded his stomach, her finger pulling the hilted trigger. His innards blew to the ground, the body hanging limp, enveloping the murderous steel. Naomi fell to her knee in the as the high tide came in, lapping at the skewered body that weighed on one wrist, almost washing away the pistol that armed the other.

She watched the foamy water bubble with red and corruption as it retreated into the ocean, leaving a trail of bloody sand snaking to the stormy depths as if the waves themselves begged for a sacrifice.

Her eyes lifted to the Dreadnought looming in the distance. There she knelt, exasperated after having slain five Venatori mages with means that they did not understand. The ship rolled upon the large chops as a conqueror of the horizon.

She was humbled.

“Inquisitor!” Cassandra ran in front of Naomi, kneeling into a crouch, her shield blocking her own left side completely as her chin met her knee. A flame dissipated on the other side of the Seeker’s shield, her body only moving slightly as her brace was too strong to be faltered.

“Nice block.” The Inquisitor whispered, “I owe you my thanks.”

She stood, pulling the Captain to her feet and kicking the body off the blade.

Cassandra shook her head, “You can thank me by ceasing this reckless behavior!”

Naomi gave her a tired shrug, “My recklessness comes quite in handy.”

Cassandra took a defensive stance, shield in hand, sword pointed outward, Naomi blocked behind her.

“Eck..” Naomi grimaced, touching a faint wound at her side.

Someone, at some point, during the shuffle had got a good jab at her.

The wet sand beneath them rumbled, the returning high tide rippled. Both women were rocked to their heel.

The neglected Venatori mage’s ramblings grew louder, now.

“We got the rest to safety- one mage can’t take down a ship! Come on, get out of there!” Varric shouted over the rain.

The solid, wet sand began to shatter, sending shallow fissures through the rolling beach. The uneven ground began to move, twist, and wane.

A mountain rose before them. It was a sand-encased being who slowly revealed itself, grumbling to life as the Venatori cast his spell, controlling the large creature. Its head was just short of the height of the cliff, it’s arms- one covered in flesh, one nothing but bone- stretched the length of the war table in Skyhold.

“A Giant.” Cassandra began to step back, slowly, easing Naomi behind her, “We need to run.”

The Captain’s mouth hung, her lungs failing to provide the air necessary for words.

The Giant was mangled, as if it had been a carcass left behind by a previous battle. Gaping, ragged, shark-like wounds littered its body, chunks of flesh missing from its thigh and torso.

Cassandra grabbed the Inquisitor’s arm, darting for the dwarf who fired a shot at the Venatori mage controlling the purple monstrosity. It was deflected with magic.

“Faster!” He shouted, loading Bianca with another bolt.

A fist slammed the ground before them, blocking the two women from the trail leading to salvation. They fell, scurrying with haste, leaving claw marks in the sand from where they urged the earth to return them to their feet.

The fist began to slide towards them, the large hand opening as it did, the sand accumulating into its palm as it charged them. Without much thought, Naomi drew her flintlocks from behind her, firing two shots into the grappling pursuer. It bought them some time, as the Giant roared and withdrew his hand.
Thunder crackled, fading back into the clouds. The waves of the Storm Coast crumbled and crashed against the Dreadnought as it began to turn in the distance.

“Any ideas?” Naomi asked, turning to face the beast. “Keep running!” Cassandra grabbed her, arching around the previous mark, hoping to run at an angle where the Giant wouldn’t be able to reach them.

An explosion of wood blocked their escape this time. The Giant hand flung a rowboat to its demise, splinters of the travels of old cascading through the air. Thunder crackled once more. And again. And again. Something wasn’t right. An explosion, the sounds of burning, and a roar.

Naomi turned to find the Giant holding a cannonball, one much larger than she’d ever encountered. The smoke from the Dreadnought indicated it had fired at the creature. The Captain wiped her nose with the back of her sleeve, her nose dripping blood that creased through the corner of her mouth, around her chin, and down her neck.

“Fuckin’ hell.” Lightning. Thunder. A cry for war hailed from the sky. The Giant before them wound up his new toy, returning it to its sender. Cassandra buckled over, her hands on her knees, panting for breath. She’d run to Varric, dragging Naomi behind her. The Inquisitor hadn’t even realized she’d been moving. Her gaze was locked to the scene before her. The crinkle of metal. The screams of a burning crew. The explosion of the Dreadnought. The flames igniting the alliance. The smoky ashes of much-needed naval support twisting up into the blackened clouds.

This was her fault. “We better get moving before that Venatori remembers the reason why he woke that thing up.” Varric turned and dashed up the trail leading deeper into the Storm Coast. Cassandra silently agreed, taking off behind him, grabbing the wrist of the frozen Captain behind her, like trying to lead a stubborn horse to water.

“Stay.” Consus’s pre-recorded voice brought Naomi to tears. It wasn’t relief, or familiarity, or the warmth of her friend’s voice that brought tears to her eyes. It was because she knew she’d listen blindly. Just like she’d follow the Creed—blindly. And that in that moment she realized, he knew this would happen. He knew, and he did nothing to prevent it. Just like the Anchor. Like what happened to Haven. Everything.

She ripped her hand from Cassandra’s grasp like the good little peon the Assassin Brotherhood had raised—had trained, had brainwashed, had stripped her of the free will she’d fought her entire life to protect.

Cassandra nearly fell as her sprint was interrupted by the freeing of her companion’s hand. “What are you doing?!” She shouted. The Giant turned toward the Inquisitor, slowly, calculating—its walking, dead stature sending fear down into the satiated belly of the Storm Coast itself.

It had gotten its sacrifice. The Dreadnought. Those who’d been on it. And the Inquisition had been granted a windfall in doing so.
It arrived on shuddering, thunderous wings of black leather with a white line edging from the tip to the joint, mirroring the ferocious waves it soared over. It arrived in scales that matched the stormiest of skies, with small glints of orange in patterns that resembled the sun breaking through the dark clouds. It arrived with horns that curled out and around it’s hungering jaws, white like the boning that protruded in a natural barrier above its eyes.

Lightning crackled from its throat, charging until it was released from its gaping teeth. The thunder clapped beneath its wings.

Again.

And again.

This is what Consus wanted her to see. He wanted her to fall into embarrassment of her misinterpretation. He wanted Naomi to bear witness to the corporeal embodiment of the sea, of a true storm.

“A Vinsomer…” Cassandra eased as she whispered. The Inquisitor turned to see her, Varric, Dorian, and the Iron Bull lined up behind her.

“Oh, look- a dragon. What a perfect way to ruin our day.” Dorian sighed.

“Seeker, you’re a dragon expert. What do we do now?” Varric placed lowered his crossbow as the Vinsomer landed on the beach, flickering it’s scaled tail like a knight with a flail.

It circled its prey.

“No get killed. By either of them. Let’s get going.” The Seeker sheathed her sword.

Neither Bull nor the Inquisitor moved.

Naomi couldn’t tell if he was taken more aback by the battle of beasts or the flame-engulfed Dreadnought.

The Vinsomer took the first swipe as if an angry cat toying with a mouse. A ravaging claw caught the Giant’s left leg, tripping him onto his back. The dragon arched its head to the sky, almost as if drawing power from the weather itself. Ripples of an electric current hummed and glowed in a blueish-purple hue, filling one gill-like membrane after another. Without any indication, the dragon’s head snapped forward, releasing a current into the Giant’s body as it flopped upon the sand.

“Okay, obvious shortcomings of this trip put aside, that’s badass.” Bull lifted his axe to his shoulder as he watched.

“What is the purpose of this?” Naomi wondered to herself.

“Enough. We are leaving. NOW.” Cassandra grabbed the Inquisitor by her shoulder guard, pulling her along, “This is ridiculous.”

The Inquisition left the beach, but Naomi couldn’t tear herself away from the scene that grew father and farther away from them.

The seizing giant.

The burning ship.

The dragon who looked at her as they left.

Naomi’s heart tripped.

The Vinsomer watched her in the distance, eyeing her carefully.

“Sintesla.”

A shrill cry echoed from the beast’s bowels into the sky before feeding on the carcass that lay in the sands below.

“Her name is Sintesla.”
Enemy of My Enemy

Chapter Summary

“You are free to choose, but you are not free from the consequence of your choice. The universal paradox.”
-Unknown

Chapter Notes

(More in-depth explanations with pictures in The Codex)

Sages: Sages are human reincarnations of Aita, a member of the Isu and the husband of Juno. Sages are typically born with personalities and memories of their own, but they also possess the memories of Aita, which usually manifest themselves as visions at some point during adulthood and later throughout a Sage's life.

The Manuscript: The Voynich manuscript is an illustrated codex hand-written in First Civilization writing.

The Observatory: It operated by placing a Vial, containing a drop of blood from the person to be observed, into a Crystal Skull located within an armillary sphere. The device would then project what the person was seeing and hearing into the room.

Vials: Blood vials are small crystalline cubes, designed by the First Civilization to contain the blood of an individual, for the purpose of viewing their actions through the Observatory.

Crystal Skull: The Crystal Skulls were Pieces of Eden that functioned as communication and observational devices, projecting audio-visual surveillance through connection with a living being's blood in a vial.

Kenway’s hand was placed gently on the young Templar’s back, steering her through the winding halls of the Paris Bureau to meet with the Mentor.
“Is that a…?” A member of the Assassin Brotherhood whispered in a hushed tone as Edward pardoned a blindfolded Élise from bumping into someone.

One by one, Kenway’s Brothers and Sisters paused, stopping to observe her with unmasked criticism.
“Bloody Templar…” More hushed judgments.

Élise snickered at the remarks, “You could at least give me the dignity to see the faces of those who’d wish me a long, painful death.”
“They’re a touch paranoid when it comes to security.” Edward consoled.
“Two right turns, seventy-three steps, then down a flight of stairs, a left, and another right. Did I get all that?”

Kenway looked at her and sighed. He shouldn’t be surprised. But, he was.
“What in the hell have you done this time, Pisspot?” An Irishman approached them swiftly, angered by the Templar-cross-bearing woman Edward brought into the Assassin safe house.
“A pleasure, Master Bellec.” Élise grinned, “It’s been awhile since I’ve heard that scolding-hot
voice reprimand me.”

Bellec halted.

He recognized the dark-red hair, the innocent side-grin, the gentle freckles over porcelain, unblemished skin…save for the birthmark on her neck behind her ear- a patch of skin two shades darker than the rest of her.

“E-Elizabeth?” His eyes bounced from her to Edward, as if asking both of them.

“The Templars have marked her for death, Bellec. She-”

“So you brought her here?” Bellec’s teeth chattered.

“’The Brotherhood has resources, manpower…”’ Élise mocked.

“Smart mouth on you, still?” Edward spat.

“Edward, Mirabeau is-” Bellec tried to warn them of their new company.

Mentor Mirabeau interrupted the harsh reunion and the underhanded threats that surrounded them, “Well, well…what do we have here?”

A hush fell over the ill-tempered Assassins.

Edward positioned Élise in the middle of the now-gathered crowd, facing the man who questioned them.

“Go ahead.” He whispered to his prisoner.

“My name is-“ Élise began.

“For heaven’s sake, take that blindfold off. Ridiculous.” The Mentor scoffed, “And release her hands, Kenway. We are Assassins, not barbarians from the middle ages. We do not shackle our guests.”

Edward’s hidden blade shot from his gauntlet, slicing the ropes and letting them drop to the floor. He half expected her to lunge for one of his flintlocks.

Carefully, the blindfold was lifted from her, revealing her steel-grey eyes.

The first sight of hers was Bellec’s tears running freely. It made her hurt, like the lump forming in her throat; like the venom under her curled tongue. Despite the hate she had for the Assassins, Bellec would always hold a special place in her dislodged heart.

Behind him were the dimly-lit stone walls of the circular room that held banners, paintings, and metal brackets for the candles and lanterns. Grandiose, red-carpeted, golden-railed stairs curved on either side of a central balcony where a large Assassin’s Insignia cloth draped from the railing.

Above the banner stood Mentor Mirabeau, his councilmen on either side of him, all eagerly awaiting her speech that Kenway had promised them.

“My name is Élise de la Serre. My father was Francois de la Serre, Grand Master of the Templar Order. I’ve come to ask for your help- and offer it in return.” She continued.

“That’s not your bloody name, and he wasn’t your fuckin’ father.” A whimpering Bellec took a deep breath through his nose, catching his temper.

“Pierre,” Edward rested his hand on his shoulder.

Bellec shrugged it off.

More chatter erupted in the meeting room. The Mentor silenced them with a raised palm, “It is a pleasure to find you alive and well, mademoiselle de la Serre. I have heard much about you. Please, continue.” He offered.

“Your words are kind to me.” She bit her lip, taking a silent breath.

“I can do this. This is what we planned.” The young woman dug deep for the courage she paraded until now, “I admit, you are not a man with whom I would normally parlay, monsieur. But my father is dead, as are my allies in the Templar Order. If I must turn to the Assassins to hunt the truth, so be it.”

A councilwoman spoke from next to the Mentor, “I say we kill her and send her head back as a warning.”

“Enough!” Mentor Mirabeau warned those that would continue to interrupt, “You’re aware that your brother, Shay, betrayed our Order when he stole the Manuscript, no? Might I add, he himself is the accused killer of the late Francois de la Serre, and alleged thief of the Precursor Box stolen
from your estate.”
“I am aware, monsieur.” Anxiety tingled in her fingertips.
“So answer me this, mademoiselle de la Serre…How do I know you weren’t part of this? Have you a sign of good faith?” The questions that Mirabeau asked her were not unreasonable.

“Deliver the message.” Durga, the voice of the Koh-i-Noor, instructed.

A bead of sweat trickled down the neck of the plotting Templar. Edward’s brow furrowed at her paleness—her shift from a wolf to a trembling sheep. Even her voice seemed uncannily suspicious.

“The Manuscript that Kenway etched from his maddened dreams—have you lost it, no?” She scolded herself in her mind for her shaky delivery.

Edward’s teeth ground on top of each other, “How would you know of the Manuscript’s pages?”

Élise ignored him, doing her best to pretend he wasn’t standing next to her.

“Oui, I would have knowledge of it.” Mirabeau answered.

“Shay is…” Her heart would leap from her chest if her ribcage hadn’t been there to restrain it, “My brother shares the blood of the Sages. After Sage Roberts fell, he started to change. Among those changes, he gained certain…abilities. Abilities that he used to decode the Manuscript.”

Élise retrieved a small box from a satchel held by her belt. She opened it slowly to reveal the Koh-i-Noor, a sky-blue gem that glistened in the candlelight, “I know this because it is he who showed it to me before going rogue one year ago. It’s probable he’s sorted much more of it by now, but one thing can be certain. The Koh-i-Noor is his next target, for he wants the fruits of the Precursor Box for himself. The gem is the key.”

“You—you played me a fool! You acted as if you had no idea—” Kenway’s eyes narrowed. He was much harder to deny, now.

“Captain Kenway. Please. Not now…” Mentor Mirabeau begged.

A councilman whispered fervently, “We should seize that artifact immediately, Mentor. The Koh-i-Noor is the most powerful of the Pieces of Eden…”

“There will be no such doing.” Mentor Mirabeau rubbed his chin, “So, Shay Cormac would be the next Sage— the reincarnation of Juno’s husband Aita. Interesting.” He searched the artifact in the Templar woman’s hand for any hints of fallacy, “And you truly stole this from the Templars, then? What motive would have to do as such?”

“I wish only for what everyone at this assembly wishes for, monsieur.” Élise considered her words, deciding that a short answer would be best.

“And what is that, child?” The Mentor asked.

“The truth.”

Mirabeau studied her, mulling over her plea.

“The mystery of the Manuscript is not lost upon us. It was brave of Edward to use the Crystal Ball to speak with the First Civilization…Brave of you to steal the Koh-i-Noor from the Templars.” The Mentor continued to ponder, “And to thwart the resolution of such efforts would truly be a waste of an opportunity.”

“What would you ask of the Assassins, traitor?” The councilwoman, who once ordered for her head, asked.

“Information. Help me find Shay. In return, I will assist you in the endeavors of the Pieces of Eden, beginning with the Precursor Box.”

“And what of the Templars?” Bellec was confused by her choice of bargaining material.

“Allow me to be clear on this matter.” Élise’s eyes danced between faces among the crowd, the wolf returning to her essence, “I belong to neither the Templars nor the Assassins. I dream of a day where our Orders may be reunited, where we can work together through history instead of tearing it apart from the shadows. I would offer myself as the first to make this amend. But it is you, and only you, that will allow me.” She looked to the Mentor on the balcony.

“You say you want the truth, harmony—all those things appear swell from the mouth. But what of your brother? He must answer for his crimes.” The councilman asked, “You cannot expect us to
allow such treasonous acts go unpunished.”
“And what of the Templars? You cannot expect us to harbor you- to protect you from their search party.” The councilwoman followed.
“These are matters to be discussed at a later date.” Mirabeau interjected, “Very well. I permit Master Bellec and Mentor Kenway to exchange information with you where they deem necessary. You have the Assassins and our resources backing your search for the Sage, Shay Cormac.”
The council standing on either side of him erupted into protest, as did the voices from down below.
“Plainly, this discussion is better conducted in private,” He spoke loudly over the small riot, “If you will excuse us, mademoiselle de la Serre.” Mentor Mirabeau presented Élise with a bow.
“Certainly.” She returned a slight nod.
Bellec gently grasped Élise’s arm as they departed the meeting chamber, Edward walking behind them to hide her from harsh stares and daggered tongues. Although, it felt more like chasing her.
He had a few questions.
The three of them hurriedly navigated through the underground network of narrow passageways that had been paths for more than one mission in Paris.
“What’s the rush?” Élise asked sarcastically.
“Wait ‘till we’re behind closed doors, kid.” Bellec did not share her humor.
They saw a door at the end of the hall, the gentle fire lighting their way from dangling lanterns.
The three of the scuttled into the room, the Irishman locking it firmly behind them.
His hand still clenched the key in his fingers, the metal rattling within the lock. Bellec’s lover of ten years, Gael O’Mailey, was unable to bare children. Ever since Élise and Shay were born, they’d been in the couples’ care. The two Mentors never claimed to be the siblings’ true parents, who they told the children had been “killed in heroic acts of duty.”
Slowly, he turned toward the young woman, fresh tears stinging his cheeks, “W-we should be safe, here…” He sniffed, “There are those who’d betray Mirabeau’s demands, even if it meant their execution. We will supply at Market tomorrow morn’ and set sail on the Jackdaw,”
He wiped his eyes with his coat sleeve, “I can’t believe, after all this time,” He was unashamed at his emotional display, “You’re alive.”
“I am, indeed.” She let off a nervous smile, uncomfortable with such heart-touching conversation.
Admittedly, Élise still looked to Bellec as a second father, and the late Mentor O’Mailey as a second mother. They’d been the ones that woke up in the middle of the night to feed her and her brother when they were babes. They’d been the ones to calm her as she cried until early hours of the dawn from night terrors. They’d been the ones to qualm any altercation between the tiny siblings.
“You know I tried, right? Tried to find you? Tried to save you?” Bellec shook his head, “We got to your brother…God help me, I was so grief struck. I couldn’t care for him. They put him up with a nice Irish foster family out in the Americas, but…Our family was ripped apart- you, Shay, kidnapped; Gael, dead.”
“Master Bellec,” She rested her hand on his shoulder, “I know. It’s alright, really. I didn’t turn out so bad, did I?” Élise gave him a gentle smile.
Bellec embraced Élise into a strong hug, disregarding any concern for making her feel awkward. After a moment, she returned the gesture, hugging him as tightly as she could.
Edward sat on a stool, his elbow resting on a small desk as he watched the midnight oil burn. He’d been so focused on finding Naomi, of securing the alliance between him and the young Templar- he hadn’t given himself time to reflect on who she was to him, or who she appeared to be. Memories of Naomi’s strange sickness flickered behind his eyes- the unexplained year-long voyage to Ireland, the change in her shape upon her return, the constant trips they took to the Dublin Bureau on “business.”
“Shay is a Sage? Like Roberts?” Edward muted his thoughts and interrupted the tender moment. 

Élise and Bellec separated, and would have laughed at each other’s vulnerability if Kenway’s question hadn’t been so corrupting of the reunion.

“He is. It’s the eyes that mark him.” She admitted, “One blue, one green- one pupil smaller than the other. It’s true he joined the Templar Rite by choice after the events in Portugal, but…” She gripped her elbow with her arm, averting her gaze to the floor, “I was there when the memories came. The memories of Aita. He was lost in himself. He was no longer my brother. He’d gone mad.” She shook her head, as if not wanting to remember, “This whole time, I knew he was the one who’d killed Francois de la Serre. I didn’t want to admit it to myself- or anyone else. I framed an Assassin. I made my denial a reality.”

Bellec and Edward let her continue to speak. The two men looked at each other in surprise, both in disappointment and confusion. Bellec leaned against the locked door behind him, crossing his legs at the ankle, and his arms at his waist.

“I just wanted to protect him,” Élise pulled a small handkerchief from her pocket, wiping her eyes as she sat on the bed, “He’s all I’ve ever had. And now, I can’t even find him.”

Kenway broke out into a laugh. The Templar woman’s temple pinched, and Bellec shed a disgusted snarl, “What’s the matter with you?” He asked.

“Christ, mate, you’re a clever one.” Edward glowered, “Those are crocodile tears if I’ve ever seen them.”

“How dare you!” She screeched.

“Drop the act, Elizabeth. You may fool Bellec and yourself, but I’ll not be so easily betrayed.”

The woman’s entire character shifted. Her eyes blackened. Cold. Animalistic.

“Why must you squander everything?” She growled.

Edward stood up, placing his hands on his hips, “Tell me. Do you know of the Observatory?”

“Yes. Never heard the end of ‘Captain Kenway’s Folly’ growing up.” Élise answered.

“So, you’re aware it’s capabilities, then?”

“You mean what it could do before you and McNamara broke it, essentially? Save me the details. I’ve heard the stories.” Élise rolled her eyes.

“You’re a right brat, aren’t you? Gael and I raised you better.” Bellec scoffed.

“You’re hardly one to talk. I’ve seen the amount of drink you swallow, old man.” She shot back.

Edward stood and grabbed her arm, pulling her from the bed and forcing her to sit on the stool that he left warm. A yelp escaped her, but he spoke angrily anyway, “When Roberts removed the Skull from the center, it activated some kind of…contraption. Made the whole damned place stop working. Adéwalé, Ah Tabai, Anne, myself- we charted the Sage. I retrieved the Skull. A simple operation, so I thought.” He removed a small, crystal square from his pocket. It contained a red dot at its center, “When McNamara and I found the Observatory, there were thousands of these Vials all along the walls. The Sage drew Naomi’s blood in an empty vessel for demonstration...When he put it in the Crystal Skull we could see everything she saw, hear everything she heard.”

“But, that would’ve been you, and, well…the Observatory, right? Weren’t you all in it?” Bellec asked.

“Aye, but…” Edward struggled, “My point is, it worked, and I…” He sighed, “I kept the Vial of her blood. Or, received it as a gift, rather…” Captain Kenway’s eyes swelled behind his masked strength.

He struggled not with the concern of how Élise would take the newfound information he was about to share with her. No, her sore attitude had made quick work of that. Edward struggled with the memories of Naomi, of her face before the scar, the smile and the ecstasies of finding the Observatory together, the Sage at their side. “What would she say,” he wondered, “to find that the same soul who’d maimed her passed to her son? And that it was my fault…”

“Remember when you asked me how I found you?” He voiced aloud.

“I do.” Élise was quiet.
“I gave the Skull a Vial of my own blood as a test, to make sure it still functioned. And then I found you.”

“Make sense right now, Edward.” Élise’s brow pinched in between her eyes.

“And imagine my surprise finding Shay upon offering Naomi’s Vial.” He continued.

“What are you implying?” True tears ran down her face above her quivering lips.

“François de la Serre led you astray, Elizabeth. The Templars were never your blood kin.”

“Enough, Kenway.” Bellec growled, “That’ll do.”

Edward’s focus pointed back to the Irishman, “What’s this?”

Bellec’s aura gave away his secrets—his guilt.

“You knew about this? This whole blasted time?” Edward raised his voice, “All those trips, and letters, and visits—”

“Enough.” Bellec repeated himself.

“Tell me, if your convictions are so strong to deny my lineage, Edward, who might that be? What are you trying to say?” Élise grew angry, “Someone tell me what you’re all dancing around, now.”

Bellec’s voice was but a whisper when he spoke, “Perhaps another time would be most appropriate.”

“Perhaps,” you both start talking.” Élise pulled a pistol to Kenway’s forehead, and held a knife in the other, “I should’ve known better than to trust a pair of washed up Assassins.”

“Calm down, Élise,” Bellec begged, standing up slowly, “This isn’t the right time to speak of this.”

“Then write.” She snarled, clicking the pistol with her other hand.

Bellec did his best to calm the situation, coming at a loss trying to say what was on his mind, “I was there when Captain McNamara gave birth to you and your brother.”

“McNamara?” She spun around, “You’re fucking ly—”

Edward took the pistol from her hand, twisting her wrist and disarming the other of her blade. He kept the woman in a hold, his forearm around her neck.

“Edward! Get your fuckin’ hands off her!” Bellec grabbed his arms, pulling them down.

The three of them eyed each other, unsure who to align themselves with.

Élise counted the stone tiles on the floor in an effort to calm herself.

“Does that mean…you’re our father?” Her gaze lifted to Kenway, “Truly, our father?”

Edward shook his head, his voice cracking when he tried to form a single word, “Aye.”

Her lip raised into a scour, “Horse shit. That’s madness. You?” She grabbed him by the folds of his tattered hood, “You?”

“You have the Sense, don’t you? You must. I have it. She has it.” His tortured gaze hampered the fire in Élise’s stomach, “Use it.”

The truth stared back at her, only in the forms of auras in a sick twist of relief and torment.

“Does Shay know?” She whispered.

“I wouldn’t know.”

Élise yelled as she gripped the wooden stool beneath her, breaking a leg off it against the wall in blind fury, “You just…Everything is your fault, Edward! You delivered Duncan’s letters. You led Naomi back to the West Indies. You killed Roberts and forced Shay to become the next Sage. All of this could have been avoided if it wasn’t for you!” She yelled, her face turning red and splotchy, “And now you’d…you’d…” Her voice failed her, as she remained a sobbing mess, crumbling to the floor in front of him like a stack of dominoes plucked into motion.

“You’re right,” Edward smirked, “I found the traitor Assassin Duncan Walpole’s letters, claiming gold for delivering the Vial and Bureau locations to the Templars. I carried out that act before knowing of the Assassins or Templars. I was captured, and I was the prisoner who Naomi was beckoned back to the West Indies to deal with. I was the one who slew the Sage Roberts, forcing Aita’s soul and all the burden that comes with it to bury itself into Shay.” He knelt down to her, lifting her chin to meet him on level ground, “But I am also the one who knew naught of the consequences of my actions. I am the one who wishes to make it right. And I am your…” Edward couldn’t finish the thought.
The sobbing woman lowered her eyes, not wanting to look at him.
“I told you this wasn’t an appropriate time to talk about this.” Bellec’s hallowed stare avoided Élise or Edward at all costs, “We’re all stuck in this room. Only place that’s safe.”
Élise’s tongue clicked, “Fortune favors us, then.” She dabbed her eyes with her glove, “Because we’ve got plenty to talk about.”
"Red sky at night, sailors’ delight.
Red sky at morning, sailors’ warning."
-Weather Lore

The lack of chatter was something Naomi had grown unaccustomed to processing. As the group traveled down the coast to take back the port, the last few conversations played back in her head to fill the void.

“Thank you, Inquisitor. We’d be face-down in the sand if not for you.” Krem said.
“I knew you wouldn’t leave us stranded down there.” The Dalish-archer-Charger said.
“Showed you up, didn’t she, Chief?” Another member of the Iron Bull’s Company had said.

The Iron Bull.
“Tal-Vashoth.” Gat had called him.

That prickly little elf who declared the Iron Bull a traitor and cast him from the Qun- an unexpected consequence followed by a promise of destruction. Bull retreated with his Chargers back to the comfort of The Dishonored and the Inquisition camp near Her, a request that Naomi had granted.

And then there was Consus.
Sintelsa.
A Dragon. What was her role in this?

“…the Fade was a closely guarded secret to the Isu. It was the Original Resource, the origin of the Pieces. We drew much of our power and abilities from it, such as the ability to bond with our sacred beasts- Dragons.” The voice of the Shroud’s words from the Nexus left her searching.

There was a connection. Consus knew her name. Had he bonded with her? Was she his Dragon?

Many questions sprung from the loose ends of the Captain’s thoughts like a frayed cloth’s uneven threads, urging someone to mend it.

She had no tailor, for now.
All she had, was silence.

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The Dishonored rocked angrily in the water, Her anchors cursing the sailors who’d stamp upon the deck above. The sailors felt the ship’s vexation as their water-logged boots gave them blisters. A break in the rainfall gave the deckhands a moment of piece. Adibas stood on the deck, speaking with sailors gleefully as he would among friends. He tried not to concern himself with the explosions of fire and smoke in the distance behind a looming mountain.

“Don’t fret, lad.” Aquilla assured a sailor who’d been expressing concerns, “She always leaves stuff blowin’ up in her wake.”

Adibas turned, hearing the Sea Artist behind him. Kilean and Christopher trailed him.
“A moment to breathe, my friends.” The Quartermaster smiled.

“Don’t go jinx’n it!” Kit hawked a lugi overboard, wiping his nose, “Between da’ cold and dis’
weather, me health can’t keep upright.” He sounded stuffy, is nostrils choked with mucus as he spoke. “Far from an easy adjustment, it’s been.” Kilean shivered, “Jealous of the Captain- that Shroud keeping her from being sick.” “Aye, the change in climate’s been brash.” Aquilla agreed, “Lots of sailors complaining about it, too.” “You fools over here gabbin’ about the weather when that’s goin’ on out there?” Thaddeus bellowed, “If yeh have time fer that, grab a scope and take a gander!” The Shantyman pointed a finger to the shore. Adibas’s brow raised, looking to the coast to see a band of people moving towards them. He retrieved his spyglass, peering into the drizzling distance. “Iron Bull and his Chargers.” He reported solemnly. “Without the Captain and the others?” Aquilla asked. “It’s getting’ late. I’ll go down, see what’s goin’ on. Need to stretch my legs, anyhow.” Kilean straightened her jacket, “Starting to really hate being cooped up in that navigation room while you’ll get to see the new lands we sail in.” “From what I’ve seen and heard thus far, I’m not so sure your envy is well-placed.” Aquilla rolled his eyes, “This place is simply dreadful.” “Feels nice t’me!” Thaddeus cackled, “Rain keeps the stench off, less soap means me skin don’t get all dried up.” “Bah, that’s a bunch’a rot. Ya still stink, mate.” Christopher laughed. The sailors around them laughed, making slight comments to the Officers. One of them compared Thaddeus’s smell to that of the bilge water beneath them. “I will go with you.” Adibas nodded to Kilean, then looked at Christopher, “Keep them in line while we’re gone.” “Will do, Quartermaster.” Kit saluted. “Lousy start’o doin’ that, Kit! We won’t make it easy for ya!” Thaddeus sat on a barrel of rum, kicking the tab with his foot while holding a mug underneath. He leaned up to wave the two Officers off, taking a gulp of liquor, “Off ya’ be, and be safe ya’ ought!”

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The Inquisition party walked amongst bodies littered on the cavern floor. The Storm Coast brushed against the shore of the gaping port opening, where years of corrosion and failed resistance to the waves told their story through the fragmented stone and dust. Naomi brushed the blood of a Red Templar from her cheek, staring at the letter commandeered from the dead witch’s body. The stains of battle made some words ineligible, but the message was clear: The smugglers were under orders from Samson, the same man who’d led the Red Templar charge in Haven. A location was repeatedly mentioned: Sahrnia. “Finding more red lyrium really punches a hole in my ‘red-lyrium-at-the-Temple-was-a-coincidence,’ theory.” Varric said. “You’ve seen this before, then?” Dorian asked. “Wish I hadn’t.” Varric’s solemnity gave Dorian pause before asking. “Do you know if a mage could access its power?” “Don’t go there, Sparkler. Don’t wonder if it’s useful. Don’t even think about it.” Varric narrowed his gaze at a red lyrium deposit before firing a bolt into its’ center, “Just stay far away, and hope none if it gets to your stupider cousins back home.” Naomi flipped the parcel over. A cross with a circle around the center was embossed on the note. It reminded her of the Celtic crosses from her homeland- simple in design, but a peculiar find for a cave, nonetheless.
“Here,” She handed it to Cassandra, her counterpart in silence, “What does this symbol mean to you?”

The Seeker looked at her confusedly as she took the splattered note, “What?”

The Captain squatted to observe the body of the woman she’d slain, trying to envision her face without seething red crystals growing from it.

“…resistant to red lyrium. They’re unusable to us, now. I gave you orders- now follow them.”

Lord Seeker Lucius’s words echoed.

“Found it on her person. This is the woman I saw walkin’ the Lord Seeker out of Val Royeaux. She took orders regardin’ some folk bein’ resistant to red lyrium- he deemed them ‘unusable.’ Don’t know what he intended, but the lass seemed less than thrilled.” Naomi mumbled, “Probably should’a asked her a few questions before sending her down…”

“This…this is the Order of Fiery Promise.” Cassandra croaked, “A cult with…strange beliefs about the Seekers. They’ve hounded us for centuries.” The smuggler’s note trembled in her hands, “Any member of their order would tell you we robbed their powers long ago, preventing them from ending the world.”

“Why would they want to end the world?” Dorian asked, twisting his mustache.

“The only way to truly eradicate evil, in their eyes. ‘The world will be reborn a paradise,’” Cassandra grew frustrated, “We’ve dealt with them. Many times. But they reappear, like weeds. Nobody knows how.”

“So, what’s a symbol from a bunch of fanatics doing on the back of a letter addressed to…a bunch of fanatics?” Varric wondered.

“Those of the Order of Fiery Promise are drunk on whatever forbidden magic they can find to make themselves ‘true’ Seekers. I wouldn’t be surprised if they’ve turned to red lyrium as a means to do so. But it begs the question- what is their connection to Corypheus?”

Corypheus.

Every time Naomi heard the name, she was reminded of that fated night. The evil bird-clawed-man who held a corrupted Piece of Eden, and swore upon vengeance for robbing him of his Anchor.

“Corypheus wants his new world order. We know the Venatori revere him. We know Samson and his Red Templars work for him. And now, these same red lyrium smugglers bear the cross of a people who’d see the world burn in hopes of forging a new one.” The Inquisitor stood to face her companions, “Far be it from me to make assumptions, but sure sounds a lot like another faction got itself tied up in the Elder One’s scheme, yeah?”

“Indeed. I’ve seen no hint of any Seekers amongst the Red Templars. Or the Lord Seeker…” Cassandra crossed her arms, her gaze locked to the waves that rolled into the cavernous sea port, “Perhaps Corypheus has imprisoned them…with the Order’s help.”

“Why imprison them? Couldn’t he just as easily have killed them?” Dorian asked.

“Not ‘easily,’” The Seeker responded, “But yes, I suppose the Seekers could be dead.”

“Could Corypheus have made them Red Templars? Or, ‘Red Seekers,’ if you’re being technical, I guess…” Varric asked.

“Seekers do not use lyrium.” Cassandra paced, “Let us assume Corypheus gained control of the Templars by corrupting the lyrium they were already taking. If he wanted to do the same to a Seeker, he’d have to force the lyrium upon them. But…” She shook her head, resting her hand on her sword, “We’re missing a piece of the puzzle, Inquisitor. I need to find it. I left the Seekers, but I can never abandon them.”

Hearing Cassandra’s convictions resonated with the Captain. Naomi understood what it was like to have left an Order behind, but not the allegiance…no matter how suffocating. She scolded herself for the moment of doubt she felt towards the Assassins as she gazed upon the Vinsomer.

“I need to be more like Cassandra- with a strong resolve and a remembrance of the vows I took-the Creed I swore by. And it’ll start with this.”

“We’ll find them, Cassandra.” Naomi nodded, “We should search the bodies for anything we can
send to the Advisors before our seafaring. Perhaps they can get a head start on figuring out what all this means.”

Dorian, Varric, Cassandra, and Naomi ended their talks and scavenged for anything else that might be useful in their pursuit of Corypheus and his followers.

It felt wrong, rummaging through dead bodies and reddened corpses, as if it was somehow disturbing their peace. Small, wet rocks clung to Naomi’s hands as dirt built up around the Assassin’s Insignia on her gauntlet. Pebbles flipped themselves under her feet as she shifted the dead Templars. Rocky beaches weren’t her favorite, but they were sure less invasive than the sugary sands of the West Indies.

“Should be use to all this by now, right?” Naomi thought, “Piecin’ together the truth with scraps of bait lain by those who’d see me fall into a trap. The life of an Assassin.”

Her hands continued to switch from body to body, not finding anything useful, save for a few gold sovereigns that she slipped into her pocket.

“I wonder what they’re doing now…Elizabeth. Shay.” Naomi’s hands were guided by practice, no longer a conscious action, “Fifteen years passed, Consus said. By God, they’ve got to be twenty years of age by now. And I missed it. All of it.” She turned her head away, hiding faint tears, “All those around me call me Inquisitor, Herald of Andraste, Mentor, Captain…but what kind of woman births children, and has yet to be called ‘Mother?’”

She pulled a medallion of some sort from a corpse’s pocket. It was silver, with two griffons emblazed on the front. It seemed a noble piece, foreign within a battlefield of dead miscreants.

“Found something.” Naomi sniffed, wiping her eyes before an interrogation would come her away, “Looks like that marking on the Warden helmet we found in the Hinterlands.”

Dorian was the closest to her. He wiped his hands clean on his long mage’s coat, taking the item from her for observation.

“A Grey Warden-Constable’s badge. What in the blazes is this doing here?” He asked.

“Another mystery. Perhaps one best answered by the Inquisition’s resident Warden.” Cassandra smirked.

Damn it to Hell.” Naomi put her hands on her hips.

“What’s wrong, Spitfire?” Varric asked.

“We forgot to give that helmet to Blackwall,” She looked to Cassandra, “Do you still have it?”

The Seeker blinked, “I do. I apologize.”

The water started to push farther into the port, the waves crashing harder. Out on the horizon, the sun began to set, casting orange and yellow light unto the ocean. The red water would have been a beautiful site, if not a warning to get going.

“High tide rollin’ in, we should leave. Safer sailin’ in the morning and I’d not want to get stuck out here after dusk.” Naomi took the badge from Dorian, putting it in a satchel where it would remain safe, “We’ll write a few and send information to Skyhold. They can get these investigations on the move before we return. With any luck, they’ll have some answers by the time we get there.” She walked passed her companions, who all exchanged looks of inquiry.

None of them had spoken about the events of the afternoon. Not because they hadn’t wanted to, but because they lacked the capacity to form their thoughts into words.

An echo of thunder and a gust of wind bounding through the open-faced port gave the Inquisitor pause. She turned to look at the opening, peering through the rocky window formed by the curved stalactites. An island loomed in the distance. Naomi narrowed her eyes, wishing to see passed the lessening rain.

“Is that Sintesla’s perch, Consus?” She asked herself.

“Within time.” An answer from the Shroud.

Naomi sighed, ignoring the stares from those around her, continuing to the exit back to the shoreline, “Somehow, I doubt we have much of that ‘time’ thing left, mate.”
Scout Harding’s ordered bonfire illuminated the Inquisition camp. It burned red, blue, and glints of purple—a magical flame to fight the night sky’s scarce rain. The mages that accompanied the Scout were proud of the fiery concoction.

The Officers mixed themselves among the Chargers, and Harding joined them for a meal.

“Rain isn’t so bad right now, but I doubt the Captain’ll want to set sail at night in a place like this.” Kilean took a bite of a toasted squirrel, plucked fresh from the makeshift spit.

“Crestwood isn’t too far from here. Even if you wait until daybreak, *The Dishonored* will be able to make it there and back to Skyhold within a day’s time.” Harding took a sip of her soup, “Seems like a pretty fast ship.”

“She’s quick, alright.” Bull sharpened his axe with an obsidian stone, “Quickest ship I’ve ever seen. Who’d-a thought building them bigger and adding a mast would make it faster?”

“It’s all in the sails.” Aquilla pushed his spectacles up from sliding down his nose, journal in hand, “She’s a brig bigger than any we’ve encountered in Thedas thus far, but is more agile because of the sails. Not just the quantity, the shapes—”

“Alright, yeh bookworm.” Christopher nudged the Sea Artist, “‘Nuff’o that, lest you wanna put our mates to sleep?”

“Some of us are interested in science, not intimidated by it.” Quill shot back.

“A’right, a’right, calm yerselves.” Thaddeus took a puff of his tobacco pipe, “Say, how about some proper introductions? You lot’are the closest to pirates we’ve crossed since we got’here, eh?”

Krem smiled to Bull, “Hear that, Chief? We’re like pirates.”

“Yeah, I heard it.” Bull rest his axe at his feet, turning his functioning eye behind him, “Maybe we should wait until the others get back…I’m starting to think leaving them was a bad idea.”

“They’ll be back soon, I’m sure.” Adibas looked out into the same darkness Bull did.

While the typical storm of the coast was naught but slight rain, the clouds were greyed, blocking out the moon and stars. All they could see was what the fire showed them. Even *The Dishonored* was nothing but a dark mass, dotted with lanterns and hazy orange windows from the Crews’ Quarters.

But out there, there was nothing but a green shimmer on the shore.

Adibas pulled his spyglass from his vest, peering down a humid lens.

“Blasted thing.” He cursed as he lowered it and wiped the glass against his shirt, “Look.” The Quartermaster aimed his scope.

“Quartermaster Lacroix, do you really expect to find anything in this sort of night?” Quil judged.

“There’s a spec out there…can’t find it with this spyglass-ah, there!” He was overjoyed.

A light sprung from the Captain’s hand, casting shadows upon her face— an inherent torch. The green of the Anchor was so saturated, it drowned out any color but itself. Naomi was a canvas of whites and blacks, mixed with emerald hues.

“It’s the Captain.” Adibas closed his tool, leaping to his feet, “I think the others may be following her. I can’t tell.”

Kilean’s hand grabbed his wrist, “Wait here, Quartermaster. I’d deem it dangerous to go out there in these conditions.”

“She’s right,” Bull agreed, “They’ll see this big fire.”

Adibas sat back down, anxiously. No one spoke in anticipation, all eager for the return of the Inquisition party that had seemingly lost itself to the blackened wetlands.

“What is that stuff, anyway?” Krem pointed his chin to Thaddeus.

“Nothin’ I’ll be sharin’.” Tad puffed.

Krem leaned closer.
“Cut it out, would ya?” The Shantyman scooted away.
“It smells so good, though.” The Charger lieutenant sniffed.
“Krem, you’re being creepy.” Bull laughed, “Leave the man alone.”
“It’s tobacco. A leaf mixed with other shite that us of the sea fancy themselves to pass the time.”
Christopher took a swig of his flask, “Tobacco, drinkin’, singin’ and swabbin’- the life of a sailor.”
“Was,” Adibas gripped a dagger and peeled a flakey piece of cooked fish from a skewer, his lips retrieving the meat from the blade itself, “Was, the life of a sailor.”
In Good Company

Chapter Summary

“You are young and young your rule and you think that the tower in which you live is free from sorrow: from it have I not seen two tyrants thrown? The third, who now is king, I shall yet live to see him fall, of all three most suddenly, most dishonored.”
— Aeschylus

Naomi approached Scout Harding, who greeted her away from the group as they stoked the flames in the background. “Inquisitor, it’s always a fine night to see you return in good health.” The dwarf extended her hand.

The Captain shook it firmly. “Scout Harding. Alive and well, I see.” With a flick of her wrist, Naomi silenced the Anchor, “What news would you have?”

“A letter from the Commander,” Harding pulled an envelope from her person, “Your eyes only.” “Ah…thank you.” Naomi tucked it away in the lining of her coat, “Anything else?”

“Orders from the Spymaster. We’re to set sail in the morning to the East Side Hill region of Crestwood to a village named Verchiel to rendezvous with Sera. The prankster elf will fill you in on the ‘larger matter at hand’ upon completion of a ‘meniscal, but necessary’ task.” “No rest for the wicked, hm?” Dorian snickered as he walked by the two women, addressing the merry bunch ahead, “They better have prepared a meal for me, too.”

“I think you meant ‘us.’” Varric corrected.

“Hah! That would imply that I wouldn’t fight you for any remnants of sustenance.” Dorian said. “A fight you would both lose, once I entered the fray.” Cassandra smiled.

“A joke? From you?” Dorian jested, “My, these are trying times, indeed.” Naomi’s eyes fluttered as she complained to the Scout, “Traveling with these few have been a test of me convictions, lass.”

Scout Harding laughed.

Her humor dissipated when the Inquisitor did not. “Right, well…Inquisitor, I know you must be exhausted, but could I burden you with a written report before your departure? I’ve been asked to send a raven.”

“You’re not coming with us?” Naomi asked.

“Not yet, as much as I’d like to leave this place. We want to make sure the port you’ve secured remains stable for a few days before leaving the region.” Harding said. “A sound option, I suppose. Aye, I’ll have the report drafted before we hoist anchor.”

Naomi gulped as she saw Bull’s grand horns shift before the fire. She’d foolishly hoped he’d be asleep by now. Cassandra had taken a seat next to Adibas. Varric and Dorian bickered as they joined the Officers and Chargers’ company.


“I meant the skewer!” Dorian snatched the food from the Qunari man, swearing as the metal rod burnt him.
One by one, the faces before her melded into her previous life’s companions, both dead and alive: Charles Vane, Edward Thatch, Mary Reade, Jack Rackham, Anne Bonny—even Benjamin Hornigold. And Edward.

Edward was there, too.

“Gotta stop lettin’ the past sneak up on me.”

“Should probably get to sleep.” Naomi grumbled.

“You aren’t hungry?” Scout Harding asked.

“No particularly.” She admitted, walking toward the dock.

Gotta stop lettin’ the past sneak up on me.”

“The Captain felt isolated. She didn’t belong there, with them—not after today.”

“Shall probably get to sleep.” Naomi grumbled.

“You aren’t hungry?” Scout Harding asked.

“Not particularly.” She admitted, walking toward the dock.

The Captain felt isolated. She didn’t belong there, with them—not after today.

“Boss!” Bull called.

Naomi’s legs halted, waiting for harsh reprimand. She waited for him to curse her, to dehumanize her, to tell her that if she’d just stood her ground, the alliance would be held and he’d still have his Qun to follow.

“Foods getting cold.” He said.

She looked up to see him patting at an open seat at his side.

“Join us, Captain.” Adibas beckoned.

The Inquisitor’s body moved towards the small crowd, even when her mind told it not to. A brief wind of relief swept through her as she lowered herself onto the overturned, wooden bucket next to Charger’s Captain.

“Think you’d just slink off onto that ship of yours, huh?” The horned man whispered, handing her a bowl of soup, “Last I checked, that cook of yours can’t make shit like this.”

The chunky liquid rolled in a horn-carved vessel, inviting her to devour it into her growling stomach.

“No, he can’t.” She chuckled.

“You know, those horses you teach to…” Krem, you’re from Tevinter, surely you know what I speak of?” Dorian giggled.

“Show-pony?” The blazes is that supposed to mean?” Naomi asked, lifting the bowl to her mouth. She was too hungry for civilized cutlery.

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She was too hungry for civilized cutlery.

“You know, those horses you teach to…Krem, you’re from Tevinter, surely you know what I speak of?” Dorian tried to recover from the blank stares that bore down on him.

“I do,” Krem held back a laugh, “But I wouldn’t be so bold to make that comparison.”

Dorian rolled his eyes, “And Varric is so different with his cute little nicknames?”

Varric quietly smirked, staying out of it.

“Hey, when I was growing up, my name was just this series of numbers. We all give each other nicknames under the Qun.” Iron Bull said, “They get a pass, in my book. Not so much for Tevinter pastimes.”

“Speaking of which- they ever wear shirts under the Qun? Or do they just run around binding their breasts like that?” Krem pointed his chin at Bull’s armor.

“It’s a harness.” Bull’s eyes narrowed.

“Yes, for your pillowy man-bosoms. Let me know if you need help binding. You could really chisel something out of that overstuffed look.” Krem took a drink from his mug.

“Binding? What would you know of binding?” Naomi asked through a mouth full of warm goodness.

“In Qunadar, Krem’d be an Aqun-Athlock. That’s what we…’they’ call someone born one gender but continue living on like another.” Bull explained.

“Well, great. Now we can all talk about it.” Krem sighed.

“Right well had, mate. Could’a used your skills when I guised meself as a man in me younger days.” The Captain said.

“That’s a tale in itself.” Aquilla closed his journal, returning its dampened pages to his satchel.

“One we can share on this fine, drizzly night.”

“Sorry, Seeker. We agreed we’d be doin’ this when you lot got back,” Thaddeus puffed his
tobacco, leaving the envious Krem sniffing the air roguishly, “and this old fart loves to run his mouth ‘bout some tales, he does.”
“I should’ve left you in Dublin.” Quil looked to the Shantyman.
“Boys,” Naomi looked to them, “Yer makin’ me look bad.”
   The circle of friends laughed.
“Shite, what was, it ’04, ’06?” Aquilla straightened his back.
“The year,” Adibas explained to the Chargers and Scout Harding, “We address the year simply by the number. No fancy title like ‘Dragon.’”
“I were born in 1693, and was thirteen at the time, so 1706.” Naomi said.
“Ah, quite right.” Aquilla fumbled in his pack, “Well, I’d been forced to work on the docks after the British seized my trading company. Population in Ireland was boomin’. They gutted our resources. Needed more ships, they said. Liked my trade routes.” The Sea Artist lit his own pipe from a box he’d retrieved.
Krem whimpered.
“Got recruited by Johnny McGrath to manage the charts of his ship, the Medusa’s Scorn. Imagine how surprised we were to find he’d come back from that brothel of theirs with a newly-hired, bastard cabin boy named Nathan.” Quil have a hearty chuckle.
“That’d been me.” Naomi smiled at the fond memories.
“Aye, that was her, all dressed the part for that beast. A grand galleon- twice as tall as The Dishonored with an extra mast to boot. Privately owned trading ship, only one in its fleet. Armed to the teeth in case of pirates, or British interference, I suppose. Anyway, we sailed to a neighboring country by the name of Wales. Afterwards, we’d stop at an island McGrath was fond of, then go home for the night. Laborious, it was.” Aquilla puffed, “They left us alone, though.”
   The Chargers were enthralled by the forty-nine-year-old’s mannerisms and storytelling. He had the voice of an old scholar, educated and accented, but still had wits about him as if he was in his twenties.
“Did this for three years without much trouble, save for ‘Nathan’ and his friend Edward stealin’ apples here n’ there. When McGrath promoted the cabin boy to a Rigger, I knew we were done for.” Quil laughed, “Sixteen years old, swingin’ around on the ropes of sails, dropping and raising them with the others. I always told Johnny boy you’d be the first to fall.”
“Thanks for the honesty, mate.” Naomi mumbled. “Glad to hear you placed all yer faith in me.”
“Aye, aye.” He sighed, “A year later, when Ms. McNamara passed to sickness, this one evolved into something dangerous.” Aquilla looked apologetic as he glanced to his Captain.
“Held a lot of anger in me gut back then.” Naomi admitted.
“Still do.” Christopher added.
“Bah, saved your arse, didn’t it?” She teased, “Aye, me mum told me of the Assassins on her deathbed. Told me McGrath had been a Mentor that whole blasted time.”
“I’m not there, yet.” Aquilla smoked, “Turns out that brothel was a hub for intelligence collectin’ for the Order, and McGrath was devastated at the young mother’s death. Couldn’t do much about it, though, except let vengeance ruin him.”
“Vengeance?” Naomi asked, “McGrath wanted revenge?”
   She hadn’t heard this part of the story.
“For your mum, lass. Said the British were hoggin’ up all the doctors. Poor man tried to rationalize the natural order of the world, as did you. ‘Cept he let yeh act on it, despite my objections.”
   Aquilla’s comments were disconcerting to the Captain.
“McGrath told me to gather the best of my previous Company. Said we needed to go with Nathan to the West Indies to meet a man by the name of Antó.” Quil took a sip of drink as he continued,
“He himself was predisposed with a plan the Assassins had in motion.”
“What was that?” Dorian asked, his eyes glistening.
“Overthrowin’ the British and stockin’ weapons for the Irish Rebellion.” Christopher finished, scratching the skin under his eye patch, “We learnt’o that later.”
“Much later,” Quill continued, “Begrudgingly, I went to my best men, young as they were, and brought them with us on the H.M.S. Zealand, a British whaler sailin’ for Kingston who needed some hired hands.”

A hush fell over the Officers. None of them wanted to revisit that voyage, or the screams of a captured Naomi that came from its cabin.

Aquilla recovered from the awkward silence, “Among my rehired few was Thaddeus ‘Tad’ Gallagher and Christopher ‘Kit’ Byrne, two scallywags who’d spent their years takin’ over taverns, hand-in-hand.”

“More like ale-in-stomach,” Kit winked to Tad, “I was a gun master on Quil’s first brig. Old man knew better than to hire anyone else for the job. Needed my fastest sponger with me, too.”

“Aye, I could load’a cannon faster than a lad could spend a sack’o reales in Havana, back in da’ day.” Thaddeus smiled.

“We grew up together out in Swords. Moved to Dublin when our families came looking for work. Been joined at the hip since.” Christopher grinned.

“Much to everyone else’s sacrificed sanity,” Quill scoffed.

“Hardly sane to begin with, mate.” Thaddeus smirked.

“Four weeks into the six-week journey, the Captain, who’s name’ll not be mentioned, found that Nathan was a woman. Threw her in the cellar for the remaining two weeks.” Quil went on, “We tried to free her. The Royal crewman killed the rest of my privateers. Still don’t know why he left us three alive.”

“To do what yer doin’ right now, ya twat. Ta’tell the story. Don’t give the bloody bastard the satisfaction.” Tad took a deep gulp, “Bloody goat-fucker.”

Kit was angered, “When we made it to Kingston, the ‘goat-fucker’ tried to sell Captain McNamara at a slaver’s auction. Antó, our contact, was the highest bidder, thank the almighty Lord himself.” Quill shifted, “Antó and the Captain stealthed their way onboard the whaling vessel that night, and saved us from the clutches of the Britishmen. The Mentor told us to let the H.M.S. Zealand go free, ‘cause the Creed dictated orders, and those were orders we didn’t have yet.’” He spit a throat full of mucus to the ground, “So we lot got inducted into the Brotherhood and got our first pair of those damned orders—

“-to tail the Santiano.” Naomi was lost in the dancing flames.

“Liberated myself and other slaves. Most of us followed the Irishmen’s steps in joining the Brotherhood and the Captain’s crew.” Adibas stretched.

“I remember when that rambled old brig rolled into my father’s harbor,” Kilean laughed, “No name on the charter. Everyone pressed the Captain for one. Only ended up with a knife in our ledger. That’s when I knew I wanted to sail with her.”

“Aye, your father wasn’t too happy with me. ‘A Harbormaster’s daughter belongs on the arm of a merchant,’ he said. Wanted to marry you off to that Williams fellow. A business arrangement, no doubt.” Naomi laughed, “Did you ever tell him you’d previously tried to join the Royal Navy?”

“Course I didn’t. That sod for a father hated my guts after mother left us. Don’t miss him, either. Never have.” Kilean took a swig straight from a bottle, “All those times in Kingston and not once did he try to contact me.”

“Bah, he was a right piece of shite anyhow.” Quil crossed his arms, “Better off without him.”

“This story,” Varric leaned his chin on his laced fingers, “I’m enjoying it. Please, go on.”

“Right, right.” Quil cleared his throat, a crackle of fire whisking into the air, “So, we set sail to see the Mentor of the West Indies, Ah Tabai. We were officially dubbed Initiates that day. Brotherhood gained about twenty or so members, all held up on the ‘ship with no name.’ I sent a letter to Mentor McGrath telling him everything that’d happened during the voyage. All we got back was a message from the Bureau requesting aid.” Aquilla shuddered, “In Ireland, it’d be the dead of winter. Us being us, we installed an ice ram to the front of the ship, and took orders to sail back home to Dublin Port to investigate.”

“We docked home not but eight months after we’d left.” Naomi looked up to her companions, “I’d found from a good friend by the name of Mentor O’Mailey that McGrath had been betrayed by his
First Mate and sold out to the Templars. Accused of treason, despite the lack of evidence. The stockpile at the Isle of Man was gone."
"Recovered by the Assassins, I hope." Cassandra said.
"Aye, they’d got to ‘em in time. Got to McGrath, too." Naomi frowned, “Arrested the crew, sunk the Medusa’s Scorn to the bottom of the ocean after looting Her. Made the sailors watch.” Her fists tightened.
"Turned out the crimes was carried out by the swine who Captain’d the *H.M.S. Zealand*,” Thaddeus snickered.
"We crippled that blasted boat and I cornered him in his Quarters. I’ll never forget his last words… ‘This won’t change anything, yah dishonored fools!’ Shot a hole through his head, sendin’ his brains to his own desk, I did.” Naomi growled.
"The golden cannons and weapons The Dishonored has were among the loot from the Medusa’s Scorn. Her wheel and figurehead are from the sunken ship, too.” Adibas added, “As Quartermaster, it was a challenge getting all that onboard.”
Naomi drew her pistol sword, twisting the metal in her hands, “This sword was McGrath’s once. Pistols, too.”
"He was a good man, Cap’n.” Christopher was saddened.
"Wish you would’ve left that damn Shroud, though.” Adibas huffed.
"The Shroud came from the Medusa’s Scorn?” Cassandra questioned.
"Aye. It was old Johnny’s before Captain McNamara seized it.” Quil sighed, “Was hoping to never see that damned thing again.”
"The Shroud?” Krem asked.
The Assassins looked to one another, “Nothin’, lad.” Tad responded.
"Your turn.” Naomi said to Bull, diverting the topic, “Tell us of the Chargers, yeah?”
Bull shifted upon his log-bench, his foot brushing up against his axe that laid in front of him. The disaster of the day hadn’t been addressed, but for now, this was enough.
"Well, you all know these are the Chargers…or what’s left of them,” He started.
Naomi tensed.
"A lot of them went looking for stronger drinks.” Bull smiled.
The Captain relaxed.
"We’ve got Rocky and Skinner there,” Bull pointed to a quirky dwarf and a harshly featured elf woman, “-over there is Dalish, Stitches, and Grim,” he nodded to a gentler elf, a tanned man, and a blond gentleman sitting in the sand, “And you know Krem. Lost my eye saving his careless ass at Tevinter’s border.” Bull fidgeted with his eyepatch, “Crazy bunch of assholes, but they’re mine.”
Naomi studied the faces that she’d not been properly introduced to beforehand.
"‘Rocky?”’ Scout Harding asked, her feet kicking against the log she sat on, “How’d that one work out?”
The dwarf had a peculiar mustache that almost curled to his ears. He wore a brown, linen hood.
"Exiled from Orzammar, the Dwarven capital. Stupid noble crap. Also, I accidently blew up a bit of the shaperate.” He grinned.
"Rocky’s one of our best sappers. He can take down enemy fortifications faster than a golem.” Bull said.
"I’m also working on my own version of Qunari blackpowder. I’ve almost got it!” Rocky sounded enthusiastic.
"Yeah…you really don’t.” Bull shook his head, taking a swig of drink.
"*Does that mean Bull knows how to make it?”* The Captain wondered.
"How ‘bout you, girl?” Kilean nodded to Dalish, the gentle elf with Vallaslin etched on her face, “Seem a little light on the artillery to be roamin’ round with these blokes.”
"Our Keeper, the one in charge of a Dalish clan, thought I should see the world a little.” She answered, attuning the purple bauble on top of her bow.
“Dalish don’t have Templars, so they can’t have too many mages in a clan at once.” Bull taunted.
“Now, ser, you know I’m not a mage! That’d make me an apostate.” Dalish grinned mischievously.
“You carry a staff, Dalish.” Rocky sighed.
“It’s a bow!” She defended herself.
“A bow with a giant glowing crystal at the tip?” Krem asked.
“Sounds useful. Wonder if you could put it on a gun?” Naomi smirked.
“Perhaps, Inquisitor. Let me get my hands on one of those things and we’ll see.” The elf girl smiled.
“Er…no. Don’t give her that.” Bull warned.

The pirates and mercenaries laughed. The tanned man with burn marks etched into his face gleamed at the argument.

“And you’re…’Stitches?’ Healer, I presume?” Varric asked.
“Yes. First time I ever picked up a sword was when the Blight hit Fereldan. Never put it back down.” The scarred man responded.

“He makes a potion that’ll put you right back on your feet after even the toughest fight. It tastes terrible, though.” Iron Bull’s face twisted.

“That’s because it’s a poultice, ser. You’re not supposed to drink it.” Stitches answered.

“It’s not like there’s directions on the vial…” Bull snorted.

Aquilla yawned, “Oh, directions. Those precious things we all wish for, and then never follow.”

“Aye, takes the adventure out of it.” Naomi laughed.

“I think this circle has had enough adventures for a lifetime,” Adibas said, “Earning a name like ‘Skinner’ probably has a few involved.”

The intimidating, Orleasian-accented elf sharpened a knife in her lap, “Killed some people.”

“Skinner didn’t take kindly to nobles testing their new swords on the elves in her alienage.” Bull explained.

“Alienage?” Naomi asked.

“In human cities, the elves are grouped up into their own town. More like slums,” Iron Bull sighed, “City elves have it bad.”

“Bull took me in. Now I get paid to kill Shems. This city elf has it good.” An evil smile flashed across the woman’s face.

The Inquisitor shifted, feeling a bit unsettled at the elf’s dark gesture.

“This is actually really good behavior for her. She’s not marking her territory or anything.” Bull laughed.

“Don’t jinx it.” Krem said.

Aquilla took the opportunity to hand Krem his lit pipe while Bull was distracted. The lieutenant acted as if he’d been given the Holy Grail, hiding his initial coughs and continuing to puff away on his gift.

“And last but not least, ‘Grim.’” Dorian smiled, “Don’t like to talk amongst friends?”

“Hmph.” The human grunted.

“Grim doesn’t talk much. I’m pretty sure he’s the lost king of some small country. Or a chieftain. Something like that.” Bull explained.

“Hmph.” The disheartened mercenary affirmed.

The night began to wear on the circle of exchange. Yawns triggered by Aquilla echoed through the group.

“Interestin’ band’o fellows.” Tad puffed.

“We take in anyone who can pull their own weight in a fight.” Bull gave a tired smile.

“And who can put up with your bullshit, chief.” Krem laughed.

Bull noticed the pipe dangling out of his mouth, “Hey, where’d you get that?”

The lieutenant grimaced, shrugging innocently.
Aquilla laughed at the glare Bull gave him, “Don’t look at me, I’m a senile old man.” Naomi adjusted herself, the hard surface she sat on worsening her aching tailbone, “How did you start the group, Bull?”

That would buy Krem more smoking time.

“It’s easy to make a name for yourself as a merc when you’re a head taller than most folks.” Bull’s horns towered over her, “I spent a year or two working for another Company called the Fisher’s Bleeders, but their Captain was crap. Figured I could do better. The best folks in the Bleeders agreed with me, so we split off.” He rolled his shoulder, stretching his joints, “A lot of ‘em got turned away from other companies that didn’t want a knife-ear or a crazy dwarf. Their loss. You get my back in a fight and carry your own weight, you’re good with me. And you and your crew are definitely good with me, boss.”

The Captain was taken off guard by his last minute, endearing comment, “But I—“

“Saved my entire mercenary Company, and your people. None of these folks would be sitting here-drinking, eating, getting fat, being lazy-living, if it wasn’t for you.” He smiled at her, “Tells me your heart is in the right place. Getting to Corypheus will be a lot harder if we must climb a mountain of Inquisition-banneored corpses, first. Thought we’d have to, actually. You’ve proven me wrong.”

The crew of The Dishonored and the Chargers looked to her with love in their eyes.

“If I’m going to die fighting some crazy Tevinter asshole, I’d rather die for a leader like you than a Qun who values nothing but results.” Bull placed his enlarged hand on the Captain’s shoulder.

Tears began to well in her eyes, embarrassed as she was. She knew she messed up. But something good had come out of it, at least.

Comradery.

“Thank you.” She whispered, resting her hand on his.

“No, thank you, Inquisitor, for having the balls to tell the Ben-Hassrath to shove it.” Krem laughed.

Naomi’s reddened eyes smiled in return, “Anytime, lad,” She swallowed the lump in her throat,

“Anytime.”
Verchiel March

Chapter Summary

"The best government is a benevolent tyranny tempered by an occasional assassination."
-Voltaire

Chapter Notes

"Running Down to Cuba" linked to first line of lyrics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

leep evolved from a necessity into an abandoned dream in the Captain’s Quarters. Naomi’s quill slid a black line across her words as her forehead almost collided with her desk. She jumped at her own drowsiness, eyeing the scribble that sliced her previous, droning words of the report she tried so desperately to write.

“Fuck it all to Hell.”

The Captain crumbled the parcel in a fist, replacing it with another. She began to write furiously:

“To My Overburdened and Shortwaged Advisors,

Met with the Ben-Hassrath weasel named Gat. Shite at his job, as it were. More mages than he counted on the Venatori boat. When they washed ashore, the Chargers were outnumbered on their camp.
I involved myself in the fray, as are the way of things. Most of them lived.
The Chargers that is.
Not the Venatori, ‘cept for one daft Mage who summoned the corpse of a Giant covered in Dragon bites. The Giant blew up the Dreadnought and the Dragon returned to finish her meal. Right saved our arse.
Didn’t save the alliance, though.
Bull tells me to inform Leliana to post agents ‘round Skyhold and screen for Qunari assassins. A bit of an advice, being the Assassin I am:
Watch incoming shipment…and haystacks.
Overall, we had a whale of a time save for the fret of Bull no longer being a part of the Qun.
The Ben-Hassrah can dance the hempen jig for all I care.
The port was secured, however. I’ve included a few fascinating letters we retrieved on the corpses of slain Red Templars.
Time to batten down the hatches, mates. Weathers about to get fierce.

All the Best Otherwise,
Captain McNamara”
The Inquisitor dipped her quill back in the glass pot, rubbing her eyes to wet the dryness from not blinking during her rant.

“One to go.”

Naomi took a swig from her flask, pulling the letter Cullen wrote to her from her coat. The wax seal held the same mark at the Inquisition’s forces map marker, a fist clutching a spiked ring.

She traced it with her finger before cracking it open, smiling at the thought of her knight in waiting. Observing the scraggly text, she sensed his nervousness as would a shark smell a wounded man’s blood:

“Dearest Naomi,

I hope this letter finds you well.
I’m sure it will, as Scout Harding is exceptional at fulfilling her duties.
Your lovely companions have left me with little but a headache. Their bickering is endless.
Something you’re familiar with by now, no doubt. I should be used to it, too.
Another thing I find difficult to cope with that I should be accustomed to…you being away.
Of course, I don’t mean to implore guilt, it’s just…the world isn’t the same when you’re gone.
Maker, I’m not very good at this. Leliana and Josephine are little help. They’d have me write like Varric in one of his books.
What I’m trying to say is that I miss you.
I hope to be the first to greet you at Skyhold Port when that grand ship of yours sails around the bend.
Until then, I will cower at the thought of you reading this.
I can only imagine the devious grin on your face as you do.

Devoted to You,
Cullen”

Naomi’s breath was siphoned at the Commander’s words.
Her heart shuddered in her chest, frightful of the warm blood that pulsed through her icy veins as the remnants of her frozen state melted through her eyes. She wiped the tears away, clenching her teeth to still her quivering lips.

It was the first time she’d received anything so lovingly crafted. And to receive it from Cullen, who’d done nothing but hold her together rather than dismantle her piece by piece like the man who came before…it filled her with the same joy she’d been tirelessly trying to tame.

Perhaps it was time to let it run wild.

“Damn you, Lion…”

The Captain rest the letter next to her lamp, pinching the quill in her fingertips.
There would be many drafts tossed before she’d make time to rest.

…

The calm waters were rustled by The Dishonored’s hull after their departure from the Storm Coast. The newfound quiet of the stormless sea was interrupted by Thaddeus’s hoarse voice.

“Running down to Cuba with a load of sugar,
Weigh, me boys, to Cuba!
Make her run you, lime juice squeezes,
Running down to Cuba.”

Captain McNamara and the boisterous pirates sailed through the clear, sunny skies. She
was in rare form, smiling and whistling along with her crew.

“**Weigh, me boys, to Cuba!**
**Running down to Cuba.”**

Adibas grinned as his stare caught her, “That letter from Cullen has you high in spirits, Captain. I noticed Scout Harding received not one, but two letters this morning.”

Naomi laughed, “How very observant of you, Adie. An Assassin first, a Quartermaster second.” She shook her head, “Last I heard, my writing didn’t keep half the Quarters up into the wee hours of the morn.”

The Quartermaster howled as he leaned his arms on the railing, “Jealous I scored a roll in the hay before you, Captain?”

“For the sake of the Lord, how would you know that I haven’t?” She asked.

“Because your temper has yet to level as of late.”

“**O, I got a sister, she’s nine feet tall,**
**Weigh, me boys, to Cuba!**
**Sleeps in the kitchen with her feet in the hall,**
**Running down to Cuba.”**

“Aye, I get a bit gripey when the old loins are neglected.” Naomi sighed, “I’ve been told I have precious little to show for patience in courting.”

“Then it would seem the Commander knows you better than he thinks he does.”

“Is figurin’ me out something you lot swap notes for often, then?” She raised a brow.

“More like swapping drinks, aye.” He admitted, “Lest you forget my third role in your service.”

“Remind me?” Naomi asked.

“Wingman.” He winked.

“**Weigh, me boys, to Cuba!**
**Running down to Cuba.”**

“Speaking of role, I have a proposition for you.” He crossed his ankles as he turned to her, his right elbow balancing his weight.

“Go on, then.”

Adibas inhaled the salty wind, “Lady Pentaghast has informed me that Skyhold, too, is need of a Quartermaster.” He smirked, “Luck favor you, I have experience in the way of Quartermastery.”

“**The captain, she will trim the sails,**
**Weigh, me boys, to Cuba!**
**Winging the water over the rails,**
**Running down to Cuba.”**

“You’d leave your post aboard The Dishonored?” Naomi frowned.

“Nay, Captain. Of course not.” He shook his head, “We don’t get to stretch our sea legs as often. Checkers with Blackwall only keeps a man entertained for so long, and I’m not much for the stables or kitchen-”

“Definitely not the kitchen.” She agreed.

“…Which is why I’d like to oversee the improvement of our stronghold.”

“**Weigh, me boys, to Cuba!**
**Running down to Cuba.”**
“I appreciate the initiative, Adie. A fine idea. I’ll see Josephine hands over the authority and resources.” She smiled, “Many thanks, mate.”

“Anything for the Inquisition, Captain.”

“Give me a gal can dance Fandango,
Weigh, me boys, to Cuba!
Round as a melon and sweet as a mango,
Running down to Cuba.”

Cassandra walked through the doors below, having left Adibas’s private quarters, no doubt. She clipped a few straps of her gauntlets while climbing the stairs to the Captain’s Deck.

“Now that’s something I’m quite familiar with. Telltale walk of shame.” Naomi giggled.

Cassandra’s face blushed a loud red, “I-I don’t know-“

“Hah! Well if you don’t, ask anyone hangin’ ‘round the Quartermaster’s Den!” Christopher called while operating the lift, raising a crate to the Riggers above.

“It’s a’right, lass. We’re just codding ya! Got yerself a good one, here.” The Captain nudged her.

Adibas kissed the Seeker’s hand as she stood next to him, “Good morning, my lady.”

“Weigh, me boys, to Cuba!
Running down to Cuba.”

Kilean slammed the door open from Navigation, “Oy, Captain! Pay attention, would yeh?!” She pointed East, “Yer compass, use it!” Adibas jumped as the apprentice slammed the door.

 Naomi checked the wobbling device on her wheel, the needle tipping below Quil’s neatly scripted directions.

“Made a right bags of this chart, eh?” The Captain corrected the course of the ship.

“So it would seem.” Adibas chuckled.

“Load this sugar and home-ward go,
Weigh, me boys, to Cuba!
Mister mate, he told me so,
Running down to Cuba.”

…

The dockhands of Crestwood marveled at The Dishonored as She dropped anchor in the narrow rivulet. It made the villagers nervous.

“ Took you long enough!” Sera elbowed her way through the gathering crowd, waving at the Captain as the makeshift bridge slammed onto the reed-tied dock, “Bout took a dip in Adder’s Kiss, I’ve been so bored!”

Naomi descended the brig, careful not to trip. A tumbling Inquisitor would not be flattering in the bulletins.

“ Far be it from me to keep a sharp lass like you waitin.’” The Inquisitor shook her hand upon making landfall.

Cassandra, Varric, Bull, and Dorian began to follow.

“No, no, no, this won’t do. Not at all.” Sera looked over Naomi’s shoulder, “You. Just you.” She pointed to Varric, “The rest stays.”

“Excuse me?” Cassandra’s brow pinched.

“You’ll not direct me like some-” Dorian argued.

“What? Slave?” Sera flicked her elven ears.

“That’s not what I was going to say…” He sighed.
“Good with me.” Bull shrugged, turning on his heel, “I get paid either way.”
“Bull, what do you mean?” Dorian spun to his horned friend, “What?” His head turned back to Sera.
“But-“
“Nope. No butts. None except his.” Sera nodded to Varric, “Come on, Chesthair.”
Dorian sighed, slumping in defeat, “Don’t leave me alone with him...” He whimpered, looking to Bull who was already cheering a flask with Thaddeus. He went back onboard the ship.
Cassandra was fuming, “Explain yourself.”
She took a step forward the elf.
“Stop pointing that at me!” Sera yelled.
“What are you talking about? My weapon is nowhere near-“ Cassandra said.
“Your face. That scary angry face.” The elf rasped.
The Seeker’s fists tightened.
Adibas put a hand on her shoulder, “Come, Seeker. I’ll show you more of the ship.”
Varric burst, “Ship? Is that what we’re calling it, now?”
“Enough, Varric.” Cassandra spat.
“‘Enough?’ That’s not a word that I heard during your,” He cleared his throat, “‘Ship’ exploring endeavors.”
Naomi’s face turned red, her puffed cheeks trying to restrain a laugh of her own.
“Fine.” Cassandra turned, shrugging off Adibas’s hand.
He smiled, raising a thumbs-up to Naomi, “Wingman.” He mouthed.
The Captain nodded to him, returning the gesture.
“Alright, alright, ’nuff of that. We’ve got business. You ready?” Sera put her hands on her hips, looking to the Inquisitor.
“Ready.”
The Captain gave a salute.
“Alright, Buttercup. Lead the way.” Varric joined the two women.
“This way!” Sera turned, grabbing Naomi by the hand and pulling her through the crowd.
Mutters surrounded them as the three cut through the villagers.
“That’s the Inquisitor...”
“What is she doing here?”
“What is she doing with a dwarf and an elf, you mean?”
“That boat...”
Once again, Naomi was the center of attention, surrounded by strangers. That was a feeling she’d never get used to...or wanted to get used to.
A light rain had swept the village, and the dampness stuck to her with every step. Half of the houses were reduced to ashen bones, others still blazing persistently through the mist. The recently extinguished lot sent smoke twisting towards the sky as if someone had pinched them out a candle.
Verchiel in it’s prime might have reminded her of paintings she’d seen depicting the medieval times, constructed of stone huts, tattered rooves made of thatched plant material, and animal shit stinking up the muddied streets.
The citizens were hushed and skeptical. Their way of dress was different than other regions she’d been to. The women wore bonnets and loose, frayed dresses made of simple linen. The men wore little but tunics and long sleeves underneath. Everyone wore boots, though. In that regard, she was similar.
“So what exactly is the deal with the Friends of Red Jenny?” Varric asked.
Sera huffed in front of them, “Why are you lot always on about this? There's no deal. You just do things.”
“Just...’things.’ Like...whatever?” He asked.
“Just things.” She repeated.
Varric was perturbed, “Like the...what, hundred or so groups in Kirkwall? The ones that
sat around all night dressed as guards or exotic dancers, waiting to jump out and hit someone?”

Naomi grinned, dodging a pile of horse manure on the ground as her friends went on.

“Nah, a friend shut those in particular out. But they were legend, right?” Sera said.

The dwarf pinched his temple, “Of course…”

“I dunno why you’re so smug. I know way more people than you.”

“Quality over quantity.” Varric huffed.

“Pbblt! Winner over loser.” Sera stuck her tongue out, looking to the dwarf behind her.

The group left the confines of the log-fenced village, traversing down a path that cut through soggy lumps of grass. The fields were expansive with mountains just out of reach. It might have been pretty if the stench of death didn’t clog up the place.

“We’re not meeting them in the village?” Naomi asked.

Sera stopped walking, “Wait. You’re right. This is weird.” She pulled a note from her pocket, looking up at a tree marked by a boulder ahead of them, “I thought this little picture here would be closer to Verchiel. The people that leave me stuff don’t trek out to places like this. Give me a city, and I’ll give you a tour, but surprise, surprise – I don’t know stupid woods, or fields.”

Naomi peeked over her shoulder. Her eyes switched from the note, up to the landmark Sera was fixated on, and back down to the drawing.

“Let me go first.” The Inquisitor left the beaten trail, walking towards the sagging tree.

“Right, then.” Sera followed.

Varric took Bianca from his back, “You know, Buttercup, you might get better results from your ‘friends’ if you planned ahead a little.”

“See? That’s how I know you’re not really one of us. You think like a noble.” Sera stretched her hands before putting on her archer’s glove.

“Nah, I’m more of a pretender, really.” Varric lowered his voice as they entered open territory, “Keep acting like a big shot and hope it sticks. That’s pretty much how the surface dwarf thing works.”

He shook his head, judging by her expression that his words were lost upon her, “Point is, if you put a little more work in, you could pull off much bigger pranks.”

“Ugh. I get it, all right? You have better friends somewhere else.” She grunted.

“I’m not used to being so uninvolved in my own conversations…What did I say now?”

“All growly, never eye to eye. You miss people. Fine. Are you full-up or something?” Sera grimaced as she stepped in a deep puddle.

They were only a few paces away from the rendezvous point.

“Look, Buttercup, it’s hard to start a new story before you set down the old one.” He scanned the field for any signs of their contact.

“Again with books? Get a ruddy shelf. You know, that holds more than one?”

Varric nodded his head, condescendingly pursing his lips as he toyed with her words in his head, “You know, that was almost a coherent metaphor. Well done.”

“Piss off. Or thanks.” Sera turned her head, contemplated, then looked back to him, “Piss off!”

“Shh! Quiet.” Naomi directed, holding her hand out.

They were standing under the tree now. A rustling came from above them.

“What was that?” Sera looked up.

The view of a man’s underside came quickly, followed by weight that pinned the Inquisitor.

Then a shuffle.

And then a shout.

“Don’t hurt me! Harmond made me do it!” The man begged.

Naomi landed on her back as he fell on top of her.

The Assassin’s hidden blade pressed firmly to the man’s neck as he froze.

“Get. Off.” The Captain growled.

The man shuffled backward on his behind, kicking up mud as he frantically put space between himself and the vicious woman in front of him.
She leaned up, flapping her arms with disgust, “Fuck’s sake, mate.”
Sera extended a hand, pulling the Inquisitor to her feet.
Naomi rubbed the bruising area where she landed on the Staff strapped to her back,
“Appears things have gone sour, as they do.”
“No, no! It has to go right, or he’ll kill me for the marching. It wasn’t my fault!” The man jumped to his feet, his legs working again.
“You were the one with the rumor out of Verchiel? My friend?” Sera cocked her head.
“You’re her? You’re the one he’s waiting for!” The man ran towards a hulking boulder, shouting at the top of his lungs, “It’s her! She’s here! Red Jenny!”
As he ran passed it, he fell to his knees, a bloodied gurgle bouncing off the stone to his right. He slid on the wet ground, dead.
Someone was behind the stone, and that someone had shot the messenger.
The man walked out from his hiding spot, pulling the two arrows from the twitching corpse.
“There, that wasn’t so bad, was it?” He pulled a cloth from his pocket, wiping the red arrow tip as he approached the Inquisition party, “We identified the confusion, and we worked past it.” He placed it back in his quiver as he extended a hand to Naomi, “I’m Lord Harmond.”
Naomi’s lips curled into a snarl. She looked at his hand and crossed her arms.
“Fucking nobles.”
He retracted friendly gesture, his black glove crinkling as it rested on his side, “I shouldn’t be surprised. After all, your choice of company is hardly virtuous.”
“Pardon?” The Inquisitor’s brow creased.
“Friggin user, you are. Another noble prick who punches down!” Sera shouted.
Naomi held a hand to quiet her friend, “This show was your doing, or am I remembering that piece wrong?”
“Honestly?” Harmond shrugged, “Previous to this very moment, I thought you’d also been tricked by these Red Jennies. I attacked them on behalf of us both. I see that I was mistaken.”
The Captain looked to the rogue elf, “Sera, what’s he goin’ on about?”
“He killed my contacts. My friends.” Her fists tightened, “Killed innocent servants that did nothing but talk about what was going on.”
“Fucking hell. This was a revenge scheme?”
“ Entirely true.” Harmond admitted a bit too casual for Naomi’s liking, “Now, Inquisitor. Could we speak privately?”
“…and a plot to get me here.”
“You wanna have a light chat, but you’re quick to forget that Sera is my ally. You attacked her ‘friends.’” Naomi’s scarred nose crinkled, “‘Friends’ of the Inquisition.”
“Come now. It wasn’t a direct attack. The first move was hers…and apparently yours, by association.” He clasped his hands, “Inquisitor? Herald. I don’t want to be your enemy. I am barely invested in being her’s. If you are willing to recognize an opportunity, we could be exceptional partners.”
“Stop talking to him. Really, just stop it.” Sera interjected.
“Give it a minute.” Varric looked to the elf, “Take a deep breath.”
Naomi looked to the nobleman, “I’m more interested in hearing a piece about your occupation in Crestwood that my Spymaster wrote so fervently on.”
“Lady Chelle Monaeu and I were jockeying for the land south of Verchiel. To claim land, you must populate it. My people encouraged hers to leave. Her people answered in kind. Et cetera.”
Harmond smiled, “Really, it was all terribly standard displacement until your troops ‘seemed’ to change the balance. Well played, by the way.”
“So, you were up to something. And getting people hurt in the crossfire.” The freedom-fighting Assassin in her was becoming bloodthirsty.
“If you mean by seeking to strengthen my wealth and position, sure. I’m always up to that.” The nobleman ran his hand through his thick, black hair, “As for the villagers, well…Your ‘friend’
here is the one who empowered them. Made their complaints a threat.” His gaze turned to Sera, “Perhaps you should’ve warned them about talking to you.”

“Arse biscuit!” Sera spat on the ground at the man’s feet.

“Josephine has better taste than him, Inquisitor.” Varric’s hands grew restless.

He envisioned them around the man’s throat.

“You’re the same, you and I. We both need people.” Harmond continued his plea to the Inquisitor.

“Three, two,” Sera was quick to draw a dagger from her belt, “Friggin’ DONE!” She hurled the short blade.

Naomi tried to stop her, but wasn’t quick enough. Luckily, the dagger bounced off the man’s chest, it’s flat side hitting him rather than it’s point. It fell to the ground with a defeated, “thud.”

He leaned to pick it up, “Now, what was the point of that?”

As he stood, Sera and her blinding speed kicked the man between his legs, crippling him where it hurt most.

Varric cringed, covering his eyes and squeezing his legs together, “Oof, that hurt to watch. Should’ve just shot him, Buttercup.”

But Sera wasn’t done. She gripped Harmond’s shoulder, tossing him to the ground, knocking an arrow into her bow.

She fired it into the man’s chest, “Mother pusbucket friggin bastard shitebag pissface!”

And then another, “Eat it you lop-eared, son-of-an-arse-nut.”

“Sera.” Naomi whispered.

A third arrow lodged itself into the wheezing noble, “rot-suck-piece of--“

“Sera!” The Captain shouted as a fourth shaft was prepped to fly.

The blood-splattered elf turned to her, “WHAT?”

Sera’s chest was heaving, her eyes watery. Her arms eased the tension of the bowstring as she saw Varric and Naomi’s startled faces. The tip of the arrow lowered to the ground as she whimpered.

“You’re done. He’s done. Relax, it’s over.” Naomi rested a hand on her shoulder.

Sera eyed Harmond as he took his last breath, replacing her sadness with a renewed rage, “Like fun it is.”

She put a foot on his stomach, dislodging her arrows and bundling them with the one she ceased to fire, “Pisshead…” Sera pillaged the man’s quiver for more, turning to the Inquisitor and dwarf that patiently waited for her sanity to resurface.

“Friends, Inquisitor.” Sera released a hot breath, “Better than his lot any day.”

Naomi smiled, “There she is.”

“Seriously…” Varric snickered as he observed the dead man, “Nothing about the way you run things could ever possibly work.”

The elf let an evil grin twist her, “They work. They’ve done more. This is just...what I do.”

“Like fun it is.”

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“Well what you do doesn’t make sense.”

“Oh yeah? Well, you don’t make sense either.” Sera rearranged her overflowing quiver.

He looked up to Naomi, “Should I push, or am I just setting myself up for, ‘Your face doesn’t make sense?’”

Sera’s mouth hung open, “Your-...shut it!”

“A’right, a’right. Come, now. Let’s get out of here before we get in more trouble.” Naomi turned to the path.

Muffled laughs came from behind her.

She looked at her friends, “What?”

Sera covered her mouth, “You...you...” She burst into laughter.

“You look like you shit yourself.” Varric joined her.

Naomi twisted so she could see her backside. A perfect outline of her body was painted in brown, “Blast it all...fuckin’ arses, the both of you.” She glared at them, “Hop to it, then. Aren’t
“you supposed to tell me what else we’re in this God-forsaken place for?”
“Oh, yeah. Something about meeting the Champion. Can’t remember where, though.” Sera clutched her cramped stomach.
“The Champion?” Varric asked.
“That’s what I said.”
Naomi rubbed the side of her head, tuning out the current banter and reflecting on her past encounters, “I’m starting to think it’s just Varric.”
Shouting came from a slope that met the end of their previous trail. A man ran out of a cave, another trailing behind them, “FASTER! That’s the Champion, you idiot!”
Both of them were suddenly lit aflame, becoming a mess of orange and red and tortured screams.
“Yelling and fire. Sure sign that Hawke is around.” Varric chuckled.
Naomi’s shoulders lifted and fell as she took a deep breath, thinking back to when she united the Staff with the Apple,
“Should’ve just let that Templar kill me.”

Chapter End Notes

Dear Reader:
Thank you so much for sticking it out with me. I truly hope you enjoy reading "The Howling Rift" as much as I enjoy writing it. It's a labor of love, and it's hard to get all the kinks worked out sometimes, but your support and feedback is what has kept me going.
I'm working on something special, and I hope to not disappoint! Hint: Comics. ;D
"You cannot friend a hawk, they said, unless you are a hawk yourself, alone and only a sojourner in the land, without friends or the need of them."
-Stephen King

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was late afternoon, and the wind carried a warm breeze, although the burnt stench of the village ruined any solace it would have brought.

Varric, Naomi, and Sera stood at the flowery base of the hill where the flaming men once ran from Hawke. They were knee-deep in an argument, but Sera stood her ground.

She wasn’t changing her mind.

“Andraste’s tits I’m going up there.” Sera laughed, “You’ll find me in the Galley when you’re ready to set sail. Not goin’ in the cave with crazy Hawke and his wench.”

Naomi and Varric watched her skip back towards Verchiel.

“Find it a sound idea to let her go through the town unsupervised?” Naomi asked.

“Not at all, Spitfire.” Varric sighed, “Come on, let’s go meet up with Hawke. He doesn’t skulk around unless it’s important.”

Varric began up the path winding up the side of the mountainous hill, Naomi in tow.

“I’ve been meaning to talk with you.” He started, “I never officially joined the Inquisition. I don’t know how to do this…disciple hood thing.” Varric sighed, “I’m a businessman. Never really followed a ‘Chosen One’ before.”

“Varric, you’ve been the only one to treat me with some sense of normalcy. For the love’o Christ himself, don’t stop now, mate.” Naomi groaned.

“Maybe you’re right. Maybe I’m overthinking things.” He shook his head, “You just…You don’t know what you are to the people out there. The Herald of Andraste is a symbol bigger than any of us.”

“What’s with the gloom, Varric?” She asked, “Goin’ soft on me, now?”

“No, it’s just… None of this shit makes any sense to me.” He sighed, “Is this the end of the world? Did Andraste send you through the Breach? I have no idea. All I know is what I felt when the crowd started singing after Haven was attacked.”

“Christ, mate, please tell me you aren’t ‘bout to burst into song.” Naomi pinched her temples.

“Don’t worry, I’m not that cruel.” Varric grinned, “Still…either you’re guided by the hand of some higher power, or you have the worst luck.”

Naomi was shocked, “You actually believe I was sent by Andraste?”

“Shit, this is going to be awkward.” He shrugged, “I guess I do. I don’t have a nug in this race. It could be bullshit, it could be true. I’ll never know.”

“Wish I had the answers, mate. I’d be just as sure to ask questions if I knew they weren’t fallin’ on deaf ears.” She admitted.

“The deaf ears of this Shroud cursed from Hell.”

Varric’s brows pinched, “Just look at all the shit that’s happened to you. You were saved from the explosion that leveled a mountaintop, and fell out of the Fade. You traveled through time.
Faced down one of the ancient Magisters who started the Blights. Had a mountain fall on you. And lived.” He looked up to her, “One of those things would be impossible. All of them together? That’s a miracle.”

Naomi wasn’t accustomed to Varric’s newfound intensity, “Me life’s been nothin’ but bad luck and miracles.” She rubbed the crook of her neck, “In truth, I find meself getting’ too old for this shite.”

“That…” He grinned, “That is something we can agree on.”

…”

Naomi grimaced as she stepped over a smoldering sack of flesh, ripped from any humane features by the blackened ash that encased it.

“That’d be a smoke bomb if I’ve ever saw.”

“Don’t go throwing up again. Cassandra isn’t here to help you, and I’m not tall enough.” Varric huffed.

Naomi placed her fabric mask over her face.

The cave was dark, lit by only a few torches that dotted the walls. Moist stalactites jutted from the ceiling, threatening to poke her head with every step. Large bugs crawled and danced around their bases.

“Bastards better not fall on me.”

Her hidden dagger stood at the ready, eager to slice any of the oversized insects at her will.

“Who is it?” Garrett’s chime filled the tunnel.

“It’s just us, Hawke.” Varric responded, “You called?”

They rounded the corner, finding the Champion leaning on a slick wall, waiting for them, “You know, I find myself wondering why you don’t have a nickname for me.” Garrett said.

“I call you Hawke. You’ve probably heard it once or twice.” Varric rolled his eyes.

“But that’s my name. It’s not like ‘Spitfire,’ or ‘Rivaini.’” He frowned.

“We really goin’ to shoot the shite ‘bout nicknames, Champion?”

Varric grinned, “All right, Waffles. You really want a nickname, I can hook you up.”

“Waffles? That’s…unexpected.” Hawke’s brows pinched.

“Hawke said sarcastically.” Varric said.

“I wasn’t being sarcastic…” He mumbled.

“Hawke said diplomatically.” Varric continued.

Garrett looked peeved, “You know I hate it when you do that.”

“Hawke muttered angrily to the dwarf…” Varric didn’t stop.

“I hope the story ends, ‘And then Hawke backhanded the mouthy dwarf.’” Garrett snickered.

Naomi’s head bounced between the speakers, doing her best to withhold a laugh.

“Forget the novelty of you two alone and together,” She interrupted, her voice muffled by her mask, “Can yeh tell me what drug us here ‘side from Sera’s li’l show?”

Hawke straightened himself, “Of course, Inquisitor. Please, this way.” He extended a hand, showing them to the back half the cave.

Varric and Naomi followed him.

“We charted the course and only landed yesterday. Isabela went to fetch her ship, said it was anchored somewhere nearby. She’ll be arriving with my uh- contact shortly.” Hawke paused, “Oh, and Varric?”

“What?” He answered.

“Isabela also told me she was calling in a special favor from Redcliffe, and said you would know what she meant before kissing me on the cheek and running away.” Hawke turned to him, “Oh, oh no. You only give me that look when something very bad’s about to happen. Forget I said anything.” He pulled a torch from the wall and continued.

“If she’s bringing who I think she is, things are about to get very, very interesting.” Varric sighed,
“Your Warden friend, the one you refuse to tell us about—are they also coming from Redcliffe?”
“No. He’s coming from Kirkwall…or came from Kirkwall. I don’t think he’s been there as of late, what with Sebastian and Starkhaven trying to take over.” Hawke led them into a circular chamber, well-lit and furnished with wooden chairs and tables.

A map lay on a desk in front of them, and the cave appeared to have been inhabited.
“Found yerself established after a day, aye?” Naomi asked.
“This was a smugglers cave before I disposed of the smugglers.” Hawke admitted.
“Ah, must be why I feel so at home.” She removed the Staff from her back, using it to help herself lower onto one of the chairs, crossing her legs.
“You were a smuggler too, then?” Hawke asked.
“I’ll never admit it to the others, but aye, we dabbled in weapon and goods trafficking fer the cause.” She slung her mask around her neck.
“Likewise. Not so much for an Order of Assassins—well…actually, they weren’t too far off. Anyway, that’s how my family and I got into Kirkwall.” Hawke shrugged, “Take what you can get and run with it, am I right?”
“You are, mate. You are.” Naomi agreed.

So Rivaini went to Redcliffe to call in a favor, but that had nothing to do with your contact.” Varric began, “And your contact is a Warden from Kirkwall. Hawke, please tell me it isn’t—"
“Hellooo?” Isabela called from the chamber.
“Halt! Who goes there?” Hawke answered sarcastically.
“Of course it is.” Varric sighed again.
Isabela rounded the corner with a man who wore heavy armor. It was silver, and his pauldrons held embossed Griffins like the one’s from Josephine’s Grey Warden lessons.
"The lion-eagle from mythology. Always found it fitting."
Blue fabric protected his skin underneath the plates. He had black hair, and piercing blue eyes.

More footsteps followed.
“What Thedas-shattering matter requires my attention this time?” The strong-jawed man asked Varric.
“So, they know of each other.”
“Easy, Junior. The Inquisitor is among us.” Varric answered.
“Don’t call me…” The Warden shook his head, “Inquisitor, I am Warden Carver Hawke, at your service.”

Naomi extended a hand to greet him, “Inquisitor McNamara. Pleasure.”
He studied her carefully, grasping her palm, “Sorry for the smoke and mirrors. The guards have been told I’m a traitor and Warden-Commander Clarel has issued my arrest.”
Too many a time a good man’s blood is shed by following bad orders.” She said.
Carver scratched his head, looking at Garrett.
“Darling,” Isabela hung off of Garrett’s arm, “Please don’t be mad?”
“At wha—”

Two figures stood in the clearing.
Immediately, Naomi stood from her chair, Staff standing parallel to her form, “Aye, quite the surprise to see you two again.”
Alistair and Katya Theirin.
The King and Queen of Fereldan.
However, they, too, now wore Grey Warden’s armor.
“The surprise is mine to have, I assure you.” Katya crossed her arms.
“O’King, nice to see you again. Cousland, keeping him alive, through all this, I see?” Varric bowed.
“Odd seeing Varric so pleasant toward nobility.”
“You’re the only one who can still call me Cousland without getting their head severed from their shoulders.” Katya laughed, “I’m sorry that our last encounter was so cold. We were not among familiar faces.”

“You don’t need to explain public appearances to me, my lovely Queen.” Varric winked.

“More like you, mate.”

Katya scoffed, rolling her eyes.

“That’s my Commander you’re addressing,” Carver jabbed a finger to Varric, “Show some respect.”

“It’s alright, Warden Hawke.” Katya walked forward, “Varric served Fereldan valiantly when he, Alistair, and Isabela journeyed together.”

“The three of you? Out and about?” Naomi asked.

“I’d rather not hear them revisit it.” Garrett sighed.

Isabela gave him a nudge, “You’re not the only one who disappears on their loved ones to scout the uncharted wilds, my sweet.”

“Yes, and strange how both of you still give me the utmost headaches.” Alistair nodded to Garrett, “Champion.”

“King.” Garrett responded coldly.

Alistair glared, “Fereldan could have used your service stomping out the magical flames of the war Anders started. Pity you were so quick to flee Kirkwall.”

“Some bad blood there, aye?”

Hawke bit his tongue.

Isabela sighed, “Dear King, haven’t we gone over this oh so many times before? Friend, you are still as stubborn as you are handsome.”

“I’d be inclined to agree.” Katya chuckled, “Also, I don’t ever think I had the chance to thank you properly, Isabela.” She offered a handshake, “So thank you for helping my husband remedy the mystery of his father.”

“His father? It’d seem I’m behind in the times, as it were.”

Isabela shook Katya’s hand with vigor, “You’re very welcome, Queen. If the throne wants to pay me that much for anything, ever, please don’t hesitate to call on my crew and I again. And I do mean anything.”

“Allrighty then,” Hawke pulled Isabela back, “I do believe it’s time to get this meeting started.”

“Agreed.” Carver glared at Isabela.

Naomi kicked a rock, bored and anxious all at once, “Go on, then. Tell me what you ought to.”

Carver clasped his hands behind his back, pacing throughout the small cavern, “When my brother slew Corypheus, Weisshaupt was happy to put the matter to rest. But an archdemon can survive wounds that seem fatal, especially when not put down by the hands of a Grey Warden.” He continued, “Then, not long after, every Warden in Orlais began to hear the Calling…”

Naomi crossed her arms, “What’s this ‘Calling?’”

Alistair explained, “The Calling tells a Warden that the Blight will soon claim them.” His eyes drifted to the ground, “Starts with dreams. Then comes whispers into their head. The Warden says their farewells and goes to the Deep Roads to meet their death in combat.”

Naomi whispered to Varric, “Deep Roads?”

“Darkspawn everywhere. Underground. Tell you more later.” He quietly answered.

Hawke’s eyes saddened. “And every Grey Warden in Orlais began to hear the Calling…”

“Does that include you?” Varric asked.

Carver avoided the stares pointed at him, “Sadly. I have heard the whispers of the
“Calling myself, but it is only noise. No words, certainly no commands.”

“Maker,” Garrett stepped closer to him, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Katya answered for Carver, “It is a Grey Warden matter. He is bound by an oath of secrecy.”

Hawke shifted, clearly upset.

“Speaking of pesky rules and such, if you’re the Commander of the Grey, who is Commander Clarel?” Isabela asked.

“She is the Orlesian Warden-Commander.” Katya answered, “Her actions drove Warden Hawke into my service once she started…” Katya turned to Carver, “It’d be better if you explained it.”

“Yes ma’am.” Carver nodded, “Warden-Commander Clarel spoke of a blood magic ritual to prevent future Blights before we all perished. When I protested the plan as madness, my own comrades turned on me.”

“You mean to say Corypheus controls Commander Clarel, s’well?” Naomi asked.

“It’s hard to say.” Carver shook his head.

“Either way, the guilt is hers.” Alistair’s fists tightened, “She is a Warden-Commander. She should bow to no one’s word but Weisshaupt’s.”

Katya gave him a loving smile.

“Dedicated fellows, aren’t you?”

“Weisshaupt is the Warden’s headquarters.” Varric whispered.

Naomi nodded, “Thanks, mate.”

“So, the Wardens think they’re dying and have stopped thinking clearly? That won’t go well.” Varric put his hands on his hips, “Corypheus pulled the same shit the last time we fought him. He got into their heads. Messed with their minds, turned them against each other.”

“Wonderful.” Naomi leaned against the Staff, “Corypheus has the Venatori, the Red Templars, the Order of Fiery Promise, and now, possibly, the Wardens as well? We’re going to have to get to work on our recruitment. Competition’s gettin’ thick.”

Garrett’s teeth clenched, “Corypheus is my responsibility. I thought I’d killed him before. This time, I’ll make sure of it.”

Carver laughed, “We are the only ones who can truly slay Archdemons.”

“I don’t think you can, not my ‘normal’ means, anyway.” Garrett explained, “The Wardens at the prison couldn’t attack him. They had him locked up because there was nothing else they could do.” He turned to Naomi, “They used my father’s blood in a ritual to seal Corypheus inside. But he could still reach out and influence the Wardens’ thoughts. He sent them after me. The only way for us to escape the prison Corypheus was trapped in was to go through him.”

Varric finished, “We weren’t going to just leave the door to his prison open behind us and hope he was dead. We made sure.” He rubbed his chin, “He claims he’s a Magister. One who assaulted the Golden City, what, more than a thousand years ago? It seems crazy, but if he’s telling the truth, he’s one of the people who caused the Blights.”

“I remember searching for a pulse. There was none.” Isabela shuddered, “A sly one, that Corypheus…”

“He must be stopped.” Carver pulled a map from his satchel, pressing it over the previous bandit’s notes that resided on the desk.

The others gathered to observe it.

Carver pointed to an expanse to the west, “Grey Wardens are gathering here, in the Western Approach province within Orlais. There is an ancient Tevinter ritual tower nearby.”

Katya looked to Naomi, “Inquisitor, with your help, I believe this is where we will find our answers. Without the Wardens, the Blights will consume the world.”

“You’re the Queen of Fereldan and Commander of the Grey within, what could you possibly need with the Inquisition?” Naomi asked earnestly.

Alistair leaned in from around Katya, “Our political position in the Fereldan Courts makes it…difficult, for us to travel in Orlais. The ball at the Winter Palace isn’t too far off, and we were hoping the Inquisition could grant us safe passage…discreetly.”
“If by ‘ball’ you mean the gathering of murderous, politickey charged psychopaths, sure.” Varric grunted.

Naomi gripped Alistair’s shoulder, “Why didn’t yeh just say so, mate? My crew and I live for breakin’ the rules!” Her finger traced a blue line that led to the edge of the Western Approach, just south of Orlais, “This inlet deep enough to sail The Dishonored?”

“I would think so.” Isabela observed, “I believe that’s the main thoroughfare used by the voyagers who discovered it in the first place.”

“Splendid,” Naomi grinned, “We’ll already be halfway there by the time we’re done stoppin’ the assassination.”

“Yes…Isabela informed us of the vision you saw at Redcliffe. Trying times, indeed.” Alistair grunted.

“Well, now that you’ve agreed to help us, I believe it’s time to discuss the second part of our plan.” Katya interrupted, “Once we are close enough to Val Royeaux, Isabela and her ship will break away from your Inquisition. Warden Hawke, the Champion, and I will be onboard.” She sighed, “And Alistair will remain at Skyhold to oversee things while the Inquisition deals with the ball.”

“I’ll what?” Alistair turned to his wife, “We’ve discussed no such matters.”

“Aye, hadn’t given it much thought, but you wouldn’t be wrong ‘bout Skyhold’s vulnerability while my Advisors and I be away.” Naomi answered.

Alistair had little to say after that.

“How many Wardens can Skyhold fit within its walls?” Katya asked.

“We’ll find the room, lass.” Naomi said.

“Wonderful. I will mobilize my Wardens upon our arrival. Warden Hawke, you will sail with your brother on Isabela’s ship. Alistair…” Katya turned to her husband, “I will sail with the Inquisitor aboard The Dishonored. I’d like some time to speak with her alone.”

Could never keep you tied down for long, could I?” Alistair smiled, “Except on a few special occasions…”

Garrett cleared his throat, “Ahem.”

“Very well. Never had a Queen sail with me, it’ll be an interesting voyage fer sure.” Naomi smirked.

“Save for the Queen Anne’s Revenge by my side…Oh, Blackbeard…”

“Where’ve you dropped anchor, lass?” Naomi asked Isabela.

“Next to you. In the port.” Isabela rested an elbow on her shoulder, “This is where you get to tell me yours is bigger than mine.”

“Finally admit it, aye?” Naomi laughed, “Maybe now we can be friends, then.”

“Women of the sea should always be friends…” Isabela answered, “Count me in.”

“Avast, mate.” Naomi shook her hand, “Let us be off, then.”

Garrett protested Isabela’s tug on his arm, “You two aren’t allowed to be friends. Sounds dangerous.”

“Only if you let it be.” Isabela winked.

The Champion of Kirkwall, Garrett Hawke, and his brother, Warden Carver Hawke.
The Scourge of Thedesian Waters, Isabela, and her well-connected friend, Varric Tethras.
The King of Fereldan and a Grey Warden himself, Alistair Theirin.
The Queen and Hero of Fereldan, and Commander of the Fereldan Grey, Katya Theirin.
This was Naomi’s company, now.
“Maybe the Inquisitions’ recruitment shan’t be different than that of Corypheus’s, after all.”
The small army left for the docks of Verchiel.

…

The stares that followed the march through the small village were more honoring than when Naomi had arrived. They couldn’t believe what they saw—royalty among the Inquisition.
“This’ll have repercussions, no doubt.”
Katya finished her letter to Skyhold, and handed it back to the postman. She rejoined them thereafter, and took to the Inquisitor’s side, “I’ve sent word to my Wardens, as well as a report to Leliana.”
“You know of Leliana?” Naomi asked.
“I do. We are comrades from what seems like a lifetime ago.” Katya answered.
“A lifetime I’d soon forget.” Alistair huffed.
“This bunch gets more interesting by the minute.”
A booming laughter caught her interest.
Adibas.
He stood at the docks, facing an elf man who wore a familiar sort of leather armor and a dagger on his hip.
A pirate.
“Seems our Officers are bonding quite nicely.” Isabela walked next to Naomi.
“What’s that?” She asked.
“My First Mate, Brand.” Isabela pointed her chin to the elf, “He’s made a new acquaintance.”
“Quite.”

The two women approached them, the rest of the group in tow.
“Captain.” The men responded simultaneously, laughing at one another.
“You been drinkin’, mate?” Naomi grinned at a mischievous Adibas.
“Perhaps.” He answered honestly, “This crew offers a fine wine.”
“Share the rum, then, aye?” Naomi smirked, “Won’t be outdone by ‘em, will we now?”
“We will not, Captain.” Adibas rest a hand on his chest, and gave her a slight bow.
He walked up the wooden plank, “Thaddeus! Help me move three barrels from below!”
Tad hiccupped, “Aye-aye, Quartermaster Lacroix!”
Isabela laughed at their display, “Brand, we’re headed to Skyhold. Get the men ready.”
“Aye, Captain.” Brand answered, looking behind her, “Oh, no…”
“What’s the matter?” She asked.
“Last time Alistair and Varric were aboard the Siren’s Call, we ended up sieged by the Qunari and anchored on the coast of a mad man’s prison.” He frowned.
“Yes, and now Hawke and his brother are here to keep us in line.” Isabela jested.
“Was that supposed to make me feel better? Because it didn’t.” Brand marched aboard, “Come on, then. Let’s get you all settled so we can depart.”
Varric, Carver, and Garrett followed him.
“What’s that supposed to mean?” Hawke asked.
Alistair paused, turning to Katya before he embarked, “Stay safe, my Queen.”
He embraced her, and kissed her forehead before looking into her eyes.
“Makes me feel all tingly. Hate the tinglies nowadays, I do. They complicate things.”
Naomi tried not to think of Cullen.
“I’ll be right behind you.” Katya returned a kiss to Alistair, “Try not to worry.”

“With you?” He laughed before following the others, “I always worry.”

He made his way onboard, and followed Varric below deck.

Cassandra stomped to the railing of *The Dishonored*, “I leave you alone for a few hours, and all I hear is—” She froze, “Your majesty!?"

“It’s alright, Seeker Pentaghast,” Katya approached the wooden bridge of the ship, “No need for formalities. We are among friends, now.” Katya turned to Naomi, “Permission to climb aboard, Captain?”

“Aye, lass.” Naomi crossed her arms, “Thanks fer that.”

“Of course. I know the rules around here.” Katya smirked, walking next to Cassandra and putting a hand on her back, “Introduce me to everyone, would you?”

“Y-yes, your grace.” Cassandra stammered.

“So many yellings are to be had for me. Sorry, lass.”

The water lapped against the who Hulls that rolled above them, reflecting the sunset that shone between the gap of the two ships. Salt water drifted through the air, and Naomi filled her lungs with the welcoming scent. She looked to *The Dishonored* and exhaled.

"It's always a feeling of home and hearth when I see you."

Isabela placed a hand on her hip and watched the vessels float on either side of a narrow pier, “I suppose yours isn't that much bigger.”

“We’re makin’ progress, don’t squander it.” Naomi grinned.

“Shall we see who is *faster*?” Isabela held a hand out.

Naomi embraced her forearm, “Aye, we shall, *Captain*.”

Isabela’s eyes lit with excitement, “Off we go then, Captain McNamara.”

“Aye. Off ya’ be, and be safe ya’ ought.” Naomi waved as they both climbed the bridges of their respective ships, their backs facing each other.

“And prepare yourself ta’ lose that challenge’o yers, lass.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry this chapter took so long to post. Life happened, and I've been enthralled in my other fic. I will do my best to update in a more time-sensitive manner.

Love you all, and thank you again!

Will be writing more after finals.
ind crept down the Frostbacks, glinting the frothy waves that kissed the Dishonored’s Hull. Winter’s scent descended upon Her crew, carrying a promise of colder days to come. Naomi growled at the numbness spreading from one cheek to the other. The gradual shift from temperate to frigid air never got easier.

“Blasted weather…Was nice not feel’n me bones chatter from breathin’ for a bit in Crestwood.”

She stood at the Helm, wiping her nose on her glove. Adibas and Katya had joined her on the Captain’s Deck. The Queen shivered much less than the two pirates.

“Batten down the hatches, mates! Rammin’ the ice soon!” Naomi pulled her furred hood tighter around her neck.

“Aye-aye, Cap’n!” Christopher shouted, followed by hoarse commands to various crewmembers. “Getting’ rather tired of being a ferry…” She sighed.

“Truth be told, I miss the battles for the sea.” Adibas agreed.

“As I, mate. As I…”

A cold gust blew the sails, and the masts rocked back in protest.

“Cassandra was right. She is a mighty vessel.” Katya smiled.

“Aye. Best prepare yourself, Queen of Ferelden. Ice ram gets a tad vicious when it’s hungry.”

“A splendid occasion there’s plenty to feed it, then.” She nodded, “Is this ship yours, or is She commissioned?”

“She’d be mine. Sank lots others like it in our time together.”

“Hm…Yes, the burden of power.” She leaned against the railing. “Much like your mark.”

“Save for the Anchor is sure to kill me sooner than this ship.”

“Of the Pieces.”

“The key to Thedas’s survival is something that kills you slowly?” She smirked, “I’m familiar with that sort of fate. A Grey Warden’s duty comes with the same level of sacrifice.”

“Aye, so Warden Blackwall says.” Naomi looked at her, “I promise that the Inquisition will do everything in its power to protect Ferelden and its allies.”

“I don’t doubt that, especially with Cullen as Commander.”

“Do you know each other personally?”

“Not as well as I’d like. He was a famed Templar, and my husband, being the ex-Templar he is, speaks highly of him. As for myself, I only fought alongside Cullen for a brief time.” Katya sighed, “Either way, I’m pleased to find he’s recovered after what happened at Ferelden’s Circle. The state I found him in…There are still nights I dream of it.”

“Did something…happen to him?”

“Has he not told you?”

“Nothing specifically…” Naomi frowned.

“I’ll let him be the first to speak of it, then. It wouldn’t be my place.”

“I understand, lass.”

Naomi’s gloves froze against the spokes of the Helm. A shallow layer of snow danced
in the wind, spiraling upwards from the ice sheet approaching them.
“Are you two close?” Katya grinned.
“You could say they are.” Adibas sniffed before spitting a mound of mucus overboard.
“I suppose…He is one of my most treasured advisors, after all.”
“Ah, I’ve seen that look before.” Katya smiled, “Careful, Inquisitor. Take it from me- fighting next to someone you care for can have its upsides, but what goes up…”
“Will most certainly come down…Unless of course, I pump it full of magic unknown to the lands I hail from.”
“Quite.” She laughed, “Say, it’s true then? That your home harbors no magic?”
“None of the sort you’d find in Thedas, I’d reckon.”
“It must be pleasant, having no demons to fight.”
Naomi grunted, “We have demons of our own, they just come in the shape of rich men and politicians with means they can control.”
“Seems more dangerous to me.”
“I have yet to decide, in truth.”

A cloud of snowflakes descended from the heavens, twirling and twisting around the ship and those who were tasked to keep it afloat.
“Never fancied the royal life myself. I always wanted to ride off into combat with my brother and father.” Katya watched the icy waves roll, “There was a time where my name was Katya Cousland. The Couslands were a noble house that ruled the teyrnir of Highever, having power only seconded by the Royal Family.”
“Fitting you’d become the Queen, then.” Adibas noted.
“Yes…At first, pursuing the crown was a personal goal bred by vengeance and despair.” She admitted, “A once-trusted man by the name of Arl Howe betrayed my family, and held responsibility for their deaths. My brother was the only survivor from his siege on Castle Cousland aside from myself. I was young and ambitious, and I would not let my family name die to the Fifth Blight. So when Warden Duncan offered me a place within the Grey Wardens, I accepted merely to prolong my life so I could take Howe’s…Alistair was among the Wardens. I came to love that man more fervently than I’ve ever loved in my entire life.”
Naomi and Adibas listened intently.
“And then it came to light that Alistair was the bastard son of King Theirin, ‘Maric the Savior,’ one of the greatest Kings Ferelden has ever known. Even after making myself the Queen became a lost priority, it seemed the Maker had another plan for me.” She shifted, “A king requires an heir…a legitimate heir. The Joining strips Wardens the ability to create children, and so, I’ve spent the last six months trying to find a cure. For both Alistair and myself.” She paused, “I apologize, I didn’t mean to bore you with a history lesson. I’m sure Josephine puts you through enough of them.”
“Perhaps another time, then…”

“A’right, beasty…Have your fill!” The Dishonored’s ram caught the edge of the sheet, sending it’s stern skyward. The wood and steel that formed Her Hull came down, scattering bits of ice into an array of broken crystals. The arctic ocean spray burnt Naomi’s face as the white water brushed the Deck.
The ship rocked forward and took aim below. Adibas held Katya, securing her against the railing as his muscles strained to keep both of them in place.

“Swift reaction, Quartermaster! I don’t suppose you’ve given thought to working for Ferelden’s Army?”

“Apologies, Queen!” He shouted over the destruction, “I sold my soul to the Dishonored long ago!”

The waves rippled under the ship, violently rocking it in place.

“Are we stuck, Captain?” Katya looked to Naomi.

“Nay! Give Her time!” She scrunched her nose and squinted as another gust blew over them.

A horn bellowed from behind.

“What is it, Adie?! Bit occupied keepin’ Her stable!” Her boots squeaked and slid, and her strong legs quickly adjusted.

“Siren’s Call, Captain! Some sort of signal!”

“Think they’re smart enough to follow through the path?”

“I believe you’ve given them little choice!”

The ship creaked and waned, and the Dishonored lurched forward, chomping at the bit. Her jaws crunched through the frozen depths with gnawing teeth, devouring the ice. She shook as the obstacle before Her crumbled, creating piles of snow and splinters on either side. They created a rift in the ice that filled the inlet leading to Skyhold Port.

Katya gazed at the entrance, formed by two mountainsides that were split in the middle,

“She fits through here?”

“Aye, with careful navigation!”

They left the open waters and pushed through the narrow passage. Naomi spun the wheel against the squall, keeping the masts away from the stone walls that enveloped them. The wind funneled through the inlet, sending the snow straight into the sails. Their colors darkened, harboring the wetness from the frozen flakes.

“Wet sails give us more speed. Less escape for air that way.” Naomi explained as she struggled to keep the Helm in place, “Get our mains off the wind!”

The Riggers responded, pulling the main sails into a roll.

“Can’t be going fast in a valley like this.” Adibas glared at the cliffs.

“That’d be fer certain!”

“I find comfort onboard a ship with such an experienced crew.” Katya nervously rubbed her arms as Adibas released her.

“We’ve been at this for a long while.” He winked.

They rounded a bend, and the sun twinkled in the cloudy sky. Golden flag posts glinted in its rays, highlighting the port and the castle that loomed above it.

“This…is Skyhold?” Katya’s mouth hung in amazement.

“Grand old fort, isn’t it?”

“Indeed…”

Naomi cracked her neck, “Adie, take the wheel for a moment.”

“Aye-aye, Captain.”

She switched places with him and shook the looming vibrations from her hands. Her arms were jellied from holding the jerking wheel in place.

“Angry today, isn’t She?” Adibas cackled, wrangling the Helm.

“Always had a bad temper, this ship.” Naomi shakily extended her spyglass, curious to see who’s faces awaited their return, “Leliana, Josephine…and a handful of guards, armed to the teeth.”

Her heart sank.

“Not a Commander in sight. Must’ve mucked that letter worse than I imagined.”

She sighed, “Prepare to drop anchor, mates. We’re home!”

A cheer came from the shivering crew. Naomi shook her own chill from herself, though, it came from something other than the weather.
Isabela’s ship followed, using the trail carved by the *Dishonored* as an avenue. The remaining ice was thin enough for her ship to break, and she dropped her own anchor at a second pier that looked to have been constructed under a severe time restriction.

“*Hope the lass doesn’t fall in.*”

The slam of the *Dishonored*’s wooden bridge against the cold earth sounded, and Naomi left the Helm.

“Captain on deck!” Thaddeus shouted.

“It’s too early t’be yellin’, Tad.” Naomi rubbed her head, “Little sleep these last nights.”

“Apolgies, Cap’n.”

Katya grinned, “After you, Inquisitor.”

“Aye, I not be the Inquisitor till I make landfall. I’d like to stay on the ship and delay it as long as possible.”

“Inquisitor!” Josephine called.

“Comin’, lass!”

*Bloody fuckin’ Inquisition, blasted demons, stupid-*

She marched down the bridge.

Josephine looked like she hadn’t slept in days, either. Her hair was frazzled, and her eyes were sunken.

“Stay up all night drinkin’?*”

She shot her an angry look. Josephine was never one to be cross and show her hand, but today she was clearly irritated.

“I’ve spent the last 48 hours planning the arrival of the *King* and *Queen* of Ferelden. Do you know how last minute-“

“Josie.” Leliana nudged her.

Katya joined them, and the two Advisors bowed in unison.

“Leliana.” She muttered, “Please don’t do that.”

“You are the Queen, Lady Theirin.”

“Oh, bother. You’re still angry with me?”

“You disappeared for months without a word. Why would I be angry, your grace?”

Katya pinched her temple.

“If it isn’t my second-favorite red head.” Alistair approached them from the left, “No offence, Inquisitor. You’re a close third.”

Naomi huffed.

“Hello, old friend.” Leliana smiled.

“Well, well, well. Isn’t this interesting?” Varric put his hands on his hips, “O’King, Nightingale, Cousland- three of the original band who fought the Fifth Blight. Myself, Hawke, Rivaini, Junior-four heroes who banded together to clean up the aftermath. And then there’s the Inquisitor, who makes us all looks bad. This chapter will be a crowd favorite.”

“Show some respect, *Varric.*” Josephine sneered, “You are in the presence of-“

“Oh, dear Antiva. If you only knew the adventures I’ve been on with this one.” He nodded to Alistair, “I’m pretty sure I get a pass.”

Naomi looked passed Leliana and Josephine at the stairs leading up the cliff.

“*Where is he?*”

Cassandra’s boots crunched the snow behind her.

“Lady Pentaghast, I have orders from the Commander to escort you to the forge, at once.” A soldier saluted her.

“The forge? Why would…” She darted from Naomi to the soldier, “Of course. I will follow.”

Naomi’s eyes narrowed, and she watched the two depart. She looked at the group of Thedasian heroes, and tried to slink away.
“Captain McNamara!” Isabela shouted. 
She froze, “Yes, lass?”
“What in Andraste’s pointed tits is that thing?!”
“An ice ram.” Naomi snapped her fingers, “Isn’t that obvious by the trailing mote of free-running water it left your li’l ship to sail on?”
“Little?” Her fists curled at her sides, “Call my ship little again.”
“Li’l. Stinkin’. Ship.”
Isabela’s face scoured and melted all at once. She burst into laughter, and slapped a hand on Naomi’s shoulder, “Well, done.”
She slipped out from under her, “Cover me, yea?”
Isabela raised an eyebrow, “What are you up to, Inquisitor?”
“Doin’ what I do best, getting’ into mischief.” She winked, and disappeared behind a rack lined with fish.
“I’ll do as you ask, but you owe me.”
“Owe you? Don’t forget who sealed the Breach, lass.”
A golden, subtle light marked her exit, unknowing to the reunion that took over the docks.

Naomi bound across the courtyard. Solas came out from the tavern, and she ducked behind a wagon loaded with linen sacks.
“Damn it all…”
She peaked through the spoked wheel to see Cassandra still tailing the guard. He halted, and opened the door to the forge. Cassandra gave him a nod, and walked inside. The man stood guard out front.
“Spying on-“
Naomi twisted, grabbed a tan shirt, and pressed her hidden blade against a pale throat.
“Solas.”
“It appears I’ve forgotten the cardinal rule of never sneaking up on an Assassin.”
“So it seems.”
She released him, and turned back to the building. Solas crouched next to her, hiding behind the second wheel.
“I’ve been looking for you.” He whispered.
“I’m sure of it.”
She had yet to figure out why he irked her so, but it didn’t matter. Her instincts were always right, and they were telling her Solas was bad news. Had been that way for a while.
“We have much to discuss-“
“Shhhhh.” Naomi held a finger to his lips, and closed her eyes.
Her Precursor senses spanned across the courtyard, and she heard the muffled version of a conversation between Cassandra and Cullen.
“Found you.”
“I need to speak-“ Solas interrupted.
Naomi removed her fingers from his mouth, “Oh, what is it?”
“I need to speak with you about your magic.”
“It’s not bloody magic.”
“More reason to explore it, then.” His brow furrowed, “Your recklessness in the matter is-“
“Here.” Naomi stuffed a hand down her shirt, and fished around.
Her breasts were pushed higher as her hand scooped underneath them, and she caught him staring.
“Fancy a human pair, eh?” She retrieved a stack of folded notes from inside her bodice.
His face turned bright red, and she shoved the parcels at him, “These should keep you
busy and outside me affairs.”
“Why did you...” He shifted, “Never mind.”
He unfolded the paper, and scoured through them.
“These runes are written in ancient Elvhen…and they’re scribed in...” He sniffed the paper, “Blood?”
“Aye, is statin’ the obvious yer new craft, Solas?”
“No. Where did you find these?”
“Not of import. I know the words, but I can’t find the order to them. Need you to make sense of it all.”
“I’ll...” He frowned at the papers, “Get to work on these, at once.”
“That’s a good lad.” She winked, “Now, off you go.”
“There’s still the matter of-“
“Solas, if you don’t get on yer way, God help me, I will-“
“Chuckles, what are you up to?”
Naomi gripped the Staff on her back. She was invisible in a matter of seconds.
“Always the most taxing of the Pieces...”
Varric looked behind him.
Naomi’s teeth grinded. Her body was pained.
“Thought I heard you talking to someone.” He crossed his arms, “Saying hi to your Spirit friends again?”
She lost interest in their banter, and kept herself low as she trailed the edge of the courtyard.
“Deep breaths.”
Naomi breathed in through her nose, and out through her mouth.
“Almost there...”
She stalked the building, and quickly rolled behind it once close enough. Naomi released the Staff and gasp for air, taking in the ashes of the forge. She buried her face in her Captain’s coat to suppress a cough, and strung her fabric mask over her mouth.
Tucked between a perimeter wall of Skyhold and the back of the forge, Naomi closed her eyes once again, and extended her senses.
“You asked for my opinion, and I’ve given it. Why would you expect it to change?” Cassandra scolded.
“I expect you to keep your word. It’s relentless. I can’t-“
“You give yourself too little credit.” She raised her voice.
“If I’m unable to fulfill what vows I kept, then nothing good has come of this.” Cullen took a deep breath.
“The Hell is he goin’ on about?”
Naomi pushed herself to her feet, and swiped the grass stuck to her linens. She straightened her jacket, and marched around the building.
The guard stopped her on approach, “Apologies, Inquisitor. The Commander asked me to-“
She shot him a look, and pulled the mask from her face. The man swallowed his words, stepping aside. Naomi pushed the door open with her shoulder.
“Would you rather save face than admit-“ Cullen’s face fell.
Naomi stood in the doorway, one hand still on the handle, “You wanna tell me what this is all about?”
He shifted, and rubbed the crook of his neck, avoiding her steely gaze. He wasn’t the lion she’d grown to care for- more like a beat pup after being caught with a chewed slipper.
“Nothing, then?”
Cullen closed his eyes, and walked past her, “Forgive me.”
“You’re just leavin’?” She turned to him in disbelief.
“After all those tart words you wrote?!”
He shut the door behind him.

“And people say I’m stubborn…this is ridiculous!” Cassandra spat.
“You want to fill me in since a cat has his tongue?”
Cassandra crossed her arms and shook her head.

“Oh, for fucks sake.” Naomi puffed a strand of hair from her face.

“If I were home, this is ‘bout the time I’d start beatin’ faces in fer answers.”

“Cullen is no longer taking lyrium.” Cassandra turned to the furnace that burned between them.

“Come again?”

“The Commander has stopped-“

“I heard you, but…” She swallowed, “He spoke of it briefly, never said anything ‘bout doing so officially.”

“I respect his decision…Not that he’s willing to listen.”

“You knew about this?”

“We had an agreement long before you joined us.” Cassandra shifted her weight, “As a Seeker, I could evaluate the dangers.”

“And what is your evaluation?”

Her face hardened, “Cullen…has asked that I recommend a replacement for him.” She swiped a hand to cut Naomi’s protest at the knees, “I refused. It’s not necessary.”

Naomi closed her mouth.

“Besides, it would destroy him. He’s come so far. And he wouldn’t want to…risk your disappointment.”

“My disappointment?” Her brow creased, “That’s a load of bilgewater. Is there anything we can do to change his mind? About the replacement aspect?”

“If anyone could, it’s you…” Cassandra was lost to the flickering flames, “Mages have made their suffering known, but Templars never have. They are bound to the Order, mind and soul, with someone always holding their lyrium leash.” Her grey eyes met Naomi’s, “Cullen has a chance to break that leash, to prove to himself, and anyone who would follow suit, that it’s possible.”

“He’s a strong man…If anyone could do it, it’s him.”

“He can do this. I knew that when we met in Kirkwall. Talk to him. Remind him of this. I feel you are the only one who can.”

Naomi snickered, “Suppose I can be quite persuasive.”

“Inquisitor.”

“What?” She grinned, “That’s not what I meant, Cassandra.”

“Good. Now is hardly the time.”

“I wouldn’t say that…”

Cassandra cleared her throat.

“A’right, a’right. Wish me luck.” Naomi gave her a two-fingered wave, and backed out of the building.

The guard was gone, but the courtyard was even more packed.

“Ugh…” Naomi looked around, and smiled at the stone wall of Skyhold’s ramparts.

“Filled with uneven settings to climb. Perfect.”

…”

Naomi stood at the door outside Cullen’s chamber. She licked her thumb, and smoothed her eyebrows. Her fingers tossed through her thick, red curls, and she let them loose around her shoulders.

“If you’re goin’ to pull him from the plank, might as well look decent.”

This wasn’t as intimate as how she planned their first conversation after the exchange of romantic letters, but she was nervous nonetheless.
“You’ve slain demons, politicians, battled at sea, and conversed with the very Gods. This will be easy.”

She puffed her chest out, and opened the door.

A shout came from the direction of Cullen’s desk. A box whizzed through the air, missing her by inches. It splintered against the doorframe, and Naomi froze.

“Or not.”

“Maker’s breath! I didn’t hear you enter, I—” Cullen succumbed to the panic in his voice, and shook his head twice, “Forgive me.”

Naomi closed the door behind her and lowered the beam to lock it.

“Seems your aim is as shite as mine when we first met.” She smiled and crossed the room, headed for the other door.

“You don’t have to—” His strength left him, and a groan escaped his lips.

His hand planted firmly on the edge of the table, supporting his weight.

Naomi frowned as she lowered the second crossbar, “Cullen…”

“I…” He waved her off, “I never meant for this to interfere.”

Her compassion briefly left way for irritation, and she ignored his dismissing gesture.

She sat on the desk in front of him, and lifted his chin to meet her eyes, “Are you going to be alright?”

“Yes.” He answered, almost automatically. His eyelids fluttered as a scowl broke through his pursed mouth, “I don’t know…”

Cullen pulled away. She did her best to remain professional, to not give way to the disappointing distance between them as he left her for a corner near the window.

“Talk to me.” She prodded, “Let me help you…”

He lost himself to the outside view, “Much easier said than done.”

“Never stopped you before.”

“I suppose there’s merit in that…” Cullen leaned against the stone wall, holding it for support, “This…all of it started when Ferelden’s Circle fell. It was taken over by abominations. The Templars- my friends were slaughtered…and I was tortured. They tried to break my mind, and I… How can you be the same person after that?” A maddened cackle trickled from his throat, “Still, I wanted to serve. They sent me to Kirkwall.” He slurried the city’s name, “I trusted my Knight-Commander, and for what? Hm? Her fear of mages ended in madness.”

Cullen’s resolve left him, and he slipped into darkness, “Kirkwall’s Circle fell next. Innocent people died in the streets…Can’t you see why I want nothing to do with that life?”

“I do. I didn’t come ’ere to tell you what you’re doin’ is wrong.” She stood from her seat on the desk, “I came here to commend you—”

“Don’t! You should be questioning what I’ve done.” He slunk to her side, “I thought this would be better- that I would regain some control over my life. But…but these thoughts won’t leave me…” His teeth clenched, “How many lives depend on our success? I swore myself to this cause…”

Cullen paced back and forth, raising and lowering his fists to emphasize his words, “I will not give less to the Inquisition than I did the Chantry. I should be taking it!” He punched the side of a bookshelf, “I should be taking it…”

Naomi gripped the fabric of his coat, “Cullen. Look at me.”

He did as she commanded.

“Do you want to take the lyrium, or not?”

“No…” His hands closed around her wrists, “But…these memories have always haunted me.”

His eyes were ghastly, and the soothing effect they usually had on her melted away, “If they become worse, if I…If I cannot endure this…”

“You can.” She moved her right hand to his face, “But you can’t leave the Inquisition…”

He won’t allow it.”

Wherever his essence had retreated to, Naomi found it. She reeled him in, fighting the lake of insanity that drowned him.

“Alright.” Cullen softened, “It’s just that…Sometimes I feel as if I’m back there. I’ve never told
anyone what truly happened to me at Ferelden’s Circle. Maybe doing so will finally allow me to leave that part of myself behind…”

“Take it from me, the remnants of old always catch up.” She looked away, “Doesn’t mean you can’t beat the livin’ piss out of em…”

His hands cupped her jaw, like she was something delicate he was scared to break, “I was angry. For years, that anger blinded me. I’m not proud of the man that made me…The way I saw mages- the way I felt about magic…I’m not sure I would have cared about you, and the thought of that sickens me.”

“For what it’s worth, I like who you are, now.” She wiggled her nose against his.

“Even after…?” He swallowed.

“Cullen…We’re two people who survived a chance encounter that echoed in a rift between two worlds.” She searched him for any kind of rejection, “I hadn’t been sure if whatever feelings I harbored for you would survive the same…Our interactions sprang from attraction and reaction…But now, I feel a shift in the breeze. I care for you like I’ve cared for no other…And there ain’t shite you could do to change that now.”

Seemingly at a loss for words, the only thing he did was pull her closer, “As happy as that makes me, I must admit this reunion of ours went much better in my head.”

“We might salvage it, yet.” She backed away just enough for her nose to brush against his.

“We might.” He grew closer with each hesitating breath until their mouths were entangled.

The tips of their tongues danced with each other, and his hand dropped from her cheek to embrace her neck, her heartbeat shuddering under his thumb.

The pistols strapped to Naomi’s chest collided with the metal plates that guarded him; threatened to keep him at bay if he continued to dive deeper. Cullen ignored the unspoken warning and pushed her chin to the side, and she felt the light graze of his teeth under her jaw. He stayed there, massaging the pulse in her throat into a frenzy with his lips. His hand wandered down her back and pushed her hips against his.

Her mind was hazed. This wasn’t the way things worked- without her in control, with her unable to produce witty comebacks to shield her from feeling things.

Cullen grunted, and his sweet kiss bent into something pained. Naomi regretfully pulled herself from the brink of transcendence.

She put her hands on his sides and moved him away, “Have a seat, Lion. You’ll feel right better.”

Naomi walked him to his chair as a dog would a blind man, and lowered him slowly. He panted for breath, using the back of the chair as a rest for his neck. When he opened his eyes, they were searching for a source of reprieve. He looked lost- a lapse in the sureness he always seemed to carry with him.

“I’m with you, Cullen. And I always will be.” Her hands cradled his head, and rubbed small circles at his temples.

He nodded off at the massage, and a smile crept upon his tired face. When it began to fade, she whispered in his ear, “Sit up…”

Cullen cleared his throat, waking from the sleep he’d almost fallen into. Naomi pulled the Staff from her back, and laid it across his desk so the Apple sat in front of him.

Her hands swept up his arms, and her chin rested on his shoulder. She guided his hands to the Apple, and cupped her own around them.

“What are you…” His words tickled Naomi’s ear.

“Hold it for a moment.” She took a breath in preparation, “Now, close your eyes, and imagine a place where you’d find peace…It could exist, it could be from within the depths of your dreams- it matters naught.”

Naomi kissed his head, “Just breathe, love. Focus.”

Cullen did as instructed. She watched the Apple glow, and blades of light shot from under their palms.
Naomi smelled a familiar moisture in the air. She heard the lapping of water against a creaky, wooden structure. Her eyes blinked open, and Cullen stood in front of her with a hand extended.

They were on the shore of a lake with a short fishing pier close by, lined with cattails and decorated with various nets and traps.

“Where are we?” She took his hand.

He led her through thin fog that curled through the overcast sunlight.

“You walk into danger every day. I wanted to take you away from that, if only for a moment.”

His grip tightened.

Their feet echoed on the planks of the pier. Lily pads bounced around them, and a single lit lantern sat upon a crate near the end.

“A pier?” Naomi looked around the lagoon, “This is more my scene. I told you to go someplace you’d be able to relax, silly man.”

Green trees lined the bases of the rocky mountains that surrounded them. The scene was breathtaking, even through the fading light and mist.

“I grew up not far from here, actually. This place was always quiet.” He picked up the lantern with his free hand, and stepped into a rocking canoe. Two paddles flapped at the sides, held in place by iron handles.

The fire illuminated his face, and for a moment, he seemed healthy.

“You invitin’ me on your own vessel? On a pier you visited frequently, from the sounds of it?”

She chuckled, “You never fail to surprise me, Cullen Rutherford.”

She allowed him to help her step down into the raft-sized boat, and sat on one of the benches, “Want me to row?”

“No. I wouldn’t argue you’re more experienced, but this…I know how to do.”

He hung the lantern at the stern, and took both paddles in his grasp. With practiced precision, he turned the canoe, and took them farther away from the shore.

Naomi found a wide grin stretching across her face, watching him handle the body of water as if he’d done it a hundred times.

“You’d wait till now to tell me you’re a man of the sea?”

“Quite the contrary.” He mumbled, “I get rather sea sick on the ocean chops.”

“How quaint.” She rested her chin on her fist, “So, exactly how often did you come here?”

“All the time. Almost every day. I loved my siblings, but they were very loud. I would come here and clear my head…” Cullen huffed, “Of course, they always found me, eventually.”

He locked the oars into place. He closed his eyes and took a breath of the dirt-scented air.

“You seem happy here.”

She did her best to smile and to not feel guilty for the stress he suffered by serving the Inquisition.

“I was. I still am.”

“And…” Naomi used the edges of the boat to lift herself and slide next to him, “You have me all to yourself.”

“The thought may have crossed my mind.” He nuzzled his face into her hair, and she leaned into his shoulder.

The gentle breeze twirled the raft, and her arms wrapped themselves around him.

They were both in simple clothes, save for the coat he still wore. His warmth felt welcoming under the same tunic she’d woken up in after her drunken attempt to sleep with him.

“Do you like me in your clothes?”

“They suit you well.” His jaw moved above her as she felt him smile, “Perhaps I may find you in them again.”

“Perhaps.” She leaned up and tapped his nose, “If you behave.”
“You’re telling me to behave?” Cullen’s chest rumbled, “Says the pirate Captain.”
“Aye, the most misbehaving creature inhabiting the seven seas.”
She wished this moment would last an eternity—the serenity engulfing them, easing their tension and anxieties.
“The last time I was here was the day I left for Templar training…” He fumbled in a deep pocket of his coat, and held something in front of her, “My brother gave me this. It just happened to be in his pocket, but he said it was for luck.”
It was a silver coin with the face of a mystic woman engraved on it.
“Templars are not supposed to carry such things. ‘Our Faith should see us through,’ they say.”
“Lady luck in the form of a coin.” Naomi plucked it from his palm, twisting it in the teal sun, “She’s a peculiar woman, she is.”
“Indeed…” He watched as she continued to flip the trinket between her fingers, “I should have died during the Blight. Or at Kirkwall, or Haven. Take your pick. And yet, I made it back here.” His fist closed around her hand, and the coin she played with was stilled.
Naomi looked up, worried she’d offended him with her hand game.
“Humor me.”
Her eyebrows creased, “What?”
“We don’t know what you’ll face before the end…This can’t hurt, right?”
Her heart tripped in her chest. The way he looked at her…like she was the wind in his sails, pushing him towards sanctuary.
“I’ll keep it safe, my Lion.” She gave him a gentle kiss.
“Good.” He brushed the strands of hair from her face, “I know it’s foolish, but…I’m glad.”
Cullen kissed her forehead, and returned her to his chest.
“You’re awfully snuggly this morn.”
“I’m simply following your directions.” His hug around her tightened, “You told me to go to a place where I found peace…And that’s anywhere you’re safe, with me.”
Her arms hooked underneath him, and she folded her hands over his shoulders.
A memory played through her mind—of a time where she’d said something similar to her children, them unknowingly grieving over the departure of their mother at port.
It had been a day like this, overcast and damp with humidity. They hadn’t wanted her to leave, but in order to protect them…she had to.
Naomi’s jaw trembled, and a sharp inhale gave her away. She sniffed as she released him, hiding her face from Cullen.
“What’s wrong?” His thumb caressed her, “Did I say something?”
“I just—” She tried to swallow the heavier urge to cry, “It’s nothing.”
“Naomi.” He lifted her chin with his knuckle, “Please, speak with me as I have with you.”
“The things I have done…” She tried to keep her eyes away from him, but he would not allow it, “I’ve abandoned…people…that depended on me, that loved me, that needed me, and I…”
She nulled her sorrow, “If I let you down the same way I did them…” And then her strength faltered, “I couldn’t…I can’t-“
“I love you.” Cullen blurted the words, “More than reason. Nothing about you could ever make me change how I feel.”
His confession ricocheted in her chest, up through her mind, and back down through her heart. Her sadness slowly peeled away, revealing layers of feelings that she had no experience with.
“Bold words, Lion.”
“I’m a bold man.”
“That, I know.” She ran her fingers through his hair, slick from the sticky air, “Still, I have little faith you’d feel the same after learning the truth.”
It was something that weighed on her and corrupted the happiness of her newfound friendships and love interest in Thedas. Throughout her stay, it begun to make itself more prevalent. It gnawed at the box she kept it in, threatening to break loose and wreak havoc on her
“Tell me, and we shall put the matter to rest.” He swipe a rogue tear from her face, “You deserve the world lifted from your shoulders, if only for a moment.”

“I wouldn’t know where to begin.” She sighed, “This wasn’t supposed to be about me, Cullen.”

“Then think of it as being about us. You’re the most powerful woman in the world. You are untouchable, and yet… I want to be closer to you. I want to know Naomi McNamara, the woman who fought for the downtrodden in her world and set the next one ablaze with revolution.”

“I’m the woman who left two children behind for duties this world knows nothing of.” She ripped herself from his grasp, “My daughter was named after my mother, Elizabeth. My son Shay was named after my father, Shane.” Her voice shuddered more fervently, “I put them in the care of the Dublin Assassin Bureau at birth. Danger followed me. Their father was reckless, and I…I just wanted them to be safe.”

“Your list of sacrifices for the Inquisition are-“

“Sod the Inquisition!” She yelled, “I abandoned them long before this place claimed me. I should have left the Brotherhood, raised them in a safe city, granted them a formal education…” Her nose nuzzled against the crook of his neck, “Consus tells me 15 years have passed in my world since my departure. They’d be 21 years of age by now. I missed them growing up.”

“And I cannot imagine the pain that must cause you.” Cullen put his hands on her shoulders, “But you did what you thought was best. You stood with the Brotherhood to ensure they grew up in a better world…and what safer place for them is there than with a group of Assassins?”

His scarred smile gave her a moment of reassurance.

“‘If a man’s philosophy does not let him protect his people, his home, and his family…what good can it do for the world?’” She wiped her nose, “My father lived by those words. He left my mother and I under the indirect supervision of Assassins while he sailed the world and fought for our Cause, just as I…” Naomi pulled the dormant pendant from her shirt, “I hadn’t seen the parallels before…You have my thanks.”

“There is no need to thank me, my lady. I speak the truth. And I find you even more remarkable than ever.”

“Hmph…likewise.”

He cradled her as the small boat drifted in circles.

“I suppose we should get back to the others…” She mumbled, “Plenty to do in preparation for this…ball…”

“Don’t remind me…” Cullen moaned, “And thank you…for everything. This has truly been the remedy I needed.”

A meek smile gave way to her embarrassment, “‘No need to thank me,’ good sir. I only do what I can for those I love.”

Her heart pushed the veins in her neck against her skin, and her hands trembled in anxiety.

“I can feel him staring at me…”

Naomi shifted uncomfortably, and peaked through the red curls that framed her face. Cullen’s chin sat on his palm, and his elbow was sturdy on his knee, “You are divine, that’s for certain.”

She shook her head, and the lake burned away. Their peaceful recluse was bent and flattened until the world simmered in gold.

…”

Cullen’s cheek was flush against his desk. He lifted his neck, sore and taught with tension. He looked around, rubbing the muscles behind his head.

He was alone.

“That…no. That couldn’t have been a dream…”

His hands fumbled around his coat, searching for the coin he kept on his person. It was
nowhere to be found.

Cullen smiled, and pushed himself to his feet.

“That was real. It happened.”

He stretched, holding his leather-bound fists to the ceiling.

“And Maker was it incredible.”
Hard and Fast

Chapter Summary

“A ship is always safe at shore, but that is not what it’s built for.”
-Albert Einstein

Chapter Notes

*Hard and fast defined: This term originally was applied to a vessel that has come out of water, either by running aground or being put in dry dock, and is therefore unable to move.

*See The Codex entry with the Inquisition's plan of attack here.

"Drunken Sailor" linked to first line of lyrics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Skyhold’s Quarters was a long-neglected room. Streaks were made in the dust where chambermaids had lazily cleaned around trinkets that belonged to no one. Naomi never really lived there, she never moved in to the chamber the Inquisition expected her to stay in. Still, there were two things that beckoned her there rather than the sanctuary of The Dishonored.

The light that passed the stained windows, painting the stone walls with colors galore—all shaped around the iron Inquisition symbol that held the glass pieces together. And then there was the fireplace, something no sailor would imagine having onboard a vessel.

Naomi knelt to the prepared wood, cut and ready to be set ablaze. A box of tinder lay next to it, and she created a tiny mound underneath the heart of the firewood. A charcoal cloth hung on a hook above her.

“It’s been a long while since I started a fire with naught but a cannon.”

She laid it on the stone before dragging a fire striker across a flint, and watched the sparks catch the end of the cloth. Naomi pinched the safe end, and held the flame to the tinder, tossing it in its entirety once the wood caught fire. The flames flickered at the breeze rummaging the room, and she was quick to shut the balcony doors.

She closed her eyes and rested her back against them, inhaling the scent of a musty smoke that brought back memories of her childhood.

“Time of me own and a sound sleep…That’s what I’ll be doin’. King and Queen’ve been held up in that castle of theirs while I go out ‘nd put me neck out. They owe me a bit of peace, aye.”

Naomi stripped herself of her armor, weapons, and harnesses, leaving them in a careless trail from the closed balcony to her bed. She whipped her bodice off, and flexed her freed chest.

“Judging by the smell, I’m long due for a bath, ‘swell.”

But the bed was too welcoming, and no one else would be sleeping in it anytime soon…So she curled up under the thick down comforter, closed her eyes, and drifted off into well-deserved sleep, only to be interrupted by a dream.
The shifting of wet sand felt familiar under Naomi’s boots, and a campfire popped between rolls of waves. Smoke mixed with salt, and the water danced before a sinking sun. She looked down to find herself in nothing but her blouse and linen trousers, with her pistol sword strapped to her side.

“It would seem we have much to discuss.”

The crunching of light footsteps came her way, a particular accent alongside them.

“You’ve translated the pages, then?” Naomi turned to find Solas in simple clothes, walking down a dune to join her on the beach.

“I have. And they are most unsettling.” Solas took his place at the other side of the fire.

They spoke to the ocean rather than each other, and the tension between them was deafening.

“’Pride feareth not the Elder One, he who bowed to Mythal’s severed beast. Pride feareth the Guardian, she who tames the Storm.’”

The waves pushed higher, dragging a line of shells back into the ocean as it retreated.

“Ah, most unsettling, indeed.” Naomi crossed her arms and watched on.

“You seem...unsurprised.”

“That’s because I am. And I grow tired of this game.” She looked into her Marked hand, “My memories of the day I came here had been lost, and recently found...There once was a time I remembered everything only up until Cullen carried me back into the Temple the day I stained Haven’s snow red. And ever since what happened with that...lyrium incident, we will call it...I’ve seen fragments in a language I’ve only just learned. One chain of letters in particular makes itself present far too often.”

Naomi drew her sword, and drug the tip through the sand, “Tell me, what does that say in ancient Elvhen?”

Solas crossed his hands behind his back, and gazed at the scripture in suppressed alarm. The flames accentuated his inhuman features. Its glow smoothed his elongated cheekbones, and swirled in his large eyes. His long ears twitched at a strong breeze, and the campfire went dark.

He snapped his fingers, and breathed new life in the smoldering pile.

“Pride.” He met her stare, “It means Pride.”

“Quite right. And how do you pronounce this Elvhen word in the common tongue?”

He shifted his weight, “Sol.as.”

“Which one of them have you encountered?” Her question came as a gale.

“I do not know of whom you speak, Inquisitor.”

“Aye, yes you do.” She reached over the fire, hot and tickling on her bare arm, “And yer gonna’ answer me question. Now.”

“Falon’Din.”

“He speaks of my brother, and he speaks no truth.”

Consus’s voice came through from the sky, and Solas jumped away from her.

“Shite, Consus. Why’d yeh go and do that?”

“How?” His voice trembled.

Naomi walked around the campfire and closed the distance between them, “Yeh know of the Pieces and how to use ‘em. You just happen to know the language of the slaves-turned-free they created. Yer very namesake be a testament to their legacy. And you’d ask me how one of them speaks to you now?” She lifted her blouse, covering only her breasts, “Do you see this?”

She pointed to her tattoo placed in between them, an outline of a tall helmet with an eye in the middle.

“I...Yes.”

“And do you know what it is, mate?”

“No.”

“It’s a phrygian cap. A symbol for freedom that was inspired by a great woman of my world. Her
name was Minerva.”

His features sunk, like he was about to burst into tears, “You…You’re the Guardian… That Sword, the Staff, the Apple—“

“When I saw me vision in Redcliffe, you begged me for somethin’. You want to know what it was, Pride?” She gripped his wrist firmly as he took a step back, “You begged me to let you atone for your sins, and fix ‘what pride had wrought.’ Yeh told me you did this and mentioned the Elder One’s orb. So I’ll ask yeh again, mate. Which of the Precursors drove you to surrender an Apple to Corypheus?”

…

“Inquisitor…” A rough beard tickled her face, “Inquisitor.”

Naomi shot up, her throat colliding with a strong shoulder.

“Calm yourself, now. It’s me, Blackwall.”

Her head snapped to the right, and found a veteran pair of steel eyes watching her.

“Bad dream?” He chuckled.

She looked around, as if suspicious of the room, “Aye, suppose you could say that.”

“All of Skyhold’s been looking for you. That Isabela…she’s a crafty one.”

Naomi smirked, “Aye, she is. I can only imagine the joy she’s having in thwarting our mates.”

“Perhaps too much. Even Sera is involved, now.” He sat on the edge of the bed, “No one pays any mind to the Warden in the stables. I saw them laying their pranks, and false leads to your whereabouts. I hope you don’t mind the intrusion, I only took it upon myself to search the one place I thought to be neglected.”

“Your company is always welcome, Blackwall.” Naomi yawned, “And I never forget the Warden in the stables.”

“I’m flattered.” He stood up, “I’ll leave you be and assemble the others at your command.”

“That would be most helpful.”

He gave her a curt nod, and turned to leave.

“Oh, while I have your attention.” He looked at her over his shoulder, “I’ve been meaning to thank you. Cassandra gave me the Warden artifacts you’ve collected. You have a hundred things that require your attention, yet you thought to save them for me. It means a great deal, Your Grace.”

“If it benefits you, mate, it was worth the effort.”

His brutish charm wore down to a softer man, “Even now, with people flocking to your banner, ready to serve – to die…You’ve proven yourself to be an honorable woman. Principled. I’ve never been so certain in my decision to join the Inquisition.”

“Your words are inspiring…I’m also glad you joined us. Need all the help we can get…”

“Is something bothering you, Inquisitor?”

She huffed, “Demons, archdemons, incarnations of nightmares with bird claws for hands…Do I make it so obvious?”

Blackwall leaned against the wall and crossed his arms, “Always been good at reading faces. What’s really on your mind?”

Naomi hugged her knees. “You’re a man bound by duty, being a Warden, aye?”

He hesitated, “I am.”

“No, I mean, how do you deal with it? The pressure of it all?”

“Drinking mostly.” He shrugged, “Tell you what. Come by the stables sometime, and I’ll buy you an ale at the tavern. We’ll drink to our sodding lives, and pretend to be free for a bit.”

“Aye, sounds a right good plan, mate…” She looked to the Sword of Eden glistening on the ground, “A right good plan, indeed…”
The hall echoed with Naomi’s boot clicks. Her hand rested on her Sword’s hilt, and her pistols bounced lightly in their holsters. Josephine’s desk was empty, a good sign that the Advisors had been gathered. She pushed the doors open and prepared herself to face the Inquisition and it’s needs head on. Katya, Alistair, Hawke, and her Advisors waited for her.

“Inquisitor.” Leliana greeted, “Wonderful time to join us. We were just about to review the spread plan of attack throughout Orlais and Ferelden.”

“Yes, yes…wonderful…” Naomi shielded a yawn, “What do you have for me today, merry band of mates?”

Josephine’s quill got to work upon her writing board, “The Inquisition will rendezvous in Vivienne’s estate, where we will prepare for the Ball. This takes place in exactly two days, and we will have to factor in travel time. I recommend that we leave tomorrow afternoon when Val Royeaux’s port is lightest.”

“Aye, of course it’s only but a day of rest.” She pinched her temple, “Go on.”

“In the meantime,” Katya’s finger traced a narrow river south of Val Royeaux, “Warden Hawke, the Champion, Isabela and I will venture to the Western Approach to investigate the blood magic trail. We will sail under the Inquisition’s banner, and my identity will be a safely guarded secret.”

“Ah, Fereledan Queen stirrin’ up trouble in the neighborin’ country. Good idea to keep yer namesake hidden.”

“Quite right.” Katya smiled.

“The next phase will commence once we’ve stopped the assassination of Empress Celine.” Leliana moved the Nightingale map marker to a place called the Hissing Wastes, “The Venatori leader, Calpernia, has her cult searching for elven ruins. For what, we do not know.”

“Calpernia? The first I’ve heard that name. What would we know of her?”

“It is a name from an ancient Tevinter legend…an unusual one. She was a priestess of Dumat, foster-mother to the Founder of the Imperium. A name like that is meant to assure the Venatori they follow in the footsteps of legends. We must prove them wrong.”

“What do you suggest, Spymaster?”

“My lieutenant Charter has made contact with a pair known in Tevinter as the ‘Magekillers,’ a man and a woman named Marius and Tessa. They will dispatch alongside Dorian, Iron Bull, and the Chargers to the Hissing Wastes where a large Venatori encampment has been established. Perhaps we may discover more about her location, as well as what she seeks in these elven ruins.”

“Do share the results of the raid.” Naomi growled, “I’d love to see what they’re hunting.”

“Elven ruins. Must be a lot like the Precursors’, damned lot they are. If I find another Piece of Eden, I may intentionally choke on it.”

“My turn?” Alistair chuckled.

“You are the King of Ferelden, my love.” Katya rolled her eyes, “You hardly have to hold your hand up to be called on.”

“That’s just manners.” He smirked, “Inquisitor, my scouts in Ferelden have reported unusual activity surrounding Therinfal Redoubt, the abandoned fortress of the Seekers of Truth. Large Templar banners adorned in red have been hung from the towers, which your Commander informs me is the Red Templar crest. With your permission, I’d like to ask Seeker Pentaghast to lead an expedition for answers.”

“A request I’d have a hard time denyin’ should she hear of the sort.” Naomi rubbed her elbow, still sore from sleep, “Surely not by herself, aye?”

“If I may.” Cullen interrupted.

“Of course.” She gave him a devious side grin.

He twitched a nervous smile, “Varric, Vivienne, and Cole have shown personal interest in this matter. They have asked to embark aside Cassandra in her venture to the keep.”

“Let us go, then. The Dishonored will get ‘em there faster than other vessels.” Naomi reviewed the map, “Therinfal Redoubt seems quite the voyage from Val Royeaux. Our sails can handle it.”
"I fear your ship and Her ice ram are needed elsewhere, Inquisitor…Which brings us to our last matter of business." Cullen sighed, “If we are to cripple Samson’s red lyrium smuggling efforts, we must destroy the mines reported in Sahna, the quarry mentioned in the notes you found on the Storm Coast. The cold is fierce in Emprise du Lion, and your ship may be the only in our fleet capable of making the trip this time of year. Blackwall, Sera, and Solas will accompany you.”

“Solas…splendid.”

“Our ‘fleet,’ you say?”

“The sailing village of Jader was quite impressed with The Dishonored when your crew took her to port.” Josephine chimed, “They have graciously lent us ships in our time of need.”

“How quaint. Thank them properly, Ambassador.”

“Most certainly.” She bowed her head slightly, and took more notes.

Cullen rubbed his neck, “Taking the Red Templar’s source of red lyrium will be a loss Corypheus won’t soon forget. We must be ready…”

“I’ll give him something to remember, Commander.” She winked at him, “There’s naught I enjoy more in Thedas than ripping that creature’s hopes to bits.”

“Something we find common ground on.” Alistair scoffed, “He will danger the people of Ferelden no more.”

“Not after we’re through with him, King.” Naomi put her hands on her hips, “Will you keep watch at Skyhold as planned?”

“I will, Inquisitor. The Inquisition has expanded greatly, and I will ensure your hard work will not fall to the hands of lesser men.”

“With an attitude like that, we have little to fear in the ways of threat, eh?”

“I certainly hope so.”

Josephine rested her board on the table, “Leliana, Cullen, and myself will return here once the Ball has concluded. We will collect information from our respective agents and have a full report prepared for you upon the return from Sahna.” She clapped her hands, “It is an exciting time to be a part of the Inquisition, Your Grace.”

“Just wait till I wipe that smug, half rotted grin off that bastard’s face.” Naomi raised her fist, “I’ll be buyin’ drinks for the ‘ole damn army!”

“Do remember me when you commence that celebration.” Alistair crossed his arms, “I haven’t had proper Orlesian wine in years.”

“That’s because when I ask you about our import list, you always say, ‘Whatever you want, dear. I’m not picky.’” Katya lightly punched his shoulder.

“Right you are, my Queen.”

“These two are sickly in their affections.”

Josephine took her board in her hands, and pinched the candle upon it silent, “Shall we get to work then?”

Cullen fidgeted, and his jaw tensed. He began to sweat, and ran his fingers through his hair.

“Aye…” Naomi watched him curiously, “I suppose we shall.”

“Perfect!” She cupped the side of her mouth, “We are ready!”

Her shout echoed through the war room. Dorian burst through the doors, “Hello, Your Grace! Fancy meeting you here!”

“I’m so sorry, my lady.” Cullen whimpered, “They told me they’d do wretched things to me in my sleep if I warned you.”

“What? Cullen, what are you-”

“Inquisitor!” Dorian hugged her, “My, my you smell like you’ve just been on the Storm Coast for hours on end, playing in mud and flipping rocks. How so, I wonder?”

He hooked an arm through hers, and drug her towards the door.

“Dorian! What is this madness?” She snarled, and looked back to the hiding Commander, “Cullen!”

“I’ll be with you shortly.” Leliana nodded to Josephine, “Vivienne’s tailors stand at the ready in
the Inquisitor’s chambers.

“Tailors?!” She tripped over her boots.

“If you’d give them the credit of calling them that, sure.” Dorian snickered, “I recommended the dressers from Tevinter, but there’s no use negotiating with the Lady of Iron. I had to learn that the hard way, I’m afraid. A mistake on her part I’ll suffer for just as you, seeing you dressed as such.”

Katya covered her mouth to suppress a laugh, and Alistair put a hand on Cullen’s shoulder, “She may never forgive you for this.”

She watched the two of them as the doors closed, “Don’t soften the truth for him, King! He’s a dead man walkin’, he is!”

The Inquisitor’s Quarters that had been peaceful earlier in the day was transformed into a parlor. Women of gold-lined clothes stood at the ready, with racks of finer clothing at their backs. A stool with a silk cushion sat at the foot of her bed. A short, pale woman held a tray littered with narrow glasses to Naomi, “Some wine, Inquisitor?”

She yanked her arm out of Dorian’s, and shot him a dirty look, “What’s the meanin’ o this?”

He took a glass off the tray, and backed away towards the stairs, “I’ll be taking this with me, and to that, I bid you adieu.” He took a sip of wine and bowed at the same time, scampering away.

“Dorian, do be a sweet and watch the door as we discussed!” Vivienne shouted.

“What else would I do with my time? Perfect my craft? Enjoy Leisurely Hour at the tavern?” He called up the stairs.

She scowled, and drank from her own glass, “My dear, with the Ball being so close and you having been away for such an extended period of time, we felt it best to have you in proper form by the time of our arrival.”

“Proper form?”

Naomi noticed the wafting of vanilla in the air, and the freshly drawn bathwater in a wooden tub. A low table sat next to it with an array of supplies.

“Uhm…”

Josephine and Leliana joined them, carrying packages tied in gold cord. They laid them on the bed, and watched on eagerly. Even Leliana began to take her chainmail off, sitting comfortably. The maid smiled and offered her a drink, where she gratefully accepted, “Thank you, Madame.”

“It is my pleasure, Lady Nightingale.”

Naomi looked around panickily, and Josephine met her front.

“It is my pleasure, Lady Nightingale.”

Naomi jerked around panickily, and Josephine met her front.

“Is this ‘er way of exacting revenge for me showin’ up with a King and Queen?”

“While I help you lose this armor,” Josephine’s angry fingers unlatched Naomi’s chest harness, “Why don’t you tell me how you made contact with the King and Queen of Ferelden,” She yanked it off, “And arrived with them in less than a day’s time?”

“She’s still angry, a’right…”

“Orlesian on the outside,” Leliana chuckled, “Antivan at heart.”

Naomi jerked around at the Ambassador’s fierce tugs, “Aye, lass, careful now—”

“And please, dear Inquisitor, Herald of Andraste, Captain of The Dishonored, Mentor of Assassins—” She unbuttoned her Captain’s coat after Leliana carefully removed her pistols, “Will you also tell me why you, in all your resources, were unable to send proper notification to those of us who would prepare for such noble guests?”

She was almost stripped down to her skin, and the questioning ceased. Vivienne, Josephine, and Leliana lined up. Vivienne crossed her arms and took a sip of her wine, shaking her head. Josephine frowned, and Leliana bit her lip. The three women eyed her from head to toe, then up again.
“What crimes have I committed now?” Naomi spat.
“This…this will present some problems.” Vivienne looked to Josephine, “Shall we try to make do?”
“This is precisely why I had our…” She cleared her throat, “Backup plans made.”
“I’ll give you that, Lady Josephine. You were not overexaggerating.”
“Would one of you posh git tell me what yer goin’ on about?”
Leliana nodded, “Take your bodice off, please. Everything else as well.”
“You want me to strip naked?”
“You hardly strike me as a shy woman, Inquisitor.” She laughed, “It’s for a noble cause, I assure you.”
“Aye, save it lass.” Naomi unwound her bodice and let her breasts free, “I’ve stripped for less than noble causes, just don’t like bein’ examined by you lot is all.”
Her boots and linens were quick to go, and she put her hands on her bare hips, “This better?”
“There’s more on her legs?” Vivienne groaned, “That takes the lace cape off the table. It won’t cover those.”
“More what?” Naomi looked down, “What’s wrong wit me legs?”
“Your tattoos, Inquisitor.” Leliana pointed, “You’re covered in them.”
She covered her face with her hand, “You’ve got’ta be…I’m a PIRATE, fer fuck’s sake!”
“Do they tell stories?”
Leliana seemed less disgusted with them, and more interested in what they meant.
“Aye, all of them mean somethin.” She turned around, “This be The Dishonored here on me back.”
Josephine sighed, “We’ll reassess while she’s being groomed.”
“Groomed?”
“Yes, groomed. Get in the tub, and for all of our sakes, take a bath.” She pinched her nose.
Naomi waved her off, and stomped away.
“This is the worst kind’o ambush I’ve lived through to date.”

Cullen descended the stairs to the courtyard, watching his feet in an effort not to trip.
“I half expected to hear screams from the windows by now.”
He scanned the area for orange head rags, trying to find the man he was looking for.
Thaddeus and Christopher stood to the left of the tavern entrance, playing a game Cullen hadn’t seen before.
Thaddeus, in his cut-off best and ankle-high linens, raised a wooden mug in the air,
“Mate, yer goin’ta be piss broke by the time yer done bettin’ against me!”
His head was covered by a blue rag, and a single iron hoop dangled from his ear.
“Why isn’t he wearing shoes?”
Christopher was wearing his normal leather, fur-lined vest with his cloth sleeves bustling out. His eyepatch was still daunting, nonetheless, “Tad, fer the last time, you drunken fool – yer losin.’”
The two men were drinking and throwing knives at a board with a target painted on it.
Christopher took a peculiar stance, with one arm folded behind his back. He held a throwing knife between two knuckles. He rocked forward, and with a flick of his wrist, the knife went flying through the air and impaled the innermost circle.
“You’ve one eye, Kit! How’s that even possible?!?” Thaddeus spat his drink.
“Yer wearin’ close to nothin’ because you think it’ll get ye used to the cold, and yer askin’ me how I’ve outsmarted yeh?” Christopher smoked his pipe.
“You’ve got the prowess of a lion, Kit. But yer still daft as all ‘ell!”
Cullen let the men be, and ducked into the tavern while they were distracted.
“If her First Mate and Shantyman are here, her Quartermaster must be…”

Adibas sat at a table across from Solas. He was less merry than the other pirates, and the glare he gave the apostate mage was deadly.

“I’m asking to put your suspicions aside for her sake. Please, Quartermaster. Speak with her.” Solas stood up, and froze when he saw Cullen standing in the doorway.

“Commander.” He nodded, and walked passed him.

Cullen crossed his arms, and his eyes followed Solas as the short elf slunk passed him.

The fur on his coat separated at his snort.

“You’re quite the iron lad.” Adibas drank, “Not much for hiding it, either.”

His accent was different than the other Officers’. It was low and hoarse, and sounded Orlesian. But for some reason, it had more of a twang than they did. Sounded more honorable, despite the namesake of the ship he sailed for.

“I’ve never trusted him.” Cullen sat down, and unwound his coat from his chest, “There’s too many holes in his story.”

“So I have been told. But alas, you’ve been looking for me all afternoon. What questions can I answer for you, Commander?”

Cullen put his coat in the seat next to him, “You knew I was looking for you?”

“We are Assassin’s, lad.” Adibas leaned back in his chair, nodding to the other pirates in the tavern.

They came in all shapes and sizes, and all colors of skin. Always listening, always watching, it seemed. He wondered how many of them outside the tavern he failed to notice.

“Kit and Tad told me you were here, so I ended my friendly chat with the Elf.” He drank again. “How? They’re outside throwing blades into wood.”

“Hide in plain sight. One of the tennets of the Creed.” He hiccupped, “I do not hold my rum like I used to. Don’t repeat that.”

“I won’t.” Cullen leaned his arms on the table, “What did Solas want?”

“Let me worry about him. Ask the question that’s burning, Commander.”

He cracked his neck, and looked over his shoulder.

“The rest of them seem occupied enough…Maker, is there nowhere safe to speak?”

He looked back to Adibas, “She told me about Shay and Elizabeth.”

Adibas choked on his drink, and beat his chest with his fist, “Come again, Commander?”

He coughed.

“I told her I loved her.” Cullen kept his voice low, “And she told me about them. She didn’t think I would after that.”

“You told my Captain you have love for her?” His hand tightened around his mug, “You better mean those words if you are to use them.”

“I did-I do! I still do!” Cullen stuttered, “It’s just, I have questions about them. I fear asking her, for I…”

Adibas slid his mug to Cullen, “Drink, my friend. Words come easier that way.”

Cullen smelled rum, and without hesitation, he picked up the mug and slid the liquor down his throat. He slammed the empty vessel on the desk, and wiped his mouth with his hand. “That’s more like it, mate! Keep that up and you’ll have a job on The Dishonored in no time!” Adibas laughed, and held two fingers up to the barkeep.

She replaced the mug with two new ones, and Cullen and Adibas tapped them together.

“T’s a pang of jealousy.” Cullen admitted, “And a bit of curiosity.”

“You’re a man of duty, but still a man.” Adibas nodded, packing a pipe, “You’ll get no judgement from me.”

“The father, he wasn’t the man who…You know.” Cullen rubbed the back of his neck, “The bad one. Worse one.”

“No, not that monster.” Adibas struck a match, and shook it quiet after his pipe was lit, “It was Kenway. Edward Kenway.”

“Ah, my second guess.” Cullen drank more, “Did he visit them in Ireland, too?”
“…Kind of.” Adibas looked around, leaning in, “He was under supervision of the Captain. Had to
go where she did, back then. He never knew the children were his…” He shook his head,
“Kenway was far from perfect, but I told her she needed to tell him. A man, no matter how
dishonest, deserves to know…She never did.”
“What was he like?” Cullen leaned on his palm, dazed from the rush of rum on an empty stomach,
“Kenway?”
“Hah, if you want a Quartermaster’s honest opinion…” He smoked some more, ‘Captain Kenway
offered his crew prizes, plunder, and adventure...Aye, amongst all the gentleman of fortune sailin’
those West Indies, he rank the most clever. There was a time where men thought he was the
deadliest scourge of those seas...He was a fearsome dog who fed off of trouble and turmoil.” He
waved a hand over the table, “I seen him clear the deck of a Spanish Galleon like it were nothin’.
Fights like a demon, dressed as a man...And he was a canny one! Knew his way around every
crack and crevasse of those islands.” Adibas drank, “That was before McNamara returned from
Ireland, that is.”
Cullen smiled at that, “And what was she like?”
“I’d do her disservice trying to put it into words...Captain McNamara was not only the deadliest
hound of the sea in battle, but she knew the importance of reputation. There was a time that we
would take the ship from simply boarding it, and she’d bark at the English sods all but once before
they jumped ship or surrendered...But watching her fight, Commander? To see that kind of anger
unleashed, to see bloodthirst completely render a body victim to the Devil’s will...It changes you.
And it sure as Hell makes you glad you are on her side, following her command.”
“Ah! There he is!” Hawke busted through the door, “Carter, you remember Knight-Captain
Rutherford, no?”
“Carver?” Cullen looked up, “Maker, it’s been years.”
“Commander.” He gave a nod, “You, the King, and myself – this place seems to pool in ex-
Templars.”
“It does.” He smirked, “I see you’re a Warden, now.”
“I am.”
“And he’s still Junior.” Varric walked in between them, and sat next to Cullen, “You hear back
from good ol’ Spitfire yet?”
“What did you do?” Adibas raised a brow.
“He helped devise an ambush on your Captain.” Varric put an elbow behind the chair, “Led by
Josephine, Leliana, and Vivienne. She’s probably knee deep in silk gowns by now.”
Adibas spit out his drink, “What say you, now?”
“Sounds like an ambush most heinous.” Adibas flipped a coin on the table, “I’ll catch you up.”
“Have fun, Quartermaster!” Varric waved, and Hawke and Carver sat on his side of the table.
They eyed Cullen carefully, and exchanged grins.
“You can take men out of Kirkwall…” Cullen raised his mug.
“…But you can’t take Kirkwall out of men.” Hawke clanked Adibas’s leftover ale against his, and
drank with him.

They’d forced her into steaming water, and scrubbed her with lavastones and soap that
felt like butter lathered on her skin. They’d poured a special serum in her hair, massaged her scalp,
and rinsed it thoroughly. They’d brushed the knots from her salty, red mane – leaving wavy, tame
locks in their wake.

It was a crime most unforgivable.
And now, Naomi watched a glass jar of red gel be heated over a flame. Her elbows
rested on the side of the wooden tub, and her neck laid back. The water felt good on her aching
joints, but she was angry all the same.
“What’s that shite?”
It smelled wonderful, but she feared it like no other.
“Beeswax.” Vivienne explained, sifting through the rack of clothing, “And strawberries. Do dry
yourself off, my dear.”
Naomi shivered as the hot water left her body. The servant women engulfed her with
towels before she could step out, and she scoffed at their frenzy. She focused on Josephine, who
stared at her with daggers over her wine.
“I swear I see a sly grin under that tipped glass.”
Vivienne scolded at the selection of dresses, “I suppose your plan will have to suffice. I
cry for the day I will be seen in that dreaded thing…”
“I’ve had a few alterations made.” Josephine smiled, and pulled one of the large boxes she brought
on her lap, “I think you will be quite pleased.”
“Oh?”
Josephine pulled the string, and it fell to the floor. She lifted the lid slowly, and peeled
back thin paper that crinkled.
“The argument was made that we are a military force, and should be looked on as such.” Vivienne
crossed her arms, and watched Josephine.
“Clearly not by you.” Naomi snickered.
“Clearly.”
Leliana put her hands in the box, “Allow me, Josie.” She pulled out a red coat with gold
on the hems and shoulder tassels, “To be worn with a blue sash. Or in your case, a dark red. I
assumed you’d want to bring your own.”
“I would.”
It looked like a shorter version of a Captain’s coat, more formal and made of velvet
rather than shark hide.
“There will also be matching gloves, boots, and linens. Do you approve, Your Grace?”
“…I do.”
A woman bowed before Naomi, “May I have your hand, Inquisitor?”
She sighed, and let the woman take her wrist. She used a wooden stick to later the warm
gel on her arm, where it clung to every morsel. The woman pressed a cloth over the gel, and ran
her hand over the top.
“What are you-”
With a swift pull, the cloth was ripped free of Naomi’s arm, and her hair came with it.
“AYE! What in the bloody hell was that for?!?”
“The Ball.” Josephine smirked, “You must be ready for the Ball.”
“A’right.” Naomi walked away from them, “I’ve had enough of this.”
She snatched her shirt and threw it over her shoulders.
“We’re not done quite yet, Inquisitor.” Vivienne sighed, “If you’d just cooperate-“
“I’ve been away for days.” She pulled up a pair of breeches to her waist, and tied Consus around it,
“And I’ve no interest in playing along with this…whatever this is, any longer.”
Her socks and boots came next, and she eyed her bodice sitting behind Leliana.
The they locked stares for a moment, anticipating each other’s moves.
She lunged for it, and Leliana grabbed it like a cat would a mouse. Naomi caught
handfuls of bed, and glared at the Spymaster. She threw herself at her, who sidestepped her and
hopped over the tub.
“Damn you, posh nugget.”
“You’re not the only rogueish woman in this castle, Your Grace.”
Naomi swiped for it again, and Leliana hit her wrist with the palm of her hand.
“Yer a fast one, lass.”
“Of course I am. I am the Nightingale.” She smirked, and jumped on Naomi’s desk as she tried to
trip her.
“Just gimme the damn bodice!”
“Finish what these ladies have started, and I will.”
“UGH!”

The balcony doors slammed against the walls, and a cold breeze swept the room. Isabela stood with one dagger in her teeth, and the other in her hand. Kilean held a sword, “Ahoy, mates! I’ve heard me Captain’s in a pickle.”

“The bodice, Kilean! Get it!” Naomi cried.

A snap of fingers pierced the winter’s air. Naomi, Kilean, and Isabela froze.

“You will allow these women of Orlais to finish preparing you for the Ball, and you will stop embarrassing me this instant.” Vivienne growled, “As for you two…Would you care to join us and partake in the wine?”

She held a glass from the server woman’s tray. Isabela and Kilean looked at each other, still frozen. Vivienne snapped her fingers again, and the three of them were freed.

“Wine, you say?” Isabela took the dagger out of her mouth.

“The very best.” Vivienne shook the glass.

“Hmph.” Kilean put her sword away, “We’ll see about that.”

Naomi growled at Leliana, who dangled the bodice over her in defeat.

“Traitorous wenches, the lot of them.”

…”

Naomi shoulder-charged the door to the tavern, and the celebrations inside grew quiet. It was night time now, and she’d been through an afternoon of pampered hell.

“First man or woman to get me drunk gets double next pay!” She shouted, and paused when she saw a stumbling pair of men by the bar.

“Is that…Adie and Hawke?”

“Aye mate, and then what I said to her, was-” Adibas hiccupped, “I don’t remember what I said, but I told her to save the Captain, and I don’t think she did.”

“I don’t-” Hawke gulped, “Think my Isabela played her part either, mate.”

“MAYTE?! HE SAID MAYTE!”

Naomi sighed, and made her way to them.

“Cap’n!” Thaddeus hollered, and the rest of the crew followed, “Bit late to the party, ye be!”

He tripped over his guitar, and held a mug high in the air, “Even threw up o’ the Commander, Hawke did!”

“Oh did he?!”

“I’d wish it wasn’t so. I had to surrender my coat to the fate of hand washing.”

Naomi spun around to find Cullen in a pirate’s vest, one of Christopher’s own. It was snug against his form, showing every dip and roll of his strong body.

“Oh, my…’ She gawked, “I’d imagine I was mad at you a minute ago.”

“Mad? At him?” Adibas hung on her shoulder, “Madly in love, perhaps!”

“Adie, mate, you may not live to see the morn.” She cackled, shoving him off.

“Aye, I think I know this one!” Thaddeus jumped on a table, “Avast!”

Whistles and hoots followed, and the drunken orchestra slouched near their instruments. Confined chaos broke through the chatter, composed of accidently-plucked-strings and miss-beat drums.

“On my mark!” Thaddeus raised his hand in the air.

“AHoy!”

“What will we do with a drunken sailor?

What will we do with a drunken sailor?

What will we do with a drunken sailor?
Early in the morning!

The tavern exploded into a musical number, with clapping pirates and Thedesian citizens alike. Thaddeus and the others joined in for the chorus, knocking over chairs and dropping glasses in the process.

Cullen groaned, and ran a hand down his face, “Pirates. Of course, the Maker would send us pirates.”

“Why the long face, Commander?” Naomi lifted his chin with her knuckle, “I seem to recall you tellin’ me you had a fancy for some of us.”

“…Some.”

“Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Early in the morning!”

He pulled her into him, and her hand met his chest.

“Yer a brave one, holdin’ me like this. People will talk.”

“I’d be more upset if they had nothing to talk about.”

Naomi hopped away, still holding his hand. She took a dancing pose, and grinned devilishly, “Let’s put on a show then, eh?”

Her hips swayed like a snake, and her eyes had slits in their pupils. She spun into his arm, arching her back into his waist and grabbing the back of his hair.

His lips met her ear, “You’re a little demon…”

Cullen reached for her, and she turned away. His arm followed her as she twirled in place, and he caught her again. This time, her leg hooked around him and she hung from his neck.

Her nose tickled his, “You’ve not seen a thing yet, my love.”

“My mind yet wanders, Inquisitor.” His voice was full of lust, and his exploring hands left their normal boundaries.

“Shave his belly with a rusty razor,
Shave his belly with a rusty razor,
Shave his belly with a rusty razor,
Early in the morning!”

“A craving, a yearning, a burning desire to forget where one ends and the other begins.”

Naomi jumped, and she instinctively reached for a pistol that was nowhere to be found. Cole’s feet kicked from the bottom of a bar stool, and his looming hat dipped back and forth to the beats of the shanty.

“Christ, mate. You can’t be doin’ that.”

“I am sorry for frightening you.” A smile blossomed on his pale face, and he nodded at her, “You feel it too, Inquisitor.”

She crossed her arms, and dampened her scowl.

“Hold a moment…” She looked to Cullen, “So it was you that was thinkin’ that?”

“I-uh,” He held a fist to his mouth and coughed, “Uhm-“

His face burned red, and she slunk towards him.

“You have my thanks, Spirit.” The back of her fingers trickled down Cullen’s jaw, toying with her prey, “This one’s hard to read in the ways of certain…cravings…”

“Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Early in the morning!

Christopher pulled on her hood, “Would ye stop playin’ with him in public, Cap’n?!” He shoved an ale at her, “Some of us haven’t had the pleasure of laying in months!” She raised her mug, “I’d understand the feelin’, mate!” Naomi gazed at Cullen and poured the drink down to her bowels. He watched in horror as she slammed the empty mug on the table. “We’ll see how early this sailor wakes in the morn, aye?!” “With any luck…” Aquila put his elbows on the bar, smoking his pipe on a stool, “You’ll be awake by the time the ship sets sail.” Cullen shifted uncomfortably, his eyes darting around the room in an effort to avoid the taunting pirates. “If you can’t find me,” Naomi grinned, “Find him. I shouldn’t be too far behind…”

“Put him a long boat till he’s sober,
Put him a long boat till he’s sober,
Put him a long boat till he’s sober,
Early in the morning!”

Her Officers rejoined the plundering crew. Cullen exhaled in relief, a chuckle trickling from his chest, “Did you just drink that whole thing in one go?” “I can fit quite a lot in this yapper, eh?” She winked. “Oh, Naomi…” His face returned to bright red, “You’re one of a kind.” “Got that right.” She poked him on the nose, “And if ye forget it ‘nd run away with another lass, I’ll be quick to remind you!” Cullen shook his head and gave her a shy smile, “Why run from the most beautiful woman in Thedas?” “That was the right answer, Lion.”

“Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Early in the morning!”

Bull marched to their side, and slammed an even bigger mug on the table, “I’d like to see you do that trick with this one, Quiz.” “Why?!” Naomi hiccupped, “Tryin’ to size me up?!” “I did say I liked red heads.” Cullen shot him a threatening look. “I’m joking, Commander Killjoy.” A bellowing laugh left him, “I heard about what happened with the Orlesians. Can’t say she doesn’t deserve a drink!” “Coming from someone who’s not going to be taking care of her all night.” He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Whoa, whoa, don’t go making me more jealous now.” Naomi threw the empty mug at Bull and beat a fist on her chest, aiming a burp at him. “Did you just-“ “Aye! That I did, yah big-horned bastard!” She cheered.

“Stick him the scuppers with a hose pipe on him,
Stick him in the scuppers with a hose pipe on him,
Stick him in the scuppers with a hose pipe on him,
Early in the morning!”
Naomi grabbed Cullen by the strings on his vest, and pulled him close to her, “Yer dressed like a pirate, love. Best drink like one!”
She snatched two bottles from the bar that had been left unattended.
“We’ll be settin’ sail all day! We’ll sleep onboard, yeah?” She handed one to him.
He took it with hesitation, “This seems like a horrible idea.”
They clanked their bottles together, and Naomi frowned.
“Ah, piss. This one’s half empty…Yers seems full, though.”
She tipped the bottle upwards, and pushed it to his lips, “Open wide, Commander!”

“Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Early in the morning!”

Naomi’s bottle rolled across the table, and she watched Cullen down a quarter of his until he lowered it. He covered his mouth and began to cough, and she slapped his back.
“How did you-“
“Mine was just water, that round.” She laughed, “I wouldn’t dare drink as much of what you just did.”
“What is it?!” He growled at her, turning the bottle to see the label.
“Tequila!”
“Huh,” He wiped his lips, “It’s not half bad.”
“Aye! The Commander fancies himself a drop’o tequila, mates!”

The men and women cheered, and raised their drinks high in the air. Cullen raised the bottle, and tilted his head back.

“Put him in the bed with the Captain’s daughter,
Put him in the bed with the Captain’s daughter,
Put him in the bed with the Captain’s daughter,
Early in the morning!”

Sera jumped next to them, taking Naomi’s arms in her hands, “Captain’s daughter, oh?”
“It’s what we call a whip, girl.” She hissed, “A whip.”
“Why not just call it what it is, then?!”
“Haven’t you learnt us pirates hardly follow the common tongue?!”
“I doubt you have a common tongue, Inquisitor.”
“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Naomi purred.
“I’ve heard the stories.”

Cullen choked on his drink.

“Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Way hay and up she rises,
Early in the morning!”

“A’right, enough of that.” Naomi took Cullen’s drink from him, “That’s stronger than most rum ‘round here, needn’t make yerself sick.”
“I’ve been drinking two hours before you,” He hiccupped, “I have little faith in my good health for the next few hours.”
“Is that so?” She eyed him, “I have a few ideas to suggest otherwise.”
“What would you suggest, Inquisitor?” He leaned on a wooden post, lowering his neck to look at
Naomi bit her lip and looked around. They were in a dark corner, away from the bustle that was the tavern party. She looped a finger around his belt, and pulled his waist towards her, “It would be easier to show you…”

Cullen gulped, “Both of us have had plenty to drink, it would feel wrong to-“

“I told you I loved you.” She pressed a finger to his lips, “And you love me, aye?”

He nodded his head, and his gaze sank to the cleavage lining her chest.

“That’s what we do with a drunken sailor,
That’s what we do with a drunken sailor,
That’s what we do with a drunken sailor,
Early in the morning!”

“How much do you love me?” She ran her hand down her body, stopping at her hip.

He watched, and his jaw quivered, “Words would fail me, my lady.”

“How fortunate that actions speak louder, then.” She pulled him towards the back door, “Show me what you’d do to this… drunken sailor.”

Both of them laughed perhaps too loud, for Adibas cheered for them, “She won’t be risin’ early in the morn’ lads!” The rest of the crew yelled, and drank to the salute.

A gust swept over them upon their exit, and Naomi shivered at the icy winds that cooled her heated skin.

“I think he may be on to something.” Cullen kept her close, “An early morning is not in our future, ‘Captain.’”

Chapter End Notes

*Marius and Tessa are the main characters in the comic series, "Magekiller," set during the time of Inquisition. Charter also appears in this series.

*Kenway’s tale told by Blackbeard [here](#).
Lion's Den

Chapter Summary

"Some of the best moments in life are the ones you can't tell anyone about."
-Anonymous

Chapter Notes

This is purely a sex scene.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The door to Cullen’s office was pushed from its frame by the tangled bodies writhing in the entryway. Their tongues danced in each other’s company, and their clicking teeth matched the bar that locked behind them. Naomi clawed at his vest, the ferocity in her fingers scratching the leather. Cullen hesitated, almost startled by being stripped with such impatience. He froze when she started the undoing of her own clothing.

He seemed unsure, or perhaps nervous…like cornered prey coming to terms with being eaten alive.

“Not having second thoughts, now, are you?” She tugged the strings of her bodice until they lost their hold.

“Yes. No! It’s just…” He ran a hand down his face, shielding himself, “It’s been awhile, since…”

Her breasts parted, growing heavy as the cover that kept them so neatly in place was peeled away…and the way he looked at her then was enough to hitch her breathing.

She traced the wings of his collarbones, and the space that divided them grew painful. Her hand slithered over his shoulder, rounding the rigid muscles that lined him. The hairs on his arm raised when their chests met. He blinked himself out of her trance, pulling back in a daze.

“It’s okay, Lion.” Naomi wet her lips, “Don’t you want this?”

He closed his eyes as she reached for his wrist. They jolted open when she guided his large, calloused hand to the heating spool over her heart.

“I do…” His other hand found her waist, and forced her to take a step backwards.

Cullen paced a thumb over the pebbling skin of her nipple. The caressing turned into strong grasps that sent shockwaves through her body. His fingertips dug and released, a repeating motion that came in flickers of leashed hunger.

The bend of her elbow curved around the column of his neck. He fit her perfectly, and she found the closeness with him she’d wanted so badly. But now, it was stronger than a want…He became a need. It was just as she needed food, or water, or the air that gave life to her, she needed him.

The back of her thighs collided with his desk, and a vase jingled in place. Naomi withdrew from him only long enough to pop the button that held her linens secure. Cullen pressed against her, running his hands down her sides, gliding his fingertips along her naked back. Her lips quivered, and she held in a moan as his touch numbed her.

He rounded her hips. His palms sat just above the cloth that covered her from the waist
And still, he hesitated. She kissed him in protest, lowering her pants and small clothes with the hooks of her thumbs. They bunched at the rim of her boots still laced to her knees. She tugged on his waist, and his eager bulge met the gap between her legs.

Cullen pushed a strong breath through his nose, breaking from her kiss to look down at her.

“Something wrong, love?” She trailed the hard line of his throat with her finger, tipping his chin. Her own palm hugged her curves, cupping her breast as it passed.

“Maker…You’re…”

“What am I?”

His jaw tightened, “A temptress.”

“Do I tempt you, Commander?” She clawed up her thighs, pleased by his enthrallment.

He succumbed to her taunt, swatting her hand away and wrapping an arm around her waist. She was jerked to the side, and caught his shoulders. His strength kept her in place as he swept the desk clear.

The vase shattered somewhere in a far-off corner. Books, papers, his pen well – all of it became a scattered mess upon the grey tiles.

Naomi swallowed, flattening her palms on the hard planes of his chest. He grazed her neck with his teeth as his lips massaged her throat. She was immersed in his intensity, ravishing in being loved so fervently.

“I do like this side of you…”

Cullen lifted her by the back of her knees, and pinned her against the desk with his weight. “How fortunate it is reserved for you, then.” He slipped her linens out from her boot cuffs, pulling them off with ease.

“You don’t want to take those off, too?” She nodded to her boots. “I like them.”

“Oh?” She caressed his jaw with the back of her hand, “You are a devious one.”

A dangerous smile lifted the scar above his lip. He cradled her head in his palm, and leaned in for a kiss. His hand trailed the length of her thigh, soothing her ignited nerves along the way. A ghosting fingertip circled the ring of her arousal, adding fuel to the fire that burned for him.

Her heart drummed a vein in her neck. She felt empty, and could only focus on her burning need to be filled. With each passing of her clit, she grew more anxious. She spread her knees, squirming under his teasing.

A hungry growl pushed from Cullen’s chest. The sharp hairs of his jaw grazed her as he lifted his neck, and he pushed his hand forward. She gasped and clutched his arms as he dipped into her.

And he watched, toyed with her. Her toes curled in her boots, and the aching became worse.

She bit back a moan when he rolled a nipple in his mouth. His tongue swirled around her peak, puckering under the delicate pull of his lips. Her nails traced the flexing muscles of his back and up into his hair, surrendering to his torture.

The pleasure he took in her torment was little a secret. He switched sides, her wet nipple pebbling in the cold draft of his office. He pulled on the other with his teeth, and it snapped to ripple her tender breast when he set it free.

Naomi shuddered as his fingers pushed against her spot that ached the most, and her back arched forward. The wet slapping from them stopped, and they thrummed wildly in place.

Her face flushed and her skin prickled. Her teeth clenched. She became glazed with sweat. She was about to burst.

And then she was empty again.

Cullen pushed her knees to her shoulders. His hands caressed her as he kissed the insides
of her legs, teeth sinking into the meat of her thigh. His bite made her jump, and he did it again. A jolt ripped through her with each descending nibble until his breath warmed the slickness between her legs.

“Wait-”

“Something wrong, love?” He mocked.

She leaned forward, “I need-“

His tongue glided along her slit, lapping at her juices.

She dissolved, intoxicated, and her thought was finished with a cleaved breath.

“What do you need?” The spear of his tongue flicked against her clit.

He didn’t stop.

She shivered from the icy sensation that shot from below. Her back hit the desk. Her fingernails dug into the wood for reprise underneath her bucking body.

“You,” She rocked her hips against the stubble of his chin, “I need you-“

He cupped her backside and buried his face between her shaking legs. A rumble erupted from his throat, vibrating against her slit. She was rendered victim to his touch, and she cried at the ceiling.

He sucked on her clit as his fingers slipped underneath, rougher than before. Her legs spread wider. She silently begged him to go deeper, to ease the pressure from her core. He braced her abdomen, holding it down to keep her still.

“Yes,” Naomi jerked under his grasp, covering her mouth to mute her shouting.

She dug through every strand of golden hair that graced his head. Time seemed to slow, and her eyelids fluttered. A bead of sweat rolled down her neck. The coil that wound itself inside her began to spring in the form of a trickle. Her vision all but blurred. She gasped for air, her sore abdomen pushing each shuddering breath from her lungs. The room spun, and quick aftershocks shook her knees.

Cullen’s elbow met the desk next to her head. He wiped his face with his hand, and she’d barely collected herself before his tongue pushed its way through her lips. He tasted like her, like how badly she needed him to stake his claim.

Taking control of her weak arms, Naomi tugged on his linens and released the taught button threatening to bust. He kissed her neck, grinding against her and losing his hands in her hair. She untied his belt, and pushed them low enough to feel his length brush against her. The size of him…It made her even more desperate.

His cock glided against her entrance, the thick tip rubbing against her aching clit. She gripped him, and his surprised breath filled her ear. She stroked the length of his erection, the tip sliding between a gap in her fingers. His entire body went stiff.

He grunted when a small leak slickened the inside of her palm, and she tightened her grip.

His breathing stuttered, and she found her wrists pinned on either side of her head. He exhaled in frustration, and her breasts flattened against the rising and falling of his chest. He shook his head, looking almost angry as he released her only hooked her leg on his hip.

Naomi shook in anticipation. Her thigh squeezed against him, and her fingers laced through his hair. They were lost in each other’s stare as the tightness that held her insides captive was gently relieved. He inched himself in, and she splintered when their hips met. His eyes wobbled above her, and she inhaled sharply. She could feel him pulse against her walls. The way he filled her was a sensation unlike anything she’d known before.

His mouth crushed hers, and she latched her arms around his neck. He cradled the back of her head, keeping her close as he retreated and pushed his entirety in her again.

Their rocking hips broke the kiss as he set his pace. The bend of her nose touched the curve of his neck. Her hands explored every inch of him, diving over his shoulders and clutching at his back. She wanted to live in this moment for the rest of her life, the first time where raw, untainted passion took her captive.

“Cullen…”
He groaned, and wrapped her other leg around his waist. Waves of ecstasy journeyed from her belly and back down over her legs. She was beneath him, but floating away all the same. And with each powerful lunge, he brought her back down. Her mouth hung ajar, stunted by the length in which he breached her.

Her world narrowed down to him. There was no more war to fight, no more lands to save. There was just her, melting into him as she lost track of where she ended, and he began.

Sweat dripped from the tip of his nose onto her cheek, and her nipples rubbed against his chest as her breasts bounced below him. Their pounding hips made the desk slide, and he caught her by the small of her back when she almost slipped off.

Cullen lifted her, and her back collided with the desk once again. Their snapping bodies filled his quarters with the sounds and smells of sex, and the wetness between her legs became thicker.

Blood rushed to her head, pushing her to the brink of delirium. His hand secured the arch of her back against his abdomen as he conquered her.

"Cullen-"

He gripped the edge of the desk over her head as he pummeled her, every thrust harder than the last. His pace quickened, and it sent her hands sliding up his back just to claw down at it.

This was no longer the charming, shy man she'd met outside of Haven. This was someone who wanted to handle her, to make her want him more than she already had, to redefine what she thought to be only sex.

"Cullen!"

His embrace around her tightened, and their hips rolled together as he drove her into the desk. He grew harder inside her. Her abdomen tightened in response. She shuddered at an overwhelming sensation, her body made immobile by him. Her tension burst in the form of tremors and twitching limbs.

Their backs arched in a synchronized motion, his neck tilting towards the ceiling as her head pushed against the wood below. The desk ached as he seated himself with a final thrust. A warmth spread inside her, amplifying the tiny sensations that pricked her core.

Their breathing faltered. Their bodies shook, ramping down from the heightened unity.

"I’ve never…” She couldn’t catch her breath.

He stole the air from her with a look of yearning and something different, something she couldn’t identify.

“Shhh…” Cullen smiled, cupping the side of her face, “Let me relish in this.”

Naomi’s laugh echoed off the stone walls around them, “Proud of yourself?”

“I am.”

Her arms felt like phantoms as they encased him. She leaned back, shifting from one of his eyes to the other, “I love you, so much.”

Cullen lowered his head, his tongue glossing over the roof of her mouth. She could feel the passion roaming free of the prison he’d kept it in for so long.

“I love you, too.”

A vein raised on Cullen’s neck, and his searching eyes found her through whatever ecstasy he succumbed to. They watched each other, panting and sweating, flushed and dazed. His legs wobbled, and he collapsed on her chest.

“Gah-” Naomi squirmed, “You’re getting it all over the place!”

“I slipped my shirt under you-“ He panted, “I’ll clean it up later.”

He nuzzled his cheek against her, his shallow beard tickling like feathers. A breathless laugh escaped her, and she embraced him in a sweat-lathered hug.

“That was…”

“Incredible.” She finished for him, playing with a strand of his matted hair.

“Will you stay with me tonight?” He asked under ragged breath.

She peaked around his shoulder, glaring at the ladder.

“If I can get up that thing, aye.”
He let out an exasperated laugh, “I’ll carry you if I have to.”

“You may, after that performance.”

He paused, grinning at her as she struggled to move her legs.

“Oh, come off it.” She snickered, “You win this round.”

“This round?” Does that imply there will be another?

She grinned, “Quite.”

“Good.”

He scooped her up and threw her over his shoulders, her chest meeting the space in between his shoulder blades.

“Hey! I was joking!”

Cullen grabbed the first wrung of the ladder, and she clung to him with her arms, “I wasn’t.”

He climbed to the top, and pushed his hands against the floor. Using all his strength, his knees came up from underneath him, and he forced himself to stand. His muscles bulged, and he tossed her on his bed.

A small yelp left her as she bounced laughing, and he was soon to follow.

“I’m glad I didn’t kill you.” Naomi whispered.

They looked at the night sky with their fingers locked together.

“Me too.” The moonlight painted him silver, all but the gold of his eyes piercing the shroud.

He was a man who’d all else would fail in comparison, and he was hers. But more importantly…she had fallen in love with him in a way she never knew was possible.

And she loved the way he loved her.

Chapter End Notes

I've never published a sex scene before. After 748 minutes of editing time, I finally decided to just go for it.

Please feel free to leave feedback. What worked? What didn't?

Any help would be greatly appreciated. :)
Winds howled over the open ceiling, whistling a tune to the loft. A gentle snow blanketed the floor underneath, drifting lazily above the ladder. A crisp, icy morning greeted Naomi upon her waking, and it would have been cold if not for the mass of heat that clung to her. Cullen mumbled in his sleep as she began to squirm. She too winced at the sun that worsened her throbbing headache. “I’m too old ta’ be drinkin’ like that.”

She looked at her slumbering Lion and rolled in his arms. Another breeze carried a shout, probably from Adibas. “Ah, shite, we’re liftin’ anchor soon.”

Naomi pushed on his shoulder, “Up with you, now, Commander.” He argued from his dreams, speaking something incomprehensible. “Pst,” She whispered in his ear, “Wake up.”

His eyes fluttered, and he squinted below her, “Hmm…Oh. You’re still here?” “Was that not part of yer plan?” “No, I just thought you’d climb out the gaping hole in my ceiling…” He yawned, “I’ve gotten used to waking up without you.”

She scoffed, “Won’t be makin’ that mistake again.” Naomi went to stand, but his arms tightened around her waist. “I never said I liked waking up without you.”

“You’re awake now, eh? Let me g-“

She struggled, and he kept her restrained, “Ye know, I’d fight back, but you strike me as the lad who might enjoy that.” “There’s only one way to find out.”

His hair was flush against the pillow, and he looked so at peace. His tired eyes held a tint of excitement to them, and her heart grew warm. His lips were stuck in the slightest form of a grin, just enough to stun her. “I do hate it when you look at me like that.”
“How else am I supposed to look at you?” He brushed a strand of hair from her face, “I can hardly help but remind myself how fortunate I am every time I do.”

She rolled her eyes, “And when you say shite like that, how do you ever expect me to leave?”

“Simple.” He pulled the fur blanket over them, and the room went dark, “I don’t.”

He tickled her with kisses, and teased her with gentle nibbles.

“Damn it, Cullen!” She laughed, “Stop it!”

She was under him, and she inhaled sharply, “We have to meet me crew by the docks to-“

His teeth grazed her ear as he hooked her leg around his hip, “We’re going to be late, Inquisitor.”

Naomi watched her ship float in the frosty port. Her crew loaded provisions by passing crates down their manmade chain. Adibas crossed his elbows on the railing next to the extended bridge, and gave her a tired wave. She returned a nod.

“Cap’n.” Christopher took to her side.

“Mornin’, Kit.”

“Thought fer sure you’d be in the company of the Commander.” He grinned, his eyepatch pushing up on his cheek.

She tossed the snow with her foot, “We were in each other’s company through the night.”

“Good for you, Cap. Means it.” He gripped her shoulder and shook her, “Bout time you took pleasure in a man worthy of ye!”

“Aye, aye,” She shrugged him off, “Let’s not make a habit of screamin’ it, yeah?”

“From what I hear, ye took care of that yerself!” He cackled, unscrewing the cap of his flask.

“It’s the crack of dawn, lad. You feelin’ the shakes again?”

“Nay, Cap’n. Need’ta warm me cold bones is all.”

She huffed, “Quite.”

Christopher took a swig and returned his flask to his coat, waving her goodbye as he joined the other sailors.

“Inquisitor!” Cassandra called.

Naomi took a step back, and turned to greet her.

“Best of the mornin’ to you, Seeker…and mates.”

The small army of Inquisition forces funneled out of the inlaid stairway leading up the cliff. Naomi narrowed her eyes at Solas, who looked away immediately. They huddled around her as the three Advisors traverse the steps behind them.

Leliana and Josephine led, and Cullen trotted carefully with Dullahan’s reigns in hand.

“Glad to see the scaly bastard is still around.”

Blackwall put his gloved hands on his hips, “It’s about time you let me on this damned ship.”

“I have awaited this moment too, Warden.” Cole’s hat tipped upwards as he eyed the length of The Dishonored’s masts.

“She’ll be happy to have you aboard, mates. Long as you don’t get sea sick.” Naomi snickered.

“Hope you have room for your dracolisk onboard.” Blackwall tugged at his beard, “Couldn’t get the other mounts to let him on the carrier ship this morning.”

“A carrier ship came to port?”
“It did. Left just after Isabela and the rest of them. They’ve all got a longer ways to go, and Jader’s miniature fleet came early.”
“Surprised they could all fit through here.”
“They did, one at a time. Two at a time once Isabela departed. It took a while.”
“Sorry I missed it.”
“Somehow, I don’t believe you.”
Leliana raised her hood, shivering at the cold, “Inquisitor, it is good to see you.”
“Aye. And you, lass.”
Josephine gave her a slight bow, and a wide smile graced her, “Can I just say how—“
“Excited ye be to get on the ship, aye?”
Dullahan bucked his head, pulling away from Cullen and giving him a low growl.
“Come ‘ere, beasty!” Naomi clapped her hands, and Cullen let his reigns loose.
He ran to her, and the small crowd split in half to give him room. He rubbed his nose against her cheek, scratching her with his scales.
“Aye, missed you too! Gah- you stink!”
“Don’t know how you let that lizard nuzzle you like that.” Sera pursed her lips, “Might as well find a dragon and cuddle with it.”
“I’d be down for that.” Bull stretched his arms, “Can we go find one?”
Dorian elbowed his stomach, and he buckled.
“Great, now they’re touching each other.” Varric put his crossbow on his shoulder, “The Inquisition: Thedas’s best matchmaking service.”
“Jealous?” Naomi cocked her head.
“Who said I needed my match made?”
“You do seem quite lonely, my dear Dwarf.” Vivienne shielded a laugh with the back of her hand, “The company of a lady might do you some good.”
“Are you offering?”
“Absolutely not.”
Cullen stood behind the others, chattering amongst themselves as the sailors continued to pass cargo into the hold. The remembrance of the fur from his hood was welcoming. As if answering her silent beckoning, he walked around the group and paused at the other side of Dullahan. He petted his nose, watching her.
“Your crew seems less than thrilled to set sail.”
Naomi turned to the sailors, working diligently and mumbling under their breath.
“The cold’s weighed on them. Aside from our journeys to Ireland, we rarely left the heat of the Indies.” She looked back to him, “Best let them carry on and let ‘em get it out of their systems.”
He chuckled, “You’re a fair leader.”
“They haven’t stuck around this long for the wages, that’d be certain.” She took a deep breath of icy air, “Looking forward to see Her in action?”
“If by ‘Her,’ you mean you, then yes.”
“Don’t go makin’ me nervous on me own vessel, love.”
“You? Nervous? I can hardly imagine.”
“You’ve got a point, Commander.”
“Inquisitor,” Solas interrupted, “May I have a word?”
Naomi’s heart tripped, and she grimaced at the request.
“Aye.”
“In private?”
She looked to Cullen, who studied the elf suspiciously.
“Fine.”
Cullen took Dullahan’s reigns, and the beast eyed Solas as she turned to follow him.
They walked the edge of the port, stopping far from prying ears.
“I was hoping we could speak about the other night.”
“What is there to speak on? We spoke plenty when you called me in your dreams.”
Solas paced slowly, “I didn’t call you, Inquisitor. *You* summoned *me.*” She was taken aback by his statement, and wasn’t quite sure how to respond.

“How would I have known what tattoos your skin bears?”

“When you treated me for the Anchor.”

“I hardly stripped you of your clothing.” He paused, “That was Cassandra’s doing.”

“Is this where you tell me I need your help? That my power grows beyond my reach?”

He nodded, and laughed quietly, “It seems we’ve crossed this path before.”

“Where you make yerself seem like a necessity, no matter how much you betray the trust of those who place it in you? Aye, we have.”

Her sailors passed the last chest in the stack, wiping their hands on their trousers and making their way for the deck. Cullen followed, Dullahan in tow. Together they paused, watching her from the ramp.

“Trust these two accounts, if only the pair.” Solas regained her attention.

“Go on.”

“I want to help you master the Anchor’s abilities…and I want to see the Inquisition put a stop to Corypheus.”

She snickered, “Ye want to know the Anchor’s abilities so ye may learn how to put a stop to them, if raised against your favor.”

“Inquisitor, please—“

“I’ve heard enough o’ yer bargainin’, Pride.”

“You put us all at risk with your carelessness.” He sneered, “Who must die for you to realize that without the proper training, you will be the fall of all our efforts?”

Her fists tightened, ready to bury themselves in his pale skin.

“Will it be Adibas?”

“Yer walkin’ a dangerous line, mate.”

“Will it be Cullen?”

She grabbed him by the neckline of his shirt, and pulled him within an inch of her face, “I’ve heard enough.”

He raised his hands, “Have it your way, Guardian.”

She pulled him closer, reluctant to release him, “I’m going to let you go, and walk back to me ship. You’re to wait a minute before following. We clear?”

His eyebrows pinched, “Yes.”

Naomi shoved him away, and yanked the flaps of her Captain’s coat to straighten them. She swallowed her anger in an attempt to rally herself together before rejoining the others.

“I’d trust Kenway with a chest o’ gold before believin’ anything that treacherous elf has to say.”

…

Cullen paced the Deck, anxious to get the journey over with. He’d never been a fan of sea travel, and hoped the larger ship would lessen his worries.

“Keep that up and you’ll have the whole crew on alert.”

Adibas watched him from above, leaning on the railing next to the Helm.

Cullen rubbed the back of his neck, “It’s been awhile since—“

“Captain on Deck!”

The crew stopped what they were doing, saluting and cheering as Naomi stepped foot on *The Dishonored.*

“Kit,” Her neck snapped to Christopher, “We ready to hoist anchor, mate?”

“Aye, Cap’n.” He jogged to her front, “Yer pet’s been held up in the forward cargo hold away
from the supplies. Blackwall’s with ‘im, gonna keep ‘im from chewin’ on the wood.”

She shielded her eyes from the sun, looking up to the ship’s sails, “And did we get the ice off the masts?”

“Aye, Riggers standin’ ready.”

She knelt on one knee, and pinched the deck. A dusty substance sprinkled from her fingers, “Lay another round’o sand. Winds are high, waves are goin’ to be fierce. Can’t let ice take over.”

“Aye, Cap’n.” Christopher cupped his mouth, “Bring another bag’o sand from Cargo, lads!”

“Aye-Aye, KIT!” A man from the opened doors on the floor called out.

“Tad!” Naomi shouted as she rose.

“Yes, Cap!”

“Retract the lower cannons, away from pryin’ eyes. Cover the mortars ‘nd make sure we don’t let snow clog ‘em up.” She turned to him, “But keep the gunmen on alert. We don’t know what we’re gonna’ run in to out on open waters.”

“I’ll see it done, Cap’n!”

“Pull the bridge!” She ordered.

A group of men did as she commanded.

She rested one hand on the hilt of her Sword, and raised the other in the air, “A’right, mates! Raise the anchor! Today, we sail to Val Royeaux!”

Cold shouts of, “YAR!” followed her declaration.

Turning on one heel, she walked through the now-bustling crewhands to the stairs near Adibas.

Cullen tore himself away from the display, watching bold men take hold of the rope ladders on each side of the ship. They climbed until they reached the top, where their legs poked through the topmost squares as if sitting on the rungs.

One woman continued to climb, seemingly to the top of the tallest mast.

“I can’t imagine what the winds are like up there.”

She placed herself in the Crow’s Nest, and pulled a hood over her head.

“Captain at the Helm!” Adibas shouted.

The energy shifted amongst the crew. They were no longer scrambling to get in position. Their breaths were held, and the chatter was minimal. Cullen could hear his own heartbeat, with muting winds the only sound to drown it out.

The ship began to drift, and a loud thud came from below.

“Anchor onboard, Captain!”

Naomi spun the ship’s wheel, and it began to turn. Cullen stumbled in place at the sudden movement.

Her hands flexed and tightened around the spokes, as if waiting for something. She was focused and patient, determined but relaxed. She broke into a counter-steer, bringing a golden handle to her front.

The air grew still. The water lapped at the sides of *The Dishonored*. And when the slightest hint of breeze swept over them, her shout was carried over it.

“Set the mains free!”

The men who’d been sitting pulled themselves up, and tugged on a rope holding the sails. They plummeted towards the deck, and the sails roared to life as the breeze strengthened into a gust.

“Off we go, mates!” Adibas called out, “Stay focused and you’ll make this voyage a simple one!”
The Dishonored broke through open water, and a light snow fell from the clouds. Cullen pulled his coat closer to his body. They’d only just broken free of the inlet leading out of Skyhold Port, and the ship’s speed pulled the wind harder than he imagined. The waves were fierce, sending cold broth up and over the hull. The crew wrapped scarves around their mouths, and tightened the rags on their heads.

“Now I understand why the rest of them rushed below deck.”

―As we were a-fishin’ off Happisburgh Light,  
Shootin’ and haulin’ and trawlin’ all night,  
In the windy old weather,  
Stormy old weather!  
When the wind blows,  
We all pull together!‖

He remembered when Naomi’s crew first arrived, and the sickness that had onset among most of them. They wore short-sleeves and hardly owned a pair shoes at that point. But now, they were lined to the neck in fur and leather.

“Bring us to full sail, lads!”

“You heard the Captain! Drop the tops and gallants!”

The Riggers above responded with an experienced quickness, and the rest of the sails dropped free. The ship moved faster, and the winds became almost too much to bare.

He shivered, and looked at the hatch leading inside.

“Commander.” Naomi called, “Join me?”

She turned the wheel, and the ship adjusted accordingly. He waited until it stopped moving to make his way to the railing.

“Yes, Inquisitor?”

“Up here.” Adibas nodded.

Cullen gave him a nervous smile, and made his way onto the Captain’s Deck.

“You’re shiverin’ like a street pup on a winter’s night.” She grinned under the fur of her hood.

“I didn’t expect the ship to move so…fast.”

“Aye, she’s a quick one. It’ll be colder as we get farther out.”

The ocean was faded at a distance, lost in a quickening bustle of flurries.

“I can hardly wait…”

“It’s plenty warmer below deck, Commander.” Adibas turned to him, “No one would blame you for joining the others.”

“I’ve been wanting to see The Dishonored crew work since you’ve arrived. I wouldn’t miss the chance…”

Naomi raised a brow, “Not even for a bit of warmth?”

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say you didn’t want me here.”

“On the contrary, Commander.” She nodded to the wheel, “Go on, then.”

“Erm…”

―When up jumped a herring,  
The Queen of the sea!  
Says, ‘Now, old Skipper, you cannot catch me!’  
In the windy old weather,  
Stormy old weather!"
When the wind blows,
We all pull together!

“Captain?” Adibas squinted. “What are you…”
“Stand next to me,” She pulled Cullen over, keeping one hand in place, “And take the Helm.”
“Inquisitor, I can’t. I haven’t—”
“It’s just for fun. I won’t let go, promise.” She winked.

The compass in the middle stuttered, and she rocked the spokes until it fell back in to place.

“All right.” Cullen pushed steam from his mouth, and reached out to where her other hand once rested.

_The Dishonored’s_ power seeped through the Helm’s metal plating in the form of resistant vibrations.

The compass tilted, “A’right, spin down on it, now.”
She pulled the other side, raising it slightly. He had to exert more strength to lower his spoke, the Helm pushing back harder than expected. It was heavier than it looked.

“How do you spin this wheel so quickly?”
“Practice.” She snickered, “Being under fire teaches you how to maneuver rather hastily.”
“I can imagine.”

A gust bellowed in the sail, and the ship jerked to the right. She gripped the wheel with both hands then, her feet sliding a bit at the hard turn.

“Winds pickin’ up, I’ll take it from ‘ere.”
“Thank the Lord.” Adibas pinched his temple.

“Ey, he didn’t do so bad.”
“That was…” Cullen ran a hand through his hair, “Insightful, to say the least.”
“I could have a more boring job.” She laughed, “Now, why don’t you find yerself a nice stool below and keep warm. Yer lookin’ rather pale, Commander.”
“Is that an order, Inquisitor?”
“Captain.” She winked, “And aye, that’s an order.”

He smiled, “You know where I’ll be.”
“That I do, Commander…That I do.”

A guitar strummed in the back of a mob of collected bodies. The blizzard’s bright light cascaded inside from around the cannons, reflecting off their golden plating. Lanterns swayed overhead, flickering from the draft.

The rest of the Inquisition sat on barrels, chests, crates – anything they could turn into a chair. They talked amongst themselves and kept away from the working sailors. A man cleaned a stand on the end, and a pot of something that smelled delicious boiled atop a stove.

“Commander!” Leliana waved, “Over here!”

The mob of heads turned to him, and he sighed at the whispering gossip that followed.

“It might be warmer down here, but much less quiet…”

The ship creaked and ached, and the waves roared outside.

“Cole left to keep Blackwall company. I doubt it was well received.” Cassandra smirked as she wiped her mouth, holding a mug of something hot.

“That burly Warden _does_ keep to himself, doesn’t he?” Vivienne sat with her legs crossed, and her
hands folded upon her knee.
“Now if only I get the rest of you to keep to yourselves.” Dorian leaned against a wooden beam with his arms and ankles crossed, “Perhaps I’d be able to rid myself of this migraine.”
“I’ve got something for your migraine.” Bull winked at him.
“Oh, I bet you do. Does it come with horns?” Sera poked him, “Like a little mini pair, all pointy.”
“Part of its pointy. And we don’t call the pair that comes with it, ‘horns,’ Sera.”
Dorian frowned, “How disappointing.”
“Perhaps a change of discussion is warranted.” Solas cleared his throat.
“And lose out on all this great dialogue?” Varric huffed, his legs crossed on a low table in front of him, “Not a chance.”
“Do you write everything you hear?” Cullen wrested an arm on a nearby post, shifting his weight to one leg.
“It’s all in here.” Varric tapped the side of his head, “And yes. Everything.”
“A memory like yours would certainly make my job easier.” Josephine drank from her cup.
She seemed more relaxed than she did back in Skyhold.
“Must be the Antivan in her, feeling so comfortable on a ship.”
She swallowed before continuing, “Keeping family names in line, events, the treasury—“
“Yes, yes, we know your job is quite difficult.” Dorian grinned, “And we love you for it, ‘Josie.’”
“Excuse me? Only Leliana has the right to call me that, Sparkler.”
Dorian scoffed, and let it go.
“Stew is ready once I take pot off flame.” The chef behind a counter barked.
He was a strong man, and Cullen had seen him in the kitchens of Skyhold once or twice.
“You take bowl to Galley and clean up after yourself. Vlad is not barmaid. You leave mess? Vlad will know. Do not let Vlad find mess.”
The Inquisition looked at each other, and gave him a nod in return.
“Good.”

…

The flurries had evolved, and a blizzard caught The Dishonored in a snowy trap. The sails flapped, crinkling under the weight of the gusts. The cold ocean embraced the ship, frosting the railing and making the deck slick.
“Drop us to half sail and check yer lifelines, Riggers!”
She could barely see her crewhands as they pulled the rope, lifting the sails into a roll.
Experienced as they were, it was times like these where she feared for their safety.
“Kit, how’s the ice down there?!”
“We’re doin’ all we can to keep the Deck clean, Cap’n!” He swept alongside the sailors, “Havin’ a hard time with the snow!”
“Keep at it, mate!”
“Aye-aye!”

“We sighted a thrasher-a-slashin’ his tail, ‘Time now old Skipper to hoist up your sail!’
In the windy old weather,
Stormy old weather!
When the wind blows,
We all pull together!”

The wind stung, and the snow slapped against her skin. “Might have to wait it out.” Adibas pulled his vest over his nose. “Wouldn’t be opposed to it.” Naomi mumbled, “Can’t feel me hands…” “I can take the wheel for a bit, Captain. Take a moment in your Quarters to warm them.” “What about you?” “I’ve had them in my pockets.” His cheeks tugged his eyes in a smile. “How fortunate…” A gust pushed her hood off, and her hair snapped in her face. “Goddamn-“ “Go on, Captain. We will trade once you feel fit to do so.” “Aye,” They traded spots for the Helm, “Shout if you need me, yeah?” “Of course.”

The diversity of Naomi’s crew had been lost upon Cullen, not having spent much time with them in such close quarters. He found himself amused by their friendly banter. “It is Indian silk, you buffoon. You cannot just wash it.” “You been wearin’ that garb since we brought you on. 4 years woulda’ thought you’d learnt not to wear it then, mate!” “What am I to do? Abandon the ways of my country? Do you so easily forget the treasures of England?” “Pfft, treasures, he says. You know what treasure I found in England?” “I do not, but I feel as though you are inclined to tell me.” “Oy, I am. ‘Er name was Delilah. She had a pretty little treasure to share, ey me boys?!” The sailors slammed their mugs on the table, and drank after shouting. “Egypt has treasures abound.” A beautiful woman with bronze skin and honey eyes raised an arm at the man, “Perhaps I could teach you the ways of my people.” “OOOO-“ The man turned in his seat, “Pasha, don’t go playin’ my dreams as a fool’s.” “I’d never do such a thing.” Cullen shook himself out of his daze, and took another spoonful of stew in his mouth. “If you so much even look at the wine pool…” Josephine pushed the loose bits of hair from her forehead, “Sera, please-“ “Listen, you.” Sera pointed her spoon at her, “They can’t just leave a wine pool out in the open and expect people not to swim in it. That’s like…That’s like-“ “Capturing bees without making a grenade.” Varric finished for her. “Exactly!” “Ugh…” Josephine cupped her face in her hands. “Relax, Josie.” Leliana put a hand on her shoulder, “We’ll be fine.” “Speak for yourself.” Cullen sighed, “I think I’d rather take on Corypheus with little else than a broom handle than go to the Winter Palace…” “What a meek comment from the grizzly Fereldan.” Dorian shook his head, “You’re a master at chess. This isn’t so different, you know.” “Except he Game is played with real pawns, with real consequences.” Vivienne corrected. “Yes, while the rich and the fat dance the night away to their elven-enslaved backdrop.” Solas
glared.
“Great. Just friggin’ great. You got him started on the elfy stuff.” Sera groaned, “They’re not so helpless, magey.”
“Because you’ve spent so much time with them?”
“More than you, probably. City elf, remember?” She pointed her thumb at herself, “Red. Jenny.”

The hatch at the end of the hall opened, and the guitar strumming stopped. The heads of the Galley turned, and Kilean marched to the Inquisition’s table.
“Need one of you in Navigation.” She found Cullen, “You’ll do. Let’s go.”
She pulled his coat, and his bowl tipped over. The contents splayed on the table, and the sailors gasped.
“Will you just wait-“
“Nay.”

Vlad crossed his arms, his anchor-tattooed muscles pushing his apron up. He whispered something under his breath with knives in his eyes. Kilean ignored it and kept dragging Cullen until a wall hid him from sight.
“I hope they clean that up.”

... 

Naomi slammed the door behind her, rubbing her arms to try and null her shivering. Her teeth chattered, and her clothes became more soggy as the snow on them began to melt. She plopped in her chair, and ripped her gloves off. She blew in her hands before rubbing them together, her thawing nose burning on her face.
“Winter in Thedas makes Ireland’s snow feel like a bathhouse.”

She remembered the sauna rooms she’d taken part in during her stays in Kingston, and the hot steam cleansing her pours. She’d gone there with Edward a few times.

“And up jumps a slipsole as strong as a horse,
Says now, ‘Old Skipper, you’re miles off course!’
In the windy old weather,
Stormy old weather!
When the wind blows,
We all pull together!”

Thaddeus’s muffled song slipped through the overhead planks.

“How fitting…”
Naomi held her hand out, and her thumb rolled the ring on her finger.
“Still don’t know what this blasted thing does…”
It looked like the ring Mary wore.
“Can’t imagine he’d part with that.”
She sighed, and looked around her Quarters.
The white light cast an eerie glow on her room. It was aged, perhaps a bit dusty. There were so many memories of home, and at one point, they’d filled her with comfort and a sense of belonging. Now, they felt foreign, as if hung in a different life.
“Christ.”
She hacked a wet cough, and massaged her chest.

“Home sounds nice right about now.”
She wondered how Cullen would fair in the heat, on the beach, or what laying with him in the sand would be like.

“He’d burn to a crisp the first day.”
The image of a sunburnt Cullen forced her to smile. She leaned back in her chair, and closed her eyes. The ship ramped up before coming down a steep decline.
Naomi jumped, and gripped her armrests.

“Blizzard’s getting’ worse…”

…

Aquila’s desk was covered by a map of Thedas. A compass spun madly in the corner, a strange tool clicked the table under his hand, and his finger traced where the sharp points danced.
His pipe dangled from his mouth, and he pushed his spectacles higher on his nose.
“Found this one in the Galley.” Kilean shut the doors behind them, and marched to Aquila’s side,
“How goes it?”
“Ah, Cullen! Splendid.” He gave him a wave.
“Evening.” Cullen rubbed the back of his neck, “How may I be of assistance?”
“Well, you see—“

“Then along comes a plaice who’s got spots on his side,
Says, ‘Not much longer- these seas you can ride!’
In the windy old weather,
Stormy old weather!
When the wind blows,
We all pull together!”

“Goddamn that man.” Aquila reached behind him and grabbed a long, wooden walking stick.
He beat it against the roof, “SHUT YER MOUTH UP THERE!”
“Quil, please.” Kilean took it from him, “It’s not like he can hear you.”
“I swear that man just never shuts…Right.” He took a deep breath and collected himself, “As I was saying. We’ve hit a —“

“Then up comes a conger as long as a mile,
‘Winds comin’ East’ly,’ he says with a smile!
In the windy old weather,
Stormy old weather!
When the wind blows,
We all pull together!”
Aquila looked at Kilean, “I’ve never murdered a man before.”
“Deep breaths. Remember what we talked about.”
Cullen gulped.
“Crazy old man.”
“Alright.” Aquila adjusted in his seat, “The Dishonored might be outfitted for just about anything, but this storm is getting worse as we continue. Just how bad can blizzards get in Thedas?”
“Well…” He crossed his arms, “At this time a year, it’s hard to say. They can come and go in an instant, or-“

“I think what these fishes are sayin’ is right,
We’ll haul up our gear now an’ steer for the light,
In the windy old weather,
Stormy old weather!
When the wind blows,
We all pull together!”

Cullen shot the ceiling an irritated look, “Hand me that stick.”
“Commander.” Kilean pinched the bridge of her nose, “Please…”
“I’ve never seen a snow storm of this magnitude. And although Naom-“ He cleared his throat,
“Your Captain has reduced the ship to a crawl, I can only wonder if that will be enough.”
A heavy wave shuddered the wall of Aquila’s office as if to emphasis his point.
“Very well. Come, come.” He beckoned Cullen over, “I don’t see any charted cities, and my calculations predict we are…here.” He pushed his tool into the charted map, “So tell me, where would it be safest to drop anchor and wait out the storm?”
Cullen eyed his mark from over his shoulder, not breaking his focus before answering his question, “Where would you say we are, as of this moment?”
“The compass has been unreliable to say the least, but if I had to guess…” Aquila pointed, “Right above Emprise Du Lion, Commander.”
Cullen rubbed his chin.
“The people of Emprise Du Lion wrote of damning cold, but I didn’t think this is what they meant…”

The sailors sang as they cleared the Deck of snow. There’d been so much that Naomi felt the crunch under her boots upon exiting her Quarters, and deep marks were left from where she pushed her doors open. She could barely see the ocean; the blizzard had picked up such speed.
“Adibas!” She turned to shout at the wheel.
“Captain! I don’t know how much more she can take!”
A clap of thunder shifted the breeze.
It was out of tune with the rest of the storm, not quite carrying the same tones as the gusts.
Naomi bit her lip, shielding her eyes from the frozen onslaught. A second clap came vibrating through.
“Adie…” She mumbled, dashing up to his side, “Adie, I think there’s a-“
A deafening screech passed over The Dishonored. It rattled her eardrums, and shook the frost off her bones.

“DRAGON!” She hollered, “To arms, mates!”

The alarm bell rang, a chattering metal sound that failed in comparison to the beast on approach.

“Captain, what exactly do you expect to do against a dragon?”

“I don’t know yet!” She took the wheel, “But we need more speed!

The last of her shout was muted by the roaring dragon in the sky.

“Angle the sails with the wind!” She cranked the Helm to keep the ship steady, “It’s time we siege the squall, lads n’ lassies!”

The doors leading down to the Galley slammed against the walls that framed it, and the Inquisition’s party poured out.

“Not another one…” Cassandra groaned, drawing her sword.

“Mages!” Naomi yelled below deck, “Do yer…mage things!”

Dorian returned her a cocked grin, “Mage things, you say?”

“Shields? Barriers? I don’t know!”

The Dishonored’s sails dropped. They filled with wind as the Riggers rotated them, bellowing and blanketing them in their shadow.

Cullen took the shield from his back, “Here it comes!”

The flapping wings grew closer.

Naomi wasn’t lying, she didn’t know what to do…

But they couldn’t die here…not with the Inquisition’s victory so far on the horizon.

“Get ready!”

She aimed the side of the ship at the direction of the sound, and a handful of her crew gathered on the Deck’s cannons.

“FIRE!”

The farthest one sounded first. And then the second.

The row of ignition crackled in the storm, sending cannonballs soaring at the white blanket of a target. A screech followed, and Adibas covered his ears.

“I think we hit it!”

“Aye, I’d be obliged to agre-“

A light-blue ray of ice brought spikes along the surface of the ocean, giving life to a jagged trail that raced towards the ship.

“One mage thing, coming right up!” Dorian shot his staff forward, and a shield covered the ship’s hull.

“Oh, dear…” Vivienne raised her hand, giving height to the barrier, “And where do you plan to put this beast’s breath once it’s been caught?”

“Up.” Solas slammed his staff on the deck, and the tip glowed green.

When the dragon’s ice met the shimmering screen, he steered it towards the sky.

The ship shook violently, and Naomi slipped. She caught the Helm, balancing herself with its handles.

“Damn it-“ She growled, glaring at the faint shadow of the dragon, “Buggers’ got a punch to it.”

“More than a punch.” Varric fired his crossbow, “I’d say it even bites!”

“Cannons ready to fire, ser!” A crewman shouted, “On your mark, Cap’n!”

Naomi chewed the inside of her cheek as the masts ached on the wind.

“Can’t break the-“

Another roar echoed to their front, a new pair of wings shattering the rhythm of their assailant.

“What is this?!” She shouted in disbelief.

“They could be fighting over territory,” Cassandra’s voice fought with the storm, “They’re very protective!”

“Well tell them to protect somethin’ else!” Sera argued, firing her bow.
“Yes, allow me to just send a raven to the dragon.” Leliana scoffed, reaching for another arrow, “We’ll put in a nice request!”

Naomi laughed, “You’d be the best Spymaster in my books if you could!”

“I’m already the best Spymaster, Inquisitor!”

A bright flash blinded her for a moment, and a stretch of lightning tore the sky in half. A boom of thunder followed with a delay, and a gust of wind threatened to send the ship off-course.

“They’re definitely fightin’!” She steered the Helm away from the conflict, the silhouettes of the battling dragons coming and going between shots of lightning and ice.

“Let them, then! Better that than us!” Cullen shielded his face from the snow.

“I agree with the Commander,” Bull gripped his axe, “What I would love to battle that beast face-to-face…”

“Which one?” Dorian redirected a misplaced streak of lightning away from the ship.

“Either would do, really.”

“Well I’m glad you’re enjoying yourself!”

The blurs collided, hovering in the sky. They remained in a molded, combined mound before plummeting towards the ocean. Their trajectory was far too close for comfort.

“Brace yerselves!” Naomi warned.

They spun in a mess of snapping jaws, winding necks, and fluttering wings. Their tails whistled above them as they approached.

The waves splashed, and the ice that bounced between them shattered. The ship rolled from the quick interruption of it’s current, and Cullen gripped his stomach.

“It had to be on water, didn’t it…”

Naomi chuckled, “Here be dragons, Commander!”

One of them emerged from the water, sending cold sprays over the deck and stinging Naomi’s face. She grimaced, rubbing her cheek on her shoulder.

A pair of black and white wings stretched alongside it’s hulking body, keeping the scaled creature suspended.

“Hold your fire!” Naomi shouted, sprinting away from the Helm.

“Captain?!” Adibas took her place, correcting the spinning handles.

She slid on the deck, gripping the railing to halt her momentum.

“That dragon—“

“Is about to attack!” Cullen jumped in front of her, shoving her behind him, “What are you thinking?!?”

The dragon hovered above the water, watching them patiently. Naomi wasn’t sure if it was toying with them, planning their demise, or simply observing…but she was sure she recognized it.

“That’s the Vinsomer from the Storm Coast…” Cassandra muttered, taking to Cullen’s side with her own shield drawn, “Has it been following us?”

Naomi watched from her manmade barricade, humbled by the massive size and overwhelming power of the dragon.

“Sintesla…”

Much to Naomi’s surprise, or perhaps not, she rose higher with a mighty flap of her wings. She continued to do so until she was out of the cannon’s range, and turned to the right.

“What was that?” Cassandra put her shield on her back and sheathed her sword, watching the Vinsomer fly towards the distant shore, “Dragons don’t…they don’t show mercy.”

Naomi was speechless. She didn’t have words for the moment they’d just shared with a creature she’d only recently encountered.

“That one did…”

She sighed, stretching the crook in her neck.

“Now if you’d ask me why, I’d have little an answer…”
I sincerely apologize for the long wait. I went through a time of discouragement only because I know how rough the earlier chapters are. If you've made it this far, well, thank you for giving me a chance.

I'll do my best to update at least once a month like I was before, even if they're shorter chapters like this one. It's only because of the encouraging feedback I've received (even the new subs I can't see) that pulled me out of my rut with this fic. So, thank you again, and I look forward to writing the next chapter, "Wicked Eyes," which will be the first of two chapters involving the Ball.

See you then! <3

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