Three years since the last time he saw Lavellan, Solas remains determine to bring down the Veil. His plans change unexpectedly when he comes across an ancient mention of a relic that pre-dates the fall of Arlathan and has the ability to bring down the veil as his beloved once wanted: safely. However, he soon learns that to release the magic of the relic, his must find an ancient set of brothers known simply to long-forgotten history as The Guardians of Bellanaris. The only problem? There is only one soul in all of Thedas who knows how to find them. His heart. With determination, he sets out to find her only to realize, along the way, that what he wants, what Thedas needs, what The People deserve, and what he should
have had all along are more intertwined than ever before.

Notes

This story begins in the middle of the telling. The first chapter will be the "here and now." Subsequent chapters will contain flashbacks, up to a certain point before it returns to the original timeline.

Warning: Emotional Mayhem. Non-Canon/Canon!Break Relationships. Will contain some native languages of Thedas: Elvhen, Qunlat, and Tevene. Some Canon, some constructed, and all with translations. Watch the Tags so you know what you're getting into.

***Triple-threat "All-Female-Mage-Hero" Heartbreak Scenario***
Warden loses Alistair due to her Dalish-ness (Mistress/romance not continued post DA: Awakening, implied political scandal). Hawke executes romanced and committed Anders (on moral grounds, and lives with the guilt), Inquisitor loses romanced and committed Solas (due to his pride).

Story-line progression: This is an "in search of" fic, with heavily engrossed flashback chapters, for the most part of the first half. The flashbacks are Non-Canon AU sprinkled with a little Cannon -but absolutely necessary for the heart of the story.
“Abelas...”

“Have you...is she...”

“Is there any news?” he sighs.

“It has been a year, my lord, and still...nothing,” Abelas replied, his disappointment and saddened sympathy for the man’s palpable pain evident in every syllable, as he dropped his eyes from the aging form slumped over a cluttered old desk.

“Even...Tevinter...?”

“Our agents report no sightings. No whispers. *Tarasyl’an Te’las* remains empty; as it has for the last three years.”

He remembers that day with full clarity. The moment when she stood before him in agonizing pain, dying from his own magic, and called him by his real name. The torment in her eyes. The shuttering of her breath. The wavering of her resolve. And the love dripping from her lips, as she trusted him with her very own truth as he, in turn, gave her the answers she sought with a heavy heart.

His final betrayal.

“Friends forgotten and lost to their own designs across the whole of Thedas. And nothing of her. There has been no communication or even a sign that they still design to oppose you. They are living their lives...as you once advised her to do so.”

“And Dorian?” If anyone would know...Pavus would.

“The Magister, her friend, he too searches. His distress is evident. Even he does not know where she has gone.”

She swore she would save him from his path.

*‘*Var lath vir suledin.*’

She swore their love would endure.

“She could not have just disappeared, Abelas!” he grinds out through clenched teeth, as every muscle in his back tenses.

Abelas suspects there is a reason for her disappearance. He speculates the truth may be something far worse than what the solemn man believes or would want to hear. He knows he should not ask. To voice such a thing would be unworthy of his friend’s dearest sorrow, but the possibility is likely, and at a time like this, he must try to be the voice of reason.

He takes a breath, praying that his voice does not fail him.
“Perhaps she is...” Dead. He chokes back the words; his determination faltering in an instant; knowing the pain it would cause, feeling it just as sharply as the twisting dagger of regret buried in his friend’s heart. “She could have...given up?”

“Abelas!”

His disdain is immediate, his fist pounding onto the unforgiving wood before him.

“Ir abelas, ma’falon.” he sighs. “I did not mean...”

“She lives...”

A certainty and a hope whispered ever so softly after a constrained and heartbroken pause.

“I know she does.”

“How can you be so certain?” Abelas questions, trying to make sense of the man’s strange confidence in such a statement.

He does not answer.

“The Fade?” he tries again.

“Echoes.”

He has sensed her.

“Will you not follow? Can you not hunt her? Track your heart’s prey and try to find her through dreams?”

“I...can’t,” he breathed. “I’ve tried.”

“Why?”


“Cole...” the tortured man whispers, ever so quietly, not needing to even look.

“Her heart... her Vhenan... ma’fen... ma’nehn... ma’vhenan’ara.” the spirit whispers the words of her heart, the words so cruelly taken from her before they could fall from her lips in truth and confession.

“Solas...no...Solace. His smile. His laugh. His joy. His heart. The scent of old books, of ink, of elfroot and paint, of sunshine and the winter’s chill... Words. Echo. His..., not hers. Ar lath ma, Vhenan.” the spirit adds, as the source of the flurry of words steps gingerly into the moonlight filtering through the room’s lone window. Its face shadowed by a wide-brimmed hat, eyes closed. “She sighs. Ar lath ma, bellanaris. ma’vhenan. The only one. None before him. None after. Her only.”

“Cole, please,” he whispers with trembling lips. His pain, his regret, and the inner thoughts of her heart and mind are just too much. Since his betrayal, they have always been too much.

He tries to rise, to gain some modicum of composure, but his heart and his body will not listen. He is weak, far too weak than he should be with Mythal lurking within the shadows of his magic, and yet
he is and he does not know how to fight it.

“She does not fear the wolf. She accepts. She welcomes. With open arms and open heart.” Cole sighs. For it must be said. A promise, he must keep. “She wants to be hunted. To hunt. To be held. To be loved. To be safe in his arms. To be taken. To wear his mark. To stand at his side.”

“To defend. To protect. To love him. Bellanaris.”

“To guide, and be guided. Ma ghilana, Vhenan. Bellanaris.”

Cole turns to him. He need not see to know the spirit’s eyes are upon him, but the compulsion to seek out compassion’s telling eyes, that see him and through him, faintly echoes within his heart a second before Cole utters his next breath.

“Ma’Fen’Harel.”

He collapses onto the stone floor beneath his feet, his strength of will and his resolve vanishing the instant that word falls pointedly into the room.


“We come to her,” he informs, to seemingly no one and everyone. “Where she wallows. Spirits. Love, Peace, Wisdom, Joy, Hope, Compassion; to help the hurt, to stop the blood, to mend the wound caused by Pride. His...and...Hers. Halani. Revas. Her soul pleads. But she will not listen. It will stay. Must hold on. Must.”

“Cole.” he chokes out. “Please…”

“It hurts but the hurt means more. The pain is real. Means he was real. Not a dream. Not the Fade. Not the Beyond... Not a lie. Never a lie! It makes her real. What she endured. What she saw. What she’d done. It was real. All of it.”

“It had to be. If not, what was I fighting for?”

“What they had...have...was...is real. She clings to the last vestiges of it. His voice. His words. His touch. Her heart. Ma’vhenan. She doesn’t want to forget. She will never forget.”


“Don’t go, Vhenan.”

“Let me help you.”

“I would not have you see what I become...”

“You don’t have to be alone.”


Abelas watches as Cole steps gently across the room, coming to a stop beside his distraught and regret riddled friend.

“He hurts.” Cole breathes out as he places his hand upon the man’s shoulder and notices that his friend is trying to hide the pain quietly falling down his cheeks. “He knows. His pride had never
been his own. It was her. Fated to be her. Always her. He would take it back. Find another way. Take back the... Chance squandered by fear. By doubt. Ruined. In Ruins. Must find a way. Must find the path. Must. Must.”

“Another way. He knows now. He was never meant to hunt alone. Her love was a gift. Precious. Rare. A gift freely given. A gift for an old fool, from an old soul. Foolish. Unknowing. Unseeing. Blind. Blinded by the truth. By Pride. By disbelief. Guilt. By the inevitable. But now he sees. She was his and he was hers. He would have it back.”

“But he can’t...”

“Why not?”

“Voices seek only to help, to bring the calm, to protect. But she won’t listen. He feels her. Has her scent. Knows her magic like his very own. Hunts her. Tracks her like Halla prints in the falling of fine snow on a mountaintop. It is an echo. Soft. Sweet. And a little silly. Her laugh. That beautiful laugh. Full of kindness, understanding, love, and the innocence he stole.”


“But he...Cannot. The magic is too strong. It smells of her. Vibrates with her spirit. Calls to his heart with her beautiful voice. It is not hers, yet it is. Too strong for her. He cannot get through. No matter how hard he tries. Why can he not get through? Why will it not bend? Why will it not break? Why will it not yield? Not to the heart of Fen’Harel. Not to the might of his magic. Not even to the will of Mythal?”

“He cannot get through. He cannot enter. None can enter. Not even him. Especially not him. Never him.”

“I don’t understand.”

“The Well...” the broken man finally answers. “I suspect...It is protecting her, somehow. Though I don’t know how.”

“It’s...shielding her somehow. That’s why I haven’t been able to find her after all this time. In the waking, it seems to mask her scent. Hides her heart, her feelings, and her thoughts. There is no compulsion, no bond to call upon, no magic of Mythal that can cut through the protection. In the Fade, it locks her away in seclusion.”

“A prison.” Cole supplied.

“The magic is begging to wane, or perhaps it’s her strength. Her ability to endure. I do not know.” he continued, with a deep sigh, wiping his cheeks yet refusing to show his face. “But I managed to sense her for the first time last night.”

“What Cole says is true, however. The fade barrier I encountered is unlike any magic I have ever come across. It will not bend to my will, nor will it answer to the will of Mythal, and no spell at my disposal can harm it.”

“The Well...” Abelas gasps. “It has become tainted, then.”
“I suspect you may be right my friend. Perhaps even before she took its power.” the man replies, drawing his face towards the ceiling yet seeing nothing. “Though neither of us sensed it at the time. It is possible, should our assumptions be true, that it was not the well itself but perhaps one of the final additions to its knowledge that made it so. Like a monster looming the dark, waiting only to show itself to the Well’s next host.”

“No.” answered Cole knowingly. “The Voices are pure...It is not a corruption...”

“Then what is it, Cole? You know something, don’t you?”

“The Well is protecting her.”

“From what?” he pleads.

“I...do not know.”

For a moment Cole closes his eyes and concentrates.

“It...They are angry.” he breathes. “Something has happened. Something she has done. Years ago.”


“What is it, Cole? What did she take?” Abelas asks.

“I am sorry, Sorrow. I...do not know. I cannot see. It hides. Hidden.”

“What do I do?”

“You must keep trying,” Cole advises. Crouching down to look her wolf in the eyes. “Seek the place of Pride in the daylight, and the place of sorrows in the darkness.”

“I...don’t understand.”

He stands, searches the man’s face with his eyes, and with a telling and frustrated sigh slams his hand down on the ancient map spread out across the dusty old desk.

“Seek the place of Pride,” he repeats.

The wolf stands, fear and curiosity swimming within him. As Abelas joins him, their eyes fall to the map and a small gasp echoes throughout the room as their minds settle on two words.

*Tevinter Imperium.*

“Vhenan...no.”
Elvhen Translations:

Tarasyl'an Te'las: the place where the sky is kept/held back; Skyhold.
Var lath vir suledin: (my usage; accepted Canon definition) “Our love will find a way to endure” or “Our love is strong enough to withstand this” or “Our love can get us through this.”
Ir abelas: I'm sorry.
ma’falon: My friend.
Vhenan/Ma'vhenan: My heart.
a'fen: My wolf. (constructed)
a'nehn: My joy. (constructed)
a'vhenan'ara: My heart's desire. (constructed)
Ar lath ma: I love you.
Bellanaris: Eternity/Forever
Ma gilana, Vhenan: Guide me, my heart.
Ma'Fen'Harel: My Dread Wolf.
Halani: Help.
Revas: Freedom.

Collection Title Translation: "The Guardians of Eternity"; or more pointedly; "The Eternal Guardians"

Grammar Note: For the most part: Italicized dialogue will either be standard repeated/remembered dialogue (double quotes,) thoughts (single quotes,) and in rare cases used to imply translated dialogue (double quotes.) Italicized words or phrases, without quotes but included in a quote (a quote within a quote) denotes spoken (repeated) Languages of Thedas or repeated dialogue from a third party. (Example of the latter: See Cole's verbalism of Lavellan's feelings in Chapter 1)

Notes on Author: This is my first time writing a DA:I fic but not my first rodeo in writing fanfiction. I do hope everyone will like the story as it unfolds. Please feel free to comment, subscribe, and let me know what you think. I'll probably tweak the first chapter later, just so you know.


(DA1 Breakdown) Female Dalish Mage, Romanced Alistair. Alistair rules alone. Stayed Alistair's Mistress for a short time before disappearing into obscurity. Alistair does not know where she is. An early love triangle between the Warden, Alistair, and Zevran. Friendship with Zevran still in great standing.
Solas prepares to leave for Tevinter, to find the Inquisitor. But before he leaves, he tries once more to find and break the barrier that holds her prisoner in the fade -Never knowing what truly awaits his return.

In the "chapter one" notes I mentioned that subsequent chapters would be flashbacks. After doing a little outline, I realized that it would be necessary to add a couple more chapters before we delve into the backstory that springboards the rest of the timeline of the present.

“You are certain, my friend?”

Solas can’t help but sigh.

“You...” he explains carefully. “…is not one to speak of uncertainty. It is not in his nature to be untruthful. He would not frivolously risk his fragile existence to appear before me once again. Not after my warning.”

Abelas hums in understanding. He remembers the last time he saw the spirit of compassion in the presence of Fen’Harel. It was not a welcoming sight.

“Do not force my hand, Cole.” *His voice is commanding, heated, hostile.*

“I came to help.”

“You cannot. It is my burden to bear.”

“And hers...!” *the spirit argues.*

“No...It is not!” *He shouts.*

“And yet she carries it still. You must let me help.”

“No! Cole, you cannot fix this. Leave and do not come back.”

“But...”
Abelas flinches as the memory fades. He had never seen his friend so angry, so frustrated, at the spirit who had only wished to heal the pain he carried because of her. The thinly veiled threat, however, had been more than enough to banish Cole from their lives for nigh on two years.

Abelas had believed he would never see compassion again and, for once, his heart was glad he had been wrong. Perhaps, this time, he would finally be able to help the wolf and his little heart.

“Tevinter...” Abelas supplied. “...is vast, ma’falon. She could be anywhere.”

“Still we must go.”

“You would leave, to look for her, without even some semblance of a plan?”

“Unfortunately...” he scoffs, staring down at the map before him. “That is the way of it. Of her. She was never one to adhere to scheming or planning. Master Tethras, on a number of occasions, often likened her leadership strategy to flying by the seat of her breeches. Which, to some, was a more than adequate assessment, in most cases.”

“Was she truly that unpredictable?”

“No.” he sighed. “From the casual observer, her choices sometimes seem to venture into the realm of the shallow. Almost childish, in her apparent fumbling. However...Her nonchalant demeanor and her sometimes immature and aloof rhetoric, shown to all but her most trusted, was nothing more than a gentle deception. A deception that was inherently deliberate, and perfectly executed.”

“But, in truth, in her heart there was always a sincere thought and adamantly kind purpose behind every action. In that, when it truly mattered, we were always certain.”

“Meaning...” Abelas ventured. “She is not someone who would just simply throw caution to the wind and run off to Tevinter on a whim. There must be a reason as to why she is there.”

“More than one, I suspect.” he nodded. “Though why she would dare to go to such a place...alone. Unguarded. Without even utilizing the protection that her bond with Magister Pavus would certainly provide there, it is...unlike her. She was never this reckless.”

“The corruption Compassion spoke of...could it be influencing her...controlling her somehow?”

“Not likely.” he answered firmly.

“How can you be so certain?”

“She...” he sighed. “Is unlike any person I have ever known, Abelas. Even in the time before The Fall.”

“Her mind, her morals, her spirit; they are nothing like those of this time. Intrinsically different from even the best this world can offer. A latent dreamer; who came into her abilities not long after Haven’s destruction; whose talents and mental fortitude now rival even my own. She would not and could not be so easily influenced.”

“Making it even more imperative that we find her if nothing more than to know what is truly behind all of it,” Abelas concluded.
‘As a dreamer...she will be even more of a target.’

“Precisely.” Solas nodded. “We will leave in two days’ time.”

“Two days?” questioned Abelas. As vital as their venture was, the delay seemed unnecessary. The journey to Tevinter, even with the help of the Eluvians, was not something as simple as venturing to the next town over. It would take time, time that—according to Cole—was spilling through the future’s hourglass far too quickly.

“I need time,” he replied. “I must deal with the barrier. See if there is anything else I can do to release her.”

“The Place of Sorrow. Her sorrow. He said.” the wolf added, repeating Cole’s words. “If The Place of Pride resides somewhere in Tevinter...then one must conclude The Place of Sorrow to be her prison in the Fade.”

“The barrier. It is a mystery, a mystery that must be solved. No matter if we find her physically in the waking first or not. Without the destruction of her prison, she will never be free.”

“I must learn more about it and try to bring down the barrier once more, tonight.”

“And if you still cannot?” Abelas questioned.

“I will search for another way while we venture to Tevinter.”

“Then I shall leave you to your dreams, ma’falon.” Abelas nodded with understanding. “I wish you luck.”

“Ma serannas, lethallin.”

∞∞∞∞∞

As the door clicked closed behind Abelas, Solas sighs heavily before raising a hand and flicking his wrist. In seconds every door, window, and wall shimmers, flares, and then hums with the bluish-gold hue of an Arlathian Glyph of Silence.

An all too familiar spell that, in Skyhold, he had used countless times to secure many nights of uninterrupted solitude in the Inquisitor’s refuge.

Sending a single glance to the hearth, the fire blooms; bringing more warmth into the loneliness of the room; before he turns and silently moves to his place of rest near the farthest wall. On his cold and empty bed, he sits, quietly, mind rolling over the possibilities the night might bring. Hoping that perhaps the fates will bless him this time, but feeling far more uncertain than he ever has in his enduring lifetime.

Laying back, settling in, he lets out a steadying breath as he centers his mind and focuses on her. Her eyes. Her smile. Her laugh. The way she always seemed to read his mind, when he was feeling uneasy or unsure, and knew just when to offer a comforting touch. How she would smirk when she would bluff at Wicked Grace and cheat at chess. The swing of her staff as she slung fire and lightning, felling all who opposed her. The grace in her steps as she walked, with slow and
purposeful strides, across the grounds of Skyhold. The lilt of her voice as she carried on with her
dearest friends and traded stories around the campfire among the looming wilderness. The love that
bloomed unhindered in her eyes every time she looked upon his face.

And the joy it made him feel.

“Ar lath ma, bellanaris, ma’vhenan,” he whispered.

When he had finally immersed his senses in everything that was –or ever had been– her, his hand;
almost as if it has a mind of its own; instinctively raised itself into his field of vision and his eyes
settle on the flicker of silverite and obsidian sitting quietly there. A promise left unfulfilled.

“Ma melava halani, Ma’vhenan...” he sighed, dropping his hand upon his heart and closing his eyes.
“Mala, Sathan, Ma halani sal.”

∞∞∞∞∞

When his eyes finally open and adjust, he is standing within the great indiscernible wasteland that is
the Fade. All is silent. There is no movement, no thrum of unknown or recognizable magic, and the
gentle winds of the great plane are still. In the distance, the Black City looms; floating just above the
horizon like a great, yet unmoving, fortress of darkened dreams; as green and black storm clouds
swirl in the endless abysmal sky.

He sighs in disappointment, lamenting the unfortunate conclusion that his focus upon his lost love
hadn’t been strong enough to yield the result he had hoped. She was not here. The barrier nowhere
in sight.

He will have to search once again.

He shifts, taking the form of a black wolf with silvery-blue eyes, and heads north; with haste; as he
gently waxes and wanes pulses of his magic in hopes to feel her gentle spirit echoing back. For what
seems like days, he trudges through the murky waters and misty fields of the Fade. Seeing nothing.
Hearing nothing. Sensing nothing. Until something hits him, like the swing of an enormous ogre
barreling through the busy city streets of Val-Royeaux on market day, slamming him right in the
chest.

An echo.

He stumbles back, shakes his head, and without a second thought perks up his ears and throws out
another pulse of his magic.

East.

The direction is immediately confirmed, as his magic reflects back almost instantly.

Claws digging viciously into the ground below him, he turns east and leaps off into a furious sprint –
hope blooming in heart for the first time that night. He travels for some time before he begins to sense
something more than emptiness in the fade that surrounds him. At first, it is faint, like the dim flicker
of falling star shooting across the night sky or the gentlest of still waters minutely disturbed by
unseen life hiding down below its surface, but as he continues the sensation slowly begins to
heighten. He is unsure if what he feels is the one he truly seeks, but he presses on until suddenly, out
of nowhere, a scent that he would know in even the foulest most disgusting places of the world, strikes across his nose like a bolt of her familiar lightning.

He immediately comes to a screaming halt, paws skidding across the ground kicking up dust and ambient magic of the fade.

‘Vhenan...’

He frantically scans the horizon, seeing nothing for a few panicked moments, before his eyes finally settle on a great and looming barrier of harsh, silver magic, shimmering darkly towards the northeast.

‘There.’

In a flurry of frantic movement, he bolts towards the barrier. As he advances, echoes of the past –her memories– begin to echo upon a subtle breeze. In his hurried state, he only catches bits and pieces of the words that flutter by him in haste.

Varric calling him Chuckles.

Dorian grumbling something about hating the cold.

Bull shouting something about dragons in Qunlat.

Cullen swearing his protection.

His voice, declaring his love for all eternity.

“I will never forget you...”

He tries to shake away the sound of the voices, now ringing a muffled chorus within his head and heart, but he can’t seem to banish the memories. They stir and stir, pounding against his chest like a hammer upon an anvil.

They persist without even the slightest sliver of remorse. Not heeding to his ancient will or the power of his mind. As if purposefully trying to consume everything that his is or will ever be.

He closes his eyes as tightly as he can and tries focusing on his objective, centering his mind upon the approaching barrier and drawing in as much clarity as his dreaming mind can muster. Hoping that such concentration can help him push his way through all the static. But the effort is to no avail. The closer he gets the barrier, the stronger and louder they become. The noise becomes maddening. Sapping his strength and clenching his heart like a vice. Drowning every thought to the point that he feels he can no longer bear it, and then –with the abruptness only magic can conjure– everything suddenly goes quiet.

He skids to a halt once more and, before he can open his eyes, he hears for only a moment a litany of voices.

“I love you, Sarina...” Cullen’s voice.

“Love you, My Lady..” Blackwall's voice.
“Love ya, Boss...” Bull’s voice.

“You know I love you, my little minx.” Dorian’s voice.

“Ar lath ma...” his voice.

The voices go silent once more and he can’t help but feel a small sense of relief. With a deep sigh, he begins to open eyes just as one final voice echoes through the fade.

“Bese adora.”

A deep male voice, speaking Tevene.

Solas’ eyes immediately snap open; startled by the strange voice, and an even stranger feeling of being watched; only to find his vision clouded with the form of something far stranger than he had ever encountered in the fade before.

As the barrier towered into the sky, shimmering like dragon scales in the glow of a late sunset, the base of it harbored a chilling form.

A great white wolf.

So large that it easily dwarfs the true form of the Dread Wolf himself, and branded with a glowing silvery-blue vallaslin from head to toe, it sits peacefully as if dozing at the foot of its one true master in a tuft of powdery snow.

A Guardian of Bellanaris...

Chapter End Notes

Elvhen Translations:

Ma’falon: My Friend.
Ma serannas: My Thanks/Thank you.
Lethallin: of my blood (term of endearment, referring to someone of shared kinship; masculine form of Lethallan)
Ar lath ma, bellanaris, ma’vhenan: I love you, forever, my heart.
Ma melava halani, Ma’vhenan: (canon) You helped me, my heart.
Mala, Sathan, Ma halani sal: (heavily constructed) Now, Please, help me again.

Tevene:
Bese adora: (non canon/heavily constructed) "You are my love." This is about as close as I can get to "I love you" in Tevene. There is just not enough decipherable dialogue within the Dragon Age Universe to have a proper translation.

Grammar note: I am aware of the shift in tone, perspective, after the first break. It is deliberate.
The Great White Wolf

Chapter Summary

Haunted by a memory from the past, Solas confronts the Great white wolf in the Fade; only to be banished to the far side of the Fade and plopped down in a memory of dream he had long forgotten.

Chapter Notes

I appreciate all the Kudos guys! Please remember to comment. Without your input, how can I know if you are liking the story? ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“How do you do that, exactly?” Varric chuckled, as the nocturnal sounds of the southern Hinterlands hummed softly through the air of their intimate little camp.

“Do what?” Sarina countered as she turned to look upon one of Sister Nightingale’s messenger ravens sitting quietly on her shoulder.

“You know...that thing with animals.” he clarified.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” she teased. “You seem to be quite imaginative tonight Varric. Had a little too much wine, have we?”

“As if my imagination needs such inebriation to run amok.” he scoffed.

“Come on Sari...” he breathed out in frustration. “Give.”

“Is it a Dalish thing, or something?” Bull questioned, his curiosity piqued as well, as he reclined his back against a fallen tree trunk situated a few feet from the gently burning campfire between them.

Sarina looked at them both suspiciously for a moment before finally giving in -at least to a certain degree.

“No, not Dalish...exactly.” she smiled. “Elvhen...actually.”

That gets Solas’ attention, pulling his mind from the tome he had been so engrossed in, as he sat quietly at the edge of the fire’s radiant light.

“Elvhen, not Dalish?” Varric hummed. “Care to elaborate?”

“You won’t believe me.” she sighed with disappointment.
“Oh, little elfling, what would give you the impression that I wouldn’t trust anything from you?” Varric questioned, teasing and mock offense lilting his voice in disbelief. “You wound me...oh, magnificent and magnanimous Herald of Andraste.”

“Dwarf...” Sarina groaned in irritation at the annoying endearment always used when he intended to tease.

“Ok. Ok.” he acquiesced.

“Enough teasing.” Bull huffed. “Give it up Boss.”

“You too?”

“Yup,” he confirmed. “Give.”

“Fine.”

“It’s something my Mamaela...my grandmother...taught Me.” she sighed with a smile. “But it is difficult to explain in common terms.”

She closed her eyes for a moment, reveling the feel of the gentle raven’s spirit sitting upon her shoulder, and tried to think of a way to explain. A moment later she smiled again, with understanding.

“I’ve got it!” she snapped her fingers at the epiphany.

“Varric, you’re familiar with Andrastian teachings, right?”

He nodded hesitantly.

“Ok. So the Chantry teaches that all things are the will of the Maker. And that every child of the Maker –be he human, dwarf, Chasind, Alamarri, Elf, or whatever– has an eternal spirit, yes?” she began. “A spirit, or soul, that returns to the Maker’s side in death. In the beyond...or more pointedly...in the Fade.”

“Yeah...” Varric answered slowly as his eyebrow raised a fraction.

“And spirits –be they of wisdom, love, joy, hope, compassion, or whatever – reside in the Fade. The beyond, as it were.” she pointed out matter-of-factly. “So, in a sense, they are both the same yes? They end up in the same place when life in the waking is over. The make-up of a man’s soul, is simply the spirit of the man in the flesh, after all. For, according to the Chantry, it is only the spirit that the Maker calls home.”

“Alright...” Varric conceded slightly.

“So, within such lines of reasoning, it would stand to reason that both the spirits of the Fade and the spirits of men are one in the same. In some ways, akin to brothers or cousins in the tangible and intangible scheme of creation.”

Solas instinctively leaned in, his curiosity unabashedly entranced.

Varric scoffed.

“Why am I suddenly glad that the Seeker is nowhere within earshot?”

Sarina just chuckled at the comment, knowing full well what kind of chaos her words would stir.
within the heart of their demon-fearing, righteous Right Hand.

“We that’s all well and good, in theory.” Varric continued. “But what does the correlation between Andrastian teachings about the afterlife and the nature of Fade spirits have to do with your inexplicable talent with animals?”

“Mamaela once said that everything in the waking...everything that has a life...carries a spirit,” she answered. “The trees, the plants, the earth, the sky, the water...”

“Sounds like Avvar logic.” scoffed Bull, protest somehow lacing his tone.

“Similar, yes.” she nodded. “But most importantly, among them, is the belief that even animals have such a spirit.”

“It is said that, in the time of Elvhenan, spirits roamed freely about the world. Before the Veil, there was no separation between the Fade and the now waking world. Magic was not a construct that separated the people, the spirits, and the world, but a commonality that united them. It was a time where there was a...harmony of the spirit, as Mamaela once called it.”

“Through this belief, my ancestors, learned to become one with the spirits...as it were.” she smiled, pride showing in her eyes. “They, in essence, figured out a way to create a bond with the spirits of nature, as they did with Fade spirits. One of harmony and of mutual respect. And, of course, that –in turn– included the spirits of animals.”

“And she taught you this?” questioned Varric skeptically.

“Yes...among many other things.” she nodded. “The instruction takes many years. Beginning when we are young, on or near our fifth winter.”

“So early?”

Sarina only nodded.

“We are taught how to calm ourselves, our spirit and our emotions, too –in essence– exude the feeling of trust while in the presence of animal we wish to befriend. If our heart is calm, our words kind, and our spirit uninhibited and inviting, the likelihood that a spirit bond will be formed is greatly increased. Should the animal’s spirit liken to us, holding no fear or quarry within its heart, and accepts us, the bond is formed and we, in turn, become bond mates...or spirit friends, as it were.”

“Fascinating.” Solas breathed out. “Can anyone obtain such an ability?”

“From what I understand, it is an ability not easily acquired outside those of my direct bloodline.”

Before Solas can ask for any semblance of clarification, Varric cut in.

“And you do this on the regular?” questioned Varric, even more skeptical. “It works...what...just like that?”

“No, Varric.” she countered. “It is as magic is. An uncertainty that, under the right conditions, can become certain. It does not always work. And it cannot be done...as you say, just like that...on a whim. The conditions must be right. It is not a simple as calling forth a bolt of lightning, or swinging an axe, or walking the Fade...”

“Or even pulling Bianca’s lovely and inviting little trigger,” she added, wiggling an eyebrow teasingly.
“It’s not little.” he defended, with a nearly inaudible scoff, as he instinctively tightens his grip on his beloved crossbow laying across his lap ever so slightly. “And you’re not invited.”

Sarina chuckled.

“So...” Bull ventured. “How many of these little spirit friends do you have?”

“Not many,” she answered. “Mamaela always warned that it was unwise to overly bond so freely with animals. As the bond is not only one of the spirit but of also emotion. To bond frivolously, was to invite heartache should something happened to said friend. The wilderness is a wild and dangerous place, after all.”

“Can you create such a bond with any animal?” Bull pressed further, his mischievous train of thought pointedly echoing itself upon his face, as he leaned in and looked at her with a smirk. “Like...for example...a bear –or better yet– a dragon?”

At that, Sarina’s laugh was boisterous.

“You would ask that.”

“The answer...is...actually a bit complicated,” she noted. “It is possible to create such a bond but it is rare...and in some case even impossible.”

“Meaning?”

“You can spirit bond with the more aggressive types of animals; bears, lions, wyverns, wolves; but to do so would require a specific set of variables, and an insurmountable amount of luck, to occur naturally. Of those in my line that have managed such feats, they have only done so with the spirit of a youngling –rather than that of a mature predator.”

“There was one exception to the norm, but that was an extremely rare occurrence.”

“Noted.” nodded Varric.

“But back to your question Bull...”

“Bonding with a dragon, no matter the size, however, is nigh on impossible.” she continued. “Their spirits are far too strong, even at a young age. The dragon’s ‘strength of will’ will always overshadow the will of the one offering such a friendship. And should one press to make the bond occur by force...the outcome is always disastrous, for one or the other.”

“So, to put it bluntly, out of respect for the animal, it is simply just not done...for the sake of them both.”

“Aww.” Bull groaned in disappointment.

“Why do I get the feeling you’re not telling us everything, Sari?” questioned Varric.

“You’ll have to allow me some leeway here, Varric,” she replied teasingly. “I am...after all...practically spilling my families most guarded little secrets to those, not of the people.”

“Point taken.” he nodded.

“So Boss...” perked up Bull. “Have you ever bonded with anything interesting? Like those –what did you call them – more aggressive animals?”
The knowing and nearly malevolent smirk that crosses Sarina’s face is nigh on impossible to miss.

“Spill.” Varric and Bull commanded in tandem.

Sarina sighed in acquiescence.

“Well, I’m sure you’ve realized by now that this little one...” she answered, pointing at the raven still perched on her shoulder. “And my Hart, Da’amelan, have bonded with me. There are a few others; nothing as grand or fanciful as say a phoenix or a dragon, I assure you; but there is one other that would fall under the descriptive of an aggressive predator.”

“He...” Sarina continued. “Lives and hunts in the wilds near Wycome.”

“He?”

“Yes.” she nodded. “We have been spirit friends since I was nine winters old.”

“Nine?” questioned Bull, completely surprised.

“Oh, now, you have to tell us the story!” demanded Bull encouragingly. “What kind of animal is it? What’s he like?”

“Perhaps...” Solas interjected. “That story would be better suited for next time. It is getting quite late. It would be best if we seek our rest, lest we are unable to function properly in the daylight.”

Bull and Varric both grumble out a protest.

“Solas is right.” she agreed. “All of you go get some sleep and I promise I will tell you later.”

They both nod, knowing full well that no amount of protest will change her mind tonight.

“I’ll take the first watch.”

As Bull and Varric give into Solas’ logic and made their way to their tent, the camp fell into a companionable silence. With the necessity to tell a part of her story now put on hold, Sarina lets out a nearly contented sigh before raising her hand up towards her little friend, offering it her wrist. The raven happily obliged the offering, hopping from her shoulder with a light flap of its wings. She pulled her arm out before her and gives the bird an endearing smile.

“Have you been well, da’len?” she cooed lovingly, reaching up to pet the bird upon its breast with one soft finger.

The raven answered back with a soft, but short, caw before bending its head down to tap its beak on the small bronze cylinder secured discretely to its leg with a soft leather binding.

“Ah, yes da’len. Ir abelas. I nearly forgot.” she replied.

Reaching to the notes that she had set aside moments before her conversation with her companions began, she picks up a small rolled message and quickly places it with in the cylinder. Making sure to snap the lid of the tube securely closed.

“There.” she breathed. “Take this Mama Ean, ok?”

The bird cawed once more in understanding, and with the flick of her wrist the animal took off into
the night air.

“You surprise me, once again, lethallan,” commented Solas.

“How so?” she questioned, glancing up at the approaching apostate elf for a moment before leaning back against the mound of dirt that made up the small hillside cordoning off their little encampment from the road, and relaxed.

“Your views on the Fade...they are quite unlike those of most Dalish,” he replied, taking a seat next to her without asking for an invitation.

“Have thee forgotten...oh great and knowing Hahren, I am certainly not most Dalish.” she countered, her tone part teasing, part warning.

“No, no you are not.”

“Ir abelas, Sarina.” he apologized. “I did not mean it as an insult.”

“Do not apologize.” she answered with a deep sigh. She knew she had reacted badly. “You did not offend. I...I am tired and my response was unworthy of you. Forgive me, Solas.”

“It’s alright.” Solas sighed.

Silent contentment, fell between them as they watched the gentle crackle of the campfire for some time.

Although they had their moments of awkwardness from time to time, sitting in the dark with one another in silence had always had a way of centering the little world built between them. Bringing them a semblance of peace in a world with so much turmoil. It was nice. Comfortable.

After a few more moments of silent splendor, Sarina unexpectedly chuckled to herself audibly.

“I can practically feel the curiosity falling off you in waves, Solas,” Sarina smirked. “Something on your mind?”

Solas merely hummed in agreement.

“You have questions?”

“Many,” he replied.

“Sathan...Dirth ma, ma’falon.” she offered. “I would know what troubles you.”

“Ir abelas,” he replied. “My thoughts...They are of no consequence.”

“Yet the curiosity remains.” she countered.

“As it always will, I’m afraid.”

“Then allow me to sate your curiosity, if only a little Hahren.” she smiled, leaning back up to level a caring smile in his direction.

“Oh?” he questioned. “And how do you proposed to do so?”
“By letting you in on the secret of my little spirit friend Bull and Varric were practically chomping at the bit to find out,” she answered with a wiggle of her eyebrow. “Would like to see him?”

“See?”

“I can show you...” she nodded. “It’s a simple spell. Just a cursory illusion. But since I cannot just simply call him here so far from Wycombe, for you to see in person, I can at least show you what Ma’da’fenlin looks like.”

*My little wolf pup.*

When Solas nodded in agreement, Sarina lifted her right hand out in front of them. With a curl of her wrist and clenching of her fingers, she pulled the illusion into her hand and then, a moment later, opened her palm to reveal the ghostly image of a large snow white wolf.

∞∞∞∞∞

Just as quickly as the memory flickered across his mind, it was gone. Leaving Solas disoriented for a few moments until his eyes refocused on the scene before him. He did not understand why such a memory would be pulled into the Fade, so vividly, at that very moment, but its final and lingering realization hit home.

The wolf was not simply a construct of the Fade. It had appeared for a reason. For her.

A dawning of understanding flickered across his mind, a knowing that warned of caution. There was no telling what the creature’s true purpose in standing vigil was, or of what it would do when it finally realized his presence. He would have to tread carefully.

With an internal sigh, Solas steeled his nerve and took a gentle step. As his paw hit the Fade earth below, a massive roar of a great dragon screaming in pain echoed out from the epicenter of the enormous barrier and reverberated through the Fade. Instinctively, Solas stepped back just in time to notice the softly glowing vallaslin of the great white wolf flare ever so gently, its ears perk up, and his lyrium-blue colored eyes slowly open.

‘*Fenhedis.*’

For a moment everything was unbearably still, as the white wolf drew his head up. Turning its head slowly to the left, then to the right, the wolf took in the black wolf before him with faint curiosity for a few seconds before leveling a threatening gaze.

”*VENAVIS!*” a booming, threatening, male voice suddenly echoes through the Fade; reverberating in Solas’ mind like a wave crashing down upon him. “*Harellin!*”

The great white wolf’s mouth had not moved, but the voice was surely his.

“*Atisha sul’ema lethallin,*” Solas replies.

“*Harel lasa!*” the voice of the wolf echoes as it instantly bears its teeth and growls threateningly. “*Tel’elasa!*”
‘Who are you to bar me?’ Solas’ inner wolf demands within his mind.

He knows that provoking the beast is not the best way to handle this, but that doesn’t stop his mind from daring to lash out.

“Anahn ahsul’ma?” Solas questions, trying to defuse the tension between him and the Guardian. But the wolf’s reaction is immediate and telling.

“AHNSUL’OR’ASA!” it replies. Its voice still echoing upon the wind, teeth bared, as it finally pulls itself up out of the snow. Slamming its massive paw upon the ground, and standing tall, the wolf’s voice echoes out a determinant command as the ground shakes below Solas’ feet. “VARA’NA!”

Solas’s counter is immediate. His inner wolf unleashed.

“BANALASAL’VARA!” he roars.

It is then, for a split second, that the sound of the great white wolf’s voice changes. Falling into common for one simple sentence.

“THEN I SHALL MAKE YOU, MAGE!”

The wolf instantly drops his head, rears up, and lets out a bellowing howl.

But there is no sound, not even a whisper, and seconds later Solas feels a shock wave hit him so hard that it forcibly dissipates his magic—causing him to shift uncontrollably back into his elf form—before knocking him back to the farthest corner of the Fade in the blink of an eye.

Solas hits the ground hard, the momentum rolling him head over heels for several minutes, and knocking him unconscious for several minutes more. When he finally opens his eyes, the barrier is nowhere in sight. Sarina’s scent is all but gone.

Just as he tries to stand, the Fade shifts and before he even realizes it, he is standing in the memory of a very familiar place.

Crestwood.

Chapter End Notes

Elvhen Tranlations:

Mamaela: Grandmother
Da’amelan: “Little Keeper” (The name the Inquisitor calls her favorite Hart.)
Da’len: Little one.
Ir abelas: I am sorry.
Lethallan: (fem.) of my blood. Interpreted to mean Kin/Clansman/Of the/my People.
Hahren: elder
Sathan...Dirth ma, ma’falon: "Please....Tell me, my friend."
Ma’da’fenlin: my little wolf blood/my little wolf pup
Fenhedis: common curse (lit. wolf cock) Basically: SHIT!

Conversation between the wolf and Solas:
Venavis: Stop/Halt.
Harellin: Trickster
Atisha sul'ema: (constructed) I bring peace ("I" is implied) Basically Solas’ way of saying "I am no threat to you".
Harel lasa!: You lie.
Tel'elasa: Not allowed. (the subject "you are" is implied/You are not allowed.)
Anahn ahsul'ma: (constructed) "Why are you here?
Ahnsul'or'asa: (constructed) because of her.
Vara'na: (constructed) you will go away
banalasal'vara: (constructed) I refuse to go away.

Personal Note: constructing a full Elvhen conversation was a big pain in the backside.

Content Note: When Sarina tells the raven " Take this to Mama Ean, ok?", the term "Mama Ean" is a term of endearment for Leliana. "Ean" is the Elvhen word for bird. So essentially, Sarina is calling Leliana "Mama Bird"
The Aspects

Chapter Summary

Fighting the inner turmoil that Crestwood's grotto invokes within him, Solas sets out to understand why his banishment across the Fade brings him to such a regret-filled place.

Chapter Notes

Warning: EMOTIONAL MAYHEM!
No Elvhen this time.
Rating Change from Not Rated to Mature to make way for the eventual gritty stuff.

As a gentle breeze floats through the emptiness of Fade, Solas stands and momentarily stares at the vision that shimmers into existence. A long dark cave, surrounded by thick, vaulted walls of stone; encased in desecrated unnatural overgrowth; looms ominously before him. The echoes of falling rain, crickets, cicadas, and the calls of amphibious wildlife dance faintly through the air as the midnight sky above fills with the infinity of the vast universe and a full and eerie moon shines down with a pale blue light.

The grotto is familiar.

All too familiar.

He remembers the last time he stood in its seclusion in the waking.

Her hand within his as they walked. The peacefulness of her spirit. The smile on her face. The hope in her eyes. The understanding in her heart as he confessed the truth about her face. The joy that radiated from her skin as their bodies molded together and met in a passionate kiss.

And the heartache that ebbed deep from within her soul when he coldly turned away.

His first betrayal.

‘The first of many.’

Solas felt the flicker of regret echo across his heart. A regret that stems from his cowardice and the hurt that he never wished to inflict. That night should have seen the end to his deception, as he once intended, but it had not. In a moment of weakness, of fear, he had diverged from the truth that would have lain his burdens bare at her feet and set him free.
A divergence that had ultimately left him no other course of action other than to break his one and only heart.

In that moment of hopeless fear and doubt, he had told himself that it would better in the long run.

That the pain, though fresh, eventually would fade.

That she would find a way to endure. To live on. And one day...she would find the happiness that he would never truly be able to give.

But he had been wrong.

So very wrong.

‘Such a fool...’

He tries to push back the pain the memories invoke within him but, as time has passed, it has become harder and harder not to wallow in his own misery. In his long, unending life he has done many things that bore such regrets, but what he did to her was his greatest sin. And he knows it.

Once, he would have worn such regrets as a badge of pride. As a testament to his enduring commitment to his path, his fealty to his promise, and the eternal faithfulness of his determination to see his goal achieved. But, because of her, he cannot. It bores into him like the searing, white-hot, brand of ultimate failure. A failure that he will never be able to forget, nor forgive.

The vision shimmers slightly, a machination he understands as a silent command of the Fade to venture within.

But he fears.

The night he broke her heart has always remained a sharp and bleeding wound etched deep within his very soul. The memory of Crestwood’s grotto had become a place that he could not bear to traverse. A place, for over six long years, he had avoided at all cost. And to see in now standing before him...it is too much.

“No...” he mutters in agony.

He turns, willing his feet to flee, but as he steps a flash of light envelops his eyes. He flinches, and when he opens his eyes, once more; as the light fades; he is once again staring at the entrance to the grotto.

The Fade’s memory will no longer be denied.

He stares at the entrance, terror, and mortification echoing across his face, as he feels dread pool around his thundering heart –while an abstract understanding settles within his mind.

The grotto has not simply appeared to torment him. It's materializing with a purpose.
There is something he must see.

Taking a deep breath, Solas tries to settle his heart and walks forward into the morbid darkness within. The utter blackness seems to stretch on for eternity. The emptiness within, a mirror of his very own soul, is eerily silent.

Uneasiness builds and builds as his steps take him deeper and deeper. As his fear grows and grows.

The imagination of his mind flashes a myriad of horrid scenarios. His heart thrashes within his chest in adamant protests. His very skin turns as cold, as the temperature of the air around him, when it suddenly plummets to near freezing. His breathing, coming out in exhaustive pants of frost, turns heavy—as if the act of simply walking has become far too exhaustive—as his limbs grow weak.

As his spine begins to tingle with an overwhelming sense of foreboding, the need to escape—to flee—suddenly comes to a fever-pitch mere seconds before a single, solitary light appears in the distance.

The end of the tunnel, and what awaits him, is near.

Pushing through the cacophony of sensations ripping through every part of him, he presses forward until he finally steps within the grotto’s interior.

The high walls of stone and the ground beneath his feet are blanketed in a lushness of such natural splendor that he cannot hold back the soft gasp that escapes his lips. Exquisitely blooming wildflowers, of every color and kind, dance in a carpeted mosaic of majestic grandeur over every surface. Two pristine statues of Hanal’ghilan, gilded and reverent, stand triumphantly vigilant before a softly flowing waterfall—that tumbles down into a cool and inviting pool—as a silvery mist floats softly throughout the silent sanctuary.

It is breathtakingly beautiful.

And empty.

For a passage of immeasurable time, the grotto is eerily silent. Solas begins to feel as if he has been deceived. That, perhaps, the vision’s true purpose has simply been to test him. To see if he could have the strength to finally face his past.

Suddenly feeling like a fool, a strange sense of disappointment flutters through him like the fluttering of the delicate wings of lamentation.

He sighs heavily, releasing a frosty breath into the still air. As it dissipates, a strange tingling sensation suddenly begins to crawl across his clammy skin. Feeling somewhat akin to the spark of lightning crackling across the sky, it travels up from his toes, crawls up his legs, wraps concentrically around his torso, down his arms to his fingertips and up his spine to the top of his head. The sensation is so warm, so inviting, that Solas cannot stem the need to close his eyes and relish all of it.

The nearly comforting feeling lasts for only a short moment and then fades silently. His mind centers once more, and a moment later he opens his eyes to the hum of something familiar.
He begins to scan the grotto once more and, before he can blink, five glowing wisps subtly materialize before him. Seemingly drawn to the center of the clearing, they slowly move farther in. When their movements finally cease, they are hovering gently in a line that noticeably arcs like that of a longbow drawn to its limit.

They still. As if waiting for something.

Their eyes are focused before them.

A moment of silence descends once more, as the magic that brought them to bear seems to slowly float away into the nothingness of the Fade. For a few seconds, Solas almost believes that whatever he was supposed to witness is over but quickly realizes that such an assumption is nothing but fallacy as the magic instantly rushes back in like a tidal wave upon the sand. The force of the magic’s return is so strong that, as it blows past him, Solas immediately stumbles. He catches his footing quickly and jerks his eyes back to where the wisp float, unaffected, just in time to see a form he would recognize even in the darkness of the abyss appear before them all.

“Vhenan...” he breathes, as his eyes fall upon her form. She is kneeling, her back to him, and dressed in a floor-length and form-fitting, snow white gown that boasts a revealing and open back. Her beautiful, ice white hair, is fashioned in her usual way: a bun at the base of her skull, crossed with two pairs of braids that emanate from her temples, and secured with a singular –yet ornate– silver hair stick. Her skin is pale, unblemished by the sun or of age, and her body is intact. Whole. Her arms wrapped gently around her kneeling form in an embrace of self.

A feeling of relief rushes through him, daring him to take a step towards her. But before he can even lift a foot from the ground beneath him he is startled by a strange sound. It is faint, almost non-existent at first, but as moments tick by it slowly begins to take a noticeable form.

Music.

A melody.

Instinctively, Solas’ eyes raise to the sky above as his ears perk up. He concentrates, hoping to identify the eerily familiar tune but finds he cannot it. He suddenly senses movement out of the corner of his eye and drops his head onto the vision before him just as the melody comes to bare and echoes throughout the grotto.

Sarina stands. Her movements slow. When she draws up to her full height, a pulse of her magic rushes out from her and envelops the wisps floating in attendance. Their forms instantly begin to shake and shimmer, almost violently, but their eyes never break their gaze upon her form. She then spreads her arms wide, stretching them nearly to her limit, before raising them above her head gracefully. When they finally extend fully; stretching taught the pure, unblemished bared skin of her back; she slowly bends her arms at the elbow, reaches behind her head, grabs the pin embedded in her hair, and pulls.
The pin comes loose with a twist of her wrist, and seconds later her bound and braided hair tumbles into a cascade of shimmering ice-white hair that plunges all the way to the back of her knees. The moment the waterfall of luscious locks stills, a flash of brilliant light invades Solas’ vision and a vivid memory suddenly clouds over his mind.

He was sitting quietly at his desk, in the middle of the rotunda of Skyhold, when he heard it. A lilting and inviting laugh that echoed lovingly from the Great Hall just outside his open door –carried upon the spring wind that swept through the castle on that fine cool morning.

Sarina.

Curiosity flitted across his heart, without restraint, urging him to seek out the source of her entertained elation. Putting down his tome, he pulled himself away from his desk and headed towards the door. When her voice echoed through the doorway once more, he stopped –positioning himself just beside the entryway.

“I wish I could have met him.” she chuckled. “He sounds like an interesting man.”

He was eavesdropping but found that he didn’t care.

“Be careful what you wish for, Sari.” laughed Varric. “You may just get it and find nothing but disappointment in its wake. That man is a handful, I tell ya.”

Their conversation lulled, and for a moment Solas believed he had missed what he had been listening for. Resigning himself to never know, he began to walk back to his desk when he heard Varric speak once more.

“You know, I like this side of you, Sari,” he informed.

“What side?” she teased.

“The side that’s open.”

“Am I a door Varric? Normally closed?”

“Sometimes...” he answered.

“Meaning?”

“You’re definitely one for getting to know your compatriots...I’ll give you that.” he supplied. “You ask a lot of questions. But, I’ve noticed, that you never really ever offer up any of yourself in return.”

Sarina made to protest, but Varric cut her off.

“Look...” he offered. “I get that being wary of non-Elves is a vice that the Dalish cling to desperately...And with good reason, I know...but you should know by now that you don’t have to be so reserved around us.”

“We’re all here for you, after all. All of us.” he sighed. “You know that, don’t you?”

“I know, Varric. I do.” she admonished. “It’s just hard sometimes. I’m not used to having people outside my family that I can trust.”
“But, I am trying.”

“I know you are...and I’m glad for it,” he seemed to nod. “Just remember that, sometimes, it’s ok to trust people with the personal bits. A fresh perspective can sometimes be the key to surviving through almost anything.”

“I will remember, Varric.” her voice smiled.

“Ok...with that being said,” he prompted, pure mischief lacing his voice. “And with your understanding...Would you be willing to settle a bet between Bull, Cullen, and I?”

“A bet?”

“Yeah...”

“What sort of bet?”

“Well Bull seems to think that there is a reason why we never see you with your hair down.” he supplied. “It’s always up. Always in the same style.”

“There is a reason...”

“As I was sure there was,” he answered. “But that’s not what we’re betting on.”

“Ok...I’ll bite. So, what’s the bet?”

“The length,” he deadpans. “Bull and Cullen seem to think that you wear your hair like that because it’s far longer than any normal elf. Most wear theirs short. Cut off at shoulder length or so. And rarely have it pulled back in such an elaborate style.”

“So to settle it, you need to know how long my hair actually is.”

“Yup, pretty much.”

“Cullen seems to think that the length falls somewhere near the middle of your back, while Bull believes it’s something more along the lines of down to your... how did he put it? Voluptuous Ass.”

“And what do you believe, Varric?” She giggled.

“Well, from the intricacy of the braids you wear and the size of the bun...I guessed somewhere around mid-leg...maybe even floor length.”

Sarina giggled again, apparently finding the whole conversation relatively hilarious.

“So which is it?”

There was a pause, and for a moment Solas feared she would not answer. But when she cleared her throat he knew she would.

“Well then.....If that’s the way the bets lay...I guess you should tell Bull and Cullen to pay up.”

“It’s knee-length.”

“Really?” the surprise in Varric’s voice was palpable, as was Solas’ pure shock. “Why so long?”

“It’s a family tradition,” she replied. “It’s considered bad luck to cut a woman’s hair. So we grow it
long. But as I am a mage, it would not be smart to leave it down. With me throwing fireballs and all. So I keep it pulled up.”

“Is it wrong of me to suddenly wonder if anyone outside your clan has ever seen it down?”

“No, it’s not.” she seemed to smile. “And the answer would be: no.”

“Why not...? I mean with that color...I’d bet that it would be stunning.”

“Family secrets...Varric.” her voice warned playfully.

“Ugh...again with the family secrets.” he sighed disappointingly. “Alright, I let you have that one.”

“At least for now...” he added mischievously.

In a blink of an eye, the memory faded and his clouded vision cleared. It took him a moment to shake the lingering cobwebs from his mind but after a moment his eyes resettled on the fade vision before him just as the ethereal music began to swell to its height and then immediately stop.

Sarina stood stock still, her arms dangling at her side, as the floating wisps continued to shimmer and hum more and more violently.

Solas’ eyes flittered across each of their forms for a split second before settling back on hers, wonder echoing through his very soul.

Suddenly, the music began again. This time reverberating louder than he had ever heard it. And with it, Sarina began to move in place. At first, it was a gentle sway of her hips and a flittering graceful movement of her arms in front of her but as the music continued her movements became bolder. She bent at the waist, seemingly bowing, before turning in a swan-like pirouette – her left arm extended out before her, elbow bent, palm facing the sky as her right arm arced over her head and she stood on the toes of one foot. As she spun, as her hand passed each of the wisps, their forms seemed to flash with cool white light and shutter as if physically touched.

When she had completed the arc of her spin, she stopped for only moment to offer hands to the sky before spinning once more. This time as her offered hand passed each of the wisps, their forms instantly shattered into a rain of golden-white sparkles as a pulse of her familiar magic rushed out over the grotto.

Solas watched in complete shock, as each of the wisps slowly began to change shape. At first, he thought that he was possibly just seeing things but after a few moments, he began to recognize the patterns.

The sparkles of the first wisp, the one that had been standing to her left, seemed to ebb and flow for only a second before it immediately coalesced into the form of a great serpent. Nestled among an endless pile of writhing and slithering dark-evergreen coils, and emblazoned with a fiery-green vallaslin, the creature raised its massive head and hissed.

As the hiss rang out, the sparkles of the second wisps immediately shimmered and follow suit. Coiling and collecting until it transformed into the image of a large dragon with cobalt-blue scales and midnight vallaslin.
When it uttered out a deep, low rumble, the third wisps responded. Swirling and changing shape until its settle on the form of a Golden Lion with a massive amber main and vallaslin.

It roared and the next wisp responded. It’s form...flaring into existence like that of an enraged flame, leaving behind a golden-red, singed tailed Phoenix with blood red markings.

As the four animals settled in place, Solas’ eyes were inexplicably pulled to the fifth wisp. For a moment it just shimmere[d] and sparkled, but otherwise made no movement to change, until it noticed that Sarina’s movements had stopped once again.

For a second all was still, and then Sarina turned her head sharply towards the wisp. As if being hit by an avalanche, the wisp immediately flared and shifted with a flash of light. When the light settled, Solas’ eyes widened instantly. Standing there, in a tuft of white powdery snow, stood the Great White Wolf with it shimmering lyrium-blue markings.

It was then, that dawning struck Solas’ dead in the chest. He finally understood what the Fade was showing him.

*The wolf’s relentless vigil. It’s power. It’s declaration.*

*The wisps*...

*Their number*...

*Five!*

*Their forms*...

*The serpent, the dragon, the lion, the Phoenix, the wolf*...

*Their matching vallaslins*...

*It all fit.*

This wasn’t a memory in the fade. This wasn’t a memory of a dream. This wasn’t just some strange machination of the Fade.

Not a distraction created simply just to puzzle him, confound him, and keep him busy.

No.

It was purposeful. Clear.

The Guardians of Bellanaris had finally made themselves known.
Fade Revelation

Chapter Summary

Solas awakes violently from the fade dream and recounts, to Abelas, the final moments within the grotto.

Bonus: Epic Fight Scene?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Solas woke up screaming and thrashing; his heart thundering hysterically in his chest; as the final horrific seconds of his dream flashed chaotically in his mind.

“Falon!” shouted Abelas. Scrambling up from his seat next to the low-burning hearth; where he had been holding a lone vigil in silence; he dashed to the bedside and grabbed Solas by the shoulders in near-apocalyptic panic. “Solas!”

He had never seen the ancient man so frightened.

For a few terrorizing moments, Solas screamed and screamed as Abelas called to him over and over; hoping that terrified man would hear him, but the man continued to the thrash.

His eyes closed. Skin clammy and ice cold. Cheeks caked in rivers of tears.

“SOLAS!” screamed Abelas as he tightened his grip on the man, shoved him back down on the bed, and climbed on top of him to pin him down. “STOP!”

More thrashing. More screaming.

“STOP!”

Even more thrashing. Even more screaming.
For a few more nearly-unending seconds, the man fought his friend’s steely grip before suddenly freezing like hardened iron.

In that second, all of the time seemed to fall into a standstill, as the man beneath him drew in an enormous breath and held it.

“Ma’falon?” questioned Abelas tentatively.

Solas’ eyes frantically snapped open at Abelas voice, eyes still filled with mountains of tears, and stared seemingly out into the void almost incredulously. The look of fear, panic, and utter loss in his eyes was the most palpable sight Abelas ever beheld.

“A...be...las.” Solas croaked out slowly.

“Yes...” the man sighed. “I’m here, my friend.”

The world around them stilled, unnaturally, and for a moment Abelas could feel the thrum of his friend’s magic fall around them both.

Solas closed his eyes and took a deep cleansing breath. Letting it out slowly.

‘Finally...’

Abelas, knowing that particular breathing technique’s purpose, let his friend go and crawled off his now calming body. Sliding to sit on the edge of the bed, he never broke eye contact. He watched Solas breathe in an out for several minutes, willing himself to find his calm, as the man covered his eyes with forearm.

“Better...?” he questioned after a long minute.

Solas hummed in agreement.

“I’ve never seen you like that...” breathed out Abelas, worry, and tension lacing every syllable. “Are you alright?”

“No...” Solas’ voice trembled.

“The dream...” he sighed. “Was it that bad?”

No answer.

“Falon?”
“Dirth ma.” pleading Abelas softly. “I cannot assist if you will not speak.”

“What happened?”

“The barrier...” started Solas slowly with a deep sigh. “Is being guarded.”

“By whom?”

“What...”

As that word fell from Solas’ lips, Abelas suddenly felt an eerie sense of foreboding float down around his mind.

“I thought it was just a machination of the fade –powered by the Voices of the Well...Or perhaps a manifestation purposefully brought to bear by the corruption Cole spoke of...” he informed slowly. “A creation whose sole purpose was to protect the barrier...At first...”

“But, now you don’t,” concluded Abelas. “What was it? What creature defends the barrier?”

“The Wolf Aspect.”

“The fifth Guardian of Bellanaris?” questioned Abelas incredulously. “No...It can’t be...That’s not...You...How is that even possible?”

“Teleolasan.”

For a few moments, nothing but silence loomed between them as Abelas’ mind reels at such a thought.

“Did it speak to you?” he asks tentatively.

“Did it try to fight? To defend?”

“Yes...”

“Is that why you awoke screaming, ma’falon?”

“No...” he sighed. “At first I couldn’t believe my eyes...And then...”

“The Guardian...The Guardian is far more powerful than I had ever expected. I offered friendship, tried to placate with pleasantries, but it was immediately defensive. It bated me into losing my temper...And...”

“And, when you did...” supplied Abelas knowingly.

“It...Ejected me.” groaned Solas. “Hit me with a magic I have never known.”

“It...Knocked me across the fade. I fell unconscious for a few seconds and when I awoke I was standing... in...Crestwood.”

At the mention of such a regretful and heart-wrenching place, Abelas’ heart sank.

Solas had always been honest with him about what truly happened there all those years ago. How he
had turned away from her. In hopes of setting her free from the burden that was their love.

He understood what kind of feelings that place invoked within his only friend. And his heart ached from the knowing.

“What happened?”

Solas began to explain the events in the fade version of Crestwood’s grotto. Speaking in specifics as much as he could. He told Abelas of how the grotto had seemingly changed in appearance, looking – he suddenly realized during the telling –more reminiscent from the time of Elvhenan than it did last day he had seen it in the waking. He spoke of the appearance of the wisps, their unusual behavior, the strange ebbing and flowing of Sarina’s familiar magic, and her appearance. Concluding with the strange ritual he had watched her perform and the coalescence of her magic with the wisps forms to bring to bear the Animal Aspects of the great Guardians.

“She called them...”

“But that is impossible!” interrupted Abelas imperatively, suddenly up on his feet and pacing. “No shemlen blood, no matter how talented, could possibly ever have enough of a connection to the Fade to call them from the eternal sleep of Uthenera!”

“The Veil is thin there.” offered up Solas.

“It would have to be practically non-existent Solas!” countered Abelas almost angrily.

“Be at peace, ma’falon.” pleaded Solas gently, hoping to now calm his friend as he had done only moments ago for him.

“Peace?” Abelas questioned incredulously. “How...”

Solas instantly raised his hand, effectively silencing the man, before motioning for Abelas to sit back down at his side. He complied, mannerlessly plopping down on the edge of the bed and releasing a nearly-exhaustive and highly frustrated sigh.

“There’s more...” supplied Solas gently.

“More?”

“Yes...” he breathed unsteadily.

“Tell me.”

Mind reeling, Solas watches intently at the scene before him.

Once the magic, that seemingly forced the great wolf to appear, dissipates, the ethereal music that had been thrumming loudly through the grotto so succinctly fades into an eerily silence. Sarina does not move, and neither do they, for a span of immeasurable time, as Solas tries to make sense of everything he’s seen.

He postulates that what he has seen definitively holds a deeper meaning than just some machination
of the fade. And wonders if, what he believes to be the animal aspects of the great Guardians of Bellanaris, are actually there or just a figment of the Fade’s infinite imagination.

Or, perhaps, in an even more disturbing way, Sarina’s imagination.

That though chills his soul.

So lost in his thoughts, Solas startles as the sound of lone—but faint—howl suddenly echoes into the grotto from just over the edge of the stone walls. He immediately turns his eyes towards Sarina and the Guardians and instantly notices her spine straighten in surprise. For a second she is still, and then with a swift grace only she possessed, she turns her head to her right and looks over her shoulder.

It is then that Solas finally gets a good look of his love’s face. Her endearing and entrancing midnight-blue eyes, encircled with beautifully long dark lashes, are clear. Her lips, painted a deep shade of dark mauve, are sultry and lush. And her pale bare skin is smooth and fresh as the last time her ever saw her in the flesh.

Just as he remembers.

She is the Sarina he remembers.

Her eyes immediately focus on the opening of the cave as her ear twitches up to the sky in search of the faint whisper of a sound.

For a few tense moments, there is nothing, save for the sound of her breathing.

Solas faintly thinks, for a tick of time, that the sound was just something random but then nearly jumps out of his skin when a bellowing howl suddenly echoes down through the tunnel and into the grotto.

‘It can’t be...’

Solas turns, eyes searching the cave’s darkness for any sign of the source of such a machination. He sees nothing. Hears nothing for an indeterminate pause. And then, again, the screaming howl echoes down the tunnel. Sounding far louder and closer than before. He narrows his eyes, peering into the darkness, and sends out a pulse of his magic. Trying to see if it echoes back. It does, a second later, and Solas gasps in absolutely disbelief.

“Not possible.”

Completely perplexed, he instinctively turns his eyes to Sarina. Her eyes are hard. Her body suddenly stiff, as if she—herself—cannot believe what is happening, and her breath is held.

A second later, the sound of charging footsteps—the padding of massive paws—rumbles down the tunnel and into the grotto. As that sound hits the ears of all assembled, the Aspects instinctively spring into action. The Phoenix releases a call of alarm, instantly bursts into flames, and takes flight, taking off straight up into the air. The Dragon, the Lion, and White Wolf, turn and take some eight to ten paces before forming a line of defense; like that of immovable bulwark, a line drawn in the
proverbial sand; as the Serpent slithers from its spot to stand beside Sarina.

The thundering charge grows louder and louder, seemingly blocking out all other sounds for a few tense moments. Another howl rumbles down the tunnel, this time at an almost deafening volume, and the four Guardians on the ground defending Sarina instantly tense.

Ready and poised to do battle in the name of her.

The Phoenix screeches from high above and in a feat of unbelievably aerial skill, it banks from its path, and dives back down into the grotto only to come to screaming, and hovering stop –right in front of the dragon, lion, and wolf – at the exact moment that a massive black wolf with six red eyes bursts into the space.

The Aspect of Fen’Harel.

‘Not possible...’

The black wolf skids to a stop, kicking up sand, dust, grass, and ambient magic of the fade. With pinned back ears, it growls viciously and instantly levels a threatening gaze at the Phoenix and its compatriots.

The Dragon, the Lion, and the White Wolf counter the black wolf’s vocal threat with their own –in defiance.

They will not be intimidated.

They will not cower to the Dread Wolf.

Solas can do nothing but stand in absolute awe, as his mind –and everything he has ever known– is unbelievably confounded in an instantaneous realization that what he’s witnessing is not a memory but a predication of a possible future.

Suddenly a voice echoes across the vastness of the grotto. A voice that Solas knows all too well.

“RELEASE HER!” the Dread Wolf Commands, though its lips stay pulled back against its gums and baring teeth.

The Guardians do not move. The do not speak.

Sarina, now turned to face the intruder, just stares at the dark Aspect before them. Her face is a mask of stone until something akin to recognition slowly ebbs across her face. The apathy in her eyes disappears instantly as if the truth of what she’s seeing finally hits home.

She instinctively takes a step, reaches out to the Dread Wolf, and in a fit of near panic, she screams.
At her call, the grotto suddenly falls into a rush of chaotic movement. The Serpent darts its head out before Sarina, stopping her advance, and in a display that can only be described as an urgent need to protect, it quickly begins to encircle her. Ascending higher and higher as it circles, the Serpent wraps the infinite coils of its body first around her legs, then her hips, and finally around her chest, before arcing up off her back to bring its head to hover above her and hissing viciously in the direction of the Dread Wolf.

The Phoenix immediately attacks, as the Lion and the White Wolf charge, flapping its inflamed wings harshly at the monster before him; sending flames and fiery ashes into the dark wolf’s face. The White Wolf strikes first, its razor sharp teeth snapping down on the dark wolf’s right leg; just above the primary joint; mere seconds before the Lion leaps and lands a vicious bite upon the Dread’s left shoulder.

The Dragon falls back to a defensive position between the battling Aspects and their captive. Watching the battle intently.

Distracted by the teeth skewered in its flesh, the Dread Aspect tries to shake off its Lupine, Phoenician, and Feline attackers, as the Phoenix goes for his eyes with its razor-sharp talons. Scratching and raking, and throwing in several strikes from its gilded beak, the aerial guardian strikes violently to blind.

Within the flurry of the moment, the Dread is doing all it can to defend from the assault. Snapping its jaws, jostling its shoulders, swinging its forelimbs, and shaking its head left and right, it tries to shake them off.

But, with such numbers, it is far difficult than the wolf—in its demanding pride—seemed to have expected.

For the first time, since the battle began, Solas feels a flicker of fear for his mirror.

Solas, to his own surprise, then notices a faint flicker of recognition flutter across the dark wolf’s face.

And can’t help but smile.

The Dread suddenly drops his head, fainting to his right as if injured.

The obvious deception works, as the White Wolf slips its teeth and claws from the dark wolf’s flesh. At that moment the Dread capitalizes, drawing its massive paw towards itself before expertly striking outwards at the White. The strike immediately hits home, sending the White Wolf flying across the grotto and into the stone wall.

One...
The Dragon roars. Seeing its brother cast aside so violently, the cobalt mass of teeth, venom, and spines charges.

The Dread’s ears instantly perk. Sensing the massive movement.

Dropping its head once more, it closes its eyes against the continued fury of the Phoenix and in one quick move pulls his head back to the right only to then pull it back, slamming its head against the avian defender's body. The impact is so massive that the fabled bird is sent reeling through the air. It hits the ground hard, and its fiery feathers snuff out. Unconscious.

Two...

But the Dread’s maneuver was more than a deflection of the Phoenix, as Solas notices that the movement, concealed a tactical aggression.

Seconds after the Dread hit the Phoenix, the Dragon lunged. The movement of the dark wolf’s head was just enough for him to instinctively evade its snapping jaws. The Dread counters before the Dragon even registers the evasion and sinks its teeth into the cobalt skin of the dragon’s neck –just behind the ridge of needling sharp spines at the back edge of the formidable dragon’s head.

As the Dread’s jaws clamp down, viciously and oppressively, the Dragon tries to counter. Turning its body and slamming up against the wolf on the left side. The Lion catches the movement just in time to dodge the dragon’s body slam –releasing its bite and dexterously jumping onto the dragon’s moving body to only to leap to the top of the Dread’s back and crashing its jaws together on the dark wolf’s scruff.

The impact of the dragon’s body sends the mass of Aspects shuffling sideways and the Dread attempts to keep his balance and stay on its feet.

The Dread’s jaw clamp down harder and harder, as the dragon tries everything within its power to shake it off. Pulling and pinning its own tale underneath itself, the dragon pushes up. Lifting its massive frame from the ground just enough for it to tear into the wolf’s chest with every claw at its disposal.

After several moments the dragon’s movement instinctively reeks of panic, as the Dread’s oppressive bite does not relent.

Its blood flows in rivers upon the ground. Its heart pounding furiously. Its strength, fading fast.

Solas knows that the dragon has but minutes left.

The Lion seems to sense it, redoubling its effort to rend away the Dread’s flesh.

Suddenly a sickening crunching sound echoes through the grotto and the Dragon falls limply from the Dread’s jaws.

Dead.

Three...
At the sound of the Dragon’s demise, the Lion releases its hold upon the dark Aspects scruff and jumps down from its back, to instinctively circle into the monsters line of sight. It roars in unabashed anger, before charging for the Dread’s chest—intent on ripping the heart from the creature’s chest ever-apparent upon its blood-stained face.

The Dread rears up on its hind legs, draws back its massive paws, and hits the Lion across its side so viciously that Solas can hear its ribs shatter at the impact. The Lion goes flying. It hits the ground, rolling head over tail, until coming to an abrupt stop of tangled fur, blood, and splintered bones. Seriously wounded. Incapacitated, but still breathing.

Four...

Solas instinctively turns his eyes to Sarina, the Dread mirroring his very movement, to find that his love still stands wrapped in the coils of the Great Serpent. And, to his surprise, the Great White Wolf—still alive and breathing—stands poised between them and her; defending the Dragon’s recently vacated position.

“NO MORE BLOOD!” the Dread Wolf commands. “STAND DOWN.”

“NEVER!” echoes the voice of the Wolf.

“THEN YOU WILL DIE!”

At the Dread Wolf’s declaration, the White turns to look at Sarina and the Serpent behind him.

“The promise will be kept.” hissed the Serpent. “It has been an honor, brother.”

At the Serpent’s admonition, the White Wolf turned and charged the Dread—leaping into the air, its teeth bared.

Something suddenly flickered across Solas’heart in that moment. Something invoked by the Serpent’s words.

It was then he glanced back from the charging wolf back to Sarina, just in time to see the Guardian Serpent rear its head back and strike its razor-sharp fangs into the tender flesh of Sarina’s neck.

∞∞∞∞∞

“It...Ripped her throat out, Abelas.” choked out Solas, his voice and hands trembling. “Just seconds before I awoke.”
“Mythal enaste.” breathed out Abelas.

Chapter End Notes

Elvhen Translations:

Falon/Ma'falon: Friend/My Friend.
Fenedhis!: (lit. wolf cock) Subjective curse. Equivalent: SHIT or FUCK!
Venavis: Stop.
Dirth ma: Tell me.
Teleolasan: I don't know.
Vhenan: Heart ("my" is implied)
Mythal Enaste: Mythal's blessing (a exasperating plea asking for Mythal's guidance)

Grammar Note: In the final moments of the Battle of the Aspects, dialogue switches to bold and italicize form. This, in this case, denotes instant translation of spoken Elvhen. I was unable to properly translate all responses in proper Elvhen so I decided to denote it with bold styling. You are to assume that all responses were actually spoken in Elvhen and not common. As was my intention.
Ma'da'fenlin

Chapter Summary

Solas learns the origins of Sarina’s spirit bonded white wolf, and in the process learns something about himself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Solas...”

“Yes?” the elf replied, lifting his eyes from the tome in his lap to catch Bull’s face peering at him through the open flap of his tent.

“Food’s almost ready if you wish to eat,” informed Bull in his deep and slightly gravely tone.

“Understood.”

Draping the leather cording he used for marking brittle pages, across the open spine, Solas gently closed the ancient book as set it aside, before venturing out of his tent. As he stepped out, his eyes instinctively turned to the quietly-dark, night sky above.

They had been in the southwestern Hinterlands for nearly three weeks in search of the source of the brutal and lethal bandit attacks on travelers, farmers, and refugees fleeing the fighting of the civil war.

The entire area had been in chaos for nearly a year, the war spilling into the quiet and peaceful land near the end of the previous spring, and it had taken its toll on the beautiful nature within.

The war between the Mages and Templars had left their mark on every tree, on every stone, upon every hillside and trail.

Three months ago, when they had first arrived in the area to seek out a Chantry mother and lend aid, none of them were prepared for what they had come to bear witness to. Charred and leveled homes, butchered and burned corpses of men, women, and children, and scarred and predatory animals, littered the landscape like something from an innocent child’s worst nightmare. While vicious and terrifying demons poured out without restraint from numerous and unchecked fade rifts, to wreak havoc and death upon everything they encountered.

Those who did not try to fight for their lives hid in their homes like frightened animals waiting for salvation while those who did try to flee –to find safe harbor– were slaughtered mercilessly upon the yoke of war or under bloodied claws and sharpened teeth.

It was all so terrifyingly brutal, and seemingly without end.
Through their concerted efforts; of pain, toil, shed blood, broken bones, and a month’s time; they had somehow managed to not only secure the Crossroads but had weeded out nearly twenty roving packs of rouge Templars and rebel Mages before they had manage to make contact with the Chantry mother they had originally come to find. They, then, spent some three weeks in the Crossroads and the surrounding area trying to help the refugees find food, warm blankets, and medicine to treat the sick and injured; while gathering intelligence on the dangers in the area; without barely a shred of rest, before prudence stepped in and dictated that they must leave.

The Chantry mother had spoken to them of a gathering of Chantry sisters in Val Royeaux and pleaded with the newly dubbed Herald of Andraste, and her little band of companions, to appeal to them in hopes that they would cease their inane and useless squabbling over how to replace the tragically murdered Divine and deal with the visceral issues affecting not just the Hinterlands, but all of Thedas.

The trip had been, for the most part, fruitless however; and a complete waste of time in many respects; as the situation had become even more chaotic when they not only ended up having a confrontation with the sadistic and defaming Lord Seeker Lucius, leader of what remained of the Templar order but also received a mysterious and suspicious invitation to Redcliff from the leader of the rebel mages, Grand Enchanter Fiona.

Had it not been for the recruitment of the enigmatic and elegantly gifted Madame de Fer, leader of the last loyal mages in Thedas, and the highly skillful but scatter-brained rogue named Sera; a prodigal figure of an underground contingent known as the Red Jennies; the whole trip would have been deemed a complete disaster.

Upon returning to Haven, and after dealing with more civil unrest within its walls, Sarina and her little band spent only three days in the relative safety and security that was their base of operations before heading out for a three week incursion through the ruthlessly drenched, over-grown, and wind-beaten lands that was the Storm Coast. There, they had managed to pick up a few more allies, put down a fair amount of demons and rifts, and solidified a contract with The Iron Bull and his band of highly tested and well-seasoned mercenaries. Before receiving dire news that the unrest in the Hinterlands had once again escalated anew.

Though the rogue Templars and rebel Mages had seemingly withdrew to the safety of their hidden hideaways, and peace looked to be settling well within the area for short time, incidents of bandit attacks had surged to nearly catastrophic proportions in the lull. With barely a week’s time spent within Haven’s walls to recuperate from their work on the Storm Coast, and to resupply, Sarina, Varric, and Solas—with their newest companion Bull – returned to the Hinterlands to investigate, with a faint hope that; during their time there; they would not only be able to settle the unrest but also secure a herd of horses for their budding army from the well-known and sought-after Master of Horses, Dennet of Redcliff.

A week after they had arrived they had managed to make contact with the Horse Master and make progress with the needed military acquisition, but after the long weeks that followed those negotiations, they had not made any headway in dealing with the bandit problem.

For two weeks they fought through the wilds, seemingly without direction, barely taking any rest, until their little band inadvertently stumbled upon an abandoned camp that had managed to provide a lead to where the source of banditry centered a few days ago.

They had a direction, and a course of action, but they were finding the trek through the unpopulated, dense, and wildly infested area difficult. Wild bears, vicious wolves, and roving demons not tethered to the places where the veil was thin or torn had slowed their foray into the most southwestern area.
of the Hinterlands to barely a crawl as nerves frayed and rations thinned.

For the last two days, under Sarina’s orders, they had settled down to what she prompted would be a small respite from traveling and fighting. She had defended the choice with her usual air of logic. Claiming that should they continue at their current pace they would either die to the ferociousness of the wild all around them or to their screamingly empty bellies. They all need rest. And they all needed food. Going without, she had said, would be dooming them all to weakness, starvation, and death, and the destruction of all Thedas in the aftermath. And that couldn’t happen.

Taking in a deep breath of the crisp, clean air of the quiet Hinterland night, through his nose and letting it out slowly, Solas tried to center his mind and find some comfort in the stillness all around them. Though he had agreed with the Herald’s suggestion of rest, he could not push away the lingering doubt of what consequences such a short impasse would create. He did not question her earnest concern for those she traveled with. In fact, he had been fairly impressed with the young Dalish elf’s clarity of mind, heightened instincts, and true understanding of the condition of her traveling companions. But, he could not shake the worry of what might come to pass as they sat idle, trying to regain their strength. The Breach, hovering in the northwestern sky like a monster readying itself to devour the whole world, was still a very real threat. And it needed to be dealt with as soon as possible.

Pushing his worries to the side for the moment, Solas crossed the camp to find Bull settled on the ground around the campfire as Varric stirred the contents of the night’s dinner within a casted iron pot with a spoon.

“The Herald?” questioned Solas, seconds after his eyes rescanned the camp and saw no sign of her.

“Went for a walk,” replied Varric, sticking out his thumb over his shoulder and pointing toward the tree line. “That way.”

“Alone?” Solas questioned incredulously.

“And without a weapon, it seems,” he added harshly as his eyes caught sight of Sarina’s staff leaning against the front of her tent.

“She won’t go far, Chuckles.” dismissed the dwarf almost knowingly. “No need to worry.”

From what Solas knew of their Herald, a small part of him had to concede to Varric’s belief. But, he could not get past the recklessness and inherent danger such a situation created or held.

“Still...”

“If you’re so worried Solas...” prompted Bull. “You could go check on her. ‘Bout time to eat anyway.”

A flicker of a memory suddenly scattered across his mind.

“She hasn’t eaten today has she Bull?” questioned Solas.

“Not a bite.”

Before Bull or Varric could comment further, and before Solas even realized it, he had crossed the camp and entered the wood line without a second thought. For a few hundred paces he walked and scanned the area for any sign of the white-haired woman with the marked hand, but saw nothing.
The farther he walked the deeper his initial concern grew, until it began to morph into a feeling of both dread and panic.

“Herald?” Solas called out.

Even though he knew, should there be predators or would-be assassin’s hiding in the darkness, he would be giving away his position by doing so, he found that at that moment he did not care.

He had to find her.

A moment later he stumbled into a very small clearing near the base of an incline. It took him just a few seconds for him to realize where he was. They had traveled through this particular area the morning Sarina had made her decision about taking a few days to rest.

When they first traversed the clearing they had been ambushed by three enormous bears, all at once. The fight had been brutal, with both Bull and the Herald taking in several blows of both teeth and claws before they felled the lot. When the fight had ended, Solas had searched for her on the field to heal her injuries but she had disappeared. He had searched for her then, up a hidden path of a rocky incline, to find her studying another of those strange devices, known as an occulara, upon an abandoned ledge.

“Perhaps...” Solas wondered, as his eyes landed on the path.

Following his footsteps from two days past, he traversed the trail in silence. As he drew closer to the top, he began to sense her—though faintly.

The power of the mark was unmistakable, like a beacon in the dark calling out to lost and wayward souls, but something else lingered above him upon that ledge that seemed to muffle the mark’s magical signature.

And he could feel it.

The air, as he climbed, slowly began to take on an unnatural but suddenly familiar vibe. It took him mere seconds to recognize the shift. And not even a second thought to understand what he was feeling.

A tremor in the veil, and the lingering taste of her magic.

Quickening his pace, but being careful of his steps, he hurried up the trail as quickly and safely as he could as a new sense of fear echoed within him. In just the few months he had known the Herald, he had rarely seen her use her magic in any other way save for in battle. The fact that he could now sense it, taste it upon the wind, was worrisome and warned of possible danger.

When he finally crested the edge of the incline, he was suddenly hit with a barely noticeable wave of her ambient magic as his eyes landed on the Herald’s sitting form. There, just on the edge of the ledge’s precipice, she sat with her back to him. Her hands folded gently within her lap. Her head and shoulders slumped forward. And completely silent.

“Herald?”

No answer.

Not even a single movement that showed she had even realized his presence.

A strange sense of foreboding instantly settled within his mind. The Herald had never ignored
anyone. Not even once. She, in fact, always seemed to go out of her way to speak with those she not only fought alongside but also fought for. For her to ignore him in such a way was completely unlike her in every way.

“Lethalan?” he tried again.

Nothing.

“Sarina...?” he ventured, hoping that perhaps the use of her given name would rouse her attention.

Still, no answer. No movement of recognition.

‘Something is truly wrong.’ he thought.

Taking a single step forward, Solas instantly flinched as he felt a harsh ripple scatter through the veil before him and felt, rather than tasted, a gentle but forceful wave of the Herald’s magic crash upon him.

Sending out a light pulse of his magic, in an attempt to find more clarity to what he was feeling, Solas felt his energy deflected back to him without a second’s hesitation. Raising his hand, casting a gentle searching spell, he reached out and a second later the shimmer of a large fade barrier, encasing the entire landing, flickered into his sight.

His eyes immediately settled on the Herald’s form once more as the possible realization of what he was seeing settled into his mind.

“A cursory illusion?” he wondered.

Had she not react to his call because she was not physically sitting on that ledge? Could she be masking her true position for some unapparent reason?

Was she truly hiding herself from any who would stumble upon her with...a magical decoy?

“Impossible...no mortal could...” he whispered in dismay. “Such magic is...”

Very old.

Raising his hand once more, calling upon his magic, he reached out towards the barrier to test if it could be crossed, only to find that his hand could pass through it completely unheeded. Taking a breath, Solas made the decision to step forward. He did not know what he would find on the other side but he knew he must cross.

He had to find out what was truly going on behind the barrier and how any of what he’d seen and felt could possibly be happening.

He had to find her.

Solas closed his eyes and stepped through.

When he felt the barrier pass completely through him, he opened his eyes and instantly froze. Before him, stood no occulara nor landing, but a great forest. The trees; thick with dark green leaves and kissed with a softly falling rain; loomed high above him as the heavenly melody of singing birds echoed upon the gentle and sweet smelling breeze that wafted through the lush underbrush of the forest floor.
That’s when he felt it, the gentle and loving caress of the raw fade.

“Impossible.” Solas gasped. “There is no way she could...”

Very old, indeed.

The vision flickered, seemingly reacting to his presence. For a moment Solas deliberated if he could disrupt the conjuration before him but decided against it in the off chance that the Herald could be watching him.

He could not give away his true self, put everything in jeopardy, simply out of curiosity.

He would have to find another way and let what was being shown to him play out as it should.

The vision of the forest shimmered once more and, as if called from some treasured memory, the echoing giggle of a small child reverberated through the forest seconds before Solas sensed movement out of the corner of his eye. Turning his head, he immediately caught the sight of a young girl –no more than five or six winters’ old– running happily through the thick underbrush before she quickly disappeared behind a section of large bushes to his right. It took only a few seconds more before she immerged into the area before him and came to a skidding stop.

Solas took the vision of the child in and recognize the manifestation instantly.

Her beautiful and fiery eyes. Her pointed ears. Her ice white hair.

‘Sarina.’

The child looked at him, seemingly seeing but not seeing, before turning and darting farther into the forest. As she twisted, turned, leaped, and climbed, the vision followed succinctly—as if from the perspective of a pursuer or predator—never losing sight of her even for a moment.

After some time the child finally came to a stop near a large outcropping of trees. That moment of stillness gave him some time to take in the child a little more. The little girl’s face radiated nothing but pure joy, as she took a moment to catch her hastily fleeing breath. In that moment he could see, and truly feel, the happiness the child had felt running through the forest as she did.

She was small. Shorter than the Dalish children of that age he had come across in his wanderings.

And she was different.

A clean slate.

Gone was the fear that he had seen in others. Gone was the worry that hid behind every pair of Dalish eyes. The mistrust. The aberrance. The ignorance. The blinded faith to the falsities of long-lost Gods.

But, most importantly, gone were the walls she—in her adult life—so carefully held in place.

She was free.

Taking in one last deep breath and letting it out slowly, the child stood tall and turned towards him. For a moment she just stared at him and Solas could feel something shift once more. Her face, once smiling and joyful, fell. Her bright eyes dulled and reflected back not joy but worry. It was then that the vision turned dark, like the shift from the brightest of day to the darkest of night, and the once gentle breeze turned harsh and cold. The child’s expression deepened almost instantly to that of fear
and panic. Turning her head, left to right, while spinning around and scanning the area, the child searched with her eyes frantically as a strange sense of terror began to flow off of her in waves. The distress, unbelievably palpable even to Solas, was so strong that even he could not hold back his heart’s reaction to it.

“Babae?!” the child called out with a strained voice.

When no one answered, the child’s mannerisms changed from fretful and frightened to panicked and rash. She began to walk back and forth in the small clearing she stood, searching the area with her eyes as if looking for someone. With every step, she grew more and more panicked.

“BABAЕ!” she yelled, her voice coming out almost shrill as she paced more and more.

Suddenly, from the west, a faint sound echoed from the forest catching the child’s attention. A flicker of hope skittered across her panicked expression and without even a second thought the child darted off towards it. She only managed to move less than a hundred paces before she stepped onto—what Solas could only guess to be—a soft portion of earth and fell. Disappearing from his sight in an instant.

For a few moments the vision just lingered, and Solas could not stop the worry that bloomed in his heart.

A second later the vision shifted, revealing a lowered outcropping surrounded by a sheer hillside on three sides. The ground was littered with brittle dying leaves and surfaced tree roots, and near the far end stood a great tree whose base was uncovered and left to elements. Its large roots drew down from the hillside above and plunged into the earth below; looking similarly to that of iron bars; encasing what looked like a small cave.

It took Solas’ logical mind only a single breath before he understood what had happened to the child. She had stepped near that tree before she had fallen and the only conclusion now available to him was that she had somehow managed to step between two of the tree’s massive roots—where the ground was thin—and fell through. Landing within the small cave.

Solas, with an unpredicted fear that the child had been injured, took a step before immediately freezing as a familiar sound echoed past his ears. The vision forayed inward, coming to a stop just by the opening of the cave, and then settled—revealing what lie within. To Solas surprise, the child was unhurt. Her face, shining white hair, and simple clothing were smeared with dirt and mud from the forest floor, and she was strangely smiling with an unadulterated glee. Just then another of the strange sounds echoed from below his line of sight causing him to look down.

What he saw there pulled at his heart in a way that hadn’t been done in a very long time.

There, surrounding the child so succinctly, lay six dark grey and startlingly black wolf pups. Barely a few days old and so small that their precious eyes had yet to open, sleeping peacefully.

The cave wasn’t a cave at all, but a wolf’s den.

Panic shot through Solas’ heart instantly, causing him to turn from the visage of the child and frantically scan the area. Wolves rarely abandoned their pups, save to hunt, and even then they do not go far. The mother was still out there and could return at any moment.

The child was in far more danger than she could have realized.

Something snapped in him then. A nearly unrecognizable and never felt, but fierce, urge to suddenly protect the child, like that of a loving father, echoed across his heart. He turned to her then, noticing
that she had begun to pet the pups one by one, knowing that he had to warn her.

But how? This wasn’t reality. It was a vision. An echo of another time that he could not change.

For a few moments he watched her. Smiling happily as she played with the small pups who had roused from their slumber to the feel of her presence, he could not ignore her joy. She held each of them lovingly, one by one. Rubbing their soft coats, scratching behind their ears, and even nuzzling them like a stuffed toy. The pups gave no protest, reacting almost as if what they were sensing and feeling was everything their tiny little world should be, and drank in her affection like that of water poured down a desperately dry throat.

For a time, the scene played out in such fashion until each of the pups slowly began to pull away from the child to return to their sleep.

When the last of the pups crawled from her lap and sought solace with its brothers and sisters, the child seemed to realize that the small joy she had just encountered had come to its end. Pulling herself up onto all fours, she slowly and carefully made her way out of the small cave without disturbing the now sleeping little brood.

By the time she managed to exit the cave, the expression on her face had shifted back to that of worry. While distracted by the newly birthed litter, she had seemingly forgotten about her predicament for a short time but the realization that she was still lost in the woods had not disappeared from her little mind. She took a few steps into the secluded alcove and scanned the area for a way out, but found no path that would lead her from where she now stood to the hillside above.

Just then the sound of viciously fast and approaching foot falls echoed all around them. And a split second later a loud thump boomed across the forest floor. Both Solas and the child, startled beyond recognition, turned their eyes to the source of the sound instinctively.

Solas gasped.

The child screamed.

There, with its ears pulled back and teeth bared, stood a mass of deep smoky grey fur; growling ferociously.

_The Mother._

“Run da’len!” cried out Solas, his composure and logical understanding of what he was truly witnessing lost without even a second thought, as he turned to the child.

What happened next was unbelievably quick. The child so fearful of the wolf fell backwards into the leaves and froze. The wolf, dropping her head and letting out a bloodthirsty growl, charged forward and leapt. Suddenly, a high pitched whistle echoed. The sound of arrow meeting flesh reverberated. And then a thud.

Pulling his eyes from the child, Solas turned to the wolf to find it dead on the ground. The arrow from out of seemingly nowhere buried deep within its heart.

“Da’Vhenan!” echoed a deeply panicked male voice.

_Little heart._

Solas turned around to the sound and that’s when he saw him.
A tall and masculine elf, standing nearly his very height, with hair braided down his back to his mid-thigh and as white as snow, and dressed in green tinted leather armor, stood on the hillside above—a fearful expression plastered upon his countenance as his long bow stretched out before him, its string still vibrating from the force of its release.

Familiar.

“Babae!” the child cried out.

Scrambling to her feet, the child darted across the forest floor and dove into her father’s arms the moment he jumped from the hillside to the ground below. For a time he held her possessively, his long bow discarded upon the ground without a care, and comforted her as she let all of her fear and terror pour down her face.

The sheer relief in his eyes, so strong, so intense, was something that even Solas could not dismiss nor ignore. Nor was the very palpable worry inscribed upon his face.

It was then that the vision shimmered and shifted. Solas watched as the scene of the small alcove suddenly began to change. Gone, was the image of the small child cradled in her loving father’s arms. Gone was the body of the wolf. Gone was the darkness of the encroaching night. The air changed, hinting more of early spring than that of the late summer it had just carried. The sun hovered high above the trees, filtering down precious beams of sunlight through the leaves towards the forest floor, and the ground and surrounding hillside suddenly became engulfed in a carpet of beautiful white flowers.

That was when he heard it. The sound of pattering bare feet and suppressed childish giggles, wafting over the edge of the hillside that once held the visage of the small child’s protective and gallant father. Sensing movement, he turned his eyes to the hillside just in time to catch the image of a young girl hopping down to the forest floor.

Time had passed. She had changed. Grown. But she was still the same.

Her bright eyes shining, her white hair now braided down to the middle of her back, and dressed in a thin white cotton gown lined with lamb’s wool around the neckline, the girl—now nearly ten winter’s old—stood with a handful of freshly picked flowers in one hand and smile upon her face.

It seemed to take only a moment for the young girl to realize where she now stood, as Solas watch the reminder of the place echo through her memory and then across her young face. She instantly turned to look at the cave, and her bright smile faltered and then vanished. Now replaced with both dread and worry.

Scurrying across the forest floor as quickly as her legs could carry her, the young girl darted for the den and dropped to her knees to crawl inside.

From his vantage point, Solas could see the very moment when her whole body tensed in horror.

He knew what she had found.

The mother was dead.

And the pups were so very young.

The cry that ripped from her throat was so unbelievably guilt-stricken and shrill that Solas could not
help but flinch.

In a purely unadulterated panic and horror, the young girl fell back and scramble across the ground fleeing the tiny bones that lay before her.

Just then the sound of a deep and heavy thud shuddered across the landscape. In terror, the young girl shot to her feet and turned around, only to freeze at the sight before her. Standing there, looming like a god of death, was a massively large black wolf with golden eyes. Its teeth bared, drool dribbling from its growling lips, the creature glared at her with nothing but vengeance burning in its eyes.

*Her mate.*

The young girl looked up on the looming wolf with fear in her eyes, as she turned fully to face it. Pulling one foot behind her, as if taking a defensive stance, she eyed the monster looking upon her with an almost silent resignation.

She was caught. There would be no way to avoid a confrontation. She would have to kill him or she would die.

‘*But what could she do?*’ thought Solas. ‘*She is nothing but a child.*’

At that moment, something seemed to shift within the young girl. Her stance became firmer. Her eyes hardened. And her countenance morphed into that of a young and lethal hunter. She eyed the wolf in an almost predatory manner, seemingly mimicking the look she now carried upon the battlefield to this day, as she crouched to center her balance.

“Come then.” the girl offered willingly. “Seek your justice, wolf.”

Solas could not understand the young girl’s thinking. She had no weapon and not even a sliver of ambient magic within her blood. How would she defend herself from one of the forest’s most resourceful of predators?

Without the slightest of hesitations, the raging wolf suddenly leapt with a vicious growl, teeth and claws perched to rip the child to pieces. But before it could land even a single strike, she remarkably managed to dodge. Strafing to the left, her bare and nimble feet practically gliding across the ground as if she stood upon thick and slick ice, she moved out of the way as if it was as simple of an act as breathing. The wolf landed, its face suddenly a flicker of dismay at its inevitable miss. Turning towards the girl again, it let out another vicious and ferocious growl and pounced. This time the young girl tried to retreat, but her steps faltered as her foot hit an upturned root sticking up from the forest floor. She fell backwards, her back slamming upon the hard ground, as the wolf descended upon her.

That was when he felt it, an unhindered explosion of magic cloaked in a flash of white. Flinching from the brightness for only a moment, he opened his eyes and settled them upon the wolf and the child. The young girl lay upon the ground, both her arms stretched out before her. The wolf on top of her biting and clawing. And between them, as hard as folded steel, a barrier.

The very moment when her magic manifested.

For a few frantic moments the young girl pushed against her barrier, instinctively seemingly knowing that should she falter in her concentration for even a breath the manifestation of protective magic would disappear.

The wolf, frantically frustrated, did everything is could do within its power to break through the
barrier and take the child’s life. But it continued to hold.

A moment later, the wind that breezed through the clearing seemed to shift, and with it the
texture on the young girl’s face. What once held panic, fear, and an unbreakable sense of self-
expression, now mirrored a nearly calm sense of understanding. It was then that the girl pulled back
one of her hands. Dropping it upon her chest, right above her heart, she closed her eyes and took a
few deep breaths, before opening them once more and settling them upon the enraged wolf above
her. For a second, time seemed to go still as she looked upon the wolf, and then she did something
that Solas would have never predicted in all of his long life. Pulling her hand away from her heart,
she reached out and pushed her hand through the barrier, sinking her fingers into the soft black fur
nestled across the wolf’s chest.

At the practically foreign sensation, the creature immediately stilled and looked at her.

As their eyes locked, she spoke.

“Ir abelas, fen Hahren.” she cried, her eyes tearing up instantly, as her hand began to glow.

The glow intensified, waves of her sorrow seemingly flowing off her in torrents, as she pushed her
magic into the heart of the old wolf before her. The creature did not move. It did not fight. It did not
try to take her life. Only hovered above her and her barrier and stared into her unblinking eyes as the
tense moments of silence that followed lingered.

Time seemed to change and shift in that moment and then suddenly all seemed to become clear to the
wolf. Its hardened eyes, softened. Its poised and primed form, relaxed. And for a single second,
Solas could swear that he saw amusement and a strange sense of resignation flicker across the
animal’s face. The glowing of the girl’s hand grew bolder, the manifestation of her magic weaving its
way from her skin into the dark fur of the wolf as it slowly crawled over its entire form before
completely engulfing it in a flurry of white light—mere seconds before a bright flash erupted through
the alcove once again.

Flinching from the rush of energy, Solas closed his eyes for only a heartbeat before opening them
once more.

What he now saw, could only be described by one single word.

Miraculous.

The dark vicious wolf was gone, and in its place—still hovering above the young girl—stood a
stunningly white wolf.

“I should have died that day.” came Sarina’s very real voice.

At her words, the vision completely vanished and the landing that should have been before him the
whole time reappeared. Solas turned to Sarina, finding her sitting upon the ground leaning against the
stone wall of the landing with her knees pulled to her chest, her chin resting upon the arm draped
over them.

“He lost his life mate...his Vhenan... and his children...” she continued. “All because of my
foolishness... my selfishness. Me.”
“You were just a child.” Solas tried to defend.

“And the innocence of youth is a viable excuse to you?” she countered disapprovingly. “I did something horrible. I stole the old wolf’s future. His hopes. His dreams. His lover. His heart. All because my foolish self...had been so very tired of my strict lessons and wanted to run free, if only for a moment.”

“Had I never done that...had I not gotten so...unbelievably lost...his family would have never died!”

“His Vhenan...she died protecting her children, killed by a father protecting his own, simply because of my wanton disobedience, selfish pride, stubbornness, and that unbelievably naïve and retched innocence you speak of!” she added angrily, without any prompting. “And he spent the next three years searching for me, following my scent, hunting me, as my clan and I roamed. Biding his time. Forever bound to his vengeance, his need for retribution and justice, his unending and unyielding pain, and his determination to seek a reckoning for all he had lost. For all that I had stolen from him.”

“It was a death I deserved, one that I earned without malice, truer than anything in my entire life, and —in the end— I took that away from him too.”

“If you had truly wished to die, in that moment....then why did you?”

“I don’t know.” she cut in.

“I have spent most of my life since then reliving the memory over and over...” she sighed. “Trying to understand why; or what; made me seek to preserve my life...and more over...why —when my barrier manifested — I tried to spirit bond with the one creature that should have meant my destruction. Rather than letting him take me.”

“And you’ve yet to find those answers, I take it.”

“No.” she groaned softly.

“Even Ma’da’fenlin knows not why he ultimately yielded to me. Why he spared my life.”

“Perhaps, the reason why you still do not know, is simply because the answers to your questions do not exist?” he offered. “Perhaps everything that happened in that place was in some way preordained.”

Sarina couldn’t help but scoff at such a postulation.

“Perhaps you were meant to find that den all those years ago. The mother was meant to die protecting her children. The pups were meant to suffer and die as consequence of your actions. His vengeance was meant to fester. And you were meant to confront her mate, years later?”

“Perhaps all of those circumstances were nothing dissimilar to that of fate. The triggers that would set you on your path to developing your magic abilities and would allow you to make your first spirit bond.”

“You make it sound like I’m cursed to destroy everything I touch.” she countered with a disapproving tone. “Must you always be so grim and fatalistic?”

“No, not always,” he replied, taking a few steps toward her and crouching down to look her in the eyes. “But in this instance, it seems to be warranted.”

“No matter how hard we try, Lethallan, there will always be forces that move against what we
desire.” he offered. “It is up to us to recognize such things and learn to adapt. Otherwise, we will not survive. That is the nature of all life.”

“Adapt or perish, then?” she questioned.

“Yes.” he nodded. “It is something we all must learn, and something that is forever constant in an always changing world. But...that does not mean we don’t have the power to change our fate.”

“Free will is a powerful thing, Sarina. With it, we can forge our own course, and do what we must to make our lives as happy or as sad as we wish them to be.”

“The death of that wolf family may have been your fate, something that was bound to happen no matter what you may have tried to do to stop it, but without their deaths...that loss...you wouldn’t have become the kind of woman you are today.”

“And what kind of woman, is that? Exactly?” she questioned. Her voice still sad, yet tinged with a gentle air of challenging playfulness.

“One who, in the short time I have known her, has proven herself to be indomitably strong and kind, unbelievably and mysteriously wise for someone so young, passionately brave, fearlessly loving, fiercely loyal, and daringly true...who never hesitates to sacrifice everything –even her own life– for the greater good should this world ask it of her, who spends night and day worrying over others rather than herself…”

“And who knows that, deep down, no amount of bravado, distracting wit, or disinterested masks can hide who she truly is among those she shares her heart with.”

“Careful Solas…” she warned playfully. “With such a glorifying review of one’s character, one may find herself thinking far more fondly of you than you intend.”

“In this case…” he replied with a chuckle, offering her a hand up. “I am willing to concede to your point, Lethallan. But that does not mean I dislike such a notion. Nor does it make my words any less true.”

“Noted.” she nodded as she slipped her hand into his and flashed a nearly loving and brightened smile.

Chapter End Notes

Elvhen Translations:

Lethalan: (fem.) of my blood
Babae: Father
Da'len : child/little one
Da’Vhenan: little heart.
Ir abelas: I’m sorry.
fen Hahren; (constructed) Wolf elder/Elder wolf.
Sorry for the delay everyone. To make up for it, 6500+ words of flashback goodness.
Chapter Summary

On their way to Tevinter, Solas and Abelas stop for the night for rest. In those quiet moments Abelas questions Solas’ intentions for the future and gives him a gift that should have never existed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Settling into his saddle with a heavy heart, Solas could not shake the last few days from his mind.

After everything he had gone through, and done, over the last six years, to now have a chance to get back that which he had so painfully thrown away, had given him far more hope than he ever thought it could. A small part of him had even believed that, now that he had found the precious Heart of Elvhenan, all of the suffering they shared would finally come to an end. That he could finally have everything his heart desired.

The return of his people to their former glory, and Sarina’s love.

But nothing is ever easy.

And that realization burned more deeply than anything ever could have.

In the days, weeks, months, and years, since their final parting, he had repeatedly told himself that leaving had been the only thing he could do. For the path he walked would be nothing short of a tragedy, a path of death, and he could not allow her to bear witness to his fate.

He could not do that to her. He would not.

But, in the back of his mind and depths of his heart, regret and longing had always lingered. He did everything he could to banish those feelings. Time and time again, he tried to assure himself that Sarina would be better without him. That she would one day heal from all the pain and anguish he had selfishly inflicted upon her. That she would find a way to move on, or to forget him entirely.

That there would come a time where she would finally make peace with all of it, even when, deep in his hardened heart, he could not.

But no matter how many times he had justified his actions, placated himself with self-centered understanding, or flat-out ignored everything that he thought and felt, the pain and the loss was always far too real.
More real than it ever should have been.

When he had awoken from Uthenera, all he saw was a fractured and compartmentalized world littered with creatures merely a sliver of their once true selves.

The world was broken. Magic: that which was as natural as breathing once, that permeated the entirety of creation once, was now feared, hated, and far too often snuffed out like that of a fleeting candle’s flame caught in an unforeseen wind. Spirits he had once called his friends, those he’d spent endless centuries with, had either faded away –lost to the void for all time– or had diminished to utter whispers of their once-great selves.

And the light that shone brightly behind the eyes of every Elvhen blood, had vanished.

All because of the Veil, because of him.

He had destroyed all that he once held so dear, simply because every alternative was far more devastating, and now the world was shattered beyond recognition. A living, breathing, nightmare.

He’d told himself. He would make it anew. He would have it back. Restore the People and undo all that he had so foolishly done.

He would atone.

But...

In all his life, he never would have thought that there could be someone in all of Thedas that could call to his hidden heart. And so strongly tempt him to turn from his path. But, someone truly had.

When he’d first met the, then, unknown woman, all he could see was everything he’d seen in his limited experience in the waking of this new era.

A Dalish elf, foolishly and ignorantly branded with the mark of the only Evanuris he had ever called friend, prejudiced to fanciful stories about all-powerful and all-seeing false gods, and fearful of all but their own kind. Unyielding. Uncaring of the plight of the world. Trivial. Insignificant. Solitary, segmented, and lost from her true potential and purpose.

And branded with the searing white-hot pain of his magic.

But as time passed, as he learned her name and began to slowly learn more and more about her, he began to realize that perhaps his assumptions about her may not have been as true as he had thought.

When she had somehow manage to survive the explosion at the conclave and awakened in the dungeon under Haven’s Chantry, she learned of all that was known to have transpired to put her there and was filled to the brim with so many questions. Yet, even in the midst of the chaos surrounding the Breach, the accusatory –and condemning –threats of the lost and mourning followers of Andraste, and her inherited fearful and suspicious nature, she did not flee. She did not turn a blind eye to all the suffering, the inherent danger of the moment. She stood tall, and promised to do all she could to stem the tide of destruction looming in the once-peaceful sky.
Her courage.

It was a trait that Solas had found admirable from the very beginning. Though she was just a mere shadow to him at the time, she had an unbelievable strength and determination about her. And that fortitude, forever palpable in her presence, gave her an indomitable focus of will to carry on no matter what she faced. It was astounding to him how someone who had essentially lived her entire life secluded from everything and everyone, save for her own people, could be so lively, so warm, so understanding, so trustworthy, so knowledgeable, and so unbelievably loving—while also being evasive, meticulous, crafty, witty, demonstratively vague, and so inherently untrusting of those who had seemed to find a nearly blindingly loyal kinship with her the very moment they first met her.

A mystery, that’s what he had called her.

And she truly was.

She, without even trying, ignited his own impish curiosity from the very moment she looked upon his face for the very first time. A curiosity that, until this very day, has never truly been fully satiated.

He had loved her even then, he knew, but fought against the truth of it with every fiber of being until it could no longer be denied. With failing pride and selfish love, he gave himself over to all that compelled him to her. And, for a time, when he made a conscious effort to forget his purpose and just be in the now, he found himself feeling far happier than he had ever been over the multitudes of his years. The love that they shared, not only thrilled and elated him but worried and frightened him. It was a love unprecedented, unforeseeable, and completely unavoidable.

It was glorious.

And terrifying.

And he would have it back.

No matter the cost.

Looking across the courtyard, Solas caught sight of Abelas making his way towards him and sighed.

The day had finally come to set out for Tevinter. To find her.

After the first horrifying dream encounter with the Guardians two nights ago, Solas had visited the fade often—trying to make more sense of the barrier and the nature and meaning behind Sarina’s prison. The effort had been pointless, however, as he gleaned not even an inkling notion of how to bring down its walls and set her free. Six times he had entered the fade, and each time—when he found the barrier—the lyrium wolf was there. And every time he interacted with it, tried to convince it of his altruistic intentions, that he only sought to help her, the wolf would instantly banish him back across the fade and drop him outside that horrible and unchanging prophetical memory of Crestwood’s grotto.
Settling his eyes upon his friend, Solas caught sight of the man stopping and turning to a scout approaching him. For a moment, they conversed quietly, before the scout handed him a small bundle wrapped in cloth, and was dismissed.

Something about the nearly insignificant encounter seemed vaguely unusual to him then. It wasn’t out of the ordinary for a scout, returning from a mission, to report directly to Abelas upon their arrival. Nor was it strange for them to be delivering something that they may have found during their assignment to the man. But the fact that it had been done so, mere moments before they were set to leave, left a strangely unsettling feeling in the back of his mind.

A few moments later, Abelas cleared the distance, sided up to his horse, and tucked the mysterious bundle into his saddlebag,

“Situation?” he questioned.

“All clear.” replied Abelas, as he put his foot into his horse’s stirrup and mounted the creature.

“Scouts report that all Eluvians are accounted for and that our route to the northwest is, for the moment, safe. Fresh horses will be waiting for us at the Tevinter border and all arrangements for the encampment south of Qarinus have been, according to your orders, completed.”

“Understood.” nodded Solas.

Riding as hastily as their swiftest of mounts could carry them, they traversed through the incredibly dense and stormy forests of southern Arlathan, for nearly a day, before they arrived at the first of many Eluvians they would have to cross.

It was nestled in a surfaced cave, surrounded by the faint remnants of a once renowned and feared temple of Falon’din.

Known to the present day Dalish as the God of Death and Fortune, Falon’din had been revered for centuries as the deity whose principle embodiment was that of the keeper of the dead. He who guides the spirits of the People to the Beyond.

But such fanciful stories were just that, fanciful, and the truth of what Falon’din was and became was much, much worse.

In truth, Falon’din was a noble Elvhen, once. A scholar of sorts. True to his chosen purpose. He took great pleasure, and pride, in helping those of his kind to find their way to their endless dreams in Uthenera and to the enlightenment they so desired. Along with his brother, Dirthamen, he would aid all who sought such paths, and reveled in the pursuit of knowledge like a child consumed with curiosity. His thirst for such pursuits were rivaled by none and he became so wise that all of the Evanuris utilized his intelligence to its fullest degree.

But corruption is inevitable. And even Falon’din, with his nearly altruistic and inherent drive for ultimate knowledge, was not immune.

The war changed everything.
Solas could not stem the unease whispering within him when his eyes beheld the temple. Of the Evanuris, in the youngest of Solas’ years, Falon’din had been an Elvhen that he had at one time respected. A man after his own heart, a kindred spirit, who sought knowledge above all things, Falon’din held more in common with him than any of his brethren ever could. But the atrocities he had committed so long ago, to the very people who worshiped him with all of their hearts and souls, had been so devastatingly horrific and cruel that Solas’ could not grant him any form of mercy in those final days of Arlathan. In his heart of hearts, somewhere deep within his soul, a part of Solas had always regretted having to stand up against those he had long ago called his equals. And the punishment he so rightfully bestowed upon Falon’din, being no more an exception than the rest, haunted him just as equally.

Pulling on his mount’s reins, ordering it to halt, Solas scanned the area for a moment before looking upon Abelas.

“A Temple of Falon’din.” he informed.

“Yes.”

“It is late. We should rest.” Solas added. “But, I would not advise lingering in such a place.”

“Perhaps you’re right.” answered Abelas. The unnatural aura of the lingering temple apparent to even him. “The Eluvian is not far within. Its destination lies farther north into the forest. If you wish it, we can cross now –rather than waiting for daybreak– and take our rest on the other side.”

“I do.”

“Very well, ma’falon.” nodded Abelas.

Setting camp an hour later, Abelas worked quietly. They had packed light. Not bothering with much of anything except the essentials. But it took a little time setting up a perimeter, casting wards, and stoking up a fire from scattered and damp kindling.

That night they spent some hours sitting by the campfire, seeking their warmth in a companionable silence. Each lost to their own thoughts and their most personal of missions. Solas spent most of his time, while awake, reading and planning for the days and weeks to come. While Abelas aimlessly stared upon the fire before him, thinking deeply, and ignored everything. Seemingly enjoying the small reprieve from traveling and soaking in the peacefulness and quiet of the night. When they did finally retire to their rest, both fell into a dreamless and uninterrupted sleep.

The next two days mirrored their first. The trek, as Abelas had originally assured, had be relatively safe and uneventful. Save for the single spotting of a rogue human hunter tracking Halla through the forest, they encountered nothing and no one.

That night, the made camp near the ruins of an old village whose name had been forgotten and lost to the passage of time.

After several hours of continued silence between the two, long into the night, Solas could not help but get the feeling that something was truly bothering Abelas. Though normally quiet by nature, in many respects, he rarely withheld from at least some semblance of comradery now and then. Other than answering simple questions, or reporting back from when he would scout a surrounding area before making camp, he had barely spoken two words to Solas since they left their stronghold three days ago.
Solas, from the day the two first met, had always understood him. But such behavior was so unlike Abelas that he couldn’t help but worry.

Abelas was of the People and had lived a very long and secluded life. As one of Mythal’s sentinels, charged with the eternal task to guard and keep one of her greatest Temples, Abelas had been so far removed from the current day Thedas that it was like waking up in a wholly foreign and new world. An unfamiliar place, with even far more unfamiliar beliefs and customs, filled with strangers whose propensity for violence and misunderstanding was only outweighed by their desire for selfishness and hypocrisy.

After the events at the Temple, after Sarina had taken from the Well of Sorrows, Abelas had tried to adapt to his new circumstances. For a time he traveled, trying to learn more and more about this new era and find his rightful place within it. But the period of adjustment had been far more difficult than anything he could have imagined. The first time he came upon a human, the man had tried to rob him. The first time he came upon a very young girl walking down a path, the child had screamed and fled out of fear. And the first time he encountered a Dalish clan, they had tried to kill him simply because he was unknown—a stranger—to them.

He was alone—with no coin in his pocket, no home to go to, no family to call his own or friends to offer him shelter, and not even Mythal to call upon for guidance.

Eventually, the idea of having nothing; absolutely nothing; became too hard to bear. Falling into despair, he hid from the world completely. Taking shelter in an abandoned home, deep within the Emerald Graves, and resigning himself to wasting away in seclusion until Uthenera took him for the last time. That self-exile, exacerbating his melancholy and loneliness, quickly began to take its toll on his mind. Causing him to think thoughts that, never in his life, he would have ever thought he would think. Doubting his sanity, at times, he began to believe that he was losing what was left of his true self and even entertained the notion, on many a night, that the only way to stem his budding madness would be to fall upon his own blade and end-all of it himself.

It was then that Solas came to him, arriving at his doorstep not long after the fall of the blighted Magister, and offered him two things that he would have never expected. A new path, and true friendship. He had accepted his offer willingly, and declared that he would do all that he could to help Solas’ realize his plans for the return of Elvhenan. With Solas’ help; the familiarity; Abelas became more accustomed to this new world and began to finally feel more secure in his own skin. As time went by, their friendship grew and before too long they had become more like brothers than that of just friends.

Their bond became so strong that Abelas grew to deeply respect Solas’ in every way. And it showed.

So much so that, not long after he joined Solas, the once-feared, rebel wolf began to trust Abelas with the much more secretive aspects of his life.

It was then that he learned of Sarina’s true significance.

Afterwards, and during the first two years after Corypheus’ death, they had spoken of her often. It was usually about what she, or the Inquisition, was doing most of the time. But there were rare occurrences when they would discuss the more personal aspects of Solas’ feelings towards her.
Though Solas would often use discouraging, self-aiming comments and derisions, to dissuade any ideas that he mourned the loss of her, Abelas had seen such denials so many times in his long life that he could see them for what they truly were. He would watch every heartfelt and regretful memory flitter across the rebel wolf’s mind and with every word spoken of her, Abelas could hear and see the pain hiding just beyond the surface. Solas’ heartache was almost palpable in such moments. His hidden misery, suddenly lain bare for all the world to see. And, Abelas’ heart ached for him.

But, after the Exalted Council, everything Abelas knew of the man suddenly changed.

Solas’ once-open and viscerally real discussions of her, stopped completely. The shift wasn’t a gradual regression back to his normally shut-off self. It was almost immediate. When he had returned, his whole countenance and demeanor had changed. Gone, was the reflective and remorseful man who wished to speak of things unsaid. Of regrets that still lingered. Gone, was the longing and loving heart aching to hold his Vhenan once more. That prayed for a reconnection. Gone, was the lone wolf crying out his misery into the endless stars. His palpable pain.

In its place, stood the very real –and very resolute– rebel wolf.

Solas had never revealed to Abelas what happened between him and Sarina that day, only giving a confirmation that the mission was successful, and that omission had bothered Abelas ever since. For a time, he tried to grant his friend some leniency. Deciding not to question or speak of what happened at the Winter Palace, as a way of showing the wolf some semblance of understanding. But the curiosity lingered. Often plaguing his thoughts at the oddest of times. In his heart he hoped that there would come a time when Solas could speak once again of her but as the days, then months, then years passed, he came to realize that in some way Solas must have taken the opportunity to see her as an opportunity to end the Qunari plot and their joint suffering, all in one fell swoop.

He had closed that chapter of his life, harshly. With finality.

And Abelas mourned the loss.

“Must you continually stare, ma’falon?” questioned Abelas quietly, glancing side-long to the man sitting within reach.

“Not usually.” replied Solas. “But in this case...Ir abelas... I cannot seem to desist.”

“You seem to have fallen into melancholy, as of late, my friend.” explained Solas understandingly. “Perhaps, talking about what concerns or worries you will shed some light upon a solution to whatever it is that is troubling you. I would be willing to listen, should you wish for a sympathetic and attentive ear.”

“And if I were to say that it is you that troubles me most...” he countered. “Would you still want to hear what I have to say?”

“Of course.” answered Solas. “If it is I who has made you so unhappy, I would know of what I have done to make you so. So, that I may remedy it.”

With a deep sigh, Abelas closed his eyes –lost in thought for a few moments.

“Your goals.” Abelas started slowly, eyes opening to stare head-long into the burning campfire before them. “Are they as pure as they seem to be, or are you simply doing all of this...not because of her...but because of your desire to bring back what was once was? Because you’ve found an easier alternative?”
“You’re questioning my intentions?” retorted Solas, in disbelief.

“Among other things, ma’falon.”

“Why?”

“When you first came to me, you were a different person then.” explained Abelas. “Though you were determined to see our people rise once more, you were also a man who had not accepted nor condoned what he had done. In every aspect. You held on to your regret, and spoke of it honestly. Knowing that it was a part of who you were. You longed to change so many things and that longing turned you into a man whose sole purpose was not to repeat the mistakes of your past. Who would no longer deny the truth of who he was...and would one day repair everything he had broken.”

“Including her.” he added breathlessly.

“But then you changed.” he continued. “After the Winter Palace, the Qunari, you closed yourself off. Forgot or ignored everything that had been the man I had come to know and refused to even speak of that which you had lost.”

“For the last three years, I have watched you hid your true self from the world.” he sighed. “Denying that which made you truly happy once, the woman that –to this day– you cannot deny your feelings for. All, in lieu of your goal...”

“And, for a time, I could not understand it. Your sudden change. As the years passed, I learned to accept the man you had become in favor of my own selfish reasons and the desire to never upset the course of events we were putting into motion...”

“But?” prompted Solas.

“But, in all that time I could not deny my own misgivings and doubts.” he continued. “Nor could I assuage the heart within me that worried for you. And her.”

“Mythal once told me that love would only become a burden when you allow it to become so.” he sighed. “And yet, within, those words hinted that such burdens would be inevitable; that, over time, no matter what any of us could do, or say, regret would find its way into all love –twisting it, until it overshadowed that once-pure feeling; if we did not have the strength of will to protect such love with every ounce of ourselves.”

“Before the Winter Palace, you possessed such a strength.” he bemoaned. “But afterward...”

“I had to let her go.” admitted Solas with a deep sigh. “Release her from both the curse of my magic and the curse my love. For her sake, as well as mine.”

“Did you truly believe the love that you shared with the Inquisitor was a just that, a curse?”

“Not upon myself.” Solas admonished. “But upon her.”

“As you saw it, you mean...” Abelas grumbled, as he dropped the hand that had been silently sitting upon his lap down upon the bundle of cloth at his side. “But how did she see it? I wonder. Did you ever think to ask her?”

“What question should I have brought to light, that she had not already answered with voice or action?” Solas countered. “Her intentions were never unclear to me, Abelas. Never.”

“They were always pure.” he sighed softly.
“And yet, you still denied her.” replied Abelas with a counter of his own.

“I had no choice.”

“And you truly believed that?” Abelas questioned with disbelief.

“I did...” sighed Solas painfully. “For, at least, a time.”

“But not now?”

“No. Not now.”

“Does that mean you now want to reclaim that which your heart lost?”

“My desire for the possibility to return to her has never disappeared completely, Abelas.” admitted Solas. “Nor will it ever.”

“In this very aspect, I am the form of the wolf that nature intended.” he mourned woefully. “He who bonds for life. And will long, forever, for it lost Vhenan.”

For some time the two sat in silence, each lost to their own thoughts before Abelas spoke up once more.

“Don’t you fear that...when we do find her, she will do as you had once done to her, and deny you?” questioned Abelas slowly. “That the distance, and time, that has fallen between you has finally become too much to salvage what you once had?”

“Before discovering those ruins in the Sundered Sea, and the Heart of Elvhenan, while having no intentions on pursuing her again at the time, I would have said no. I had sealed away that part of me. And did not want to ever entertain such a belief again.” answered Solas. “But, now...now that there is a possibility to make both the return of Elvhenan and the return of my love come to bear...Yes, I do feel such a fear.”

“But I hope for a chance to atone.” he added. “To prove to her that I can be what she wanted of me and prove to myself that such a life is what I truly deserve. In spite of everything I have done.”

“And that hope is what I now cling to. Like a child hiding from the darkness, I wish for such salvation.”

“I love her still, Abelas.” Solas admonished with longing lacing every syllable. “And I always will.”

“But, will the determination you now feel falter down the road as it has done so many times before?” Abelas intoned. “Will you stay this course, see it to the very end? Or will you once again allow your pride to control and determine your future?”

“This, above all else, is the source of my disillusionment and doubt.”

“I’ve failed at a great many things in my life Abelas, but in this I will not.” answered Solas. “I am willing to pay any price she asks of me. Even if it means sacrificing everything for her, even my life, I will make this right.”

“Then...” sighed Abelas, with a soft smile, as he grabbed the cloth of the bundle lingering quietly under his hand and pulled it to his lap. “If that is truly your commitment, I have something for you.”

Solas watched as Abelas turned his eyes to the bundle in front of him and began to slowly unravel the cloth tied around it. As the fabric fell away, he caught sight of a soft, brown, leather-bound book
nestled between two stacks of bounded parchments. Without a word uttered, Abelas extricated the book, and offered it up to his friend. Taking it, Solas looked down at the unassuming book with curiosity.

“What is it?” he questioned.

“Something that I have kept from you.” replied Abelas regretfully. “Open it.”

Solas, placing the book in his lap, pulled back the front cover and turned the first page.

“To my dearest Vhenan’ara...”

Slamming the book closed before his eyes could fall upon another word, Solas looked at Abelas with a mix of disbelief and anger.

“Where did you get this?” he instantly demanded.

The book had been a gift from Solas to the Inquisitor, a memento to convey his gratitude for her efforts and understanding in trying to save his dearest friend, Wisdom.

“It was found in Crestwood.” replied Abelas with a deep sigh.

“Crestwood!”

“An agent, who had been sent to find the location of the veil markers in the area, stumbled upon it by accident.” he began to explain. “He had been there for weeks, and managed to locate what he was looking for...but as he began his return trip to our stronghold, he came upon the grotto. Wanting to confirm the area was safe before reporting it so, he ventured in to the grotto to investigate. And that’s when he found it.”

“It was left on an altar of sorts. Locked within a heavy-bound iron chest near the water’s edge, surrounded by offerings of dried elfroot bundles splattered with ink and paint, and warded against all intruders with --as the agent put it -- the strongest magical wards and traps he had ever come across.” he concluded. “The agent managed to disarm some of the more known and recognizable traps, enough so that he could extricate the chest without inflicted too much damage upon it or himself, and returned what he found to me.”

Solas’ memory suddenly flickered across his mind, and realization dawned on him.

“That mission was two years ago, Abelas!” he countered angrily.

“Yes.”

“And, yet, you still dared to keep its discovery from me.” Solas accused. “Why?”

“What else could I do?” countered Abelas, his frustration and anger rising to the surface far more quickly than he intended. “But hide it from you, save it for a time when you were willing to accept its existence. Or, would you have rather I’d given it to you at a time when you would have so succinctly ordered me to destroy it without a second thought?”

At Abelas’ accusation, Solas flinched.
His thought process had not been wrong. At the time of its discovery, he would have easily dismissed the book and ordered it to be destroyed. As determined and resolute as he was.

“Now do you understand why I hid it from you?” questioned Abelas. “It was not meant to trick or deceive you my friend, but to help you.”

“As you now hope to one day find peace with your Vhenan, so too did I hope that one day there would come a time where I could give this to you and you would accept it with a thankful heart.”

“Does that mean...that you have read what lies within?” questioned Solas softly.

“I have...”

“And?”

“I learned far more of her than I ever intended.” admitted Abelas.

“What you now hold in your hand...What was once, a gift freely given in gratitude.” he added. “Has become not simply just a book, but something I have not seen created since before the fall of Arlathan.”

“A...Vallas Val.”

“Not possible.” gasped Solas as he looked down upon the tome.

“I assure you it is.” confirmed Abelas. “Mythal’s temple held such creations within its library. Their magical signature is unmistakable. I would recognize it anywhere.”

“But how could she have done such a thing?” questioned Solas in disbelief. “The knowledge that one would have to amass to cast such an enchantment is unfathomable to the people of this time. She was always a quick study, and often times was far more knowledgeable than most of her kin, but this...this is beyond her capabilities. Even with the power of the Well.”

“Then perhaps you did not know her as well as you thought.” admonished Abelas softly. “In fact, I am certain that in many aspects you didn’t. Especially if you saw within her such a disbelief of her abilities.”

“We both had our secrets...” admitted Solas.

“But it was only you who was unwilling to share them.” he cut in, standing up in frustration and turning to the man. “She wanted you to know everything and you never gave her that chance!”

“What makes you so certain? How can you possibly know what she wanted?”

“It’s all there!” he replied, pointing to the book in Solas’ lap. “You need only to read it to know what words, your mistrust of her, silenced within her.”

“Is that what you wish of me?” questioned Solas. “To read her words, relive her memories, to find a better understanding of the woman I thought I knew?”
“It is not my wish...” replied Abelas understandingly. “It’s hers...”

“Fen’Harel ma ’ghilana.”

At Abelas words, the book in Solas’ lap shimmered with a soft green glow for a moment and then, just as quickly as it had manifested, the magic he had seemingly called upon vanished.

“The command phrase?” questioned Solas, with both surprise and pain echoing in his voice, as his eyes instinctively shot from the book before him to his friend.

Abelas simply nodded.

For a moment Abelas said nothing, and then something seemed to snap in place.

“She left it there for us to find.” he informed knowingly. “She knew that one day, either you or one of your agents, would come upon it. That it would find its way into your hands.”

Solas immediately shook his head dismissively.

“If this machination is truly her doing, she would know what significance a spell like this would be to Me.” he replied. “She would not have left it –as you say– for me to find. She would have hidden it.”

“Unless, the very point of it being there, was for it to be found.” countered Abelas. “Deliberately left, specifically, in the one place in all of Thedas that you would not dare to ever look. Unless you chose to do so willingly.”

“It was a test.”

“I believe so.” answered Abelas.

“Instinctively, she must have known that you would not freely return to the grotto under any circumstances other than by choice.” he added knowingly. “And if there came a time when such a choice was finally made by you...that you would choose to willingly confront the haunting memories of your parting once again; she would have your courage rewarded with the truth.”

“All of it.”

“There was always subtlety in her actions...” sighed Solas, sadly, as he absentmindedly ran his hand down the journal’s front cover, in remembrance. “Always a meaning to everything...”

“Will you read it?”

“I...do not know.” sighed Solas deeply.

“You fear what you might learn?”

“More than anything.” he breathed out.

“Then allow me to set your mind at ease, somewhat, my friend.” replied Abelas. “With an
assurance.”

“Though there will be a great many things you’ll certainly learn from that book.” he continued.
“There is one constant within its pages that...never changes.”

“And what is that, exactly?” Solas countered.

“Her love for you.”

After such a declaration, Abelas turned away from his friend and walked away.

“Where are you going?” questioned Solas.

“For a walk...” he replied. “You’ll need some time.”

“I...I thank you for your consideration.” stammered Solas.

“Do not thank me...” he replied. “Instead, just do as I had once done and read the book you now
hold with the same amount of respect and open-mindedness that it deserves. That will be enough for
me.”

“You have my word, Abelas.”

“Good.” he nodded, before resuming his steps.

When Abelas hit the edge of their camp, where the tree line loomed, he made a point to shoot back
one final comment before he left.

“You will owe me an apology after this...” he informed.

“And apology for what?”

“You never told me that Sarina spoke fluent Elvhen.” he answered, before disappearing out of sight.

Suddenly overcome with shock, Solas frantically opened the book in his lap and turned the pages
until he hit the first words written in her hand. And there, staring back at him, was the flourished and
familiar script of his long-since dead civilization. Ancient Arlathian Elvhen.

For a few moments, all Solas could do was stare at the beautifully penned handwriting scrawled
elegantly across the page in pure disbelief.

“Not possible.”

Closing his eyes, Solas tried to shake the sudden wave of uneasiness that echoed in his mind. But no
matter how hard he tried, the feeling lingered. Taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly, he then
tried to push the strange feeling aside in a feeble attempt to banish it to the back of his mind so that he
could think clearly. That tactic seemed to work as he was once again able to focus on the written
page and begin to read the solitary line of prose before him.

“Cry out to me in the lingering darkness, my heart, and know of me.”
For a moment Solas just stared at the words, disbelief flitting across his face, as he contemplated such an instruction. It did not take him long before he realized what it meant.

He would have to call her name out loud, for the Vallas Val to physically show him the memories within.

Placing hand upon the book and the other to his chest, right above his heart, he closed his eyes and called out the name he had not spoken to himself in years.

“Sarina.”

∞∞∞∞∞

Somewhere in Tevinter a cloaked and hooded figure collapsed upon the stone floor of a meager city home without any warning.

“Adora!” a worried man called out.

In an instant, the man was at the figure’s side.

“What is it?”

“What’s wrong?”

The figure said nothing, as they clutched the fabric upon their chest and breathed heavily in pain.

“You must tell me.” the man implored. “What is wrong?”

“My Vallas Val...” declared Sarina softly. “He has found it.”

Chapter End Notes

Elvhen Translation:
Ma’Falon: My friend.
Ir abelas: I’m sorry.
Fen’Harel ma ’ghilana.: Fen’Harel guides you

Vallas val: (constructed) lit. Writing Memory

In this story, a Vallas Val is a book enchanted with the memories of the author and is intrinsically tied to their magic. When the proper command word is spoken, the magic activates; revealing the ability to relive the memories contained within with a nearly real-world, real-time clarity; where the reader sees and feels the memory as if they had actually been there. The reader need only speak the author's name to activate each memory written within.
Tevene Translation:
Adora: (lit.) Love

Secondary Note: All words in bold are immediate translations of Elvhen.

Tertiary Note: Until otherwise specified, all flashbacks from here on will come from the Vallas Val.
The Truth about Dorian. Part 1

Chapter Summary

Solas witnesses the first memory embedded in Sarina's Vallas Val and learns something about her relationship with Dorian he never knew was possible.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The flash of light that enveloped Solas’ mind wasn’t blinding, but muted with an overwhelming sense of comfort, like the manifestation of golden warm sunrise breaking across the horizon on a calm, crisp morning. And, yet, he could not stop the involuntary reaction of closing his eyes. When he finally opened them, he was encased in a cloud of looming darkness. There was no light, no dawn. No sound. No Sarina. Nothing.

For a moment, he had of flash of warning echo across his mind, wondering if the Vallas Val was not, simply, what it was supposed to be, but a trap to lock him in her memories.

It was then that he heard her voice.

“Ar dy ghi’la ma, ma’vhenan.”

I shall guide you, my heart.

At her echoing words, the darkness that had seemed to be eternal only a moment ago, began to fade. Solas watched as the area around him started to slowly lighten with the first beams of sunlight, softly streaking through high windowpanes, as walls dully shimmered into existence all around him. For a moment their appearance was masked in haze his eyes could not quite settle into form, but as they slowly began to solidify he became more and more, acutely, aware of where he was. When his eyes finally focused into utmost clarity he couldn’t help but sigh mournfully.

The Rotunda.

Facing upwards, as the vision fully came to bear, Solas’ eyes recognized the high ceiling of the rookery and Sister Leliana’s ravens perched high above, silently and contentedly sleeping within their cages, instantly. He had spent so much time here under the Inquisition. It was a place so full of memories that he could never forget it even in death. A place of solitude within the walls of Skyhold where he could be himself. A place where guilt melted away in the peacefulness of the early morning and duty disappeared in the stillness of the night.
A place where, for a time, he truly felt at home.

A place he had shared with her.

Vhenan.

Letting out a sigh, he made the mental decision not to let the sins of the past, his wrongdoings, and the guilt that plagued him day by day because of them get the better of him. Sarina’s Vallas Val had a story to tell, and he had given Abelas his oath that he would show each memory the respect they truly deserved. It was not the time to get lost in his own pain.

Scanning the top floor, searching for any sign of movement or non-avian life, he saw no scout or messenger, and no one was mulling about. The only sign of life, he noticed, was the one constant that had ever been upon that top floor besides the ravens; even when its owner wasn’t present: the light of the candle burning upon the top of the Spymaster’s desk.

Letting his eyes fall down to the second floor of the rotunda, he once again scanned for signs of life and, once again, saw nothing. The whole level of the second floor library was dark and completely uninhabited; something that never happened. Whether it was a scout or messenger, just passing through, a random Mage reading up on magical theory, the Inquisition’s animal researcher logging data, the keep’s librarian shelving books, or even a group of seemingly interested—yet disinterested—visiting nobles, getting the grand tour from Ambassador Montilyet, the library had always held some form of life in all the days that he had lived at Skyhold—even at night.

Never once was it every this empty, this quiet, this desolate.

But, now, it was as such and that thought made him far more uneasy than he liked.

Closing his eyes, and dropping his head, Solas tried to clear the worry endeavoring to cloud his mind with a deep, yet unsteady, breath—in hopes that, when he opened his eyes once more he would see at least something of a welcoming sight.

As with all of the written memories that once existed in Elvhenan, there was never a rhyme or reason—or an explicit guideline—of what would be included when it came to their actual creation. What they contained, what they showed their readers, was completely at the discretion of its creator and what they intended to share.

They could be full of truths or full of lies.

Show false memories or true ones.

They could even be, by a powerful enough mage, tampered with—altering the creation’s original truth for some nefarious purpose, giving off the illusion of truth when there was none.

In his heart of hearts, Solas hoped that no such corruption had befallen the memories he was about to bear witness to but he also knew that there was still a slim chance that it could of occurred. And that very thought worried him most of all.

When Abelas had shown him Sarina’s Vallas Val and explained what it truly was, a part of Solas’ heart internally rejoiced at the prospect of finally finding the answers to questions that he never had the heart or courage to give a voice to.

Though he had never been completely truthful with her in all the times they were together; having
differed or omitted key facts; in his own hypocrisy, he felt the lack of her forthrightness like the sting of betrayal in the back of his heart, and his own uncontrollable sense of curiosity had eaten away at him. There was so much he wanted to know. Yet he would not dare to ask.

At first he didn’t want to give levity to her existence, but the more he came to know her the more he had wanted to know of her. But, knowing so much of her would have to come at a price, the price of the truth of his existence that he was not willing to give. So their secrets remained, festering like some dark malevolent spirit on the edge of their consciousness waiting to sow fear and doubt, while they each held back from the brink of ultimate truth and lived a quiet lie of understanding without ever knowing the reality they had mindfully ignored.

Opening his eyes to the first floor of the rotunda with another deep sigh, Solas let his eyes settle on the sight before him.

*His chair, empty, and desk, cluttered with his books.*

The implications of such a scene was not lost on Solas for even one minute.

Turning his head to look around, and take in his former residence, he instantly noticed the walls.

When he had left Skyhold all those years ago, the entire rotunda, save for one panel, had been finished. The paintings, done in his own hand, were meant to be a testament to the Inquisition and to Sarina. To depict and immortalize the story of her survival of the breach and all the heroism she demonstrated over her entire reign as Inquisitor. A parting gift, as it were, for her to remember him after he left.

*But this rotunda was untouched.*

Taking a step, he refocused his eyes on the walls and noticed that there was absolutely nothing. The walls had been re-plastered but not one single brush stroke had ever graced their surface.

The significance of such a sight punched Solas in the chest instantly.

*Right after Haven?*

An ominous feeling came over him then, something he did not want to coherently put into words, as his heart sank deeper in his chest.

Turning more, he took in the rest of the lower level.

Everything that had once resided in the rotunda was in its place as he had left it long ago and nothing seemed out of sorts. His desk and chair resided in the middle room. The sconce of burning Veilfire smoldered quietly upon the north wall. The scaffolding he used when painting was standing quietly on the east wall, and the small sofa that Sarina spent hours enjoying was sitting quietly near the entrance way to the upper levels.
The only thing that seemed truly wrong?

It, too, was empty.

Solas suddenly could not understand why the first memory contained within the Vallas Val had brought him here. To such a place of emptiness. Sarina’s intent had been clear from the very moment he heard Abelas speak the book’s command phrase. It was meant to guide him to truth, her truth. But, so far, everything he had bear witness to made no sense.

It was then that he heard a nearly silent noise echoing outside the rotunda door that led into the Great Hall. Whipping around he stared at the door trying to ascertain the source of the sound, but before he could even tilt his head to try and zone in on any more noises the door suddenly opened.

And, there she was.

With her hair pulled back in her usual style, dressed in a simple pair of skin-tight leggings and a flimsy, white tunic, and bare feet, Sarina strode into the rotunda with her nose buried in a book.

*A sight that Solas had seen many a time.*

For a moment she hovered in the doorway before walking across the room heading for the upper library. When she made it halfway across the room, she stopped for a moment and scanned the rotunda seemingly looking for someone.

“Still in dreams, I see.” she scoffed, with smiling eyes, as her line of sight landed on Solas’ empty desk.

“Always dreaming...” she mumbled, with a nearly disproving shake of her head.

Shrugging her shoulders slightly, she closed the book and resumed her path to the upper floors in silence.

Solas followed.

When Sarina made it to the top of stairs she came to dead stop and tilted her ear to the sky as if listening for something. Solas took that moment to encroach closer to her until his could see above the stairs.

It was then that he realized that the environment in which he was now in was absolutely reactive to said memory’s owner. Now the upper library was full of light of the early morning sun, flittering in through the windows, and a few people were enjoying the quietness and solitude of Skyhold’s beloved library wing.

Solas saddled up to her side and turned to look at her face and instantly noticed that, not only were her eyes closed but her face was practically glowing with both love and mischief.

That’s when he heard it, the tell-tale sound of a book page being turned over, echoing just past the edge of the nearest bookcase. The bookcase that boxed in a small alcove that always held one very particular and infuriating person.
Dorian Pavus.

The mischievous look upon Sarina’s face instantly deepened. With a nearly teasing smirk, she quietly turned and gently placed the book in her hand on an empty shelf, before she painstakingly crept to the edge of the wall as stealthily as she possibly could and peeked around.

Stepping past her, Solas walked further across the library’s landing and immediate caught sight of Dorian. He was laying upon his favorite chaise lounge, tucked in a corner of the small alcove, with his nose stuck in old Tevinter tome discussing the benefits conjuration magic in respect to defense.

*A book that Solas had read just three chapters of and tossed away because of its purely false postulations and rhetorical assumptions.*

It was then that Solas turned his eyes to spy Sarina once more.

Her face was alight with nothing but pure mischief, completely consumed by some errant scheme she had—most likely—just pulled out of thin air.

Crouching down, Sarina took a step and began to creep around the corner of the wall into the alcove. Her eyes transfixed on Dorian’s unaware form, she crept and crept until she was looming at his side near his hips. For a second she just looked at him, stone-still, watching to see if she had been detected. When it seemed she had realized that Dorian had somehow not noticed her lithe form sneaking around him, Sarina pounced.

In one fluid movement she crawled into his lap, straddling his thighs, and reached up to pull down the book in his hand with one long and slender finger. Snapped from his train of thought, Dorian instantly looked up at her.

“Good book?” she questioned in nearly seductive tone.

“No, not at all,” smirked Dorian mischievously, as he immediately tossed the book onto the floor in a dramatic and exasperated fashion, reached out and encircled his arms around Sarina’s waist, and pulled her up to settle right on his hips as he sat up to meet her ascension.

Sarina’s immediately reactive and completely enticed gasp was like a twisting thunderclap of confusion and rage across Solas’ heart.

“What the...?”

Solas could not believe his eyes.

The position they were in, the nearly sexual familiarity between them, looked far too intimate than any behavior he had ever witnessed in the entire time he had known them both.

’Sarina….and Dorian?’

“No, not possible.” he dismissed to himself sharply.

“So what brings my little adora, my little minx, to me on such a beautiful day?” questioned Dorian with a seductive and honeyed tone and a suggestive brow raise. “Has the drudge of political maneuvering and noble kowtowing already become too much?”
Sarina just smiled wickedly.

“Come to grace this poor, deprived, old Vint with your voluptuous and alluring self, then.”

“Yes...” she breathed out almost wantonly.

“And, perhaps, gift him with your very special attention?”

“Would you desire such a thing?” she countered with practically moaning voice that spoke of hidden and private things. “My pet.”

“More than anything, my adora...” breathed out Dorian, his voice as smooth as silk, as he leaned in closer until they were barely a hair’s breadth apart.

“You seemed lonely.” she purred, her voice dripping with intimate and wild promise, as she lifted her hand a pressed it against Dorian’s chest nearly lovingly. “Thought, perhaps, you would wish for a far more pleasantly distracting company than that dusty old tome.”

Tightening his grip, Dorian dropped his hands down to cup her backside and pulled her up higher onto his hips until she was resting upon his most secretive of places, and then leaned in to whisper.

“Enticing little minx.” he accused, breathlessly, nuzzling into her ear, as Sarina snaked both of her arms around the Tevinter’s shoulders and threaded her fingers through his hair.

“Shall we go make a mess of your very inviting little boudoir...” he moaned wantonly before turning his head and moaning pantingly near her ear. “My sweet Adora?”

Solas, standing frozen in place, just stared in complete disbelief as his mind reeled at the realizations that all he knew about Sarina and Dorian’s relationship had been a complete misconception.

He always knew, even when he didn’t want to believe it himself, that Dorian and Sarina had always had a very peculiar bond. An unusual bond.

They, in many aspects, were like two peas in the same pod –even though they were from completely two different worlds. Like twins. They were so close that they did almost everything together. Could understand one another so succinctly that sometimes they even seemed the same person. And often times finished each other sentences as if the very act was as simple as breathing.

But Solas never thought that they could possibly be this close.

For a time, in the beginning, Solas had suspiciously and jealously suspected that Dorian had only befriended her simply because he held some secret desire for her. A desire that inherently stemmed from his life surrounded by the myriad of enticing and alluring Elvhen slaves, which permeated his family estate, as he lived and grew up in Tevinter. That his only reason for being so nice to her had nothing to do with who she really was as a person, or her political influence, but only had been so he may get her into his bed.

Lusting after her like some wild animal on the hunt for a mate.


But, over time, from Solas’ perspective, Dorian had proven that such motivations had not been true
in many ways.

The situation with his father, having been the nail in the proverbial coffin of that very idea, confirming without a doubt the truth of the man’s most guarded secret.

Dorian would never be interested in Sarina as a lover.

Or, at least, so he had thought.

Now he wasn’t so sure.

As Dorian and Sarina sat so close to one another, and for a time whispered things to each other that he could not hear, Solas tried to wrap his head around what he was seeing and think logically. From what he could tell of the time in which this memory looked to have occurred, it had to have happen just after the first confrontation with Corypheus. But what he wasn’t sure was, whether or not this memory came before or after the night he kissed her in the fade for the first time. And that bothered him.

He could not stem the doubt forming in his mind as he postulated scenario after scenario in his head, bitterly.

‘Does this memory come from before the kiss?’

‘If so, did Dorian say or do something in a way that Sarina had felt rejected, so she decided to come on to me instead?’

‘Or did this actually happening after the kiss, after the declaration of her intentions?’

‘Was she involved with both of us? At the same time?’

That question, above all else, made him shiver in disbelief.

Shaking his head, in hope to disparage the cacophony of deprecating thoughts mulling around his confused mind, Solas reminded himself of his promise to Abelas.

‘I must not jump to conclusions.’ he thought.

Sighing deeply, willing himself to stay calm, he refocused his eyes upon the couple just in time to hear Dorian’s next word.

“Bese Adora.” he breathed out in Tevene, his nose buried deep in her ear.

“Fenedhis Dorian!” groaned Sarina exasperatingly, as she instantly and reactively pushed herself back from the man and swatted his arm playfully.

“What?”

Reaching up with her hand, Sarina irritably rubbed her ear.

“I told you not to do that!” she grumbled. “You know what it does to me.”
Dorian just laughed, falling back against the little sofa’s head rest completely amused.

“If you’re going to play the Game, you could at least play fair!” she accused. “That’s cheating.”

“All’s fair in seduction and war, Sari.” Dorian chuckled.

“Dorian.” she chided.

“What?” he questioned, in mock innocence. “That’s the point of such a tactic, is it not?”

“To use seduction to mirror a sense of false safety, to allow your opponent to believe you are not only trustworthy but want them so implicitly and uninhibitedly that they will drop their guard, simply so you can learn their weaknesses. Whether it be for sexual aspirations or of political use. Using every word, every turn of phrase, every intonation of your voice, every mannerism, every bat of your eyelashes, or lingering gentle touches, all to your advantage, so you may turn it against them when the proper opportunity presents itself? To elicited the very reaction you intend? Or consequence you aspire to?”

With Dorian’s little oratory, everything suddenly made sense to Solas.

*Dorian was teaching Sarina the art of seduction.*

Sarina nodded in acquiescence.

“So,” questioned Sarina playfully. “How did I do this time?”

“Was I convincing?”

“Very.” smiled Dorian. “I would even venture to assert that your skills have improved, so extensively and in such a short time, that you will definitely excel even in Tevinter. With your skill, I have no doubt that you could have the entire Magisterium twisted around your little finger in a matter of hours, if you so choose. Begging like little lost puppies. And they would love you for it.”

Sarina giggled.

It was then that Dorian seemed to sense a pair of eyes on him. He looked up and caught the sight of a Mage sitting in an alcove on the other side of the library wing looking at them both.

“But, it looks like it’s time we end our lesson for today,” he warned. “Lest we add more fuel to the fire that is the rumors of us.”

“We have an audience,” he added conspiratorially.

“Let them assume what they will.” Sarina dismissed with a wave of her hand, not even bothering to look over her shoulder at who was watching them. “I don’t care what they think.”

“I wonder if you would say such a thing if it was your little hobo apostate who was watching?” countered Dorian, knowingly.

*Little Hobo Apostate.*

Solas saw the exact moment when Sarina’s smiling face fell and her head bowed.
“What is this?” questioned Dorian worriedly, he –too – catching the sudden shift in her composure, as he extended his arm and tilted her face back up. “Sari...”

For a moment Dorian just looked at her, trying to gauge what was wrong, and Solas could not miss the very moment when realization suddenly hit the man.

“He’s still hesitating?” Dorian questioned, before dropping his hand and sighing dramatically. “Typical.”

“You know, I thought I had that man pegged. That I understood him, at least a bit.” grumbled Dorian. “But I never pegged him to be such an arrogant and uncaring fool.”

“Has he said anything?” questioned Dorian. “Anything at all?”

“Nothing.” Sarina bemoaned.

“The damnable fool.” cursed Dorian under his breath.

“I don’t understand it Dorian.” Sarina supplied. “I know I made my interest and intention clear. And I thought, after the kiss at least, that he understood how I felt.”

After the kiss...

“That he felt the same way too...But...I don’t know.”

“He asked for time to consider what I was offering, time to consider his options...And I said ok...but...”

“What an ass!” Dorian grumbled. “There should be no need for such a thing. He either likes you or he doesn’t, it’s as simple as that.”

“It’s been over a week.” sighed Sarina, brokenly. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Do nothing.” declared Dorian. “If that insufferable hedge-mage is too damn stupid to realize what you could be to him, or even how you truly feel about him, then he doesn’t deserve you anyway.”

“Dorian...” Sarina chided.

“Don’t ‘Dorian’ me,” he countered. “You know I’m right. He walks around here like he’s better than everyone else, looks down at people as if they have the intellect of pond scum...that they are without meaning...without any worth...useless and so beneath him he wouldn’t piss on them even if they were on fire....”

“Sounds a lot like a Tevinter I know...” she shot back, with an air of playfulness and derisiveness lacing her tone.

“Hey, I might be an arrogant prick sometimes...but I’m not that bad. At least I have some humility and respect for people’s lives!”

“Besides...That’s not the point, Sari.” he countered. “It’s the fact that he is all that, and –unlike me– plays with your affection like it’s some dam toy...That he has the audacity to simply brush off the feelings of the one person who not only has the power to keep him safe from the Chantry, and Templars, and the Venatori, and this Elder One...but who has also loved him from the very moment they first met?”

’Loved me from the very moment we first met?’
That statement hit Solas dead in the chest.

“Don’t blame him, Dorian,” she replied.

“Why not?” he countered. “Solas is the one who is making what should be something simple, overly complicated for absolutely no reason.”

“It’s not his fault,” she answered. “It’s me.”

“There’s something wrong with me,” she explained. “I’m just not good enough. I...”

_Solas had never seen Dorian move so fast in his life._

The Tevinter immediately shot up, grabbed Sarina by the face, and planted a kiss on her lips without a second thought. Silencing her.

Sarina froze.

For a moment, the still, unbelievably chaste kiss lingered, before Dorian pulled back with a sigh.

“Don’t. Don’t you dare...” he warned, his hands still cupping her face as he looked her in eyes. “Don’t ever say that again.”

“You are an extraordinary woman Sarina.” he offered. “And there isn’t a man or woman within these walls who would not sacrifice everything they had for the opportunity to stand at your side. To protect you.”

“To be loved by you.”

“Bull...Blackwall...Cullen...especially Cullen...hell, even Sera and Varric in their own way...not to mention half the soldiers within your command...They would all do anything you asked of them for such a chance. Such a gift.” sighed Dorian. “So don’t sit here and say that there is something wrong with you. Because, there’s not.”

“You are perfect just the way you are,” he added. “And if that damnable hobo can’t see that, then it is he who is the fool. Not you.”

When Sarina sighed, seemingly in understanding, Dorian fell back against the headrest once more.

“Does such a list...include you as well?” she questioned, in a nearly-inaudible voice, after a few moments of silence fell between them.

As that softly spoken question fell into existence, Solas couldn’t help but hold his breath.

_Did Dorian love her, as the others once did?_

Dorian chuckled dismissively.

The look on Sarina’s face, which had been lifted up by Dorian’s very caring review of her desirability just moments ago, fell once more.

When he did not answer her, she let out a huff and immediately tried to climb out of his lap. But, before she could move even a couple of inches, he grabbed her upper thigh and stilled her.

“Alright...Fine...Ok,” he admitted finally. “Yes, that includes me as well.”
“Is that what you need to hear?” he countered. “For me to admit...That even I, the one person in all of Thedas who has a real reason to bury his feelings, is still tempted every single day? That, above all else, I’ve become something that I never thought I could. That I can still find myself attracted to someone who I thought would never appeal to me? All because of you?”

“I tempt you?” she questioned.

“More than you will ever know,” he replied with a deep sigh.

“But, even so, I know what that really means in the grand scheme of things. And, in the end, my feelings in that area are completely meaningless.”

“Meaningless?” she countered. “Why?”

“Because.” he answered, reaching up to place a hand over her heart. “This, your heart, knows what it wants. Has chosen its fate. And it doesn’t include me.”

“But...It...”

“I know...” he cut in, holding his hand up to still her impending rebuttal. “That there’s a small place reserved there just for me, just as there is a small place for each and every one of us you hold dear...And that, no matter what happens, you will love us as you do now, forever. But, I also know – just as Cullen, Blackwall, Bull, and the others instinctively know– that the person who takes up the majority of your heart can never be, nor will ever be, us.”

“You love who you love, my beautiful little minx,” he concluded knowingly. “And that’s the way it should be.”

“Does...our game...?” she mumbled.

“Cause me harm?” he answered. “No. Nor do the looks you give Solas when you think no one is watching or the way you speak to him with such love in your voice. Because, above all else, I know what we are. And how you truly feel about me.”

“What I want, what we want, for you, is not to simply own your heart and all of your love. It is your happiness we seek the most. We want to you to be happy, because we love you. Not the other way around. And if that means that we each must stand down, and let you be with someone else. We will gladly do so. If that is what it truly takes to makes you happy.”

“What I want, what we want, for you, is not to simply own your heart and all of your love. It is your happiness we seek the most. We want to you to be happy, because we love you. Not the other way around. And if that means that we each must stand down, and let you be with someone else. We will gladly do so. If that is what it truly takes to makes you happy.”

“Does loving Solas make you happy?” he questioned.

Sarina immediately nodded.

“Then that’s all that matters.”

“Thank you, Dorian.” she smiled.

“Do not thank me, Sari...for what I do is not for your gratitude but because I cannot bear to see you unhappy. Watching you being surrounded by so much death and tragedy is hard enough to bear, knowing the suffering your kind heart has had to endure and will endure, simply because of all of this.”

“Above anything else, you will at least have some solace in this life where no other can. That is our vow, a gift freely given with hope, love, and understanding, to make your days easier in a time when you will most likely have to sacrifice everything for the greater good.”
“It’s the least we can do.”

In that moment, the vision shimmered and then flared into a bright flash of light. When Solas’ opened his eyes once more he was sitting in front of the fire at their campsite staring down at the pages of Sarina’s Vallas Val. For a second, he felt somewhat disoriented but as his mind refocused from the memory he caught a strange shimmer echo across the page. Solas watched as the magic that washed across the page deliberately erased the words ‘Cry out to me in the lingering darkness, my heart, and know of Me.’ written in Elvhen, and replaced them with an entire page of script written in Sarina’s own hand.

Taking a deep breath, Solas began to read.

“Dorian lied to me that day.

It was a gentle lie, but a lie all the same.

Our game was never just a game.

Not to him.

Never to him.

Even when I had learned all that he could teach me, he kept up the artifice of the game anyway. Not because he wanted me to keep practicing but because our time spent playing the game had become the only salve to his mourning heart. A heart that mourned of what could not be.

It may have taken him some time to truly understand how he really felt but he knew from the very moment we met that he cared for me.

As I cared for him.

What happened in Redcliff...it changed us...what we should have been...what he had originally intended...what I had intended...what he had thought....what I had thought...what we felt.

It changed everything.

Everything.

When we were in the future, he saw the fate of Thedas –what Alexius would do, and the guilt of knowing that he had a hand in such destruction, had affected him greatly.

Because of that guilt, we became far closer than either of us had expected.

For a while, we did not even realize we had created such an unspoken bond...until...I came upon that cell in Redcliff’s dungeon.

When we found you in that terrible future, when I witnessed what would happen to you if I were to fail...the red lyrium corrupting you, your body and mind slowly wasting away, wallowing in uncontrollable despair, locked away forever to die in misery, alone...Dorian realize my truest regret, as he watched my face cripple in heartbreak and guilt and held me as I sobbed for the very first time in my entire life.
And it pained him deeply.

At that moment, he wanted to do everything he could to make me smile again. To take away the pain that such a future put upon me. And give me the life I wanted more than anything.

So, he did all he could so that I could have back the second chance that such a terrible future had taken from me.

It was an admirable thing, his empathy, caring, and understanding...

Traits that you so often times said he did not possess.

And his love for me, then as it still remains now, was always heartfelt and true.

Had Dorian and I met in some other intangible way, I do not doubt that our relationship would have been different. And, even now, I have no doubt that if I had been born differently, the relationship I had with Dorian would have taken a path that would have led to the future as lovers.

A sentiment that he too mirrored to me on several occasions – lamenting the loss.

However, since that was not the case, with him knowing how much I loved you, we both dealt with how he felt as best we could.

But, what I could not freely give him, did not deter the sincerity of his heart.

From the moment Dorian came to the Inquisition, until this very day, he is, was, and will always be my closest friend and confidant. He, above all others, was the one person I could be my true self with.

The one person I trusted implicitly, with everything.

He was a person who I could tell all my worries and fears to. A person that would always be by my side through everything.

He was not only my comrade-in-arms, but in many ways, my mother, my father, my brother, my lover, and my best friend, all in one.

Ma Nas’falon.

And...He carried the responsibility of such roles proudly, determined to do anything he could to make me happy.

Even when that meant he had to fill the voids in my life that you created, with and without malice. The voids left in your wake that you were unwilling to fill on your own. And bear the brunt of my pain caused by you.

I do not tell you this to hurt you, ma’vhenan. To twist the knife.

Only so that you can understand why, in the end, I ultimately chose such a complicated and endearing friend.

For he was a silver-tongued devil that manage to slink his way around my heart and protect me when no other would.

He became a source of strength that guided me on days and nights where all seemed to be lost. He gave me advice, when I asked of it. He gave me knowledge when I needed it. He gave hope when I
could not find it, courage when all that I’d possessed had faltered. He gave me determination when I was unsure and peace when I felt lost. Comfort when I could find none and love when I needed it most.

He took your place...filled your shoes.

Not just because of me, but because...in the end...he knew that you would want him to.

Because he loved me.

And... Because...

You loved me, too.

Sarina Revelana

Lavellan

Wintermarch, 9:45 Dragon”

“13th day of Wintermarch, 9:45 Dragon...” Solas muttered out loud. “Late winter, two years ago.”

“Yes.” came Abelas voice.

Solas looked up from the book and turned around to see the man leaning against a tree a few feet behind him with his arms crossed across his chest.

“Barely a year after the Exalted Council ended.”

“So it would seem,” replied Abelas.

“That doesn’t seem right.” sighed Solas.

“How many memories are there?” he asked, a moment later.

“Teleolasan. I do not know.”

“But...you said you’ve read it.”

“And I have...” Abelas replied. “But that does not mean that her Vallas Val showed me everything that was intended for you, now does it?”

“You believe that the book is different depending on who reads it? That the spell put upon it has some special type of recognition engrained within it, somehow, and reacts to the reader’s voice?”

“Yes.”

“What makes you think that?”
“That page...her explanation of the memory....the one you just read.”

“What of it?” Solas countered.

“It never appeared for me.” sighed Abelas.

“Not even once.”

“Not even once?” repeated Solas. “Just how many times have you actually read her Vallas Val and leafed through her memories, Abelas?”

“Far too many time to put a number on, ma’falon.” he sighed sadly, with a deep solemnity lacing his every distressed syllable. “Far too many.”

Chapter End Notes

Elvhen Translation:
Ar dy ghi’la ma, ma’vhenan: I shall guide you, my heart.
Vhenan: Heart
Fenehdis: (lit.) wolf cock. Used as and explicative like shit or damn!
Ma Nas’falon: my soul mate
Teleolasan: I don’t know.
Ma’falon: My Friend

Tevene Translation:
Adora: Love
Bese Adora: (constructed) I love you.
Dreaded Dragon's Fire Pt. 1

Chapter Summary

Abelas and Solas fall into dreams after the Vallas Val's first memory. Abelas encounters someone he had not expected to see again, while Solas relives one of the most painful moments of his life during his time in Inquisition.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With the realization that what he knew of Sarina wasn’t but a tenth of the real her, settling in, Solas closed the book in his hands and sighed in resignation.

“We should get some rest.” he breathed out.

“As you wish,” replied Abelas.

Settling into their bed rolls, they each turned from the burning fire between them and drifted off to dreams with thoughts of her mulling around in both of their heads.

Some hours later, Abelas awoke in his dream to find himself standing in a very familiar place.

A place that he had seen so many times in his dreams, within the last year, that he knew its significance without even a thought.

A lonely and unused path of dirt, surrounded by a dark and foreboding forest; where thick underbrush, and sleeping flora, filled in the spaces between ancient and towering trees like a bulwark of defensive greenery barring all who wish to stray from the path; stretched out before him under a silently-still, and clear, star-filled sky.

With a deep sigh of resignation, Abelas nodded to himself only once and followed the path as he had done so many times before. For a time, nothing changed –just the ever-present forest passing from his field of vision with every step, as he ventured deeper and deeper into the dream. After what seemed like hours, he finally saw on the horizon the destination that he had known would be waiting for him.

When he eventually stepped into the small clearing, a quiet glade untouched by most of the world, he immediately noticed the bright midsummer moon glowing high in the sky and how it seemed to illuminate every aspect of the area.

‘Just as I remembered’ he thought.

Suddenly the sound of an echoing and ethereal giggle reverberated through the clearing catching his attention. Turning to the sound, Abelas spotted a familiar form.
Solas, dressed in dark blue mage robes, was sitting underneath a large tree at the edge of the surrounding forest; with a book in his hand; and reading a story out loud with an uncharacteristically elated smile on his face. Beside him, on both sides, sat two small forms. The first, a young boy—perhaps five or six moons old—sitting cross-legged in the grass, was watching Solas’ face and intently listening to his words. While the second, a slightly older young girl—perhaps seven or eight moons old—leaned contentedly against Solas’ shoulder, with her eyes closed, and slept peacefully.

Though the scene before him had been one he had witnessed many times over the past months, Abelas could not stop himself from crouching down and watching it play out before him once again. Solas, surrounding by his children: content, fulfilled, happy, and finally at peace with the world, looked so unlike the man that he had known for years that the stark differences were like night and day. Gone was the need for absolution. Gone was the desire to undo everything he had wrought. And gone was the regret that forever shadowed the man that wanted so much more out of life than he would ever allow himself to have.

It was a picture-perfect existence, a dreamlike future without fear or sorrow, that Abelas truly hoped would come true for his dearest friend one day.

"Abelas..."

Standing slowly, he let out a deep sigh before turning towards the person that had called his name—the person he knew would be standing behind him.

Dressed in a simple, emerald green full-length Dalish gown, with her long beautiful white hair unbound and flowing in the gentle breeze, the owner of the dream stood with a soft frown upon her face and both her arms crossed over her chest in disapproval.

Sarina.

“You’ve broken your word, Abelas.” she accused angrily. “You promised you would never come to me here, again.”

“Ir abelas...” he apologized, immediately taking a knee and bowing his head. “It was unintentional, my lady.”

“When I allowed my Vallas Val to teach you the truth of my family and our ways of dreaming, it was under the agreement that you would never use such a gift against me...” she countered. “Yet, here you are...once again...trespassing into my fondest memory, uninvited!”

“Why?!?” she demanded.

“...I was thinking about you before I fell into dreams...” replied Abelas apologetically. “It must have been enough to bring me here.”

“And why were you thinking about me so strongly?” she countered again. “When I specifically told you never to do so when in his presence!”

“Anything you dream of can be a target for Fen’Harel, Abelas. Anything.” she ground out. “He is strong enough to be compelled into any dream if he so wished. You could have brought him here,
and never even known it until it was too late!"

“He will be lost in his own dreams tonight.” explained Abelas. “He will not sense you here.”

“How can you be so certain?”

“He witnessed the first memory tonight.” he informed. “I have no doubt that he will be pouring over it in his dreams till daybreak.”

“Then, its true...” she sighed. “You gave it to him.”

“Yes.”

“Why, in all of Thedas, would you do such a thing?” she questioned. “I told you...You know he is not ready.”

“I begged to differ, ma’falon.” countered Abelas, as he stood and looked her in the eye. “His world has been upended as you predicted. His thoughts have shifted from where they once roamed and now center on you.”

“And, thanks to Cole’s intervention, he has finally realized that the future he wishes to bring to bear cannot be done without you...”

“Or the guardians.”

Immediately, Sarina reached up and snapped her fingers together. In an instant an uncontrollable and gut-wrenching pain echoed across Abelas’ chest making him kneel involuntarily.

“You will not speak of them here!” she ordered angrily.

“To speak of them in dreams, gives them reason to manifest themselves.” she spoke coldly. “And I will not have them invade such a holy place. Not now. Not ever!”

It was then that the pain that had nearly caused him to collapse completely, dissipated as fast as it appeared; as Sarina waved her hand dismissively.

He knew why she had done it. Made him submit. It was a punishment for speaking of those that nearly pained her heart as much as the thought of Solas did and a reminder of his oath.

“Forgive me.” he begged softly. “I know how hard it is for you to be in two places at once. To maintain this sanctuary...I did not mean to put the memory of this place...or you, in danger...”

“I know...” she sighed as she turned her attention from him to that of the dream wistfully.

For a few moments, no one spoke, as she watched Solas reading a story to the children that looked so much like them both – fondness on her face quickly erasing the anger that had been there just moments ago.

“Is he well?”

“He worries for you.” he replied. “Confounded by your prison, and lost to what he must do to free you.”
“Does he know?” she questioned.

“That the knowledge of how to set you free is contained in the Vallas Val...?” he countered. “Or that you can end all of this at any moment, if you so choose?”

Sarina nodded.

“No, he does not,” Abelas answered. “Good.”

“I still do not understand why you are so insistent that he be kept in the dark, until the most opportune moment.”

“If the point of all of this is to end the turmoil between you two, save The People and all of Thedas, and re-form the path that leads you both to this future...” Abelas question as he motioned to the vision of Solas and his children. “Why not tell him how to end all of this now?”

“Because that is not the way this must go.” she answered. “For him to be finally be free of all that has kept him from this path, he must realize the truth that he has for so long ignored. It must be his choice, Abelas. One he makes of his own free will. And until that time comes, he must suffer from his own decisions that keep the future he deserves forever out of his reach.”

“And, until then...” he ventured. “You will willingly endure your prison?”

“In that...I have no choice.”

“I know what haunts me Abelas.” she admitted. “I could banish its influence, destroy the prison it has created without a care, and free myself to live in this world as I once did. But that would upset the balance, the natural order of things. And call upon forces that would wreak havoc across all of Thedas, in its wake.”

“To do such would be condemning this world to the future that leaves the waking world in chaos and the land of dreams tainted beyond all recognition.”

“I cannot do that.” she sighed.

“Even if that means you could lose your life?” he questioned.

“Yes.” she nodded.

“Do you even understand what you are saying right now, my lady? The consequences...” he probed. “Do you have any idea of what he would ultimately do should you perish? Should anything or anyone take your life...The destruction he would cause...the wrathfulness of his revenge...”

Sarina didn’t answer.

“He would...” Abelas sighed.

“It will not come to that, little sorrow.” she interrupted.

“How can you be so sure?” he countered.

“Because no justice can be sought...” she replied, turning to Abelas knowingly. “Against the one who takes my life, if my murderer is my own hand.”
“You would end your own existence?”

“To protect him from himself...?” she answered. “Always.”

“I would rather die, than allow him to become something far worse than Pride.”

“Vengeance.”

“Yes.”

For a moment the conversation lulled, each lost in thought of all that had been discussed, until Abelas spoke up once more.

“Are you still safe?”

“Does your wolf still stay by your side, in the waking, at least?” he questioned. “Does he still protect you?”

“He does.” she answered with a sigh. “Though I fear that my path makes him wearier by the day.”

“You’re worried for him?” he asked. “That he will not be able to endure much longer?”

“No.” she dismissed. “My fen’lin will not falter in his duty...”

“He will die protecting me, if he must.” she sighed. “But what I fear is not his death...but...”

“What he will do when the need for his service ends?” he finished for her.

She nodded.

“His hatred of Fen’Harel is strong,” she admitted. “He’s seen what I have endured over these last few years, and knows what I will suffer...simply because of the Dread Wolf...and in his heart...the heart that secretly loves me...he dreams of the day he can set me free, permanently.”

“By killing Solas.” Abelas interrupted.

“Yes.” she answered. “Even though he knows I will never allow him to do so. That I will kill him if he even tries.”

“And I fear that such a day will come.” she sighed. “That I will have to choose between the wolf at my side and the wolf that should have been at my side all along.”

“He has been tormenting Solas in his dreams.” Abelas deadpanned.

“But, you already knew that didn’t you?”

“I did...” she sighed.

“His sense of justice, his hatred for Fen’Harel, and his desire to protect me...drives him to such machinations.” she explained. “He’s sees the Dread Wolf as more than just an enemy or a rival. He is a monster hell-bent on enslaving everything I know and love for his own gains. He can see
nothing more than an evil and manipulating Evanuris who dares to lust after a mortal who he
doesn’t not deserve, and —in his eyes— will never have. Not as long as he still draws breath.”

“Are you safe with him?” Abelas asked worriedly.

“As safe as I can be with a Guardian of Bellanaris stalking my footsteps.” she replied. “So long as
Fen’Harel does not appear before me in the waking, that is.”

“And when he finally does?”

“Then, it is then, that I will have to deal with my beholden little wolf on my own terms.”

“But, enough of this...” she dismissed, waving her hand towards the dream version of Solas.

In that instant, the vision faded leaving behind just the empty and desolate plane of the fade
surrounding the manifestation of Sarina’s prison and the white wolf guarding over its existence.

Turning to Sarina, Abelas sighed.

“What are your orders?” he questioned. “What do wish of me, ma’falon?”

“Keep him on the path...” she answered. “Keep your connection to me unknown to him, and do not
seek me out again.”

“It is a long journey.” countered Abelas. “Will you not speak of where you are in the waking?”

“It is best that he find me on his own,” she answered. “For the searching is part of the path he must
take.”

“Do what I have asked of you little sorrow...” she added with a wistful smile. “And I promise that
this will end sooner than you think.”

“Ma nuvenin.” bowed Abelas in acquiescence.

Abelas woke with a start, his eyes opening up to the quiet night sky above him, as his heart filled
with a mix of both dread and hope. Turning on his side, he looked upon Solas’ sleeping form to see
the man clutching Sarina’s Vallas Val to his chest and unconsciously frowning.

It was at that moment that Abelas noticed the flash of magic echo from the Vallas Val’s pages.

Solas opened his eyes to find himself standing in the fade outside the barring walls of Sarina’s
prison. Everything was silent for a split second before he caught sight of two spirits standing side by
side just yards from where the white wolf slept. He turned to them, and looked upon them for only a
moment before the taller of the two vanished as if it had been blinked out of existence in an instant.
The second, seemingly smaller and more demure, lingered for only a moment before turning in
Solas’ direction and looking at him.

The spirit seemed to take in Solas’ full form for only a moment before fluttering almost in
recognition.
Finding the spirit’s reaction encouraging, Solas ventured towards it with a faint hope that the spirit had appeared to give him some sort of guidance rather than to cause him harm.

Stopping only a few steps from where the spirit lingered, Solas looked it over more closely for a moment—trying to ascertain if it was a spirit he had come across before. When no recognition dawned upon him, he placed his hand on his chest and bowed respectfully.

A greeting he had always used when meeting a new spirit for the first time.

Straightening himself, the need to wait for a reaction was dismissed immediately as the spirit mirrored his motion with understanding.

“Greetings, I am...” Solas ventured before being stopped by the spirit with the raise of its partially formed hand—hushing him immediately.

It was then that Solas noticed it, movement out of the corner of his eye. Turning quickly to it, he immediately caught sight of the white wolf standing from its refuge of ice and snow and leveling a threatening gaze at him with a vicious growl. Coming to its full height, the wolf took a step—determined to advance upon him as the unwanted intruder that he was.

Solas reactively took a step back in defense to the wolf’s movements and never saw the reaction of the spirit until it was nearly obvious. In a matter of seconds the spirit darted out in front of Solas, hovering between him and the wolf, and stretched both its hands out in opposite directions. Motioning them both, almost commandingly, to stop.

“Venavis.” came an eerie effeminate voice that wavered and echoed like thousands of separate voices all at once. “Fen’amelan!”

‘Guardian Wolf.’

Immediately the white wolf complied; with a nearly inaudible whimpered protest; stepping back from Solas and sitting down on his haunches like a loyal and obedient thrall bound by the command of its master.

With the white wolf’s acquiescence assured, the spirit dropped its arms and turned once again to Solas.

“What are you?” questioned Solas tentatively.

He could not understand how a seemingly innocuous spirit could have the power to control a Guardian of Bellanaris in such a manner. Nor how it could possibly even know that it would need to intervene in the first place.

The spirit did not answer, only continued to look upon him in what seemed like fascination, or curiosity, for a few moments, before coming closer to him. When it finally ceased its forward movement and stopped completely, it hovered quietly, just within arm’s reach of him, and tilted its head as if scrutinizing Solas’ very existence.
“You are searching, yes?” it questioned in its resonating and multifaceted voice. “You have lost your way, and seek to find the path?”

“You have lost your way, and seek to find the path?”

“Yes...” Solas nodded.

“The path you seek leads through the past, not the present. Little Wolf.” it replied. “For this is not the beginning, but its ending.”

“It's ending?” questioned Solas, confused by the spirit’s words.

“Seek the place overshadowed by pride...through the path of the past tainted by secrets...and you will find the one that awaits your saving grace deep within the lingering darkness of despair's binding grasp.”

When the spirit's final words fell from its intangible mouth, it reached out and touched Solas’ cheek for only a moment before reaching up and pressing two fingers upon his forehead, right between his eyes. Instantly, Solas’ world was encased in a flash of blinding white light. Flinching from the brightness, he closed his eyes for only a moment and then opened them to find that everything had changed.

He was no longer standing in the desolate planes of the fade, but lying down and staring up at a clear blue sky. For a moment, his mind reeled at the spirit’s words and he couldn’t grasp a single coherent thought. None of his interactions with any spirit in his entire life had been as what he had just experienced.

And no simple spirit, in all of creation, had the ability to practically snatch him out of the raw fade and exile him to one of his own dreams.

For it took only a moment more, and the beautiful visage that was Sarina appearing above him with a smile, for him to realize exactly what memory he now found himself in.

Solas’ heart immediately sank.

“Get up, sleepy head.” chuckled Sarina playfully as she hovered above him with an amused look on her face. “It’s already past dawn.”

‘The day we fought the Fereldan Frostback.’

They had been in the Hinterlands for just over a week when Scout Harding had brought them the news of a dragon terrorizing farmers and travelers heading north from the crossroads to Redcliff. The report spoke of groups of refugees being beset upon by a large dragon that would scatter their bands like frightened children, raze carts to the ground, and scoop up tethered livestock and plow horses without a care. The reports from local farmers were just as terrifying, stories of the dragon gutting...
whole herds of goats, sheep, cows, and druffalo like they were its own personal dining hall, burning houses for the apparent joy of it, and killing at least three farm hands and four Inquisition soldiers in the process.

“Time for some dragon slaying...” called out Bull from a short distance away. “Anan!”

Victory.

“Meravas!” shouted Sarina with an adamantly playful tone.

So shall it be...

“Your pronunciation is terrible, boss,” Bull chuckled.

“Parshaara,” mumbled Solas, leaning up on his elbows. “Enough.”

Sarina instantly raised a curious brow.

“But his...is getting better,” added Bull with another chuckle.

“But!” she countered.

“What?” he questioned, with a teasing shrug of his massive shoulders. “It’s true.”

“Fine. Whatever.” she dismissed before reaching down and patting Solas on his shoulder. “Let’s get moving.”

The Frostback was just as massive and as vicious as he remembered.

Bull and Blackwall had charged the second the monster of claw and fire touched the ground, screaming out in tandem an adamant battle cry, and hacked through scaled flesh and bone with the fervor of the greatest warriors Thedas had ever seen. Solas and Sarina had fallen back to a distance, pelting the creature with every spell at their disposal and trying their very best to protect them all, as Harding and several of the Inquisition’s scouts darts it with arrows from atop a narrow ledge above them.

The battle was grueling. With every fiery blast from its hellish breath, the swipe of its massive tail, a rake of its vicious claws, snap of its razor sharp teeth, and bellowing calls; so loud that it stunned the mind; death encroached closer and closer to their end like an inevitability.

Solas remembered the fear he had felt, in that moment, at the possibility that everything they had worked for –everything they had endured– could end at any moment. That their existence, her existence, would be snuffed out due to her own dedication to protect others. That she would die because of what he hadn’t had the strength to prevent.

Suddenly, Bull cleaved a heavy blow, catching the dragon right under the joint of its right, weight-bearing, leg and the tide of battle shifted in their favor. The creature immediately stumbled, collapsing to the ground with an enraged cry, bearing its soft and vulnerable underbelly to all the world. Sarina and her team instantly capitalize with her and Solas pelting the dragon’s face with strong frost spells meant to blind as Bull and Blackwall hacked and slashed vindictively.

What happened next, seconds before the dragon faded into the unrelenting darkness of death was something that Solas had not seen coming back then. But Sarina had.
With one desperate act left within its waning life, the dragon drew in a deep breath and roared out a screaming stream of deadly dragon’s fire at Solas and Sarina. With mana drained and energy depleted, Solas thought that his moment of death had finally come for him. Nearly resigning himself to his fate, he closed his eyes and accepted what to come only to feel the snap of Sarina’s barrier clamp around him and someone knocking him out of the way, mere seconds before the breath of fiery flame hit him.

He hit the ground hard, rolling over a couple of times, before righting himself up again. His eyes immediately refocused on the dragon, catching the very second it collapsed dead upon the ground, before turning to see who had deliberately saved his life.

And standing there, leaning heavily on her staff and breathing hard, was Sarina smiling triumphantly.

“Anan!” yelled Bull, completely pleased with the day’s goings-on, as he turned to look at them both.

“Anan.” Sarina mirrored, pain lacing her words so succinctly that Solas’ heart dropped into the pit his stomach in an instant.

“Lethallan?” he called out worriedly.

At Solas’ words, Sarina unceremoniously collapsed; falling down to the ground like a bolder falling off a high cliff; and fell unconscious.

“Boss!” screamed Bull.

The group immediately clamored to her side, fear thrumming through their hearts like stampeding drafufluo, as they each tried to see what was wrong. By the time Solas had managed to get to her, a half step slower than the hulking Qunari, the source of her distress was painfully clear. There, like a massive rift in her skin, sat the tell-tale simmering burn of weaponized dragon’s fire eating through her armor.

She had saved Solas from death but at a price. She’d been hit in the process.

‘No...’ begged Solas in his mind. ‘Not like this.’

Gathering what little strength he still possessed, calling upon every ounce of will he could muster, Solas dropped to his knees and poured all of his magic into Sarina’s body –begging the wound to heal. For the first few seconds, it seemed that Solas’ magic was having some effect but it wasn’t long until he began to feel the strength and severity of the injury pushing back against him.

“STOP!” came a screaming voice.

Solas snuffed out his cast and looked up to see Scout Harding running towards them.

“Magic won’t heal that!” she argued, coming up to Sarina’s limp form and practically pushing Blackwall out of the way in the process.

“What are you talking about?” countered Bull angrily.

“Magic alone can’t heal a dragon fire burn.” she informed as she frantically tugged her pack off her back, dropped it on the ground beside her, and began rifling through it. “Not from a Frostback. It needs to be treated with herbs first so that the remnants of the breath can be extracted. You have to sap out the chemicals that still smolder in her skin or it will continue to eat away at her and take her life.”
“Like acid?” Bull questioned worriedly.

“Yes.” she answered as she snatched a mixed bundle of dried herbs and a slightly glowing purple potion from her pack. “If you just seal up the wound with magic, it will continue to fester. You must leave the wound open until there is no longer any residual heat remaining in her muscles and skin.”

“Only then can it be healed properly.”

“Are you sure of this?” questioned Solas.

“I’ve seen it many times, lost too many good agents to that damn thing,” she answered with a nod. “Had to come up with a treatment on the fly, an old alchemist concoction.”


“I will pack the wound now. But we will need to move her out of the sun. Somewhere cool and dry, preferably dark as well.”

“Dark?” questioned Blackwall as he watched Harding mix the potion in her hand with the dried herbs and begin to pack the wound.

“When dragon’s breath lingers in tissues it gives off a faint glow...like...well like a fire,” she answered. “In the dark, we can better see how much of it is actually infecting her.”

It was then that a hooded scout came up to Harding’s side and saluted.

“Dorian is helping refugees at the Crossroads. Inform him immediately.” Harding ordered, glancing at the scout. “We will need him.”

“Yes mam.” the scout answered, before darting off.

“Dorian?” questioned Solas. “Why do we need Dorian...I can.”

“You’re exhausted, Master Solas.” Harding cut in with finality. “Your magic, at your current levels will not be enough!”

“It will take the both of you to help her.”

By the time an hour had passed, the group had managed to find a large cave to the north to settle in. According to the scouts, it had once been the dragon’s den and from the look of what they found, it seemed a perfect spot for Sarina to be treated and recover.

Harding, along with another scout, had managed to get Sarina partially stable before she had been moved, a quick field dressing good enough for transport, but once they were settled in the cave the two proceeded to check her wound more thoroughly. They realize that the amount of dragon fire that had settled into Sarina’s skin had not been as much as they had feared, but Harding was quick to dissuade any belief that her recovery would be quick. The damage was no longer, one-hundred percent life-threatening, but there was still a serious chance that she would not recover should they not tread carefully.

“She will need extensive treatment for the next twenty-four hours.” Harding told them after Dorian had arrived. “After that, she should be stable enough to transport her back to Skyhold. Until then, she will need to be watched over without interruption and the herb packing and bandages will need
to be changed every two hours.”

“I’ve sent scouts to hunt for more herbs in the surrounding forest and one of Sister Nightingale’s agents to Redcliff to pick up some more of the potion I use for the poultice,” she informed. “I’ll need to head back to our nearest forward camp to obtain a resupply of bandages as well.”

“And to send a raven back to Skyhold to inform her advisors,” she added.

“Thank you.” nodded Solas, before turning to Dorian. “Dorian and I will watch over her while you’re away. Is there anything else we need to know?”

“It would probably be best to keep her unconscious for the time being.” she advised. “The pain, though somewhat neutralized by the herbs, will eventually grow too strong and will wake her. This type of wound is extremely painful even for the most seasoned of warriors. Some say almost unbearable. So I would suggest doing your utmost best to manage her pain, if you can, so that she will not have to endure it.”

“As for keeping her asleep, Magic would be your best choice as I would not suggest using a draft of any kind.” she added. “Some of the components of most sleeping drafts have a negative effect on the burn poultice. Could make her worse.”

“Understood.” nodded Dorian.

Harding looked upon the mages standing before her and without hesitation leveled a threatening gaze.

“You almost lost her today...” she said, pointedly looking at Solas.

“I know...” he sighed regretfully.

“If this happens again...” she threatened purposefully. “There will be nothing in Thedas that will stay my hand.”

“Understand?”

“Yes.” nodded Solas. “I give you my word, Lace. I will never allow her to do such a thing again.”

“You better not.” she practically growled before turning away from them and stalking off.

When Harding finally managed to disappear out of view, Solas felt the very instant that Dorian turned on him.

“What happen?” he demanded angrily.

“You know what happened,” replied Solas as coolly as he could manage. “She...”

“I know what she did...” he countered, cutting in almost viciously. “But what the hell were you doing, that had you so fucking sidetracked that you couldn’t even get your own damn self out of harm’s way?!”

“I was...” he started.
“Dorian!” interrupted Bull harshly, grabbing the man by the shoulder.

“What?”

“Not the time, little man.” he urged. “Not the time.”

“But Bull.”

“Let it go for now,” Bull advised with a knowing look. “The Boss is more important.”

Dorian grumbled.

“Come on.” Bull pleaded, tugging on the man’s arm. “Don’t blame Solas for this.”

“Sari...you know how she...” Bull stammered for a second. “She is.”

“Alright fine.” Dorian sighed, seemingly understanding what it was that Bull was trying to say without saying.

With the argument ended, for the time being, Dorian and Solas spent the night watching over Sarina’s prone and unconscious form in silence – each taking turns in reapplying the poultice and new bandages as Scout Harding had advised, and both praying to any of the fates who would listen that she would survive. It wasn’t until a few hours before the sunrise of the next day that one of them spoke.

“How do you regret it?” questioned Dorian.

“Regret what?”

“Agreeing to help her fight the Frostback.”

“I don’t know,” Solas replied, looking down upon Sarina’s sleeping face.

Dorian immediately lifted a curious eyebrow, nudging him to clarify.

“Are you asking, that had I known that she would be willing to throw herself between me and the dragon, would have gone along with her plan anyway?”

“Precisely.” nodded Dorian.

“I cannot say no, nor can I say yes,” Solas answered. “There were times during that fight that, I know, had I not been there both Bull and Blackwall would have fallen. But what good I did for them, doesn’t overshadow what was ultimately done to her because of me.”

“Because that’s what all this is...” he added. “This happened because of me.”

“Because I was...” the elf stammered, reaching up and rubbing his eyes with his palms.

“Stop.” Dorian interrupted.

“Look Solas...” he sighed. “Just like I can blame you for all of this because she tried to save you, you can sit there and blame yourself for all of this because you failed to act...or failed to realize that she
would be willing sacrifice herself to protect you...But Bull was right, and I knew it.”

“This is not your fault.”

“Isn’t it?”

“No,” Dorian confirmed. “This is all Sarina’s doing. She chose to protect you the only way she could, in that moment, knowing that by doing so she would be risking her very life.”

“And you’ve always known, as well as I have, that such a sacrificial nature has always been a part of her personality—especially when it comes to the people she cares about.”

“Yes.” he nodded.

“So we should not be surprised by this,” he concluded. “Right?”

“No, you’re right.” Solas sighed. “But, even knowing that, it still doesn’t make me feel any better.”

“Nor should it.”

“What Sarina did was not only frivolous but foolish.” sighed Dorian. “But that doesn’t mean it wasn’t, otherwise, noble.”

“You should feel grateful, Solas.” he offered, looking down at Sarina’s face.

“Why?” he countered. “Because she nearly died trying to save my life?”

“No...” deadpanned Dorian knowingly. “Because she loved you enough to willingly sacrifice herself so you may live.”

“She loves me?”

Dorian just chuckled.

“What other reason would a woman have for jumping into the path of a dragon’s breath?” he postulated. “Other than for love?”

Chapter End Notes

Elvhen Translations:
Ir abelas: I’m sorry.
Ma’falon: My Friend.
Fen’lin: wolf blood
Ma nuvenin: As you wish.
Venavis: Halt.
Fen’amelan: Guardian Wolf.
Lethallan: of the people/kin
Qunlat Translations:
Anan: Victory
Meravas: So shall it be.
Parshaara: Enough.

Dun Dun Dun: Abelas is a double agent! Who knew? ^_^
Chapter Summary

As the memory of aftermath of the Fereldan Frostback continues to its inevitable end, Solas comes to realize a truth that he had long forgotten as the strange spirit from the fade grants him one final realization that he’d never realized so long ago.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

A few hours after the dawn had crested over the horizon, Solas was jerked out of an exhausted haze by the sound of horrific and agonized screaming echoing from within the large cave. With a frantic turn of his head, he caught sight of Sarina writhing and screaming in panicked agony upon her makeshift bedroll as Bull, Dorian, and Blackwall desperately tried to hold her down. Scrambling to his feet, he darted for her in a panic of his own. Falling down on his knees, harshly, at her side, he grabbed her shoulder and glanced up at Bull.

“It woke her...” the Qunari informed, over Sarina’s screams. “The pain.”

“How long.”

“A couple of minutes.” answered Blackwall. “For a few seconds she seemed to be fine, then it hit her all at once.”

“ Barely got to her side before she started thrashing,” he added.

Looking down upon her for a moment, Solas could not halt the nearly death-inducing drop of his heart within his chest. Her face was twisted in horrible pain, her eyes were screwed shut, and rivers of tears were streaming down her face, as she screamed and screamed.

The first time he had ever seen her openly cry.

“Her aura...” Dorian informed. “It’s...”

“I know...” cut in Solas, feeling the magnification of Sarina’s magic increasing exponentially with every second.

“Lethallan...” Solas called out tentatively.

“Solas...” she immediately gasped, jerking her hand up and grasping the fabric of his robes laying
over his thigh desperately.

“Sathan...” she begged, unseeing, with haggard breath. “Halani.”

“Make it stop.” she cried out, screaming the request with fervent desperation. “I can’t...control...”

“You do not know what you ask.” whispered Solas, knowing exactly what she wished of him.

“Do it.” Dorian demanded.

Solas immediately shot Dorian a nearly disbelieving and distraught look.

“We don’t have time to discuss the ramifications Solas!” argued Dorian adamantly “DO IT!”

“Do you even understand of what she is asking of me?” countered Solas, his temper showing instantly. “It could fundamentally change everything she is...”

“Damn you, Solas.” growled Dorian. “You still fucking hesitate...even now?”

“She could die!”

“Not to mention...”

“I don’t know what the hell you two are on about.” interrupted Bull with an angry growl. “But if there is a way to calm the Boss down Solas, I don’t give a shit what it is...just do it!”

“Only you have the ability. Only you know the way. You have to suppress it!” countered Dorian angrily, as Sarina’s screams grew more desperate and the taste of her magic began to manifest in the air all around them. “Or she will...”

“Fine!” cut in Solas.

“But let the consequences be on your head.”

Calling upon magic that he hadn’t called upon in a millennia, magic that none knew he possessed, Solas placed both his hands upon Sarina’s back around the edges of her large wound and forced every ounce of his will into his very aura. Building it, filling it, with all that he was until it thrummed with a strength that none could rival in their most powerful of days.

For a few moments all was as if time stopped as the ozone of ancient magic and the touch of the tingling sensation of the raw fade bled into the air around them seconds before their auras met.

The world, in that moment, seemed almost to fall away. At such an intimate contact. Leaving just the two of them, as if existence no longer existed.

“DO IT NOW!” yelled Dorian, the panic in his voice palpable.

Surrendering to what must ultimately be done, Solas pressed his hands down on Sarina’s back as hard as he could and slammed the full strength of his aura onto hers –pushing it back with all his might. For a few tense moments their strength of wills battled in the intangible plane of magic,
pressing against one another in a clash of ethereal might, as each aura fought desperately for control of the other.

As if cleaving a heavy blow, Sarina’s uncontrolled aura lashed back at him. Hitting his aura with the pure desperation of a foe making its last stand and fighting for its very life. Causing him to physical flinch at its remarkable defiance to his will. He countered, pressing his will against her as hard as he possibly could as his lips unexpectedly begged for her to relent with the pleading of her name and desperate words of his people.

“Sarina, Ar ama na.”

Sarina, I will protect you.

“Julasan atisha na.”

I will give you peace

“Vaslasa mala!”

Submit now.

For three heartbeats time froze and then, as if very world released a deeply held exhalative breath, Sarina’s aura relented with an exhaustive whimper and she collapsed –silently sill, fainting dead away.

Snatching his powerful aura back as quickly as he could, Solas slumped over and let out a shuddering breath. Exhausted and drained.

“It is done?” questioned Bull tentatively.

Solas nodded.

“We’ll need to get her back to Skyhold.” informed Dorian, not taking his eyes off Solas. “Bull, tell Lace that we can no longer wait to move her. We must go now.”

“Alright.” nodded Bull, before climbing to his feet.

“Blackwall...” added Dorian. “Go with him. See to it that everything is ready.”

Without a word of protest, Blackwall stood and left with Bull. The moment they were out of earshot, Dorian refocused on Solas.

“I told you to suppress her aura.” he said with an accusing tone. “Not smother it.”

“I had no choice...” breathed out Solas regretfully. “It was far stronger than I anticipated.”

“Will it survive?” he questioned.

“Only time will tell.” replied Solas, raising himself back up to level a look at the mage.

“Only time will tell?” questioned Dorian with distaste and disbelief. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”
“Exactly that.” Solas countered. “Her aura is, as her magic is: different. You’ve known that all along, just as I have known it. What ramifications will come of what I have done will only manifest itself in time. Until then, I cannot bear to speculate on what damage has or has not been done.”

“In the meantime...you are right.” he added. “We must get her back to Skyhold. Treated properly.”

“Until then we will never know.”

For a moment all fell silent between the two mages and then Dorian sighed.

“Where is she?” he questioned looking down at Sarina.

“In the fade...” Solas answered, worry slightly lacing every word, as he reached out and petted Sarina’s head. “Deep in the fade, where the pain can no longer pull at her.”

“And where demons have full reign!” Dorian retaliated. “You’ve left her unprotected with not even the solace of waking up as way to keep herself safe?”

“The connection had to be broken.” Solas replied with a distraught sigh. “Between the physical and the mental. It’s the only place she would be free from the pain.”

“It was the only thing I could do.”

“Bullshit.” argued Dorian. “You didn’t have to go that far. You could have just as easily put her out without practically exiling her subconscious to far reaches of the damn fade and leaving her to the mercy of any fucking demon that finds her!”

“She will not be unprotected, Dorian.” countered Solas adamantly. “I can...go to her...watch her dreams. Protect her in the fade.”

“So you really are a fucking somniari, then?” Dorian argued.

Solas nodded.

“Just fucking great.” he mumbled.

“I can protect her, Dorian.” Solas reiterated. “But...”

“I will need to stay with her...” he informed, ignoring the sheer irritation mixed with curiosity instantly flowing off Dorian in waves. “By her side until we reach Skyhold. The closer in the waking I am to her, physically, the easier it will be for me to walk in her dreams. So...”

“I understand.” nodded Dorian, sounding far less angry but still irritably frustrated. “The travel carriage from Redcliff should be here within the hour. Go to her now...sleep...dream...do whatever it is you need to do...and we will make sure you two stay together when we move her and while we travel.”

“You better keep her safe, Solas.” he added, standing up. “Help her survive this...and whatever debt you may owe me, because of the injury inflicted upon her by your carelessness, will be paid to me in full.”

It was then that the memory shifted from what had been the waking to the dream that Solas had
encountered as he had lain beside her that day and dreamt.

Solas opened his eyes to find himself standing on the edge of a forest clearing. Before him sat a ring of Dalish aravels under a star-filled, midsummer, night sky. All was quiet. Still. Save for the burning campfire centered within.

‘A dream of home?’ he thought.

Stepping from the edge of the forest, Solas walked towards the oddly quiet camp with an eerie sense of foreboding stalking his every footstep.

From everything he knew of the Dalish, most Dalish, there was never a time where a clan was left unprotected. There was always a guard or two posted during every hour of the day to keep watch for trouble. Always someone hiding in the shadows, or perched upon a nearby branch, watching as life went on through the day to day. Ever vigilant in their duty to protect all that the clan held dear.

But in Sarina’s dream there was nothing, and no one. No guards. No watchful eyes. No movement. No laughter. No songs. No voices chattering into the night. No quiet snores of loved ones tucked safely in their beds.

No warmth. No love. No contentment.

Nothing.

Everything was just cold. Empty.

Stepping between two aravels, Solas entered the center of the camp to investigate the dream further.

When he finally got a clear view of the encampment he couldn’t help but notice that the campfire – which should have been burning a beautiful amber – was tainted with the greyish-blue hue of veilfire. And lying upon the ground were some fifteen empty bedrolls All smeared with fresh blood.

“What has happened here?” he questioned, fearing that what he was witnessing was truly not a comforting dream of home as he had first thought, but a memory of a devastating nightmare, as his heart sank with fear for Sarina.

Walking up to a bedroll nearest to him, he studied it. From the look of what remained, the blood splatter and trails, it seemed that the entire encampment had been slaughtered while the clan slept, by something or someone that had attacked from stealth –leaving no one behind. Not even the bodies.

“Where did they all go?” he wondered. “What happened to them?”
Trying to keep his mind focused on finding Sarina, looking for clues to where she might be, Solas pushed through the uneasiness trying to settle in his heart and continued to look through the camp and at each bedroll.

The next few were as the first. Empty and soaked in blood.

It wasn’t until his eyes landed on the fifth bedroll did his heart truly fall out of his chest and his mind reel at the ramifications of what he saw.

There, laying in a pool of blood, was Bianca.

Varric’s trusty crossbow.

Suddenly, a deeply implicit and horrific thought resonated across his mind like a clap of thunder, causing him to instinctively and hurriedly scan the remaining bedrolls. And as his eyes landed on each one, and he saw what remained, his worry and terror grew.

Dorian’s staff, snapped in half—its crystal dark and lifeless.

Cole’s hat, ripped and lacerated.

Blackwall’s boots, soaked in blood.

Cassandra’s shield, dented heavily and punctured.

Sera’s bow, shattered.

Vivienne’s Orlesian hennin, rent asunder.

Bull’s axe, bloodied and broken.

“The Inquisition...” he gasped.

It was then that the truth of the dream hit Solas dead in the chest.

Her friends.

Those who had become like family to her...

Those she loved more than her own life...

Slaughtered in the night.

Mercilessly devastated.

Dead.
The dream, this nightmare, was a manifestation of Sarina’s greatest fear.

A fear that she had only mentioned once.

‘The loss of everything she had come to love.’

Instinctively, Solas’ eyes immediately drifted to the last two bedrolls at the west side of the campfire. Somehow knowing that what they represented were the last two who were not accounted for. Him and Sarina. When his eyes finally landed on the two, laying side by side, his body moved on his own accord as his eyes widened at the realization that they alone had not been touched by whatever had destroyed the others.

For both bed rolls were left undisturbed and pristine. No blood covered the matching bundles and nothing was left behind. Almost as if they had never even been used.

Suddenly a harsh gust of wind rushed across the encampment, so strong that it nearly knock Solas back a step, carrying with it the sound of a heart wrenching and devastated scream. As the wind swept cry faded, almost as quickly as it had appeared, the feel of a very familiar form, bending the fade to its will, flickered into existence at his side.

“You must help her.”

“Cole.” replied Solas turning to the spirit standing beside him with his eyes closed in concentration.

“I came to help...felt her pain...loud...so very loud...called me from Skyhold...but she does not see me...cannot hear my words. Will not listen...will not see.”

“What...?” Solas tried to question, before being cut off by Cole’s gleaning intuition.

“She is too weak. Too weak to see. Too weak to hear. Too weak to fight. She can only feel. Hurt. The pain that is too much. The fear that threatens to swallow her whole.”


“Brothers. Sisters. Friends. That became family...”

“A heart. A future. Love. Found where it wasn’t supposed to be.”

“Lost forever.”

“The life that was hers, stolen by her own hand. Ripped away. Leaving nothing but her.”

“Alone. Forever alone.”

“Lost. Lost in the pain that is not real, but is real.”
For a moment the spirit paused, and then, with a deep frown of worry marring his gentle face, he let out a shuttering breath.

“Fear...and Despair.”

“They are tormenting her, Solas.” he warned, opening his eyes to look at the elf at his side. “Trying to break her...Trying to push her over the edge...”

“And...That edge is so very close...”

“You must go now!”

It was then that the scream echoed once more. Pulling Solas’ eyes away from the spirit towards the west. Casting away any thoughts of propriety or manners, Solas caught sight of two pairs of unbound footprints upon the ground leading from the campsite just seconds before his own feet began to move and he bolted toward the tree line.

Running as fast as he could, he let his heart lead the way as his mind filled with thoughts too horrible to comprehend. Seemingly pulled by an unbelievable force, drawing him deeper and deeper into the darkening forest, he darted through the towering elms and sickly oaks, jumping over downed trees and littering boulders, as agile and as impulsive as the man he once had been in his youth. Climbing higher and higher as the path inclined, as the sounds of Sarina’s cries grew louder and more devastated, he pushed through the pain raging through his over exerted muscles and the screaming fears echoing in his mind –determined to find her no matter the cost.

Suddenly, the barely recognizable tracks pounded into the earth turned sharply to the right and Solas’ eyes landed on the faint reflection of a moonlit, snow bound, meadow on the horizon. Redoubling his efforts, increasing his speed, stretching himself and his body to its very limits, he ran towards it with all the fervor a desperate man.

Clearing the tree line a moment later, Solas skidded to dead stop –kicking up dirt, ice, snow, and the ambient magic of the fade in his wake –as his eyes landed on a horrifying and soul-crushing scene.

There, in the middle of the small meadow, amongst the fall of soft and silent snowflakes and surrounded by five ancient stone statues of the wolf god Fen’Harel; their eyes glowing and looming around her in an arc; Sarina knelt upon the ground in a pool of blood soaked snow–hunched over in despair.

Her luscious ice-white hair, unbound and cascading down her back, flowed across the ground like an unhindered waterfall surrounding her on all sides. As her face, splattered with more fresh blood, marred by excruciating pain and stained with rivers of flowing tears, was held low. Her devastated cries filled the night air, with the deepest of agonies and sorrows ever known to man, as her heartache poured out of her soul, into the world, like an uncontrollable and unstoppable avalanche of devastation and desolation.

All as her fearful, distraught, and mourning eyes stared down upon a silently cold, blood-caked, and unmoving form laying in her arms.
“Sarina!” screamed Solas, desperately, as his very heart exploded into a thousand pieces within his chest.

At his call, Sarina did nothing more than let out another heart-shattering cry—sobbing with all her heart and soul as she shook violently and clutched helplessly to the man in her arms.

“Unseeing...Unhearing...” Cole whispered softly, as he flickered into existence once more. “Lost in her own fear. Lost to her own pain. Snared by the unwavering words of despair and the ungentle caress of fear’s encroaching will.”

“Where are they?” questioned Solas viciously, his teeth clenched hatefully, as his eyes scanned over the entire meadow.

“There...” Cole supplied. Pointing to where Sarina mourned.

It was then that Solas noticed it, the strange movement of a few strands of her hair. Seemingly swept back from her face, ever so slightly and ever so gently, by an unseen touch.

Gathering his magic for only a moment, Solas set his eyes on the nothingness at Sarina’s side and pushed out a pulse of his ancient power across the meadow. As the wave of magic hit her, her hair immediately fell limp for a few seconds and two forms, taking the visage of two Elhven kneeling beside her, shimmered into view.

The woman, with long black hair, grey skin, and lyrium blue eyes humming deep within pools of black, knelt on Sarina’s right, whispering in her ear. While the man with fade green leathered skin, ice white hair braided down his back, and silver cobalt black eyes, knelt on her left—petting her hair as if she was the most precious thing in all the world.

Solas recognized the form of the man instantly.

“Her father.”

“No.”

“He is Fear. Hiding himself in the form of the man that raised her.” informed Cole. “The other is Despair. Masked as the woman she never knew. The woman who sacrificed her very life so that she could be born into this world.”

“Using the comfort of an emphatic and enduring love against her...” Cole sighed, turning to place a hand on Solas’ shoulder.

“To them...She is unlike the others. Unlike all that came before.” he whispered. “Too precious. Too rare. Too unique.”

“They won’t let her go, Solas.” he added. “Not without a fight.”
“Then they shall have It.” bit out Solas angrily, unceremoniously shrugging off the spirits touch.

With anger filling his heart, Solas jutted his hands low before him and raised them slowly—calling forth a surge of his magic so palpable that Cole inadvertently stepped back. Building his magic, intertwining it with his will, Solas turned his hand towards Sarina and her two captors just as the glowing appendages reached the height of his heart and pushed out a shockwave so harsh that it spirited across the meadow and crashed into them like a catastrophic tidal wave. Recoiling from the impact, Sarina eyes, seemingly unseeing, sprang up from the lifeless form in her arms just as Despair and Fear shot to their feet and leveled a murderous glare at Solas.

“RELEASE HER!” commanded Solas.

For a moment the two demons just stared, taking in the form of the elf that had dared to intrude on their machinations, and then Fear just chuckled.

“Tis desire.” Fear dismissed as he turned back to Sarina and returned to lovingly petting her head. Desire.


“We shall not share the child. No matter how much you wish it.”

“Leave.”

“You dare to mistake me!” growled Solas, fist clenching at his side resolutely as his anger grew to a fever pitch in an instant.

He would not abide by such a dismissal. Not now. Not ever.

“Look...My brother...” laughed Despair. “Desire...is angry.”

“Angry that it was we who found her first.”

“She is not yours to share!” countered Solas angrily, as his aura uncharacteristically flared.

“Solas...” ventured Cole tentatively, suddenly fearful of his friend’s manner.


“But.”

“Now Cole!” Solas ordered.

Flinching at the harshness of the man’s tone, Cole took another step back.
“I came to help.”

“I know...” answered Solas. “And you have...Now go.”

“You do not need to see this.”

“If not for my sake, then for hers...Please.”

“Alright.” he sighed, before blinking out of existence and leaving Solas in the fade unwatched.

As soon as Cole disappeared, leaving him full autonomy, Solas turned his attention to the two demons –who in the course of his short conversation with the spirit of Compassion had left their places at Sarina’s side to stand between him and her– and leveled a threatening gaze of his own.

“You!” he threatened hatefully. “Have one last chance. Release her and leave this place forever. Or...YOU. WILL. DIE.”

“You dare to think to take what is ours, do you?” questioned Fear with a devious smirk.

“I dare to take what is mine!” growled Solas, swiping his hand defiantly.

At his movement, Sarina’s anchor instantly flared –calling forth a scream of pain from her lips that echoed all across the meadow.

The two captors immediately turned to level a look at their prisoner and growled at such a machination.

“She belongs to me!” he declared, voice suddenly booming.

Turning back to the elf, both Fear and Despair narrowed their eyes.

“So it is you that has cursed her.” accused Despair, softly.

“Betrayer!”

At the demon’s words, the thread of what little composure Solas was still desperately clinging onto snapped.

Standing to his full height, he waved his hand out in front of him and the entire dream froze dead still. Leaving none aware of what was going on save him and his two foes.

Calling upon the part of him that he had so desperately tried to keep hidden, the magic that he had secluded away from the eyes of the world, Solas let out a vicious growl and in an instant his form transformed from the poised and regal apostate elf to the towering, blood-thirsty, giant six-eyed wolf of Dalish nightmares.

Dropping its head, and shifting its shoulders, the great dark wolf Fen’Harel pinned back his ears and bellowed a soul-shattering howl dripping with nothing but pure rage.

Fear and Despair, at the wolf’s murderous call, immediately shook off the illusion of the Elvhen they
had held up until that very moment and revealed their true forms as they each advanced a step and took up a defensive stance between it and their prize.

“Last chance...” came the gravely, ferocious, and hellish voice of the wolf.

“LEAVE!”

“NEVER!” shot back Fear.

“THEN YOU WILL DIE!” declared the wolf, before charging in a vicious leap.

Landing hard, the wolf snapped at Despair with murderous intent only to miss by a hair’s breadth as the demon strafed to the side at the last moment and rounded on him. Turning his back to Sarina and gauging the demon before him, the wolf pounced a second time. This time landing a well-timed strike. As his razor-sharp teeth dug into the ethereal essence that was Despair, he clamped down determined to chomp the monstrosity in half as Fear lashed out at him with is dragon-like claws – raking his fur and flesh in a flurry of horrific attacks intended to maul and dismember. Clamping down harder, the wolf countered Fear’s attacks with a massive swipe of its paw –hitting the demon’s legs and taking them out from under it. In the seconds it took for Fear to hit the ground and spring back up, the wolf dropped his head, practically laying Despair upon the ground, before dropping its paw upon the cold demon’s body and rending it apart with a jerk of its head.

Despair immediately vanished. Vanquished.

Turning sharply, the wolf growled again and leveled his gaze upon Fear.

It was then that demon took up the offensive once more. Charging with more of defiance than that of desperation, Fear attacked with the fury of a madman. Clawing and raking viciously. Determined to destroy the abomination in the guise of a wolf before it. The wolf dodged the first three strikes, before countering with a swipe of its own massive claws –catching the demon across the chest and rending ethereal flesh from ethereal bone. Fear stumbled back, covering its wound with its hand as a mix of disbelief and pure, unadulterated, rage flickered across its face. Calling up its strength one last time, the demon pushed away any thoughts that might have been mulling around its head and charged once more. This time aiming straight for the wolf’s throat.

It was in that moment that the wolf saw his opportunity. Turning its head just right, he allowed Fear’s attack to strike him –but just barely. Dropping his head, fainting left as if the demon had manage to slice his jugular, the wolf subversively faked injury. Slumping over. Believing that it had finally found the end to the wolf it so desired, Fear stepped closer to land a final deathblow. It was then that the wolf pounced. Jumping up, pressing its razor-sharp paws upon its chest and wrapping its massive jaws around the demon’s head, the wolf pushed it to the ground before, cruelly, ripping it from the monster’s body.

Practically spitting out the demon’s head, the wolf stepped back just in time to see Fear disappear.

Letting out a cleansing breath; the deed, now done; the wolf finally turned back to look at Sarina’s frozen form.
It was at that moment that Solas’ mind found clarity once more.

‘She cannot reawaken in the dream like this.’ he thought.

Closing the wolf’s eyes, Solas drew upon his magic and began to reshape the fade all around him. The snow disappeared instantly, replaced by soft green grass littered with little white flowers. The sky, which had somehow become covered in clouds, cleared. The meadow, which had been hilly at first flatten to that of a smooth small clearing. The statues of Fen’Harel, eyes still glowing as the loomed around her, faded –replaced by a ring of inquisition tents and horses tethered to strong oaks at the faint outer edges of the space. And In the middle, just before Sarina, sprang up a warm and inviting campfire seconds before the ethereal visages of her companions appeared all around it.

Frozen still, in a moment of fondness and comradery that he knew she had cherished.

Bull, Sera, and Dorian playing cards. Vivienne and Cassandra quietly reading books. Blackwall sharpening his sword. All, while listening to Varric –as he stood amongst them– telling one of his outlandish tales.

It was then that Solas sluffed off the visage of the wolf, returning to himself.

Striding across the clearing to Sarina’s side, he immediately waved his hand at the last remaining piece of Despair and Fear’s nightmare. The image of his own dead body lying in her lap. With its disappearance, Sarina changed. Her hair returned to its normally confined up do. Her clothes, which had been stained with the blood of her friends and loved ones, and the wetness of melting snow, shifted to that of a beautifully blue set of mage robes that she had always been so fond of.

When content with his changes, Solas sat down beside Sarina and pulled her to him –readjusting her frame so that she was not longer kneeling but sitting comfortably, her head lying gently upon his shoulder.

With the hope that all he had done would be enough to distract her from what she had just suffered, Solas looked up and resigned him to the last thing he must do.

“Cole...” he called out. “I need you now.”

For a moment, there was nothing but silence and just as Solas began to think that the spirit would not return, he felt the fade shimmer beside him.

“I am here.” answered Cole as he stepped in front of the two elves. “What do you need of me, my friend?”

“The memory of her dream...” Solas ventured slowly.

“She would not want me to.” countered Cole mournfully.

“I know.” sighed Solas. “But it must be done.”

“She would not want to live the rest of her life haunted by this night...”

“And I don’t want her to either.” Solas sighed.

“As you wish.” acquiesced Cole hesitantly.

Reaching up, Cole laid his gentle fingers upon her brow and sighed.
“Forgive me my sister...” he breathed out. “And...Forget...”

As the memory of her dream left her mind, Sarina’s distraught face fell away leaving behind a look of contentment and of a peacefulness he had rarely ever seen in her eyes.

“Thank you, Cole.” sighed Solas.

“You don’t know what your help truly means to me.”


And with his knowing declaration, Cole vanished once more –leaving Solas no opportunity to question the spirit’s words.

With a deep and irreverent sigh, Solas reached up with his unoccupied hand and waved it across the dream. At his motion, time resumed and the clearing filled with the sounds of the crackling campfire and Varric’s animated voice. For a few moments the dream played out, all on its own, with no movement or recognition of the new dream coming from Sarina’s still form. In that time, Solas couldn’t help but feel concern that all he had done to construct such a dream might not have been enough. But a moment later, Sarina shifted; letting out a nearly contented sigh; before opening her eyes.

The realization of where she was; that she was in-fact resting against him, her head lying on his shoulder, his arm around her; had startled her.

She quickly attempted to right herself but was immediately stopped by Solas’ tightening hold.

“It’s alright.” Solas comforted.

“I...I must have fell asleep.” she stammered, slightly aghast. “Ir abelas.”

“There is no need for an apology,” he replied. “Sarina.”

At his use of her given name, she instinctively looked up at his face.

“It’s been a trying day.” Solas smiled. “You were tired and needed rest.”

“Then I should retire...” she replied, trying to pull away, only to be held in place.

“Then stay. And rest.”

“I...It would be an imposition,” she replied, trying to justify her unspoken need to leave his side.

“No,” Solas answered. “It would not.”

“But...”

“It is my wish that you stay,” he whispered softly. “If only for a time...”

“Please...” he breathed out.

At his declaration, Sarina looked at Solas’ face and as if a realization had dawned upon her because of the look he now carried, she let out a relenting breath.
“Alright.” she sighed.

Without another word, Sarina leaned into him. Laying her head on his shoulder as his arm tightened around her once more and she closed her eyes.

There was a moment of stillness, falling between the two of them, and then Sarina spoke once more.

“Someday...” she sighed sleepily. “Will you tell me why you always look at me like that?”

“Always...so sad...” she breathed.

“Someday.” answered Solas, as he wrapped his other arm around her and held her almost lovingly as he closed his eyes. “I promise.”

It was then that the dream within the memory faded and Solas awoke to see the roof of a covered wagon looming above him and the feel of Sarina’s warmth beside him. Looking down upon the face of the woman, now gathered in his arms, as they lay upon the carriage’s floor, Solas could not stem the sigh that escaped his lips as he took in the sheer contentment upon her face.

“Is she safe?” came Dorian’s worried voice.

Looking up from Sarina, Solas caught sight of Dorian sitting in a far corner of the carriage watching them both – looking far more haggard and worried than he had ever seen the man.

“She is now,” Solas answered softly.

“How many?”

“Two...” he answered. “But they are no more.”

“What did they...do?”

“Do not ask that of me, Dorian.” interrupted Solas with a deep sigh. “I would not have her remember so I will not speak of it.”

“So you intend to be the only one to carry such a burden?” questioned Dorian in concern.

“Yes...”

“You do not need to do that.”

“Yes...” sighed Solas, looking down upon Sarina once more, with finality. “Yes, I do.”

For some time, Solas just watched Sarina sleep in his arms, as Dorian seemed to go still and fall into his own thoughts. The more he watched her, the more his thoughts turned to her. The things she had said, the things she had done. How she had changed since the first time they’d met.

How she was always so kind, so loving, and so true to those she cared for. How she would always seem to know just when and how to comfort those around her when they needed it most. How she would always know just what to say or to do in the most visceral of moments.
And, how...when it truly mattered... she could make him forget everything but her.

Letting out a deep sigh, one laced with the strange feeling of contentment that he rarely knew, Solas reached up and absentmindedly stroked her cheek with his thumb. Silently speaking to her of his gratitude for her care in the only way he could freely do.

“Solas...” called out Dorian softly.

“Yes...” the man answered not even bothering to look up at the mage.

“Are you ever going to tell her?”

“Tell her, what?” he sighed.

“How you truly feel...”

“No...”

“Why?” he breathed out.

“Because it is a burden...a burden that I alone must bear.”

“You are willingly condemning your life to a loneliness you need not suffer,” Dorian stated flatly.

“Yes,” he answered as he pulled Sarina closer and tightened his arms around her.

“Then you are a fool...”

“I know...”

With Solas’ final declaration, the entire memory faded and disappeared. Leaving him, once again, standing in the raw fade outside of her prison.

“She survived that night, and her injuries, and went on to do great things...” the strange spirit recounted.

“But you never told her what you had to do, had done...the lengths you went to, to protect her.”

“No.” he replied, looking up at the spirit before him. “It was a memory of a dream best forgotten.”

“But it was not forgotten...” the spirit supplied. “Not forever...”

Surprised by the spirit’s words, Solas took a step back.

“What are you saying?” he countered.

“Too afraid that he had hurt her. That he had changed her.” the spirit informed. “Compassion could not live with the guilt –knowing he had betrayed her trust.”

“He told her?”
“No...He made her remember.”

“No...He made her remember.”

“Everything.” the spirit added pointedly. Its voice adamantly declaring in no uncertain terms that Sarina had somehow remembered everything that happened—including what he did.

“That’s not possible.” dismissed Solas. “She couldn’t have remained aware once I froze the dream.”

“She is like you, is she not?”

“She who walks in the land of dreams...unhindered...”

“And your magic is...unique...is it not?”

“Familiar...”

“No...No. No. No.” Solas chanted, shaking his head. “Not possible. NOT POSSIBLE!”

“She knew then...as she has known since...of who and what you really are.”

“When?” he instantly demanded. “When did Cole make her remember?”

“Before the dance that meant so much more than you had ever intended...”

Halamshiral.

“That’s impossible!”

“That’s impossible!”

“Is it?”

“Yes!” Solas declared. “If she truly knew who and what I was, has known since the very first time we went to the Winter Palace, she wouldn’t have...she wouldn’t have...”

“Loved you still?”

“No. No. No.” muttered Solas in disbelief, his mind racing with every memory of her from then until now, as he began to pace distractedly. “It’s not true.”

“Why do you give her so little credit, Little Wolf?” questioned the spirit. “Why are you so desperately trying to disprove the truth you know in your heart to be true?”


“There is no way she could have known the truth for so long and stayed silent. There is no way she would have allowed me to keep up my ruse, unaware and unchallenged.”

“She would have confronted me, forced me to tell her everything!”
“Would she have?”

“You sound so sure of such a thing, Little Wolf, but yet here you are...” the spirit informed. “In the knowing that she knew that which you so desperately tried to hide from her...for far longer than you could have imagined...And, in the end, she chose to do nothing with such knowledge...”

“Ultimately choosing the man you are, instead of the wolf you pretended not to be.”

“WHY!” cried out Solas.

“Because she loved you.”

“That can not be the only reason!” countered Solas, looking at the spirit almost angrily.

“And why can it not?” replied the spirit.

“Because...” Solas began, before stopping himself and letting out a deep sigh. “She is not some frivolous woman who would allow her heart to guide her past all sense of reason. She would not do that...”

“She would not willingly sacrifice everything...every bit of her...everything she believed...everything she knew...everything she fought so desperately for...for love.”

“For... me.”

“Did you learn nothing from the dragon?” countered the Spirit with an all-knowing chuckle. “Little Wolf?”

Chapter End Notes

Elven Translations:
Ar ama na: I will protect you.
Julasan atisha na: I will give you peace.
Vaslasa mala: Submit now.
Ir abelas: I'm sorry.

A/N: I hope everyone is enjoying the story so far. I would ask that, if you are enjoying it so, please leave a comment for feedback. It can be a helpful tool to use when tweaking may be necessary. Also, I know that some of you may find my story somewhat vague in parts. Just know that it is deliberate. "I suspect you have questions." (hehe) and they will
be answered in time, I promise. Happy reading.
The Truth about Dorian: Part 2

Chapter Summary

Solas learns that the Vallas Val seemingly has a mind of its own, and is forced to witness a memory that he had never expected for it to contain.

Chapter Notes

[Trigger Warning] Torture and Sexual Assault.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The next three days, as they ventured closer to the Tevinter border, was a journey without words.

Haunted by the realization that Sarina had known his true identity years before he had ever spoken it aloud, his world once again felt upended.

He had lived years believing that the lies he’d told her had been the perfect camouflage for the truth he could not bear to give her. That his nearly altruistic deception had been the best path. That he was truly saving her from the pain of such truth; a pain that he alone could not be spared. Removing that which would be naught but a burden to her loving heart; a burden he could not allow her to carry.

That she would be better in the long run.

But he had been wrong.

So very wrong.

From the very beginning he had come to her with a closed heart, guarding his secrets with his very life, and chose to deceive her rather than allow such a lowly and insignificant Dalish to ever see the truth behind this world. His resolve had been as hard as Dragon bone, as unbending as Silverite, and as unwavering as Everite. With a fortitude to stand against anything the shadow of a once revered existence could throw at him.

Only to find that nothing is inevitable and the world was not as black and white as he had believed.

There had been gray, and in such a place she existed.
She had shown him a hope he could not dare to believe. Probabilities and possibilities that he had never once thought could exist. And for a time he railed against such things. Hiding the truth of his existence, along with the truth growing deep within his heart, day by day, behind a cold mask of indifference and superiority; to not only others but ultimately even to himself; until neither could be denied any longer.

He still remembers the very moment when he allowed his heart to overshadow his reason. The moment that he allowed himself to feel the full brunt of the truth of her and the materialization of the wonton desire to release the obligations of the past and the unwavering belief in duty. To give himself up to the present and to the woman who had stolen his heart with words and deeds as pure as the soul of Elvhenan itself.

The moment that Pride yielded to Love.

And for a time, he reveled in such a blissful existence. Being with her, unburdened and unweighted by the fate he would surely answer to in time, he found a happiness he had not known in all of his enduring life. No longer shackled by the pain of the past, burdened by what must come next, or a prisoner of the duty he would never be able to truly cast aside, he lived in the moment and was truly free.

But such freedom came with a price. A price that he ultimately paid by choice, rather than having it thrust upon them both unwittingly. And so he hurt her, adding another regret upon his soul. A soul that had carried so many before it but none far greater.

“Do you have any regrets, Solas?” echoed Sarina’s softly concerned voice over the faint crackling of a long forgotten campfire.

“Far too many to recount...” Solas sighed.

“And you, Inquisitor?” he questioned. “Do you carry any?”

“Only one.” she replied. “It weighs upon me with the strength of thousands, but I shall always carry it with acceptance, reverence, and Pride.”

“Why?”

“Because it is a regret that, for a time, gave me far more happiness that I ever thought I’d deserved.” she smiled.

“Solas!” Abelas shouted.

Snapped out of his thoughts Solas looked up to see his friend staring at him with concern from the back of his mount.

“Yes?” he answered.

“There you are...” sighed Abelas. “You were so lost in thought...”
“I...apologize.” stammered Solas, as he reached up and rubbed his eyes. “I am...distracted. Her memories...They...”

“Are beginning to sink in...” Abelas supplied. “I understand.”

“Perhaps...It would be best if we stopped for the night.” he continued. “I know we are in a hurry, that you are even more adamant to find her...most likely because of something you have learned from the book...but we have hardly taken any rest in the last three days. At this rate, our mounts will drop dead long before we reach the border.”

As if on cue, Solas’ mount seemingly agreed with a vocal protest and a hesitated step.

“Very well...”

The next few hours passed quietly. They had set up a makeshift camp under a thick outcropping of massive oaks only a few moments before the sky had opened up and it began to rain. While the miserable and steady drizzle pounded the world outside with its melancholy, Solas and Abelas had settled into their small tent and manage to have a quiet meal—with neither of them speaking for some time. When dinner came to an end, and provisions were once again stored away, Abelas took to sharpening the small dagger he normally concealed in his belt with a small stone while Solas busied himself with preparations for sleep. When all was done, he settled on to his bedroll beside Abelas and sighed as he looked upon Sarina’s Vallas Val lying upon the ground beside him.

Since his encounter with the strange spirit in the fade outside her prison, and the realization that his cover had been blown long before he had ever thought, Solas had not dared to open the book again. For the experience that night had solidified one constant truth that for a time had only been a speculation. For something that looked so innocuous, the book had not only revealed its ability to affect him on the deepest of emotional levels by burdening him with knowledge he never thought possible but also revealed that it had the ability to affect him even in dreams.

He now knew that the manifestation of the strange spirit in the fade had truly been a deliberate machination of its magic –created specifically to impart all of Sarina’s secrets by any means necessary– and that meant that as long as he was in possession of the Vallas Val he would be subject to its magical whims.

“Ignoring it will not make it go away.” came Abelas’ knowing voice. “Trust me.”

“The compulsion is absolute.”

“You never had any intent in reading it, in the first place, did you?” questioned Solas, looking up to see the man looking back at him intently. “It showed you its secrets of its own accord?”

“As it will you. If you continue to deny it, its true purpose.” Abelas nodded.

“True purpose?”

“Such relics are created with an intent.” Abelas replied. “In this case, the intent is the revelation of truth. When it spoke to me, first in my dreams, I did not realize that such machinations were caused by the book. I merely believed that my dreams were being influenced by memories of the days when you would speak openly and candidly about your time in the Inquisition. But, over time, they became more and more constant until the memories of that time became all I could dream about. And in every dream there was something that was always constant.”

“The book...”
“Yes...” Abelas answered. “It would appear every time. Always sitting quietly upon a small table in the corner of every room I would find myself in. Looming quietly like that of shadow. Always there but not really existing.”

“It took me nearly three months for me to realize that the book had been the source of such dreams.” he added. “And once I opened it, and experienced the first memory, the dreams faded and became my own again.”

“I never stopped leafing through her memories, not until I had seen all the book had wished to show me. So it never called to me again.”

“And you did not think to warn me of the possibility?” countered Solas.

“As you had already began to relive her memories, I had not thought that it would call to you, so earnestly and so quickly.” Abelas admitted. “However, now that it has I can surmise as to why.”

“Because it was created with the sole purpose for me to read.” concluded Solas.

“Yes.” Abelas answered. “And now that its rightful recipient has begun to relive her memories...it...for the lack of a better word...feels like it must impart upon you everything as quickly as possible.”

“Then why has the book been silent, these past three days?” questioned Solas. “I have not had the heart to open it and my dreams have been my own. There has been no influence from the book.”

“That is how it begins.” sighed Abelas. “Everything will seem fine, but I’d bet that if you combed through the memory of your dreams the last few nights the book will be hiding in plain sight somewhere within.”

Solas thought about it for a moment, the possibility that the book had been in his dreams somewhere, then sighed.

“There is no need for such reflection.” dismissed Solas gently as he reached down, picked up the book and placed it on his lap. “I have no reason to dismiss your conclusion otherwise. The probability of its existence within my dreams is high –though I have not had any dreams of her since the last.”

“You will read tonight, then?”

“Though I would willingly wait a few more days before I venture back into its pages, I fear that should I hesitate further it will only lash out at me with more fervor,” admitted Solas.

“Yes...” nodded Abelas. “Best to get on with it then.”

With a nod of his own, Solas reached down and opened the book. As the front cover fell flat against his leg, a shimmering swirl of magic-tinged black and fiery green– echoed across the book a split second before the pages began to frantically turn on their own with unbelievable speed. The machination only lasted a few seconds before the pages stopped moving and settle upon a place near the middle of the book. As if on cue the magic that had manifested itself vanished leaving behind a new command phrase; written not in Elvhen but in Tevene.
“Festis bei umo canavarum...” he read aloud. “You will be the death of me..."

As those words fell from his lips, Solas’ entire world instantly went black.

With thunder crash and lightening flash, the darkness deepened with the sound of brutal winds whipping through unseen trees; as the sudden sounds of battle began to echo all around him with the vibrating roar of raging war cries, the sickly smell of flowing blood, the intangible taste of corrupted lyrium, and the unmistakable clash of metal upon shield and sword.

“NO!” cried out Solas, as every sensation—every sound, smell, and feeling—drew a horrified dawning upon his mind in a flash of hellish recognition and he stumbled backwards. “Not this!”

The Ambush.

Suddenly the darkness flashed the sight of a, deeper than black, sky, covered by abyssal clouds swirling and churning like a possessed and turbulent sea, as massive and all-encompassing bolts of lightning streaked across them, and torrents fell in waves down to an eerily pitch black world.

A scream of rage, deep and raw, immediately echoes and the whole visions shifts to the earth below.

Bull, bleeding heavily from several deep wounds to his arms, abdomen, and back, is locked in the throes of battle against a swarming contingent of six hulking Red Templars. His body, fueled by rage and the unheeded need to protect, is thrumming with every bit of his strength as his muscles tense with the unmistakable lust of fury. Beneath him, bleeding profusely from a large shoulder wound and barely hanging on, robes shredded by blade strikes and singed by holy smite damage, is Dorian. He is utterly still. His eyes blown wide by the pain and shock, as he tries his best, with the one good arm he has at his disposal, to keep what little barrier he can around him and his Qunari protector.

“INQUISITOR!”

His voice.

Turning, he catches the instant the blade falls.

He, embroiled in a standoff with two Red Templars had not seen the third immerge from the tree line readying itself to strike him down. But Sarina had.

The blade instantly slices through the back of her mage robes, cutting a deep swath across her skin, seconds after she pushes Solas towards the two Templars at his front and out of the way. She immediately pivots, and sets the mindless monster a flame, before pivoting again, kicking one of
Solas’ legs out from under him with gracefulness of the most talented of dancers—which causes him to take a reactionary knee—before instantly blowing her hands wide and electrocuting both his opponents with a singular blast of her amplified lightning.

As if orchestrated by some god-like conductor, all three Templars fall at the same time. The battle lulls for a few tense seconds as Sarina kneels at Solas’ side and checks him for injuries.

“Are you hurt?” she questions with heavy breath.

Solas has no time to answer as the alarming screech of an arrow streaks across their makeshift camp and imbeds itself into his shoulder. He lurches back, hand jumping to the impact point, as his eyes screw tight from the immediate pain. Sarina, instinctive and battle worn, turns him slightly to get a look at the arrow, at the very moment that both of them taste the morbid scent of concentrated Magebane; mixed with the lethal toxin known age Blightcap essence; as it filters into the air around them.

Taking a deep breath, Sarina pulls Solas’ hand down and places her hand around the arrow’s shaft.

“It has to come out now,” she says desperately. “Are you ready?”

Solas nods, and in one fluid motion, Sarina jerks the arrow from his flesh. Discarding it quickly she places her hand on his wound and forces her waning magic into it as Solas’ skin suddenly goes pale and his eyes cloud over.

“Hold on, Solas!” she cries out. “Hold on!”

Sarina’s magic massively flares and Solas can’t help but scream. The sound of his outcry only seems to push her determination further as she screws her eyes shut and presses down upon his wound as hard as she can. Solas suddenly gasps, as if all the air in his lungs had been forcibly ripped from his chest and his body collapses against hers. His eyes instantly close, his breath stills, his heart stops, and he is suddenly lost to oblivion.

Sarina’s whole body tenses. He is gone, at that moment, and she cannot accept it.

She lays him flat on the ground, and her second hand joins the first. Her aura flares, like a massive beacon in the deepest abyss. The sight is blinding, even to Solas conscious mind as he watches the scene play out before him. The moment is tense, Sarina’s face twisted in heartbreak, as her magic unfurls from her spirit and seeps into the world all around them. The sounds of battle muffle, the cries of rage and clang of metal go nearly silent, and time seems to suddenly freeze in that very moment. For a few seconds the world is still and then suddenly, Solas’ withered and corpse-like form jerks up with an intake of an earth-shatteringly deep breath.

He turns to her, his head moving almost in slow motion, and looks upon her face just as the crushing and oppressive blow of mighty smite hits them both. Sarina slumps forward, already far too drained, and her aura completely snuffs out. Solas reaches for her, his movements gaining ground at a snail’s pace, and just before he can touch her the sight of a red lyrium laced, armored forearm appears around her waist, and she is snatched from his side.

She screams his name, and as it echoes all around him, the vision goes black once more.

Solas is breathing heavily. The vision of the ambush weighing heavily on his mind and heart just as harshly, and as raw, as that very moment had in the past. His heart is racing, his blood is running cold, and his mind is reeling at his failure to protect her when she needed him most.
Suddenly the darkness fades once more with the appearance of a softly blazing campfire under a star-filled sky. Inquisition tents appear. The sound of muffled chatter echoes and a crowd materializes all around. Soldiers, companions, scouts, and advisors abound; all looking worried beyond belief, solemn, on edge, and haggard.

“Will he live?”

The Nightingale.

“Yes...” answers Dorian.

Solas turns to see the pair and Commander Cullen standing outside the healer’s tent where his own unconscious form rests peacefully upon a quiet bedroll.

“I don’t know how she did it...” sighs Dorian, the strain and melancholy in his voice practically dripping from every syllable. “Blightcap and Magebane? It should have killed him...within seconds...but...He’ll live –and without any ill effects it seems.”

For a moment their conversation lulls and then Dorian closes his eyes and lets out a steadying breath.

“Is there any news?” he questions, looking back up at both the Commander and the Spymaster.

“My scouts have found nothing,” replies Leliana.

“And the soldiers?” he counters.

“Nothing.” replies the Commander. “All tracks disappear near the Emerald Graves’ border.”

“I have sent scouts further into the area. They are searching for any sign of the Inquisitor, or her Templar abductors. But there has been no whisper of their whereabouts since being spotted less than a league from this side of the border the night after the attack.” reports Leliana. “The search is slow going as the terrain...”

“I don’t want to hear excuses!” interrupts Dorian angrily, as he menacingly swipes his hand dismissively. “It’s been six days! She couldn’t have just fucking disappeared into the nothing.”

“Dorian...” warns Cullen worriedly. “Calm down.”

“Calm down?” he shoots back incredulously. “How the hell am I supposed to calm down? We get fucking ambushed in the middle of the night –in a place that our fucking ‘All-Knowing’ Spymaster said was cleared of Venatori and Red Templars long ago, I might add – I get browbeaten, Bull nearly gets his guts splattered all over the ground, Solas nearly dies from poison, and SARINA GETS FUCKING ABDUCTED AND PRACTICALLY DISAPPEARS FROM ALL OF CREATION!”

“And you expect me to calm down?” he adds ferociously. “FUCK YOU, TEMPLAR!”

“Dorian...” comes Solas’ strained and cracked voice. “That’s enough.”
Three pairs of eyes immediate shoot to the space, behind them, to see Solas weakened form sitting cross-legged on the edge of his bedroll and rubbing his bandaged shoulder.

“We’ll find her.” the elf adds.

“And how do suppose that’s going to happen?” Dorian argues. “Cole has disappeared...been gone for three days, without even as much as a word...and your still under the effects of that damn Magebane...you wouldn’t be able to track her aura even if you tried.”

Solas closes his eyes, bringing both hands up in front of him –with his palms facing the sky– and pulls on his magic. For a moment, his hands begin to glow with the color of the fade and then quickly putters out.

“See...” breathes out Dorian frustratingly. “You’re the only one who is even slightly in tune with her magic enough to search for her. And without yours, there is no way we can find her that way.”

“Which is why...” he adds sarcastically, turning and pointedly looking at both the Commander and Leliana as Solas slowly pulls himself up to his feet. “We have to rely on, so-called, talented trackers and scouts.”

“Who are royally failing...” he grumbles.

“That’s not fair.” accuses Leliana. “We are doing the best we can.”

“Well...your BEST...isn’t fucking GOOD enough.”

Suddenly a startled and panicked scream echoes across the encampment grabbing everyone’s attention. Solas, Dorian, Cullen, and Leliana all look up to see a frightened yet curious crowd gathering at the edge of the tree line. Grabbing onto Dorian, Solas nods to the man and allows him to help him across the camp only to come to a frozen stop when all of their eyes land on a swirling black vortex of black and grey smoke. For a few tense moments everyone stares at the magical machination, wondering what in all of Thedas was happening. And then, as if by insurmountable luck, Cole suddenly appears from within.

The gasps that permeate the air are deafening as the entire crowd took in the spirit boys form. He is covered from head to toe in blood and in his arms –wrapped in an equally bloodied white blanket– is the battered and bleeding, unconscious, and naked form of the Inquisitor.

Cole takes a step, the vortex behind him disappearing at his movement, and then he collapses to his knees in unbelievable exhaustion. Caring not for their recovering injuries, Dorian and Solas immediately dart for the pair and dropped down to their knees before them. Looking down upon her form, the realization of her physical state hits them almost as hard as Cole’s next words.

“She is fading fast...” he whispers mournfully, before flashing a vengeance-filled glare, depositing Sarina into the two mages arms, and vanishing.

The vision goes dark once again just seconds before a voice echoes all around him.
“They will pay...my Sister...” Cole declares with a blood-curdling growl. “I swear it...”

Unable to pull his mind from the thoughts of such a memory, Solas can only stand still in the darkness as the memory flashes once more.

Through the scattered particles of finely floating dust, the soft light of dawn filters into the darkness, refracted and reflected by the appearance of the glowing stain-glass windows of her private suite as the scene unfolds. The air, thick with the chill of early morning in winter swept mountains, while usually calm, feels almost bitter and remorseful of its existence. The stones beneath his feet feel as if all the warmth they could ever hold in all of time has been leeched out of them for a millennia.

As the light grows, illuminating the space, Solas catches sight of a very familiar scene: Dorian, sitting upon Sarina’s bedside, her hand in his, as his own sleeping form sits quietly upon the floor at the end of her bed. Head bowed. Tired and worry-filled eyes closed to exhaustion.

Tearing his eyes from his own reflection, Solas steps forward, carried by emotions that he can no longer quantify, and walks farther into the space. His eyes trained on the bed before him, where Dorian holds vigil, and to the form laying within.

The memory is from nearly a fortnight after Cole rescued her from her captors, he realizes.

The memory from the day she finally woke up.

Her aura is almost peaceful as the soft exhalation of her breath releases in shallow breaths. Almost as if she were merely sleeping. But Solas knows, as he did then, that such impressions were just a dream. Had it not been for himself, and Fiona, and Dorian, and the help of six other Inquisition Mages, Sarina would have perished that very night Cole brought her back.

Letting out a deep breath, he closes his eyes and tries to refocus his mind for a moment –letting the reality of this memory settle deep within his mind. He remembers the horror of those first few days, how her heart stopped on three separate occasions, only to be brought back by the strongest magic they could muster, and how all of her caregivers and healers doubted that she would ever truly recover.

Opening his eyes once more, he begins to take in the scene with a heavy heart.

She is unnaturally pale and unnaturally thin –her breathing shallow. Her face is deeply bruised and swollen around her right eye; and along her left jawline and cheek sits the tell-tale signs of more trauma. Her lips, dry and cracked, are split in three places. The right side of her neck, entire right shoulder, and arm –down to the very fingertips– are heavily bandaged and securely laced with the bandages across her chest in an effort to keep the whole appendage immobile. More heavy bandaging streaks across her lower abdomen, around her pelvis, and down her right thigh, while her left leg is splinted from mid-thigh to her equally bandaged ankle.

Dorian sighs heavily, his thumb rubbing gentle circles upon her hand as he watches her with far
more worry on his face than he had ever seen before. He is exhausted, strung out, and far too thin than he should be. Heart raw, and unguarded, the deep dark circles under his reddened eyes, and the sunken pallor of his skin, reflect a direness that is palpable in the air all around him as the exhalations of his every breath is laced with fatigue and regret. He is the true epitome of misery, heartache, and longing. All humor, haughtiness, and aristocratic air, that was once the makeup of the enigmatic Altus named Dorian Pavus, is long since gone. Leaving nothing behind but an emptiness only few in the world could ever understand.

The sight of Dorian’s misery, though he was roughly aware before, hits Solas far harder in retrospect. Seeing from outside time, it is nearly too much, as his own heart feels a sense of pity and of shame for never truly looking past his own worry to recognize that he was not alone in such misery. He had never believe that he and Dorian would ever have anything in common; that they were far too different, bound to be forever at odds at one another in morals, emotions, and beliefs; and he had let such assumptions cloud his perceptions so much that he would have never noticed such suffering.

It was a disservice, he now realizes, a disservice that Dorian never deserved.

Suddenly there is a slight movement from the bed, pulling Solas’ conscious eyes from where they settled upon Dorian’s face, to see the very moment when Sarina’s eyes finally opened.

“Adora?” questions Dorian hesitantly.

Love.

“Are you awake?”

For a few tense moments there is no movement, no sound, and then seemingly out of nowhere, a deeply soft sigh echoes from the bed.

“Do...ri...an...”

Her voice is raw, cracked and dry.

“I am here, mi adora,” he replies, his hand reflexively squeezing hers in reassurance.

Her eyes barely open, the right one first then the left, and are heavy-lidded as her face flashes a series of emotions.

Exhaustion.

Worry.

Confusion.

Fear.

“Am I dead?” she questions, her tone miserable and distraught, as her eyes instantly water.

“No.” answers Dorian adamantly, her tone sparking fear in his very heart, as he reaches up, cups
her cheek, and turns her lowered eyes to see his face. “You are not dead. You are very much alive, Sarina.”

Sarina stares into his eyes for a moment, almost searching for the lie she thinks is there and then sighs heavily and closes her own. For a few minutes, it seems that any adverse emotional reaction is not to be had, as if her mind has finally succumbed to the fact that everything is well, and nearly content look falls upon her face. But that moment of contentment disappears as quickly as it came as her face systematically crumbles into a confused scowl. The memories of the last few days of conscious thought seem to flicker across her mind and her demeanor changes to that of a deep, emotional turmoil. The moment goes still, as Dorian watches her emotions flicker across her face, readying himself for what he seems to know will come next. Sarina does not disappoint. For a few seconds later her eyes snap open and she shoots up in bed.

“The others!” she cries out.

Dorian instantly grabs her and pushes her back down on the bed.

“Don’t move, Adora!” Dorian argues.

She is fighting his hold, trying to shrug him off, as her mind settles into the memories of the ambush.

“Solas!” she adds in a flurried panic. “He’s hurt...Magebane...Blightcap...He’s going to die!”

“Adora, stop!” he commands, tightening his hold upon her shoulders to the point that there will be bruising the next day. “You’re going to hurt yourself even more.”

She does not listen, so far gone in her fear that she grabs his wrist with her unbound hand and tries to wrench it away.

“Let me go!” she demands. “I have to get to him. I have to help him. He’s going to die, Dorian. He’s going to die!”

“Damn it, Sarina!” Dorian growls forcefully. “Stop...”

“Look at me... Look at me!” he demands.

“The battle is over... Solas is alive. Bull is alive. I am alive... We all made it.” he informs, trying his best to make the truth sink in. “Do you hear me, Sarina...WE ARE ALL ALIVE!”

“You lie!” she growls.

“It’s not a lie!” he shoots back, as he pushes her harder into the mattress and leans in until their faces are just inches apart and stared into her eyes. “We made it, mi adora. I swear it.”

His words still don’t seem to sink in and for a moment Solas can see the battle of emotions running rampant across Dorian’s face. The fear of what to do. The fear of what to say to convince her. The fear of what she will do if he cannot. For a moment Sarina fights him, and then she suddenly goes still as the presence of another registers to all involved. Dorian sits back and looks up just in time to see a glowing hand upon the top of Sarina’s head materialize. He turns to see Cole sitting cross-legged on the bed beside her.

“Be still...my sister...” Cole commands softly, his face going from worried to calm as she stills completely.

When Dorian’s eyes settle upon Sarina once more, she is finally calm. Her eyes are heavy-lidded.
Her breath is slow and steady. And she seems as if all panic has disappeared.

“You’re sure?” she questions a few quiet moments later. Her tone no longer upset and fearful, as she looks up at Dorian with a worried look.

“Yes. I am sure.” he replies, nodding gently. “You saved him, Sarina. He lives.”

“See...” he adds, turning slightly and pointed down at the end of the bed.

She looks down and catches the recognizable bald head looming at the foot of her bed, completely asleep, and lets out a deeply relieved sigh.

At that moment the vision flickers, and though the manifestation doesn’t change, Solas feels uneasy. When he looks upon her face once more, her eyes are clearer now –seeming more awake, and she is looking off into the distance as Cole and Dorian watch her.

“The memories are harsh...fresh...” Cole says softly, placing his hand gently on her bandaged shoulder. “And they have questions. They will ask. Report. It is inevitable. To avoid. Deflect. Differ. Will not suffice. They worried and will want to know.”

“I know.” she sighs.


“What are you saying Cole?” questioned Dorian. “Are you telling her to lie?”

“A lie to protect the hearts of those you love isn’t necessarily a lie,” he replied. “Varric taught me that.”

“But a lie... is still a lie.” she breathed out.

“Another among the others...” Cole nodded knowingly. “But justified.”

“I will think about it Cole...” she sighed. “Thank you.”

“For saving me...and being you.”

“A brother who will always protect his sister.” he smiles.

“Yes...”

“Cole.” Dorian sighs. “Though the others will want to know that Sari is awake...perhaps...”

“She needs time.” the spirit-boy interrupted, looking down upon Sarina’s face knowingly. “I will wait a few hours...before I tell them...”

“Thank you.”

With that final exchange, Cole vanished.

For a time, the vision stays the same. Sarina lying in bed and Dorian watching her. Neither of them
speak, and for a moment Solas begins to worry if all that he has seen is all that he will see. The lull in conversation between the two gives him a moment of pause to think about everything that had happened back then. How, when he awoke from his deep sleep at the foot of her bed, Sarina had been awake and in a fair mood considering the circumstances. He had suspected, as most would, that she would be distraught or upset upon her waking but had found that she had been calm. He remembered how that bother him a bit, finding her seemingly normal, but what he remembered most was the forced smile upon Dorian’s face that seemed to be hiding something much deeper.

As the memory of Dorian’s face at that moment in time flickered across his mind, he heard the man finally speak once more.

“Tell me...”

“To know such a thing...It will be a burden...” she says softly.

“One that I will gladly bear for mi adora,” answers Dorian, love lacing his every word. “I would not let you carry the memory alone.”

“Allow me to ease your heart...” he begged gently. “If only in this...”

“Help me understand.”

“Please.”

“Alright...” she finally answers softly, as she reaches up with her one good hand and touches two fingers to Dorian’s forehead –right between his eyes. “Bear witness to the wickedness that I will forever carry.”

At her words, the vision is enveloped in a bright flash of sadistically red light then falls into darkness. The moment is still for only a few seconds before the decrepit sight of a stone incased dungeon appears all around them. The walls are covered with mold and moss, under a slick sheen of condensation. The air around them, barely lit from a single opening to night sky high above, feeling oppressive in every way, is musty with the intermingling scents of damp, disturbed soil, rot, festering bodily fluids, and fresh blood.

A soft, exhausted moan echoes.

Solas turns to the sound and his eyes immediately widen. There, just on the edge of the dungeon is Sarina. Shackled, hanging spread-eagle to a construct of two large pieces of wood crossed upon one another and hovering some distance from the floor, she is limp, barely conscious, and completely unclothed. Her pale and delicate skin is marred in bruises, with several deep cuts encased in clotted blood, and is heavily carpeted in fresh and bleeding lacerations, from the strikes of what Solas can tell to be a lash of some type, all across her chest, abdomen, and upper thighs.

“Tortured,” he whispers. “She was tortured.”

But why?
Suddenly the sound of a heavy, iron-laced door, slamming across stone echoed through the room – instantly making Sarina’s exposed form flinch. Solas turns to see the sight of two hulking Red Templars, heavily infected with Red Lyrium, enter the space followed by a tall and obviously angry man dressed in full Venatori mage robes and face mask. The two Templars, stepping aside to take a guard post by the open door, speak no words and watch as the man walks further into the space and flicks his hand. Instantly, hidden sconces attached to the stone walls throughout the dungeon flare and illuminate the room.

As the light quickly fills the space, Solas’ eyes narrow at what he could now see, as an uncontrollable bloodlust, nearly, clouds over his mind.


“Bastards...”

“Wake up.” commands the Venatori Mage, his tone vicious, as he deliberately throws a cold bucket of water upon her form with his order. “You elf bitch.”

Sarina’s body shivers and shutters from the cold water’s contact and looks up at the monster before her. For a moment she makes no movement save for looking upon him and then in a fit of pure defiance she angrily narrows her eyes and spits in his direction.

“Fuck you!” she growls.

“Feisty today, aren’t we?” the man practically sighs.

Sarina gives a nearly devilish smile.

“More than feisty.”

A taunt. Daring the man.

Her ploy hits home. For her torturer immediately takes two steps and smacks her across the face with an open hand so hard that her bottom lip instantly splits. Blood automatically begins to flow, and to add insult to injury, Sarina pulls in her bottom lip and draws blood into her mouth only to spit it back in the man’s face with a look so hateful that had it been her magic the man would have burst into flames instantly.

Stepping back, he wipes the blood from his face and narrows his eyes at her.

Sarina simply smiles at him again.

“You will pay for that...” he growls, reaching up with his hand and snapping his fingers.

Immediately one of the two guards at the door cross the room and appears at the torturer’s side.
“Lash.” the man commands, his palm opened outward towards the guard.

The Templar grabs one of the offending weapons from the table on the right and hands it off before retreating back to his post. The whip in question was one that had immediately caught Solas’ attention before. Its pommel, incased in Silverite and covered in small spikes, was as large as a man’s fist. The handle, a natural stride long, was wrapped it thick black leather. And its horse-length, nine lashes, made up of thickly braided leather, was laced with small metal beads; meant to bruise and break; and a few small shards of razor-sharp Volcanic glass.

The man, rolling the handle of the whip in his hand—seemingly trying to get a feel for its weight—chuckles softly to himself as if he was almost reveling in the joy of what was to come. At his mirth, Sarina looked at him with a nearly sly smile.

“You are wasting your time,” she informed, her voice cold and unfeeling. “You will get nothing from me!”

“So sure of yourself, are you?” he shot back, his hand wrapping back around the handle with a tight grip. “You dare to fight, the lash out at the world. When you are nothing but a little mage bitch with nothing and no one.”

“You are nothing! A gnat. An insignificant little shit whose life is just as pathetic as your soul. You serve a master who would kill you without a thought. Because you mean nothing.” she countered just as angrily. “And you dare to mock me?”

Sarina derisively laughs.

“You can torture me all you like, you bastard, but I will never give you what you want!”

“Then you will die here...”

“So I shall...” she answers fervently, balling her fists and drawing herself up as straight as she can muster dangling above the ground and showing her defiance. “But the world will not end because I betrayed everything I stood for!”

It was at that moment that the Venatori mage’s calm snapped. Without even a word of warning he drew back the whip and let its tendrils fly. The first strike from the nine fanned out across her upper thighs and lower abdomen—bruising and rending flesh. The second strike hit home across her upper chest, neck, and face—leaving finger-length gashes across her left cheek, ear, and upper throat. The third strike landed across her upper chest, breasts, and arms—cutting a deep swath down through the muscle and nearly cleaving bone.

And all the while, Sarina made not a sound.

Over and over he struck her, unrelenting and unapologetic, growing angrier and angrier at her lack of outcry.

For what seemed like hours, he continued rending flesh from muscle and bone, determined to either kill her or make her give in, until his own fatigue seem to get the better of him. Lowering his hand, he took in his handy work with a nearly sadistic smile, as his eyes roamed all over her mutilated and heavily bleeding flesh. She had fallen limp in the chains and her head was lolled off to the side, her eyes closed. No longer beautifully pale and smooth, it was now nearly completely covered with
sickly bruises and buckets of her very own blood.

“My lord.” came the voice of one of the Templars near the door. “She needs a reprieve.”

“I know.” the torturer grounded out.

Closing the gap between him and Sarina, he reached up and grabbed her chin. Turning her head towards him. When she made no movement of protest, and he noticed her breathing, he let out an irritated sigh. Dropping the handle of the whip, letting it fall to the stone floor at his feet, he immediately called upon his magic and let it flow all over her. For a few moments, nothing seem to happen, and then the cuts upon her skin began to close as her blood began to retreat back into her body. The cast took some time but before too long her wounds were mostly healed, her color had come back to her skin, and her breathing had normalized.

He snuffed out his cast, only to immediately call upon another form of magic that Solas immediately recognized.

Lightning.

The bolt that shot through her was so strong that it could have killed her. But rather than taking her life it seemed to jolt her awake instead.

“That was close...” she muttered in a challenging tone, looking up at the man with a defiant –yet faint– smile. “I guess the third time is not the charm...”

The man immediately reached up and grabbed her by the throat, seething.

“You mock me...” he growled. “But will you be able to resist forever...?”

“Until the Beyond takes me...” she answered softly.

“You need not suffer such a thing...” he implored, trying to use reasoning to get her to understand by releasing his grip ever so slightly. “You need only tell me what I want to know...If you do, I will let you go free.”

“Lying does not become you.” she chuckled.

“I seek only him. Nothing more, nothing less.” he declared gently. “Give me his identity, his location, and I will let you live.”

“Never!” she spat. “I will not give him to you! I will not give you the means to unlock the full power of Corypheus’ orb any further!”

Solas instantly froze.

The orb?

Is that what this had all been about? They were looking, for him?
“You will give me what I want!” yelled the man, his patience finally at its wit’s end, as he grabbed her by the throat so harshly that it began to cut off her air.

Struggling, gasping for breath, Sarina tried to twist herself free as the man immediately reached up with his other hand and snapped his fingers. The same Templar from before ran across the room, grabbed the lash from the floor, and handed it to him. Glancing down at his hand, an evil glint flickered across his face as a sadistic thought popped into his mind. Without any hesitation, he flipped the handle in his hand, so that the spiked pommel was facing up, and jammed it, with all of his strength, head first between her legs.

The blood-curdling scream that fell from her lips shattered stone.

Chapter End Notes

Freaking ouchies man...
FYI: When this part of the story actually happens, there is a hell of a lot more torture put upon Sarina than I will actually depict. The damage to her body being as explanatory as I feel I need to be. Just imagine the worst kind of torture, over a span of six days, you can come up with...and you're on the right page. I didn't want to get too unbelievably graphic with this but the last part I couldn't leave out. Just know that that particular scenario was repeated over the course of her capture, multiple times, with multiple instruments.

Tevene Translation:
Adora: Love
Mi adora: My love
What was lost...

Chapter Summary

With the lingering image of Sarina's torture firmly in his mind, Solas is hit with a sickening realization of what she truly lost during captivity as an unexpected source begins to reveal things he never thought to know.

Chapter Notes

This section of the story has totally tore me up on both an emotional level and an author's level. As I came to this part, I had an outline of what I was going to include with this update, but as I began to hash it out for real, I came to the realization that the update would be unbelievably long (ie. nearly 15k words or more) so I had to split it. If this half's ending seems to fall a little flat, I apologize. Finding a good place to split it in two was difficult. The second half of this memory is nearly complete so this story will most likely update again by the end of the week (or so). Keep that in mind if you are following along.

As a cacophony of her terrified and agonizing screams echo all around him from every direction, and the whole vision goes black, Solas’ horrified and devastated form collapses upon the ground. His face buried in his hands, as tears flow from his eyes unhindered, the full weight of what Sarina had endured—ultimately for his sake—hits him so hard that he can barely stand it. Crushing the very heart within him, he can do nothing but sob as an immeasurable sense of unwavering and insurmountable guilt presses down upon him like the weight of all the world as his whole body trembles violently.

All he can see, all he can hear, all he can feel, is her violated body, her lingering screams, and her shattered love.

“What have I done?” he cries out. “What have I done!?”

“I’m so sorry Vhenan...” he sobs, collapsing more and more into himself. “I’m so, so sorry my love.”

He does not know how long he cries, time no longer having any meaning. Her memory far more important than anything beyond this moment. His mind, along with his heart, races with images of the past. Her kind eyes looking upon him. Her gentle smile, smiling back at him. Her sweet laugh wrapping around his heart. Her keen wit, challenging him at every turn. Her loving heart, she shared with those she trusted. Her care, for the well-being of all. Her sense of wonder, when he spoke to her
of things long since passed. Her protectiveness of those she loved and of him. Her sense of justice, as she defended his life and the life of others. Her determination to see everything through till the better end. Her loyalty, to those she cared for. Her trust, in all of them, earned by words and deeds.

And with every image his misery expands tenfold.

He is undone. His mind and heart lost. Unable to call upon the strength to accept, he can merely wallow in all that he has done. Has caused. And hate himself for it.

High above a rumble of thunder echoes across the blackness and the air all around him suddenly goes unbearably cold. For a few seconds the change doesn’t register. His mind still buried deep in his own misery. But as the second rumble vibrates the air around him, he finally opens his tear-filled eyes to the sky. It is then that a glowing full moon, surrounding by thick storm clouds, appear. And with it the fall of icy snow. Solas’ watches the flakes fall, following them with his eyes until they land upon the ground that is suddenly covered in layers and layers of the frozen precipitation. The manifestation of a concentrated beam of white light appears, falling down from the darkened sky, through the blackness of the night, and lands on the snow drift just steps from where he kneels.

Solas’, blinking back tears, takes in the manifestation with an almost curious dread sinking in his heart.

“There is more...” he whispers, brokenheartedly. “More I must know...”

At his softly spoken realization, the snow beneath the luminous beam begins to move –bubbling up like a spring, and from within comes four shoots of winding roots. They rise, twisting and writhing upon themselves; turning over and over, around and around; climbing higher and higher; twisting and braiding together; until they suddenly coalesce into a manifestation of what looks like a slanted top pedestal.

Solas stands, and as he draws to his full height, a puff of green and black smoke blinks in to existence upon the pedestal’s top. The magic dissipates just as quickly as it came, wafting off into oblivion, leaving behind something that he immediately recognizes.

“The book...”

Tentatively he steps, snow crunching beneath his every footfall, as he slowly clears the gap between him and book in mere moments. He looks down upon it, finding that the book has manifested itself in an open manner. He takes in the pages facing him, only to find them strangely unmarked. They are blank, not a drop of ink marring their surface. Not a word etched within. For a moment, his mind reels at what he sees. His heart and consciousness trying to understand why it has manifested in such a way, and before he can even formulate a likely hypothesis, he senses movement out of the corner of his eye.

He turns and catches sight of someone he knows all too well.
Dorian.

His form, yet somewhat ethereal; a thinly veiled reflection of a memory; is dress in a regal ensemble, spun in reds and golds; unfamiliar to Solas' memory but the perfect manifestation of the opulence of Tevinter; as he paces a small track back and forth within the snow just to the west of where he stands.

He looks as he once did, when Solas knew him, yet the subtle differences of time are apparent in the tell-tale signs of age just around the creases of his eyes. He is a little older now. But with his aging, Solas can see the wisdom he has acquired through his mannerisms and movements. His once-haughty demeanor has faded. Replaced with a sophistication that he could merely emulate in his younger years. His aura, once flighty and near impossible to predict in most circumstances, is unexpectedly calm and measured. He is poised. Elegant. And knowing.

Scanning Dorian’s form once more, Solas finally notices something that his previous inspections didn’t see.

As Dorian paces, he holds within his hand a leather-bound book –and with it a quill. His eyes are furrowed deep in concentration as he stares at the page before him seemingly contemplating his next move. For a few moments, Dorian just stares and then—as if an idea comes to him out of the blue—he begins to put ink to page. It is then that Solas suddenly hears the deafening sound of quill scratching upon parchment coming from the pedestal. He turns again, eyes shooting to the pages displayed for him to see, and just as he catches the slowing scribing words appearing upon the paper letter by letter he hears Dorian’s words echo its contents.

“She will not twist the knife, but I shall…and gladly.”

His tone is immediately accusatory, and hostile.

“You ruthless, uncouth, and heartless bastard.

She suffered so much. Only hoped to find some peace in what was the chaos of her life. And when she had finally found it in you, you callously snatched it from her grasp without a second thought.”

A pause lingers.

“You lied to us. Used us all. And I should kill you for that alone...
But what you did to her...not in ten thousand millennia could you ever hope to fully redeem yourself. To undo the destruction you caused to such an innocent and loving soul who is beloved by so many.”

“And for that, I shall despise you till the end of time.”

“She GAVE everything to you.”

“Her thoughts, her prayers, her strength, her understanding, her love. She STOOD UP for you when others condemned you. She HELPED you when you needed it the most. Making it a priority above even the whole of Thedas. She GAVE your words and your opinions the respect and gravity they deserved.

She SHARED your goals, your ideals, and your hopes.

She gladly KILLED in the name of them, without remorse or guilt.

She DEFENDED your right to live; your right to think, feel, and exist; with a passion unlike any other.

She PROTECTED you—not only with every fiber of her being and every ounce of her spirit but with a willingness to sacrifice her very life so that you may live—countless times.

She TRUSTED you...with every beat of her heart.

She CHOSE you...above all those who would stand by her side till the end of time...

And YOU...you chose a duty, that should have been lost to a time long ago, over the future she would’ve happily given you.”

“How COULD YOU?

How could you be so cruel...?

How could you betray the one woman in all Thedas that could have found happiness with anyone, even me, but loved only YOU!!?”

At Dorian’s nearly incredulous question, the falling snow stills and dissipates as the world around Solas seems to freeze. Silence rains down upon him in a dark aura of misery and melancholy, in that moment, as Dorian’s voice fades softly and the sound of scribing pauses.

For a moment there is nothing, naught but the exhalations of his haggard breaths and the abysmal quiet. Another moment passes, and then another, and then slowly a deep sigh, laced with the very hubris of his undeniable sins, echoes with the depths of emphatic misery—catching Solas completely off guard. He immediately turns his eyes to the pages of the book and catches the very moment when the words begin to scribe once more.
“And so...for all your cruelty...” Dorian’s voice echoes.

As if called by his very words, a dull flash within the encompassing darkness all around him flickers. The rush of magic it seemingly summons immediately washes over him, and with it comes the materialization of a quickly moving mist that over takes the space in a matter of seconds. His vision is instantly obscured. He can see nothing or no one.

As dread, and an untapped fear, pools deeper into his heart, he reaches out blindly striving to believe that he may be able to dispel such a machination with thought alone, as the mist swirls and swirls. For a moment an echo of uncertainty his him, making his heart drop farther from his chest and then he feels it. His hand making contact with the pedestal that his conscious mind had forgotten existed. Drawing both hands to its surface, he instinctively grips the edges hard, knuckles going white with their imposing strength, with a faint hope that the creation will manage to cement his position to where he currently stands.

For a heartbeat everything in that moment goes incredibly still, and then a great wind rushes through the space sweeping away every droplet of the fog swirling around him.

Leaving in its wake, the manifestation of five unbelievably enormous Eluvians.

Each, guided and glistening with the shimmer of their reflective nature and adorned with the unmistakable images of divine beasts, resolutely encircle him –like sentinels – as he stands in the middle. Their surfaces, the doorways to memory, shimmer dully. Allowing no sight past their standing glory, yet whispering silently of the truth that lay within.

Leaving Solas suddenly feeling trapped. Almost as if he had been unceremoniously imprisoned within that instant.

“I condemn you with this.”

Dorian’s tone, now heartsick and laced with a quiet rage, is stern –almost damning, as it echoes all around him. For a moment the echo seems as if it will fade into an empty assertion and then suddenly the Eluvians magically flare and come to life on their own accord. Solas’ eyes widen in sheer panic and horror as his mind conceives the realization of what he must now bear witness to, as the surface of each mirror to the past summons up the devastating images of the things he had never known.

The torture he had yet to see.

“For this is what you deserve...”

Dorian’s words echo once more, as each Eluvian slowly begins to replay the depth of depravity that she had been put through.
“The knowledge...the memory...that I, for so long, carried alone as per her wishes.”

The uncountable beatings.

“*The truth that haunts me even till this very day...and will forever.*”

The insurmountable emotional fear and anguish.

“*The memory I swore to never reveal...*”

The unforgivable mutilations.

“*The tragedy that was her reality...*”

The unforgettable, unholy violations.

“*A reality bathed in her very own blood.*”

The unrelenting screams.

“*She never wanted you to know what the Templars had done to her and why,* he continued. “*She lied to everyone, spun a tale that spoke only as to her being an enemy of their master as their justification for such atrocities.*”

Suddenly, Cole’s voice echoes faintly from off in the distance.

“*A lie to protect the hearts of those you love isn’t necessarily a lie.*”

“*But that was all it was: A lie.*”

Dorian’s voice began echoing again, this time somber and devastatingly sad, as the images continued their horrific march through time.
“A story told to protect the truth...

Because she could not bear to hurt you...

And could not live with the guilt of knowing what was done to her would become another regret anyone else would have to carry...especially you.”

“But what we didn’t know until much, much later...”

A simply flash of the last time he saw the Sarina, the moment he told her the truth of himself, immediately flickered in the northern most mirror and then quickly reverted back to her unimaginable torture.

“Destroyed her worse than anything at the realization.”

“What they took her for...
What they took from her...
What they nearly killed her for...
The knowledge they thought she possessed...
The one they truly wanted...the owner of the orb, the source of its magic, the one who knew its secrets and could unleash it fully upon the world.
The one that would be able to secure victory for their lord...

WAS YOU!”

In that very second, every flickering image of Sarina’s torturous existence vanished, leaving behind one solitary image in the Eluvian at the forefront.

Him, standing upon a snowy mountain, the devastated temple as his backdrop. His face dark, and vicious. His eyes red and bloodthirsty. As his hand held high the orb, glowing a sickly green.

“You monster.”

Dorian’s voice instantly goes cold.

“She was kidnapped, interrogated, starved, disgraced, beaten, tormented, tortured, and viciously
violated by her very captors who sought only to force her into giving away the secret she unknowingly carried.

The secret of you!

The Trickster. The Liar.

The wolf who would betray such loyalty...

Time, and time again.

And scared her heart...

Forever...”

Dorian’s voice, as if suddenly cut short, snuffs out. The moment goes unbearably silent as the book, pedestal, snow beneath his feet, and the Eluvians all vanish. Replaced by the deep abyss of darkness.

“You have to promise me, Dorian...” Sarina’s voice suddenly echoes from far off in the distance. “He can never know.”

“Why?”

“He will blame himself...” she answers, her voice hoarse with sorrow.

“He should...it’s because of him...he failed...”

“No...” she interrupts softly. “He carries a guilt within him...unspoken, unshared...already. I will not add such a burden to one who suffers with a pain unseen and unknown.”

“You love him that much...?” Dorian’s haggard and heartbroken voice questions. “To never...”

“Far more than he will ever come to know...”

At that moment the darkness fades, the ground beneath his feet shifts to that of a stone floor covered by rich carpeting and the walls and ceiling of the Grand Hall at Skyhold appear all around him. The large room is sparsely populated by a few indistinguishable nobles and servants, a few guards by the main entrance, and the quietly writing form of Varric as he sits by the hearth buried in his work. The door to the rotunda is open, as is the door to Josephine’s office—which is strangely blocked by the quietly talking forms of the Nightingale and the Commander, and the air seems far too still to be even remotely true to history.

“We’ll be ready.” the Commander’s voice softly, as he closes the door behind him. “The army has already set out for the Western Approach. The Wardens won’t know what hit them.”

“Good.” answers Leliana. “The Inquisitor and her team will be leaving in two days. If we can make good time, we should be able to assault the stronghold within the next three days following. Until then I will have my scouts monitoring the fortress around the clock and report if anything changes.”
“Understood.” Cullen nods. “…speaking of the Inquisitor…have you seen her this morning?”

“No, not as of yet.” she replies. “I believe she had some lingering duties to attend to before preparing to leave. Checking in Dorian’s and Solas’ research projects, among other things.”

“And what, exactly, is Dorian researching?” he questions. “I have not seen a report…”

“I don’t know,” replies Leliana.

“That’s not something a Spymaster should say.” he counters, mistrust in his voice.

“No.” she answers. “But is something a friend would say.”

“I see.” he sighs, seemingly understanding the Nightingale’s point without her having to spell it out for him. “Very well then.”

“I should get back to my duties,” he adds.

“As should I.” she replies.

“Farewell.” he ends, turning from her before striding away.

Solas watches as Leliana gives no longer than a second’s worth of time to look upon Cullen’s retreating form before heading towards the rotunda, her likely destination being her office. When she disappears from sight, Solas turns his eyes to the head of the hall and his vision settles on the large, uninhabited throne sitting quietly upon the dais.

“The siege at Adamant.” he sighs. “Two months after…”

Immediately, Solas’ words are cut-off by the sound of Dorian’s voice echoing once more.

“For what you have done, we would gladly and joyously kill you. We should kill you. And I cannot promise that if you ever stood before any of us that would refrain from doing so…Even by her command.”

A recognizable noise suddenly breaks the silence in the hall, as a large heavy door opens. Solas’ eyes immediately shift to the Inquisitor’s doorway and spots her stepping out of her quarters. She is dress in a fine, white linen tunic and darker than black leggings. Her feet are unbound and her hair, freshly clean, is perfectly secured in her regular up-do. Her face is once again marred with Mythal’s vallaslin and her eyes, a joyful and as carefree as he remembers, but her expression is somewhat unnatural to him.

She looks troubled, almost as if there is something heavy weighing on her mind, and for a moment she just looks out over the Grand Hall almost absentmindedly. Then he sees it. The mask he knew so well, falling into place as she steps out into the hall and pulls the door closed behind her. She immediately scans the hall afterward, seemingly taking stock of who is present, before making her
way through the large room—the slightly noticeable limp she had carried after her abduction far more noticeable to Solas than he remembered.

“But, it seems, that I—along with my dear brothers—owe you a debt of thanks as well.”

Dorian’s voice echoes again.

“Brothers?” questions Solas’ voice, his eyes flicking and flitting all around the hall for a quick second before settling them upon the Inquisitor once more to see her veer towards Josephine’s office.

He doesn’t understand the man’s words, but cannot bring himself to mind them. The sight of Sarina seemingly erasing everything at that moment.

Feeling compelled to follow, Solas quickly crosses the room from where he had been standing near the stairwell that led to the upper loft and falls instep behind her.

“Because of you, we found our cause. Our justification. Our true purpose.”

Her pace suddenly slows as she reaches the closed door that leads to the ambassador’s office. She stops then stills, her breath coming out in uneven pants, and immediately closes her eyes.

“Thanks to you, the choices we made on our own were not in vain. Our covenant, with her, not unworthy...”

Letting out a shuddering breath as she grabs the handle, she shakes her head only once before opening it. She takes a step, now staring at the inner door the office within, and lets out an almost irritated huff.

Solas watches her for a few seconds, wondering what it suddenly is that makes the door to Josephine’s office so intimidating, and then notices the shift in her posture. She immediately turns and looks down the stairwell that leads to the lower hall and kitchens.

“And our promise to guard the heart we hold so dearly...FOREVER.

Shall never be undone.”

In that very moment, as Dorian’s declaration rings out, Sarina turns completely and descends the stairs without another thought. Solas follows his mind wondering why she would go to the lower levels of the castle on such a day. When such a battle was looming on the horizon.
Aside from the kitchen, and the wine cellar, the only thing accessible in the bowels of Skyhold from this particular stairwell was a lower hall, a few empty rooms...and...

“The lower library,” Solas whispers as they reach the lower hall and watches Sarina make a bee line for the closed door of the small space.

Reaching up, she gently knocks upon the wood before her, without a word. Immediately the door opens, a hand reaches out, and instantly pulls her inside. Fear bolts through Solas so fast that before he can even think, he darts across the lower hall and manages to slip into the room just seconds before the door slams shut behind them. He looks up, and that’s when he notices the occupant from within.

“And good morning to you too, Dorian.” Sarina quips as she looks up at the man’s face.

“I told you to come before dawn,” he grumbles, his eyes tired. “You’re late.”

Sarina has enough understanding to knowingly look a little guilty.

“I got hung up with troop movements and planning until really late last night.” she tries to explain. “I was so tired that I barely remember Solas putting me to bed.”

That memory immediately flashes through his mind at her words. He had found her leaning up against the wall just outside her quarters, so exhausted that she could barely move.

“He must have told my guards that I was not to be disturbed because no one woke me.”

“You take on too much at once Sari.” Dorian sighed. “You’re still recovering after all.”

“I know.” she nodded. “But the world waits for no man, no?”

Dorian gives an agreeing nod.

“So...” she intones. “Your research?”

“Ah...yes...” he remembers, waving her to follow as he turns down the short hallway covered from floor to ceiling in old tomes.

When they reach the small reading room at the end, Dorian falls into his chair with an exasperated sigh and closes his eyes. For a moment he is quiet, as Sarina regards his demeanor with slight apprehension.
“Well...?”

“It can be done,” he answers, opening his eyes and looking up at her.

“You’re sure?”

“Yes...” he sighs. “And no.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” her tone is argumentative, a fact not overlooked by Dorian as he narrows his eyes slightly.

“It means that...” he began. “There is a possibility.”

‘Possibility?’ Solas’ questions in his mind. ‘What is going on?’

“Explain.” she practically demands.

“As you are well aware...between all the healers here at Skyhold, we have managed to repair most of the damage you’ve suffered at the hands of those damn Templars.” he sighs. “But, I am afraid that there will always be lingering effects. The limp...the phantom shoulder pains...”

“The flashbacks...” she adds.

“There’s already a solution for that!” he immediately counters.

“No, Dorian,” she said a little forcefully. “I will not subject Cole to such a thing.”

“But he is willing to ease your burden.”

“I will not have him just take my memories to better suit some idyllic belief that I would be better for it.” she countered. “They are a part of me. A part of me that I’d rather forget, but I know that I mustn’t.”

“You are suffering needlessly.”

“Enough.” she snapped, though there was no fire in her words. “I will not have this fight with you again. Let it go, Dorian.”

“Fine.”

“Like I said...there will be damage that lingers no matter what we do...”

Dorian suddenly stops, lets out a deep breath, and closes his eyes.

“Get on with it,” she commands, this time her voice is practically meek and utterly small.

“As for the damage...” Dorian slowly stammered. “To...your...womanly bits...We’ve managed to
repair most of the damage...and restore most of the functionality...”

“But...?”

“But,” he says firmly. “The likelihood... as you are already aware...of having any chance at motherhood is slim.”

Before Solas can even process Dorian’s words, or Sarina can even formulate a sentence, he continues as if what he had just said had never been uttered.

“I have found something though,” he explains, his voice sounding somewhat assuring though his eyes are hesitant.

“In the tomes that I had Maevaris send me...”

“The ones from the Minrathous’ Grand Library?” she questions.

He nods.

“They mention a spell that could have the potential to undo what was done to you.” he sighs. “To restore your ability to have children...”

“But,” she added, her tone flat and already disappointed.

“It’s impossible.” he answered. “The amount of magic required to cast such a spell is beyond anything any normal mage can summon. From what I’ve read, the spell has only been cast once...in the early days of the Imperium. And the feat alone took the combined force of over fifty master mages...and cost the lives of nearly a thousand slaves.”

‘Blood magic.’ Solas scoffs.

“Elvhen slaves,” he added quietly.

The look of shock upon Sarina’s face, had it been a bolt of real lightning would have killed Dorian instantly and the rage in Solas’ heart would have burned the entirety of Skyhold to the ground.

“Your research is done, Dorian.” she immediately commands.

“But you know that already, don’t you?” she adds softly with an accepting look on her face.

“Yes.” he sighs. “For what it’s worth mi adora, I am sorry that there is nothing that can be done...that there is no other way, then such a horrible act.”

“I don’t blame you Dorian,” she says with a slight smile, stepping up to him and laying her hand
gently upon his shoulder. “I am not every Dalish, and neither are you every Tevinter. You have done everything I’ve asked you to do...and never asked you to do, but needed. And for that, I am always in your debt.”

“You owe me nothing,” he answered, flashing a smile as he reached up to her hand upon his shoulder and squeezed it affectionately. “I love you. It’s the least I could do.”

“You always go above and beyond for me Dorian.”

“And I always will.”

“I’d do anything for you,” he adds with another soft smile.

It is at that moment that the air around them seemed to change, not because of some magical machination from the book’s influence, but by Sarina’s demeanor.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong...per se,” she replies. “I was...I was just thinking that you and I should have a talk sometime...before...”

“Before, what?”

“Before we leave for Adamant.” she practically rushes.

He looks at her for a moment, completely perplexed by her words, before nodding.

“You have something you need to tell me, yes?” he questions almost knowingly. “Something that you’ve been keeping from me?”

At Dorian’s lightly given accusation, Sarina’s expression falls ever so slightly.

“Yes.” she nods. “And something I need to show you.”

“How ominous.” he practically chides. “Should I be worried?”

“No.” she answers. “Just...it’s something that I’ve been meaning to tell you about since the...Templars. And now that we are going into battle for the first time since...”

“The need to tell me has become more important.”

“Yes.”

In a moment of silence, the lower library fades as the images of Sarina and Dorian looking at one another lingers for a moment before following suit. In the moments that follow their disappearance, the world changes around him once more heralded in by a sudden warmth that fills the air around him and the glow from a loving hearth. As the light fills the space the world fills with the beauty of
her grand quarters. Night has fallen, the sky just beyond the closed balcony doors alight with a million stars and a glowing full moon looming high with in the sky. The hour is late, yet no closer to the time of the rising dawn than as the setting sun, and the room is quiet, still, save for the flickering sound of a burning fire within the large fireplace on the northern most wall.

Solas finds himself standing in the far corner of her room, near the wardrobe, looking upon the breadth of her private space, and her form, from the shadows. She is standing in front of the fireplace, a quiet elegance about her, and dress in an off-the-shoulder, floor length, and formfitting, white linen gown; split up to the hips on both sides and decorated with small scrolling ivy in shades of ivory and a pale green upon the hems; as she stares absentmindedly into the softly roaring flames before her. Her left arm, marked with the familiar green of his magic, crosses around her waist as her right is resting upon it, bent at the elbow and grasping a nearly empty goblet of red wine just under her lips. A small table, one that had always been a part of the décor, is standing stoically beside her as it holds a half-drunk bottle of Tevinter Red and an unadorned and innocuous looking wooden box.

Before Solas can take a step further into the memory, or gauge the scene any further, the sound of a closing door echoes up into the room from the lower staircase. A shimmer of magic, the sign of a gentle cast, wafts through the air a second later, practically announcing to all inside that the door had been enchanted with a ward. Footsteps follow the tinge of magic, and though Solas knows that someone is coming, Sarina makes no move nor indication that she has sensed it as well. She remains still, quiet, and contemplative, as she continues to look at the fire before her.

When the sound of the footfalls grow louder, Solas turns his eyes to the staircase to see Dorian immerging from below. He, himself, is dress in a light affair. A simple and unadorned set of light mage robes and a simple pair of slippers. And in his hand are two more bottles of Tevinter Red.

When he clears the stairs and notices her, he physically sighs at the sight and seems to wait a moment. The uncertainty that was rarely ever upon Dorian’s countenance is strangely there in that moment. He is worried, decidedly aware of it, and unconcerned at hiding it. For a moment more he waits, seemingly expecting her to acknowledge his presence, and when she continues to watch the fire without doing so he walks into the space.

His footfalls are gentle, quiet, and reserved as he walks to her side and places the bottles in his hand upon the table beside her. If he notices the wooden box upon its top, he makes no note of it verbally and turns to look at her again. She drains the last of her wine softly, and when she pulls it from her lips she sighs. Dorian continues to say nothing as he reaches out and takes the glass from her hand. She gives it up freely, letting it go without an ounce of protest and waits as Dorian takes the open bottle from the table and pours her more. He hands the glass back to her, as when she takes it from his hand she gives a soft smile. She takes another sip, allows the luxurious warmth of its fruity flavor to wash across her tongue and down her throat, before letting out a pleased sigh.

Something about the way her sigh fell into the room makes Dorian relax. Turning from her, he grabs the empty glass that had been hiding behind the open bottle from Solas’ viewpoint and pours himself some of the red for himself. He takes a sip, a soft smile forming across his lips at the taste, and lets out a pleased sigh of his own.

“To you...” her soft voice questions a moment later. “What is like to be different?”

“Different?” he parrots.

“So unlike your kind that you cannot be a part of them, but somehow still are?”
“Ah...” he answers softly, turning to look at the fire before them. “You speak of the futility of duality.”

“Where you can no longer call yourself part of your people, but for the rest of the world you’re nothing but as such? An individual, but not?”

She hums in agreement.

“To be part of something greater...a people, a nation, a family...is the inner goal of every conscious being in the world. To seek similarity, comrades, love, acceptance, a sense of belonging. But for those on the outside looking in, those who cannot nor do not conform to the realities of what makes a person part of their accompaniment, life can be harder than one would imagine.” he replies. “But, I find, that those who have been blessed to be different seem far happier than those who merely conform and comply to the life dictated to them.”

“Blessed?” she questions.

“Do you not think that such a life is a blessing?” he counters gently. “To be able to be one’s self, without the necessity to fit into some predetermined mold of what you should and should not be? To be able to walk the road less traveled, and be better for it? Living a life with a far greater purpose than that of the most average?”

“Duality is a gift, then? Not a curse?”

“Far more often than not.” he smiles.

“Is that merely your opinion, based on your own personal experiences?” she questions. “Or do you find such truth to be true to the entirety of those living a life of duality?”

“There are always exceptions to every rule...” he replied with a smile. “But my experiences, notwithstanding, there is still a preciousness to such a life that I cannot, in good conscious, deny.”

“What about you?” he added. “Do you find a life of duality more of a gift or that of a curse?”

“It is both, and none of these.” she smiled, taking a sip of her wine. “A life with duality can be a gift to some but such duality can also be a curse to others. In my life, duality has always been a constant. For some I must be one thing, for others something different, all the while standing upon the edge of life wondering where I truly belong.”

“You speak of the two sides of yourself. The Inquisitor and Sarina Lavellan?”

“Yes and no,” she answers. “I am both of them, but behind it all, I am something else entirely.”

“What does that mean?”

For a moment Sarina does not answer, merely sighing into her glass as she takes another sip. Solas can see from where he stands how her eyes reflect the contemplation going on within her mind. She is fighting against the conscious voices in her mind that wish to speak of different things as her heart battles with the notion that she cannot leave Dorian’s question unanswered.

“My magic...” she answers slowly. “Though fundamentally the same...in some aspects...is different
from most. Unlike the magic wielded by any Circle mage, Tevinter Magister, Qunari Saarebas, or even Dalish apostate."

“As I am well aware,” he responds.

“You know, yet neither you nor Solas has ever stopped to question me as to why.” she sighs. “You allow me to remain within your midst, fighting beside you and leading the standing armies of the Inquisition to the far-flung corners of Thedas, yet you do not dare to ask that of me that I have asked of you—countless times.”

“Your past makes no difference to me, Sari,” Dorian replies, turning to look at her.

“It should,” she answers.

“Is that why you asked me here?” he asks softly. “To tell me the answers to questions we will not ask?”

“It’s time that I give you the truth about who and what I am,” she replies, lifting her hand and flicking her wrist towards the breadth of her quarters. “The time for secrets is over.”

At that moment, the floor, ceiling, and every window, wall, and door, immediately flickered with a touch of her magic pulling from the fade numerous magical glyphs to cover the entire space.

“Arlathian Runes of Silence.” Solas breathes out, completely dismayed as he spies one of the glyphs as it appears on the wall next to him, and turns back to look upon Sarina’s quiet form. “But...how?”

He had never taught her such magic.
The Truth about Sarina: Part 1

Chapter Summary

Falling deeper into the rabbit hole that is Dorian's memory within the Vallas Val, Solas learns the first truth of Sarina's nearly unbelievable past - the history long since forgotten.

Chapter Notes

Just a quick note: I know I said the next chapter would be released this past weekend, but it had to be delayed for a day for some emergency research (fact checking) before I could let it go live. Thank you for your patience! If you are liking my story so far, especially this installment's new plot twists and developments, please leave a comment below. I would love to read your opinions!

Next Update: The Truth about Dorian: Part Three

“Secrets?” parrots Dorian, as she steps back from him and moves farther into the center of her quarters, and he turns to follow her with his eyes.

“I’m...” she begins, stopping in the middle of the room and sighing. “...not...what you think I am.”

“Not...truly...a true Dalish.”

“Meaning?”

“My family...has always been different.” she recounts slowly, admitting. “When I was child, at first I could see no difference between that of my grandmother, my father, and I...and the entirety of Clan Lavellan. But as I grew, learned, I began to sense the truth of our existence more and more.”

“Similarities that I thought we shared began to become noticeably unlike the others. Our hair, our height, our beliefs, our traditions, our feelings, our intuition...our magic. One by one they fell to the wayside, from what I believed to be the true essence of a Dalish from Clan Lavellan...”
“I began to doubt myself, who and what I was, to the point that I began to fear the others. I withdrew from them, hiding myself from prying eyes that seemed to grow more prevalent as I grew older and older, and sought the solitude that such fear tends to demand, as they began to look upon me as if I –alone– was some sort of thing to be wary of or feared.”

“My family did what they could to shelter me from what made us different for many years but, when such behavior in me began to manifest, there came a time when they were left with no other recourse than that of telling me what they’d kept from me all those years.”

“Which was?”

“The fact that we were truly different.”

“The name my family carries...that I carry... Revelana. It was not that which I thought it was: A strangely odd middle name for one of the People where no such distinction is ever made.” she admits. “For no true Dalish take on another name other than their first and their clan.”

“And, I take it, as such things do, that Revelana has some particular significance, then?”

“Yes.” she nods, still refusing to turn and face him. “The word...Revelana...loosely translates to ‘of blood and memory’ in the known Elvhen tongue. It is...a reference...to...to an ancient bloodline long since extinct.”

“The Arlathan Amelane’lin.”

“Keepers of the Arlathian bloodline.” Solas gasps.

“A lost bloodline?” questions Dorian slowly, as his mind mulls over her use of Elvhen and translates the words as best as he can. “The Keepers of Arlathan Blood?”

“Keepers of the ancient bloodline of Arlathan.” Sarina corrects. “They were a family said to possess the ability to tap into the beyond at will, and in a far stronger capacity than anyone else of their kind, and that their magic was the most unprecedented in all the world. Far more magnificent than even the Gods themselves possessed, but with a capacity for compassion rivaled by none.”

“There powers ran the gamut of known schools of magic, and many unnamed and unknown ones as well.”

“Their mastery of Elemental, Entropic, Spirit, Creation, Primal, and Arcane magic was so flawless that such schools were nothing but a speck of dust upon the road of their many talents. They could call upon spirits from the fade and bring them into the reality of the living, protect themselves from
the ravages of the vengeful nature of the world when endangered—with a simple gesture of their hand, ensnare the mind, muddle the senses, call forth great beasts to defend them in their time of need or for defense, befriend and bond with even the most visceral and aggressive creations in all the land, heal wounds that were fatal, bring back those thought lost to oblivion, manipulate emotions with nothing but a simple glance or soft smile, see into the very soul of another and know their deepest darkest secrets, reflect into the past, affect the present with just a thought, foresee the future, and could even control the hands of time.”

“And with such abilities also came the power to protect their ancient bloodline throughout the ages without needing the inclusion of another’s bloodline to further their own—to procreate. Calling forth their offspring into being with a simple word and manifestation of their power, like it was an act as natural as breathing.”

“In other words, their blood was so pure, untainted by time or of usurpation, that they were as close to an omnisciently divine being as any Elvhen could possibly be.”

“A bloodline to rival even the strongest of Gods...”

“What happened to them?”

“After The Fall, they disappeared—according to legend.” she answers. “What little remains of their history is few and far between, leaving nothing behind but broken pieces scattered in dark ruins in far-off places and lost in the annals of time.”

“Of those that know of their legend, some say that the Keepers succumbed to the quickening after the fall and simply died out. That even their magnificent and magnanimous powers could not save them from mortality. While other believe that Fen’Harel himself—sickened by and jealous of their inexplicable mastery of the fade—ended their existence, murdering them all out of spite, before he locked the Gods away and erected the Veil. While still more believe that they went in to hiding, retreating into Uthenera and losing themselves within the fade for all time as their bodies withered and decayed until they were no more...”

“But?” Dorian prompted.

“None of those are true.” she answers softly. “The bloodline, though believed to be lost to time, still lingers till this day—though in a much weaker capacity.”

“How could you know that?” Dorian immediately questions.

“Impossible...” Solas breathes out, as he catches look on Sarina’s face.
“Because...” she answers, turning to smile at him. “In me...their blood remains.”

“Not possible!” Solas immediately counters.

“Wait. So what are you saying, Sari?” Dorian completely stammers, as his shocked mind tries to understand her words and he takes a step back in disbelief. “Are you saying that you’re...what? Elvhen? And not just a regular Elvhen but an actual pureblood descendant of the Ancient Elvhen of Arlathan who were immortal and all powerful? The child of those who would be Gods?”

“They were never Gods.” she corrects.

“Answer my question, Sarina!” Dorian practically demands.

Sarina immediately sighs as if a heavy burden has fallen upon her shoulders, crushing every bit of air from her lungs. Closing her eyes she takes a moment –seemingly formulating how to explain herself –before opening them once more and leveling her gaze at Dorian.

“The answers to such questions are...complicated,” she answers.

“Uncomplicate them for me then.”

“Very well.” she sighs. “To the point...Yes, I am a direct descendant of the Arlathan Amelanen’lin, BUT, I am neither all-powerful nor immortal.”

“Were they, ever?”

“Powerful, yes. Immortal, for a time.” she answers. “But their abilities, as it happens with most legends, were greatly exaggerated.”

“Meaning?”

“They were not all-powerful master manipulators of the fade, beyond, or magic –as the legend says. They were powerful, yes, and some of their legend is based in truth, but what their powers encompassed was something far simpler than people of that time believed.”

“They were...Vhenavenlan.” she adds in a barely-there whisper.

“Masters of the Heart.” Solas breathed out in knowing and disbelief.
“The matriarch of the bloodline, the first of my line, the woman I was named after, was a woman named Sa’lin’a.”

“First of our Blood.” Solas softly translates with a strained sigh.

“–or Salina in the common tongue. She was a woman born into the world of Elvhenan from the world of spirits. To be more precise, she was once a spirit...a spirit of compassion...who fell in the love with the waking world so deeply that she chose to become more real. Living rather than just existing.”

“A spirit of compassion...like Cole.”

“Yes,” she answered with a sigh.

“That’s....wait...” Dorian stammers for a second before his eyes go wide at the realization. “Cole calls you his sister. And he, your brother. Is that why? Because he knows your bloodline is descended from a spirit like himself?”

“He senses our similarity, and such familiarity drives him to such belief.” she answers. “But as for knowing the truth for certain, no. I could not dissuade his feelings on the matter nor would I. He believes what he believes because that is his true nature and he senses it within me –though, faintly.”

“He is still untainted by this world, keeping his true self within his heart, and I would not do anything that could change that. So, I have chosen not to speak of it –neither to admit nor deny– in favor of protecting him from what such realization may do to him emotionally.”

“That...specifically, is also the main reason why I will not allow him to take my memories...” she adds gently. “...To do as he wishes...to help me...it would open him up to the realization of my heritage and that alone could be a catalyst that could change the very essence of who and what he really is.”

“What he chooses to do of his own accord to help others is his choice and his choice alone, but I will not deliberately hurt a spirit brother, no matter the need.”

A pause lingers between the two as Solas tries to wrap his mind around everything that Sarina has revealed so far. In his time, it was rare that such an occurrence, occurred. Spirits, did in fact have the ability to cross completely into the waking world when there was no barrier between the fade and the beyond –when magic permeated the world– but it was never without cost. A conversion of such would require a great deal of mana, and unbelievably strong spirit, and the strength of a mage of incredible skill to protect the spirit’s true nature from corruption. That’s why he had always said Cole’s existence was unique. With the veil intact, spirits could no longer step freely into the waking and take solid form in such a way –the likelihood of corruption far too great to make the attempt – but he had done it, and with no ill effects. But to now know that Sarina is in fact a product of such a
manifestation, that she and Cole are truly more alike than he ever thought possible, is completely unsettling.

“As for myself, I am both like those of my bloodline and not,” she states. “As our bloodline, itself has changed over the millennia.”

“How so?”

“The truth behind the disappearance of the great Keepers is mulled and dulled by history,” she continues. “But what people speculate to be true to define such a disappearance is somewhat solidified in my family’s history. The truth is that, after the erection of the veil, those of my blood lost their immortality quickly—over a span of some two hundred years or so—and became mortal. The quickening taking its toll. But those of my bloodline did not die out. After the Fall of Arlathan, they went into...a hiding of sorts. A self-inflicted banishment that led them to the farthest known areas of Thedas...to a secluded island in a sea long since unnamed...and lived out their remaining years in solitude.”

“Despite such solitude, however, their numbers continued to flourish. When once they could procreate without physical action, using magic to bring forth offspring, they then began to do so in the way that is natural to this day; out of necessity. Though never taking in another of a different blood.” she continues. “And with each new generation, the transfer of power that would have once been equal from parent to child slowly began to decrease. And, so, over the ages, their magic, and abilities, slowly diluted, until there came a time when only one in fifty children born would be blessed with the gift of magic.”

“They became ‘normal’ in the eyes of the world.”

“When that time came to be, however, any more knowledge of what became of the Keepers ceased to be.” she sighs. “Whether or not the place in which they sought refuge still exists, whether or not there is a place in which their descendants still thrive, is unknown.”

“And your direct line?”

“The only known history we personally possess is that one of my ancestors fled the refuge centuries upon centuries ago.” she answers as she begins to clear the distance between her and Dorian once more. “And fell in love with another mortal elven from what is now known as the Brecilian Forest. Anything past that, history wise, is speckled and spotted. What could be recalled by my grandmother in my younger years was more of lore than that of true history as it had been watered down over time.”

“If that’s true...then how could you know about the past...about all of this?” he questions curiously as she stops in front of him.

“By the way any true scholar of history would.” she smiles as she reaches down and picks up the wooden box from the small table’s top. “By reading...”
“What is that?” he questions.

“Follow me,” she answers, as she turns her back to him. “And I’ll show you.”

Dorian watches as Sarina clutches the wooden box to her chest and walks, almost casually, to her bed and sets it down upon the mattress before dropping her knee in the plushness of its blankets and climbing on top. She settles in, pulling her legs towards herself, and sits cross-legged for only a moment before looking upon Dorian once more.

A devilishly mischievous smile tugs at the corner of her lips for just enough time to utter her next words.

“Come to bed.” she practically purrs, patting the down-stuffed mattress beside her.

Dorian’s reaction is immediate, and immediately amused, as he barks a laugh; while Solas can do nothing but frown as the only time he had ever heard her utter those words to him flickers across his heart in sorrowful echo. The amusement on Dorian’s face, however, lasts only a moment before he silently agrees to her invitation, crosses the room, and joins her on the bed. As he pulls his legs up towards him, trying to get more comfortable and seemingly mimicking how she now sits, Sarina smiles and slides the box in front of him.

Dorian immediately flashes a confused look and at that moment Solas decides now is the time to step from the shadows. He crosses the space between the corner of the room and the bed in three long strides. Coming to a stop at its side, just as Sarina’s voice falls into the room once more.

“Open it,” she orders gently.

The wariness on Dorian’s face makes no attempt to hide itself as he pulls his eyes from her face to look at the box before him. He lets out a soft sigh, seemingly coming to the decision that he will follow her request, and reaches down and opens the box. His face flickers more confusion as the contents within are revealed, for what is inside is something far too ordinary to justify the theatrics in which he has experienced on this night.

“It’s a...it’s a book.” he breathes out.

“Yes,” she says gently. “Open it.”

Picking it up, and sliding the box further up the bed, he gently lays the thick, hardbound, leather book upon the mattress before him almost warily.
Solas’ eyes, trained on the book’s surface, can make no note discerning the green-colored tome’s origin or whether or not in any other circumstance it would be considered anything special. It is old. The spine is fairly weathered, its corners and edges frayed from multiple uses, but there is no indication as to its contents either by decoration or by title or author.

For a moment Dorian looks up at Sarina’s face, seemingly scanning her expression to determine intent, but can only see an almost child-like excitement hiding just behind her eyes. When she finally nods at him, silently telling him that it’s alright, he returns his eyes to the tome and opens the front cover. Inside the tome, to both Dorian and Solas’ surprise, the first page—though weathered by age—holds no words nor information. Dorian, curious, turns the next page; and then the next and then the next; only to find that the further he delves in the book the more he is confronted with page after page of empty parchment.

“What...?” he begins before being cut off.

“Seems harmless, does it not?” she quips, a slightly wry smile tugging at her lips. “And yet, with its aged facade, one cannot stop and think it’s an odd sight.”

“Because it’s an illusion,” Dorian replies as the thought occurs to him.

“As always, Dorian, you don’t disappoint.” she chuckles softly.

“Now close it,” she adds, nodding at him gently as he glances up at her.

“This book...” she begins as she watches the cover fall back into place. “Is very special to my family. A family heirloom, of sorts, that has been passed down from elder to child for centuries. To anyone else who may come across it, it simply looks like a book so old that the words that were once kept within have long-since faded with time, or a journal untouched.”

“But...it is much, much more than that,” she adds reverently as she reaches out and gently touches the bottom corner of the book.

At the very moment her fingers make contact, a shimmer of green magic crawls across the book’s surface in a wave like that of an undulating ocean. As it makes it march across the book, the magic slowly begins to reveal an intricate design. Around its edges, burned deep into the leather, come the colored images, in green and gold, of a border of running ivy encasing a scene of numerous animals standing within a thick ancient forest, near the lower half, and an open space near the top of the book’s face. For a moment the image solidifies more and more, and then an unexpected script appears in the section left unadorned.

While Dorian can only seem to stare at the words that have formed, Solas’ immediately recognizes the dialect scrolled upon the leather in archaic Elvhen.
“This is not Elvhen.” Dorian deduces as second later. “What...”

“It is...ancient Elvhen,” she answers, longing suddenly lacing her voice. “The language of the Gods.”

“What does it say?”

“My family name: Revelana.”

“This is...” she begins. “To put it in common terms, it is my family’s grimoire. Enchanted to only react to those of shared blood, it contains the history of my family and the wealth of their accumulated knowledge of the ancient world, and their magical knowledge gathered throughout the centuries.”

“It’s...beautiful.” Dorian breathes out as Solas’ immediately agrees with the man’s sentiment with a bewildered sigh of his own.

“And the most precious thing that I will ever know.” she answers. “My grandmother left it to me when she died years ago. My father, then, being the eldest of our line, was to hold on to it until he believed I was ready to care for it. But...”

“Before the events at Wycombe...” she sighed sadly.

When her father had been killed by mercenaries marauding as bandits.

“He...sent it to me...to the last of our line, for safe keeping.”

“Babae...” she stammered. “Must have known...somehow seeing what was to come, knowing that he would not live to see me again, and knew that it was his last chance to see the book safely into my hands.”

“Oh...Sari...” breathes out Dorian, turning to look at her with sorrowful eyes. “I’m sorry.”

“There’s no need to feel sorry, Dorian.” she said calmly. “I have made peace with my father’s death. He lived a great life, gave me a great life, and left this world without any regrets. I will always be proud to call him my father, for the memory of his guiding, protective, and loving heart will never be forgotten.”

The moment stills for only a breath, and as if the whole mentioning of her father had been suddenly erased, Sarina pulled her mind back to the task at hand. As her right hand still lays upon the edge of the book, she reaches up with her left and snaps her suddenly magic-laced fingers together. In that moment the magic that had been constantly flowing over the book’s surface stills and then vanishes.
She immediately lifts her hand from the book and smiles as the magical manifestation her blood bond had called forth remains—leaving the revelation of the book's true self for all to see.

“Open it now,” she said with a smile.

Solas cannot stop his inherent curiosity as he instinctively leans forward and watches Dorian lift the front cover. For a breath, a part of him seems almost joyous at the prospect of perusing such an indescribably fascinating and unknown relic while another part seems almost fearful of its contents. The story of the origin of Sarina’s family had seemed far too elaborate to even remotely be true in the eyes of most but he, during her telling of such a past, knew that it was not some simple fallacy or farce. The truth of the Arlathan Amelanen’lin, their existence and legend, had been a part of history long before the world was new and he had never forgotten the truth of their greatest accolades in all his many years.

As the front cover falls upon the mattress once more and reveals its contents, Dorian can do nothing but murmur in disbelief at what lies within. On the first page, inscribed in golden and green shades of stark pigment, is a drawing of an enormous, leaf-less tree with hundreds of branches—each inked and marked with tiny scrolled names numbering in the thousands.

‘A family tree.’

“How far does this go back?” questions Dorian as he inspects the drawing more closely.

“Thirty generations,” she answers.

“Two thousand years,” mumbles Solas, in awe, as he quickly does the math.

“Thirty!” Dorian repeats incredulously.

“Yes.” she nods. “From what I can tell, this book was first created somewhere around the time when Tevinter declared war on the elves...981 Ancient, or so.”

“Before the fall.”

“Bullshit!” counters Dorian, almost angrily, as he frantically pulls himself from her and the book, and stands up to round on her. “You’re lying!”

“You have to be...” he continues, seemingly more talking to himself than to her, and rants. “That’s not possible. There is no way that a book chronicling the very history of Thedas could survive for two millennia!”

“Created near the beginning of the Great War?” he scoffs. “Before Tevinter destroyed Arlathan?
When everything was razed without a care. When the world as they knew it was nothing but merciless slaughter and destruction! There’s no way! No such relic could possibly exist...and if it DID, it would have been destroyed a long time ago!”

“Dorian...” she breathes out, trying in some small way to calm him.

“No.” he argues. “I don’t believe it. And I can’t believe you!”

“You sit there and spin this bullshit, and I ate it up like a damn glutton at a feast!” he nearly yells. “You placated my inherent sense of curiosity of history to blatantly fool me into believing that, that damn book, was some ancient relic long since lost –yet somehow, miraculously, preserved in the hands of a so-called fable bloodline that none of the known history has ever mentioned! And have the gall to try and make me believe that everything you’ve said tonight has been nothing but the absolute truth based on its existence?”

As Dorian’s accusations fly out into the room and nearly echo, Sarina does nothing but smile as his heaving breaths fill the room soon after. For a moment she closes her eyes, seemingly trying to formulate a response to his condemnation of her actions on this night, and then, as if struck by her very own lightening, her smile brightens. Opening her eyes, she turns to look at Dorian, and raises her left hand over the book. For a second the appendage just hovers, and Dorian watches her warily. In the next moment, Sarina’s hand begins to glow and as if reactionary to its manifestation the book’s pages begin to turn on their own.

Solas can only count the turn of ten before the book stops, and a cacophony of ethereal voices echo into the room.

“We can no longer remain.” a female voice echoes in Elvhen. It is calm, yet warning. “The humans will bury us all in their quest for domination.”

“We must try and appeal to their leader.” a man’s voice then follows. Resolute, yet tinged with fear. “He can see reason if we...”

“We’ll not submit to them!” another male voice chimes in. Adamant and furious. “This is our city, our home! We must defend it, not flee!”

“But Archon Thalasian can be reasoned with...” another female voice advises. Seemingly hopeful. “We need only to...”

“NEVER!” the second male’s voice booms out. “He is determined to slaughter us all!”

“WE MUST FIGHT!”

The voices fade from the room softly as Sarina looks back up at Dorian with a pointed look. Bristled by what he has heard, Dorian stands there unable to move nor speak and Solas immediately
wonders if Dorian had even understood the words that had been echoing all around them, simply because the dialect was so ancient. But his speculation quickly becomes moot, as the more he looks at the would-be Magister the more he realizes that every word spoken had hit home.

Dorian had understood.

Sarina climbs off the bed quietly and comes to Dorian’s side without a word. For a moment she just watches him, as his mind is seemingly mulling over what he has just experienced, and then she sighs.

“Now do you understand?” she questions. “Why I kept my heritage a secret?”

“Who are you?” Dorian breaths out, in disbelief. His mind unable to fathom the truth beyond all fact. “Really?”

“I am me.” she answers lovingly, reaching up and grabbing Dorian’s elbow. “Sarina. Revelana. Lavellan. The Dalish elf with a glowing magical hand. Who lived through an explosion, traveled forward and then back in time, freed the southern mages from slavery, closed a massive whole in the sky that spat demons everywhere, survived the attack of ancient Magister, his Archdemon, and having an avalanche fall upon her head, and became the leader of fledgling organization based on a religion that she detests.”

“Who fights alongside those not of her own, willingly and without regret or remorse, for a cause that is just. And calls you, among them all, her very best friend.”

Her words, seeming more like a self-deprecating list of her insurmountable bad luck, seems to hit its mark in Dorian’s heart. For he cannot stop himself from the gentle smirk that pulls at the corner of his lips.

“You...are terribly bad at reassuring people...” he immediately chuckles, as all tension seems to slip away. “You know that?”

“Perhaps,” she replies. “But it doesn’t make what I said any less true. Now does it?”

“No.”

For a split second, Solas notices a flash of hesitation in her face but before the feeling can take root she reaches out and hugs Dorian without preamble.

“I know it’s a lot to take in Dorian,” she confesses, hugging him lovingly. “And I am sorry that the truth behind my past has upset you. It was never my intention.”
Time ticks by for a few breaths as Dorian stands perfectly still, not reacting to her outwardly given affection, and then as if coming to some unspoken realization he concedes—reaching up and hugging her back.

“I know.” he sighs into her hair.

They hold one another for a bit. Just standing there in the middle of her quarters comforting one another. Until, whereas Dorian is more inclined to keep her there, it is Sarina that pulls away first—a smile on her face. She looks at him, his disappointment not going unnoticed by her discerning eyes, and she gives him an even brighter smile in, what Solas decides, a way to somehow reassure the man. Dorian takes the unspoken offer of reassurance and gives her a smile back. She immediately steps away, rounding the end of the bed and resettling back into her spot upon the mattress before patting its surface once more—summoning him to rejoin her.

He complies, without a word. Once he has resettled himself, he looks at the open pages of the book and sees a scene drawn out in perfect detail.

Encompassing the upper two-thirds of the page, scrawled in wondrous color, is the fabled city of Arlathan—its beautifully decorated and fortified walls standing like bulwarks to the rushing tide as its crystal spires stretch out like reaching hands grasping at the heavens—surrounded on all sides, around the bottom, with the undefined faces of hundreds of thousands of Tevinter mages and soldiers; poised for war; waiting in mass as one human, on horseback and dressed in the familiar archaic robs of the First Archon, sits resolute—his sword raised in the midst of a battle cry.

“Are there...” he breathes out, scanning the drawing over and over as he tries to formulate his many questions coherently. “Is there...details? Specific details of this history?”

“No.” she answers. “That is not the purpose of this book. It can show glimpses into the past if I call to it. Voices. Visions lost to history. Partial recollections, like those that Solas can see in the fade when he dreams. But there is no way to discern any details past what can be seen or read. Think of it like a person’s memory, how a person’s memory works. It remembers only that which was significant enough to be included but can be diluted by those who place it within.”

“This particular section...” she continues, turning the page to reveal a page full of writing. “Details the last decisive argument between my forbearers as they come to the decision to leave the city rather than to try and defend it.”

“They ultimately chose to flee...rather than to stay and fight.” she adds. “For they knew that the might of Tevinter at that time was not something they could easily overcome. They were trapped, supply lines cut, food and water scarce. They were starving and dying one by one. And would surely die if they remained.”

“According to the recounting...” she adds, pointing towards the middle of the scrolled text. “The eldest of our line, at the time, –Madeira– had still retained her ability for foresight and had glimpsed the fall of Arlathan in a vision. Just days before they would ultimately bury the city once and for all.
So, on her order, my ancestors fled believing that had they not the line of the Amelanen’lin would end. Which, as Thedas’ known history recounts, would have.”

“Is there more?” he question, his mind suddenly awash with renewed curiosity.

“Yes...” she answered. “But now is not the time to delve into such history.”

“There is something specific you wish to show me?”

“Yes...” she smiles, suddenly calling upon her magic and waving her glowing hand over the book.

The pages immediately began to turn on their own once more, so quickly that Solas cannot count how many pass, until the manifestation finally stops somewhere near the middle of the tome. Just as Dorian eyes the page, so does he, catching the sight of heavily detailed portrait drawing of an Elvhen woman on the left page. She is dressed in a floor-length gown the color of moonlight upon still waters, her hair –luscious and as white as the driven snow –is braided around the crown of her head and falls just before the back of her shins. Her hands are stretched wide, in semblance of an awaiting embrace. And standing before her, dressed in magnificently designed and resolutely strong armor, stands five soldiers prepared for battle.

Pulling his eyes from the portrait, Solas looks upon the next page and reads the title scrolled in ancient Elvhen.

“The Knights of Eternity.”

Chapter End Notes

Elvhen Translations: All words should be self translated during the narrative -with the exception of the word "Babae" which means father in Elvhen.

Note: The ethereal voices and final line of this update's text has been auto-translated for my readers. As before, anything in bold is -in the story itself- said in Elvhen and direct translated for you.
The Truth about Dorian: Pt. 3

Chapter Summary

The point to Dorian's entry in the Vallas Val is made, culminating in a bombshell that will not only shed light on Solas' current predicament but destroy everything he ever thought about the love of his life.

Chapter Notes

This is a massive update (10.3K words in total) I could have broke it down into two but this part was something that I didn't want to split. I think the dramatic ambiance would have been ruined if I had. Let me know what you guys think. I'm not getting much feedback ATM, and am worried that my story has gone on some tangent that has made readers lose interest. If you're still reading this, please let me know.

*Check the note at the bottom for a special bonus message*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“She’s beautiful.” Dorian breathes out slowly, taking in the immaculately drawn and detailed portrait of the Elven woman’s exquisite form with a strange sort of reverence rarely seen upon his face.

“Isn’t she?”

“An ancestor?” he questions, glancing up at Sarina.

“Not to my knowledge.” she replies. “Though I understand why you would think so. Our similarities are undeniable.”

Dorian nods.

“You do look a lot alike.” he breathes out. “Who is she?”

“She was first born with the name Elliana. In the centuries after her passing, her legend dubbed her
the reverent title of ‘The Eternal Lady.’ But those of her time called her ‘The White Queen’.”

Dorian immediately laughs at the oddity of the latter.

“The White Queen?” he smirks. “Really? Are we to play chess now? Are you going to tell me the story of how the game was created?”

Completely understanding exactly where Dorian’s mind had drifted because of the Lady’s strange moniker, and his ensuing amusement, she lets out a small giggle of her own.

“No,” she replies with a smile. “I wanted to share this story with you because I think you will find it not only interesting but apropos to our current situation.”

“Alright.” he relents. “Tell me the story.”

“Lady Elliana...” she begins, turning her eyes the opposite page and skimming the words written in archaic Elvhen. “Was born into the world of Ancient Elvhenan long before humans came to Thedas. The daughter of a lesser-known King in charge of a small, isolated, and forsaken kingdom far to the north –where not but a sea of snow and ice flourished – Elliana lived a secluded life with her widowed father and his subjects.”

“As a child, she was often alone. Seeking refuge in the family library her beloved and kind father had procured over his very long life, she chose the pursuit of knowledge; rather than playing with the few children that lived within the tightly knitted kingdom or with other adults; above all else.”

“She kept to herself, far more content to learn of history, and of magic, from dusty old tomes, than from others. And felt more at home being alone than with others.”

“A lonely child.”

“Yes.” she replied, before continuing. “But being alone was how she liked it. While most children, especially before the age of ten winters, would have been ecstatically joyous to spend their days flitting away their time on childish and child-like pursuits with others of their age, rather than studying, Elliana felt more at home surrounded by her books than when surrounded by onlookers, well-wishers, courtiers, and nobles.”
“A life at court can be daunting for someone so young.” Dorian agrees. “I can see why she would feel that way.”

“It makes sense.”

“Yes...” Sarina answers. “But not for what you’re assuming.”

“Meaning?”

“Elliana was...different...than that of her kin.” Sarina begins to explain. “At first she seemed like a normal child. Cute, endearing, with a charming personality that would melt the hearts of the hardest man; in her first years of infancy; but in time, as she grew, she changed into something far different than her earlier child-like visage would have foretold.”

“She grew into an unfathomable beauty. With luscious and silky white hair the color of the driven snow, skin as pale and as smooth as alabaster, and eyes as deep as the crushing blue of an endlessly deep ocean, her body aged from the child that was loved for her innocence to that of a woman who fueled the fires of lust and want within every man who dared to look upon her.” she continues, turning the page and revealing more writing. “By the time she came into her womanhood, around the age of fifteen winters, she had become a beacon to every heartsick and lust driven man throughout the kingdom.”

“Enchanted by her looks alone, they all wanted to lay claim to her...to take her for their own, to be bonded to her...to own her for eternity.”

“For nearly ten years her family was inundated with proposals of bonding. From nobles throughout the kingdom and beyond. Trying to curry her favor, the men begging to have her, so ensnared by her beauty, showered her and her father with unimaginable gifts of wealth, land, and treasure, orchestrated grand spectacles in honor of her gracefulness, composed songs regaling the world of every speck of her entrancing and captivating allure, and even went as far as summoning spirits of love to woo her in the name of some lord or another –all in hopes to win her heart.”

“But?” prompts Dorian.

“But...” she nods. “Elliana would have none of it.”
“Why?”

“Her reasons are somewhat...unclear.” Sarina answers, pointing to a paragraph in the middle of the written text. “Or unclear according to this retelling. From what I can discern, it seems that in the beginning –when all the offers of bonding started– she was reluctant to entertain their interest. Not so much because she was against being bonded, or falling in love, per se...But because she was of a mind that studying and learning was a better course than that of marriage or having children. For she was, in essence, a scholar first and woman second.”

“And none saw her intellect...”

“Precisely.”

“After years of incessant proposals, it slowly becomes clear that she began to refuse their offers not so much because they were unsuitable for her but out of sheer protest.” Sarina hypothesizes. “Until, she had managed to make it implicitly clear that she would neither wed, nor bed, any man –ever.”

“However...” Sarina interjects, pointing to the next page where a drawing of a young man –with long, braided dark hair, deep grey eyes, and dressed in cobalt blue mage robes – stands resolutely on the steps of an ice-covered castle. “Such mentality changed in the summer of her twenty-eighth year.”

“Who was he?”

“His name was Tiar.” she answers. “Son of Tuelenas, a noble from a neighboring kingdom to the south.”

“Love at first sight, then?”

“It sounds cliché, but, yes.” she chuckles. “Though the first time she met Tiar was in an unconventional way.”

“How so?”
“When the winter of Elliana’s twenty-second year had come and went, she found her self emboldened by an uncontrollable sense of wanderlust. Unlike her life before this time, which was secluded and self-contained, she began to venture outside her castle walls in hopes to learn more and more about the lives of others –those not born into wealth or nobility. But did so under disguise so not to be recognized –even going as far as changing her name to ‘Thalia’ when she did so.”

“For years she traveled the land, learning all she could about their little kingdom and of its people. Making friends, doing good deeds, helping people when she could.”

“Being a friend to her father’s subjects rather than being just their ruler.” she smiles.

“And they loved her for it.” Dorian adds knowingly.

“Yes.” she nods.

“And, so...as the story goes...” she continues. “One day, Elliana decides to venture out into the surrounding town –where all the king’s vassal and subjects congregated for the daily markets– to purchase a gift for her father’s upcoming name day celebration. She wanted something very special for her father, and for months she had been eyeing an intricate silverite and obsidian ring a jewel-crafter had been holding onto for years but had never been willing to sell.”

“According to the recounting, that morning before she had left the safety of the castle walls, a courier had hand-delivered a letter from the crafter informing her that he had decided that he would –in fact –be willing to sell it to her. But only if she could come immediately with the gold in which he quoted her.” she continues. “So happy that he had finally agreed, she left the castle and went to the market without even questioning why or how the crafter knew where to find her –or how he even knew who she truly was.”

“Reckless.” breathes out Dorian, to which Sarina nods.

“When she arrived, the seller seemed far too happy than she had ever seen him –for he was normally all scowls and grimness – but she shook away the uneasy feeling the sight had given her simply because she was excited that she would finally have the gift for her father that she wanted.”

“What happened?”
“He sold her the ring. Even went as far as to drop the price to ensure that she would actually buy it.” Sarina sighs, turning to the next page. “When their business was concluded. Elliana headed back to the castle via the alleyway she normally took to avoid the crowds. Halfway back to the castle she was stopped by three large men, warriors armed to the teeth. They immediately backed her up against a wall and jerked off her hood –somehow already knowing exactly who she was.”

“Oh no.” breathes out Dorian softly.

“She was attacked.” Sarina growls out, pointing to the page. “They ruthlessly stripped her of her clothing. So consumed by the uncontrolled lust for her that had been growing year after year, they were determined to have what had been denied them –hell-bent on taking her body right then and there without a second thought. But before they could take her in the most disgusting and most demoralizing way imaginable…”

“Tiar stopped them.” Dorian draws the conclusion.

“Yes.” she smiles. “He had heard her cries and had come to the rescue, like a blazing hero out of some forgotten legend, killing the three men swiftly before they could do any lasting damage.”

“On that day, in the very moment she looked up his face and saw his beautiful eyes looking down upon her with the truest concern she had ever seen, she fell irreversibly and irreparably fell in love with him—as did he with her.”

“A year later they were bonded, standing before her father in the Great Hall of her family’s home, for all the Kingdom to see.” she recounts, her eyes skimming down the page farther. “And they were happy.”

“But while they began their blissful life of love and marriage, those who had once lusted after her became bitter.” she sighs mournfully, closing her eyes for only moment before opening them once more and beginning again. “Emboldened by their hate, their jealousy, and their malice, those who had once proposed to her—declared their undying love to her—turned on her.”

“Over the five years following her marriage to Tiar, those men began to move and plot against her with a series of political machinations that eventually escalated into all-out assassinations.”

“First it was her handmaiden, brutally attacked, raped, and dismembered while traveling back from
the market. Then it was her elderly, harmlessly blind, instructor, on magical theory—thrown from the tower window and falling to his death. Then her husband’s men-at-arms, a total of six, who were massacred on their way to deliver gifts to her husband’s family.” Sarina recounts. “All culminating to the worst of all their offenses.”

“The assassination of the King himself.”

“They killed her father?” Dorian asks incredulously.

“Yes.” she sighs. “An assassin infiltrated the castle late one night and caught the King, who was fighting a bout of insomnia, mulling about the family’s gardens alone and unguarded. Though the recounting doesn’t go into particular detail about how he actually died, references later on in the story point to a very gruesome death.”

“What did Elliana do?”

“She mourned her father’s death.” she replies. “Becoming a recluse, refusing to be seen by anyone—even her own husband—for nearly a year. Tiar feared that the death of his father-in-law, the King, had been the final blow to the last bit of his wife’s resolve and that she would never be the same. But, a year to the day of her father’s death, she emerged from her seclusion with an air of selfless determination rather than of distress, and claimed the throne for her own just days later. She as the Queen and Tiar as her King.”

“Over the next ten years…” she continues, pointing to the next page. “Queen Elliana and King Tiar ruled the land with righteousness and kindness, and because of their care the kingdom flourished. But, though their people prospered under her rule, those who had been responsible for so many deaths due to their spite also continued to flourish as well. Spurned would-be-lovers, after the deaths or retirements of their forbearers, began to take up seats in the noble class and immediate took to task the desire to undermine all attempts by the royal couple to lift up the peoples’ quality of life.”

“Their attempts to destroy what peace that they had built had not gone unnoticed by the royal line, however.” she explains. “And when the spring of their sixteenth year of marriage came, and Elliana found herself to be with child for the very first time, they immediately knew what was on the horizon and they would need to do.”

“A war was coming. There was no doubt about that, as her adversaries would never give up their determination to see her pay for how she had slighted them all those years ago, and would undoubtedly come for her or the child to wreak their revenge.” Sarina voices solemnly. “So, to combat such a possibility, Tiar then decided—unilaterally—to bolster the small contingent of fiercely
loyal soldiers whose sole purpose was to ensure that his wife and child would be always protected.”

“He should have done that a long time ago.” scoffs Dorian.

“I agree.” she nods. “But as we cannot, at this point, be certain of whether or not this decision had been a spur of the moment choice or one that had evolved over time from an already established contingent, we can only take the story as it is recorded.”

“As Tiar had expected...” she continues. “When the news of Elliana’s pregnancy found its way to their dissenters, the vengeful nobles broke away from the ruling government, banded themselves together, and declared war on the royal line and any who dared to remain loyal.”

“For four years the kingdom was embattled in a monotonous and horrific war that left thousands upon thousands dead and the land drenched in blood.” she sighs. “Ultimately, the Royals won the war –eliminating most of dissenters at the head of the opposition’s ranks...at least enough to end the fighting... but not before tragedy befell the royal line one last time.”

“In the early spring of their twentieth year of marriage, when their twin sons; Revas and Roshan; were barely three winters old, King Tiar was killed. But not by an assassin’s blade or by combat, but by duty and sacrifice.”

“What happened?”

“The story is vague on the details. It only mentions that he sacrificed his life to save an innocent child who had been cornered by a ravenous and enraged pack of wolves while fleeing the last of the fighting.”

“A hero’s death at least.” Dorian sighs.

“Yes.”

“And Elliana?” he questions.

“This is where the story gets REALLY interesting,” Sarina smirks.
“Remember when I said that Elliana had spent the majority of her life as a recluse...nose always buried in a book?”

Dorian nodded.

“Well, what the first part of this story fails to mention, until after the death of her husband, is that Elliana was a powerful –and when I say powerful, I mean POWERFUL – mage; whose abilities were rivaled by NONE.” she iterated emphatically, turning to the next page and revealing a portrait of Elliana standing upon the steps of her family home; its ancient edifice looming resolutely behind her, glowing hand raised high above her as she releases an expulsion of magic forming a massive barrier all around her; on the left page and another page of text on the right.

“The story recounts that Elliana –devastated by the death of her husband and determined to protect her children and her remaining subjects– erected a barrier, a veil like that of hardened dragon scales, around her kingdom.”

‘A veil...dragon scales...?’ repeated Solas in his mind.

“Wait a minute...” Dorian immediately interrupts as his eyes skim over the portrait once then twice more. “Sari...is it me or does the castle in the drawing look unbelievably familiar?”

“It’s Skyhold.” she deadpans.

“Not possible.” Solas demands.

“But, wait...” Dorian interjects. “I thought Skyhold was only a few thousand years old. If the story of ‘The White Queen’ is a legend from thousands of years before the time of humans...then this cannot be Skyhold.”

“You’re right...and you’re wrong.” she nods. “The castle in this portrait is not exactly Skyhold, but Skyhold was modeled after this castle.”

“But how is that possible? There are several millenniums separating the two in the lines of history.”
“That, I do not know,” she answers, and Solas can practically taste her lie on his very lips as she adds. “For certain.”

“Why the barrier?” he questions, looking at the illustration of a glowing blue dome.

“The story doesn’t say specifically...” she answers. “But what it does say is that with the veil intact none could enter the kingdom nor could any leave. So, in essence, her people, the remaining dissenters, her children, and she, unceremoniously became prisoners of her very own magic.”

“The unrest and embattlement of her people faded swiftly, and peace reigned for fifteen years in the barrier’s wake.” she continues. “While Elliana ruled alone from her throne, her sons grew to be fine young warriors with the unrivaled minds of high scholars and unshakable hearts of the most dedicated of battle-hardened soldiers. During this time, aside from properly raising her boys and ruling her country, Elliana expanded on her husband’s past decree for a personal regiment of guards solely loyal to the queen and turned them from the best soldiers in all the world to the greatest of guardians.”

“They were known as the ‘Knights of Eternity’.” she added. “Or more specifically: ‘The Guardians of Bellanaris’.”

Solas immediately flinched at their mention. He had never, for the life of him, thought that Sarina could even know about the Great Guardians, and now to hear their title fall from her lips so easily was almost too much to comprehend as he suddenly found his mind drifting with questions – wondering what else about the ancient world she already knew.

“What made them so special?” Dorian questions with interest.

“Magic,” she answers, turning the next page to reveal a very detailed schematic of a summoning circle and a list written in archaic Elvhen on the top left page, a full-color portraiture of five blazing warriors beneath it, and a full page of text on the right.

“Sarina...” Dorian breathes out warningly, closing his eyes in disappointment.

“Just hear me out,” she begs almost inaudibly. “Please.”
“Alright.” he gives in.

“There are always five.”

“The Guardians of Bellanaris, once highly gifted warriors; each in their own right; had come into the service of the Queen one at a time. Each earning their place through valiant deeds that both impressed and endeared them to Elliana over the years long since before she first took the throne.” she began, climbing off the bed to slowly walk around the room as she recounted the details of their story.

“Idrillas was the first.”

‘Little rebel.’ Solas translates.

“The youngest adviser to her father, he was a man of unfathomable wit and intelligence. Often described as both the chief strategist when it came to political maneuvering and a sage in the machinations of the circles of the elite, he could manipulate even the staunchest of adversaries to a cause and within minutes have them eating out of the palm of his hand and their capitulation assured.”

“But, alongside his many abilities in the realm of politics he was very much a ‘little rebel’ as his name suggests. He would often times sow seeds of dissent merely for personal amusement...”

“Though he always did make sure that whatever he did, held no consequences that would be deemed dangerous to Elliana’s family or, later, her rule,” she adds as an addendum.

“He did this simply out of boredom. For, he both loved and hated the noble class –simply because he was one of them and had seen their sins for most of his life. Their manipulations both amused and disgusted him so much that he carried with him a very strong sense of self-loathing –all because of such similarity– so he did all that he could to uproot and upheave any of their particularly loved machinations.”

“Those feelings of hate and disapproval of their behavior often manifested in his dealings with them, even more so, after Elliana had claimed her throne. He relished in the opportunity to make their pompous lives a little hectic but, far more importantly, he did it because it fed Elliana’s amusement. She found his distractions and manipulating machinations quite entertaining and would often engage in carrying out such deeds alongside him –a willing accomplice.”
“Sounds like they were thick as thieves.” chuckles Dorian.

“They were.” she smiles, stopping for only a moment to look up at him before returning to her pacing. “Their bond was so unbelievably strong that stories from that time likened their relationship to that of best friends or even soul mates. Equal halves of the same whole. They were so close that the people swore they could read each other’s minds and feel each other’s feelings from anywhere in the world.”

“Did he love her?” Dorian questions softly.

“He did,” she answers without looking up at him. “As did they all.”

For a moment Sarina pauses her recollection of their story and paces quietly –seemingly dealing with some inner thought process that has distracted her for a few seconds.

“Sahren was her second.” she continues a moment later.

‘Respected one.’

“The second of the Guardians, the acting commander of her father’s standing armies, and then hers. Sahren was a staunch protector of the law and of the people. Highly skilled in battle, he protected the kingdom with his vast knowledge of strategy and his incomparable intelligence when it came to the ins and outs of the battlefield. A fiercely loyal protector, he played a dual role in Elliana’s life as both Commander of her forces and leader of her Guardians after their foundation.”

“However, although he was formidable on the field of battle he was also a kind and generous man off of it. Often described as the heart of the Guardians, he carried with him a calm understanding of the hearts of his men and of Elliana’s people, and an unwavering faith in her judgement at all times.”

“If he had any flaw if you want to call it a flaw, it was that he was quick to anger when he saw injustice pressed upon the innocent.”

“That’s a good flaw to have if you ask me.”
“I agree.” she nods.

“The third of the Guardians was known as Nerien.”

‘Joyful violence.’

“Nerien was a vicious warrior through and through. He reveled in battle and longed for the thrill of the conquest of death.” she continues. “Unmatched in his bloodlust, he was so too unmatched upon the battlefield. The greatest of the Guardians when it came to actual combat, he was highly skilled in every weapon imaginable and took great joy in thinking up new ones to put to the test. He was a lethal killer...preferring the front lines of any battle over anywhere else...and massive brute of unrelenting power....but, he was also much, much more than that.”

“The world of that time saw him as a monster seduced by his inner urges for blood and carnage simply because they judged him on his prowess in battle. But that was not the truth of his real self. For he, according to Elliana’s own words, was a man with one of the biggest hearts she had ever known. Like Sahren, he too hated injustice. But while Sahren would stem his initial reaction of anger to first act with diplomacy, Nerien would react with aggression. He hated to see innocents threatened or harmed, to see normal people caught up in the evil machinations of lords or nobles without a care, and despised anyone who did not think of the greater good before their very own wants and needs.”

“It was that belief system that endeared Nerien to Elliana’s heart for she, too, felt as he did. The bond they formed because of their shared belief, created between them an unbreakable trust that made Nerien fiercely loyal to Elliana. So much so that he willingly chose to forsake any ties he once had with the Kingdom he was birthed in and swore fealty to her, only to her, without remorse or regret, for eternity.”

For a moment Sarina takes a pause, seemingly trying to control her emotions as her face flickers between exhaustion and irritation.

“Taris was the fourth.” she breathes out irritably.

‘Rising fire’

“He was a scoundrel,” she adds bluntly. “A man that I, for the life of me, cannot understand why
Elliana chose.

“What was so wrong with him?”

“He betrayed her.” she sighs, before she suddenly stops and shakes her head. “Well, not ‘betrayed’ per se. He lied to her.”

“What about?”

“According to the telling, Taris was once a loyal general of a noble named Kethis. He was one of the dissenters that had been part of the war that nearly consumed the entire Kingdom and was highly suspected as one of the men responsible for the King’s assassination.”

“Taris had been sent to spy upon Elliana and Tiar, by Kethis, long before they ever took the throne or the war began, in hopes of acquiring information that would be beneficial, and was ordered by his lord to do anything and everything he could to destroy the royal household from within. To sow the seeds of mistrust between the Elliana and Tiar, the King and his daughter, the royals and their loyal vassals, the noble class and their people, the commanders and their soldiers. Anyone. Everyone. All. Nothing was off limits.”

“It wasn’t until the death of Elliana’s magical theory instructor, the one who was thrown from a tower window, that he was finally unmasked. A servant who had been sleeping on one of the upper floors that night had awoke in need of the privy and came out of her room just as Taris walked out of the instructor’s living quarters. She had managed to hide before he noticed her, so he never knew he had been caught until the guards dragged him out of his bed just before dawn the next morning.”

“Tiar demanded Taris’ death immediately, but Elliana rebutted his decree and begged her father that she be the one to judge him as it was her friend that had died by his hand.” she sighs. “They both agreed, and instead of having Taris’ life taken she imprisoned him in the castle dungeon for a year.”

“Only a year?”

“Yes...” she smirks in disbelief. “But that isn’t the weirdest part. Usually, at least in that day an age, anyone locked away for such a crime –even with such a light sentence –would still be forced to take their time in solitude without little food or water. Often times dying of starvation, malnutrition, dehydration, disease, or madness as a result. But with Taris, Elliana allowed none of that. He was...
well fed, had plenty of water for consumption and for hygiene. And most of all, he had the privilege of visitors.”

“Visitors?” questions Dorian incredulously.

“Well, a visitor,” she admits. “Elliana, herself.”

“Interesting...”

“For the entire length of his imprisonment, Elliana visited him daily.” she continues. “And over time she began to gain his trust so implicitly that he offered up everything that she ever wanted to know about his lord...and more importantly about himself. He told her of his life, of how his family had been slaves to Kethis his whole life, and how he worked his way up from nothing to become a respected soldier in his lord’s private guard. When asked why he accepted the assignment of infiltrating the royal line, he had answered that—at the time—he felt what he was doing was right. For he was loyal, and his lord asked it of him.”

“He was a sheep.”

“Precisely,” she replies. “He felt he had no other choice but to obey the will of his lord because, though he may have made something of himself over the years...became someone who deserved the respect of others...in his mind, he was still a slave.”

“It was then that Elliana made Taris an offer and a promise.” she explains. “He would serve his year in prison, but upon his release he had two options. Flee the kingdom and never return, or swear an oath of fealty to her.”

“If he agreed to be her guardian, to put aside any beliefs that he was still nothing more than a slave to be ordered around carelessly, and promised to be loyal to her for eternity, she would take him into her heart and into her home as one of her beloved guardians. Where he would live out the rest of his days with respect, love, and the dignity he truly deserved.”

“She offered him a second chance at life.”

“Yes... a chance to shake off his past and become the man he was truly meant to be.”
“I can’t imagine that the King or Tiar was all too happy about such a decision.”

“They were far more willing to accept her agreement with Taris that I would have initially thought.” she answers. “But, it seems, that they too trusted Elliana’s intuition about people far more than I gave them credit for...For Taris became a guardian so fiercely loyal that he never left Elliana’s side.”

For a moment Sarina pauses, turning to face the moon beaming through the stained-glass windows of her balcony doors, and lets out a soft sigh. The room falls into silence, and Solas looks from her seemingly contemplative form to see Dorian sitting quietly with his eyes closed. There is a hard set to his jaw, one that was rarely ever there, and from his facial expressions, it is clear that a sinking feeling had begun to grow within his mind. He had felt the shift in the air about the room, just as Solas had –though it had been nearly; imperceptibly; subtle.

“The last guardian, the fifth...” Sarina sighs. “Was named Feneir.”

Solas could not help the gasp that escaped his lips.

“Snow wolf?” questions Dorian, fully understanding the direct translation of the name, as he opens his eyes and looks up to find Sarina looking at him with a smirk on her face. “How...”

“Fitting?” she questions with an inflection in her tone, before nodding. “Very.”

“What the story recounts...for the most part” she stammers a bit before continuing. “Is...That Feneir came in Elliana’s service a few years after her husband’s death.”

“She had been content for a long time, willing to live the rest of her immortal life as she had been since the passing of the only man she ever loved...”

“But?” prompts Dorian.

“When she met Feneir, everything changed.”
“According to the retelling, she had been holding court—with a small contingent of nobles—one summer morning when he appeared in the Great Hall to speak with her.” she continues, motioning with her hand the tell-tale, hinting, sign for Dorian to turn the next page. Understanding what she was asking, he followed her order, turning the page to reveal a portrait of an Elvhen man; with long, unbound, white hair, strong features, and dressed in armor of muted greens and golds—a broadsword slung resolutely on his back; standing within an enormous room adorned in fine luxury and looking upon Elliana sitting upon her throne. “His intrusion into their small gathering, the abruptness of his appearance, immediately made Elliana suspicious of him. The guards, acting on their own, tried to remove him from the hall for the insolence he had shown in just barging in on a private meeting, but he refused to leave until he could speak with her. When they tried to physically remove him, he immediately defended himself—disarming the guards, and knocking them unconscious rather than taking their lives.”

“Smart man.” Dorian concedes. “If he had taken their lives, for what purpose he had come to see her would have fallen on deaf ears.”

“Precisely. Feneir—in that regard—was highly intelligent.” she nods. “His act of defiance however, not going unnoticed by the entirety of those assembled, nearly cemented Elliana’s belief that the man would cause her nothing but trouble.”

“At that moment, she had come to the decision to send him on his way,” she smirks. “As her intuition was rarely ever wrong.”

“But, before she could find herself to order him to leave...something changed.”

“Something changed?” repeats Dorian.

“There is no tangible explanation as to why she suddenly disregarded her own initial decision,” she answers. “It only says that one moment Elliana was resolutely determined to banish him from the Great Hall and then she wasn’t.”

“There was a moment of silence...it fell heavily into the room...and then Elliana stood.” she continues. “When she did so, every noble assembled respectfully followed suit and awaited her next words. She stood there for some time, watching the quiet intruder intently, and then all of a sudden ordered the entire Great Hall to be cleared at once. Nobles, servants, the hall’s standard guards, and even Taris—who had been standing at her side upon the dais—were immediately dismissed without another word. Taris protested, vehemently, but with just one look from her he capitulated to her order with no further disobedience.”
“When the shuffling of disappearing steps vanished from the room, and they were finally alone with one another...” she recounts. “Elliana silently stepped away from her throne, descended the steps of the dais, and walked towards him. When she reached some three or four paces from where he stood she stopped and without a word offered her open palm to him —extending her hand in an act of good will. Feneir, seemingly understanding the gesture, took a step towards her and gave her his hand without question.”

Sarina immediately pauses her story, the silence stretches for some minutes, so much so that Dorian —and by extension, Solas— feel compelled to look up at her.

When Dorian does, she turns her back to him and waves her hand —suddenly laced with her magic— before her and the northern most wall of her quarters is suddenly replaced with a recreation of the scene from the story. Dorian watches as the walls of the great hall of the White Queen’s castle, its luxurious trappings and heavily carpeted floors, shimmer into view and then a split second later so, too, does the images of Elliana and Feneir standing close to one another —his hand resting upon hers.

For a moment the magical manifestation just comes into clarity, a for a time it seems as if it is merely an image and not a true vision, but a moment passes and the scene begins to take form, function, and movement.

At first, the movement is simple; as Elliana quietly closes her fingers around Feneir’s hand; but it immediately becomes far more complicated as the seconds tick by. The air around them immediately changes, suddenly charged with magic, and the very feel of the atmosphere around them intently begins to seep into Sarina’s room like a fog or slow-moving midst. The change is noticeable enough for Dorian to instinctually shiver. The magic being so old, so ancient, tinged with the feel of winter’s chill, and so powerful that even he can feel the fear sneaking into his heart.

A second later, Elliana’s hand suddenly begins to glow; the light a manifestation of what everyone standing in Sarina’s quarters had just began to feel; and she closes her eyes. Unafraid, Feneir stands calmly before her, seemingly allowing her without protest to cast upon him. He waits, without words, as she concentrates; her magic flaring and seeping more emphatically into the room; and then—as if draw from deep within him— he lets a nearly pained sigh.

The sound is almost reminiscent of relenting, a resolute soul finally giving in.

“Forgive me...” Feneir’s voice rings out. It is strong, kind, and apologetic.

Elliana says nothing, yet all who stand and watch her notice the subtle way her brow creases ever so
slightly before she finally opens her eyes to look upon his face.

“You are not of my people.” she accuses, her hand still holding his –her magic still flowing off her in waves.

“No, My Lady,” he replies. “But, I seek you out still.”

“The Veil...” she counters.

“They will tear it down...” he answers. “I have come to warn you...for I cannot stand by and watch them...”

“Destroy all that I have built.” she finishes.

“Yes...Elliana,” he answers. The bold use of her given name a prayer upon his lips, as he reaches up with his empty hand and touches her face gently.

At that moment the vision disappears and Sarina turns to look at Dorian’s face –immediately noticing the confusion she knew that would be there.

“Feneir,” she explains. “His name means ‘Snow Wolf’ in Elvhen, but in the dialect of Elliana’s kingdom the term had a separate meaning.”

“Which was...?”

“Soul Wolf,” she answers. “The words for snow and the words for soul were as interchangeable as the people and their land.”

“He wasn’t just a man, was he?” questions Dorian. “But a spirit that had taken a life?”

“A spirit of Valor,” she confirms with a nod. “Who chose life, rather than existence, for no other sake but for hers. For he had watched her for many years and came to know of her true heart. A heart that his spirit-self became drawn to more and more until he could no longer deny the deep truth within himself...”

“That he had fallen for her.”

“From the intangible, he had discovered a plot, you see. That a neighboring kingdom, which was
ruled by an emphatically pious king, had come to fear the machination of her veil. Believing that behind its impassable walls, she was not living a contented life and protecting her people, but mustering forces that would one day sweep over the entire land with conquering purpose. The King’s fear manifested itself into a belief that the only way to protect his people was to destroy Elliana and her kingdom.”

“A fearful fool.”

“When he began to amass his forces, plot and plan to force a fissure in her veil so that his own forces could march upon her land, Feneir made his choice. In no way would he be able to warn her of the truth of what was to come as he was, so he manifested into the reality of her world without hesitation. Forsaking his life as a spirit to be a man that could protect her.” she elaborates. “I can come to no other conclusion other than, that at the moment in which Elliana second-guessed herself in the Great Hall and changed her mind about dismissing him, she had come to realize what he truly was. The magic that she implored being a means to confirm her suspicion of his true origin.”

“She knew he was a spirit?”

“Somehow,” she answers. “Whether it was just a change in her perception of the man or something more, I cannot be certain. But what is for certain is that somehow she knew that the man she had initially mistrusted would end up being someone that would mean far more to her than any man that had ever come before him.”

“He swore fealty to her that very day, confessing his love for her and promising that he would stand by her side for eternity,” she states. “And with his oath, not only were the Great Guardians complete with their fifth member, but she was able to end the war with the southern kingdom long before it began.”

“And...” she adds pointedly. “She was also able to complete the ritual that for ten years she had been creating.”

“Ritual?” he immediately counters, looking up at her suspiciously.

“To bolster her guardians. To make them –truly– her immortal protectors,” she answers. The knowing in her voice: telling.

“That is why I am really here...isn’t?” Dorian instantly questions. “The ritual, you want to recreate
Solas, completely aghast, can do nothing but stare as he anticipates her answer.

“Yes.”

“Have you lost your mind?” Dorian counters, fear and disbelief lacing his every word. “You want to...Sarina...you can’t be serious. Why in the world would you want to do so such a ridiculously dangerous thing?”

“It isn’t dangerous Dorian.”

“How the hell do you know that?” His voice is firm, but not angry. “This magic is millenniums upon millennia old. Created in a world where there was no veil separating the realms of magic and the waking world...no gods, no humans, no dwarves, no Qunari, just elves –with limitless lives and even more limitless magic!”

“And far simpler than you would think.” she counters with a smirk.

“What are you talking about?”

“My ability to soul bond with creatures...the incantation; the spell; and my inherent ability; makes it possible....” she explains. “Because it is actually derived from Elliana’s original incantation.”

“Wait...” he commands with an upturned wave. “Are you saying that when you soul bond your actually recreating her ritual?”

“Yes and no,” she answers. “As I said, the incantation is a derivative of her original spell. It has been changed so to be used on animals rather than people. That change was done sometime before the erection of the veil –created, or modified if you would; by Salina herself.”

“That is, in essence, why the story of Lady Elliana and her kingdom has always been coveted by our
family,” she adds. “Why her history, her life, and the story of the Guardians of Bellanaris, has been memorialized in my family’s most cherished relic.”

“Her affluence with magic, her abilities and the incantations she created in her lifetime, became the cornerstone of my family’s abilities —intrinsically intertwined with Salina’s originating strength that— till this day— still thrives in my veins,” she explains further. “Although, we shared no blood between our lines.”

“And, just how did such amalgamation of her magic and your bloodline occur?”

“That, I truly do not know.” she sighs. “How they became so tied to one another is a mystery that none have ever been able to solve...”

For a moment everything goes quiet, as Dorian mulls over everything Sarina has told him. The more he thinks about it the more he cannot understand why she would be willing to take such a drastic measure. To dare to cast a spell, so unknown and so untested, seemed far too reckless from the woman he always knew to be very meticulous and skeptical.

“Tell me why?” he commands softly.

“Can you just not agree, Dorian?” she questions with a heavy heart. “Say yes, without any more questions?”

“You know I cannot do that, mi adora,” he answers, shaking his head. “You have to tell me why you feel something like is necessary. Why you believe that this is something you must do.”

“Fine.” she breathes out.

For a few moments, Sarina goes quiet and it’s obvious to all who watch her how painful what she is about to say really is.

“I...I cannot do this...anymore, Dorian,” she replies slowly, the pain in her voice focused and resolute. “I thought I could, that I could endure everything that has happened since the Conclave, but I...I just can’t anymore.”
“When once I was confident in my choices, now I feel like I can do nothing right.” she continues. “I feel...unwanted, unloved, untrustworthy, and useless. I can no longer bring myself to believe that I can truly protect the people of Thedas, that I can actually triumph over Corypheus,...or even...that I can do right by the ones I love.”

“I am lost...” she admits with a deep and reverent sigh. “It’s like I have fallen into a deep darkness with no way out and no motivation to even try.”

“You’ve lost your confidence?”

“No.” she answers. “I’ve lost my very reason for living.”

“How can you say such a thing?”

For a moment she pauses again, and while just as shocked by her words as Dorian is, Solas immediately recognizes the look that suddenly falls across her face.

“My dream...” she answers slowly. “For most of my adult life...and just before the Conclave...was very simple Dorian. For I had it all planned out. I wanted nothing more than to stay with my clan, to fall in love, and spend the rest of my life living contentedly surrounded by my children and then, eventually, my grandchildren.”

“I had no aspirations for glory, for war or political machinations. It was simple. It was safe. It was glorious. And it was the only thing selfish thing I ever wanted.” she continues. “And even after what happened at the Temple of Sacred Ashes, even though I awoke branded with a magic that was not mine, thrown into a war that I did not want, I was content to do all that fate had thrust upon me for the sake of Thedas...all because a part of me still knew that one day... one day when this was all over, the life that I had dreamed of for so long could still be mine.”

“A home, a husband who loved me, the continuation of my bloodline with a family of my own...”

“And, now...” she sniffs. “That dream can no longer become a reality for me.”

“With its loss...so too went my only true motivation to keep waking up every morning,” she admits. “I know it’s a selfish thing to say, that it’s pitiful and pathetic, and completely unfair, disrespectful, and downright insulting to everyone who not only supports me as the leader of the Inquisition but to
those that care about me too...but...After what those bastards did to me...what they took from me..."

“How can someone carry on after that? How can someone face the day when they no longer have any hope for their future?”

“You find a new reason to hope,” he answers.

“I’ve tried...” she defends with another sniffle. “But what little hope I have been clinging to...”

“You mean Solas.” Dorian interrupts.

Solas flinches.

Sarina nods.

“He’s different now,” she explains. “I don’t know why, or what I’ve done. But after...I don’t know...he’s changed.”

“And your feelings for him, have they?”

“NO!” she immediately interrupts, before reiterating in a calmer tone. “No.”

“He’s hurting you, though. Isn’t he?” questions Dorian. “With his indecision. Killing off what little hope you had for a future with him one piece at a time.”

“The loss of having children...You don’t think Solas will care for you once he knows that?”

“It’s not that.”

“I love him, even enough to have been willing to never have children, by choice if that was his preference if he would only stay by my side forever. But...with how he’s been acting...how he’s acted
since the very first moment we met and how he now acts around me...his hesitation, the aversions, the half-truths.”

“The fact that that he will not bed you...” Dorian adds so softly that Sarina does not hear.

“I don’t know...A part of me, I guess, has always known that I could never be enough for him to stay. I hoped I could be, that someday he would truly understand how I feel and feel the same...”

“It is my wish that he will, that he will stay with me forever, for I know that he loves me, but I cannot shake the feeling that in the end I will be left alone.”

“I’ve never, ever, been alone, Dorian,” she admits. “Not truly. I’ve always had my family, my clan, and my people. But now...I can never go back to that life.”

“And even though my bonds with my spirit friends could offer me the companionship I know I will always desperately need, I know that in the end being alone without companionship with a real person...it would destroy me. Not having someone to love, who loved me in return...Who I could comfort, or comfort me. That is not a life I ever wanted. Nor a life I could ever bear to live.”

“You will never be alone, Sari,” Dorian states emphatically. “You have me.”

“Please do not do that Dorian,” she begs. “You know as well as I do that nothing is for certain. That nothing in this world can ever be certain, no matter how much we wish it to be otherwise. Things change. People change. And life goes on whether we want it to or not. There will come a time, one day, where you and I will go our separate ways. Such partings are unavoidable. You will return to Tevinter and I will either be dead or be left here to live out the rest of my days alone.”

“Why are you so certain that you will be alone?”

“That’s the way of it,” she answers. “Look at the history of my people, has there ever truly been any real, long-lasting, happiness for any of my kind? And what of those powerful women that have come before me?”

“Warden Surana?” she scoffs. “She’s living the rest of her dwindling life wandering the wilds alone and lamenting the loss of her King simply because she was born an elf. Or Hawke? She’s bedding every man she meets and slowly killing herself with drink, every night, trying her very best to bury
the guilt-ridden memory of Anders. ”

“Is that to be my fate, Dorian?” she questions. “Am I to become just another annotation in the history books? A woman who gave everything to the betterment of all of Thedas only to drift away into obscurity—lonely and alone, broken by heartache, until death takes her?”

“I would never let that happen!” he counters forcefully.

“Then help me,” she begs.

“Don’t do this Vhenan,” Solas found himself involuntarily begging aloud. “Please.”

“What I am asking of you, it will not harm you in any way.” she states with desperation lacing her tone. “Just as it has not hurt my bond mates.”

“In truth, it can never be a detriment of any kind. For it was ultimately created as a boon, not a curse.”

“Alright.” Dorian sighs, only to immediately hesitate as he catches the relieved sigh that falls from Sarina’s lips and instantly clarifies. “I am not saying that I will agree to it…but, I am willing to at least hear you out.”

“What does the ritual entail? What does it do?”

“Though it is not as simple as bonding with an animal, it is harmless,” she answers as she crosses the room to stop at the end of the bed and look at Dorian. “You merely need to speak the oath, and I will cast the spell.”

“The magic will test you. Not in a way that will hurt you. It tests…in essence…your heart.”

Dorian immediately raises a curious eyebrow.
“Your intentions, your inner truth.”

“What?”

“He who takes the oath must prove to the magic that his heart is sincere. That he is truly willing to protect the caster with his life, for eternity. During the test —since you are a mage— the magic will flush through your mana, testing every bit of your soul for falsehoods. If you are found worthy, the bond will be forged through the power of one of the original guardians and you will receive not only a very specific bond that only you and I will share, but with it, you will gain abilities that you have never possessed.”

“And if I fail?”

“The magic will dissipate, the bond will not be formed, and nothing else will happen.”

“What abilities will I acquire?”

“That is unknown,” she answers. “For it differs depending on who the spell is cast upon and which of the guardians grants you their strength.”

“And you do not know what these possible abilities could be beforehand?”

“No.”

“Is there a compulsion?” Dorian questions warily.

Sarina’s hesitation was obvious.

“Sarina...” Dorian warns.

“Yes...” she breathes out. “But it’s not what you think. I would not be able to make you do
something you didn’t want to do. It would not be like...like how tranquil are...where they have no mind or emotions to make decisions on their own. The compulsion is more of a...”

Sarina stops to the think for a second and then sighs.

“"A calling," she says gently.

“That’s not reassuring Sari.”

“Ugh...” she grumbles, exasperated. “It’s not like that. It’s hard to explain. Think of it as a presence within, a little voice in the back of your head that can always tell you where I am. It’s the same with my animal bond in that regard. If I concentrate I can locate any of my spirit friends at any given moment --no matter where they are in the world. And with it, not only can I find them but I will always know when they are in danger. That’s how it will be between us. I will always know where you are...if you're ok. You will always know where I am, and if I am ok...and in the times when I am not.”

“I will know right where to find you...to help you or protect you, whichever needs to be.” he draws the conclusion. “That’s really why you want to do this, isn’t it?”

“You feel guilty for what you put us all through when you went missing, for hurting us and worrying us to death while you were kidnapped and no one knew where you were or even if you were alive.”

“You are blaming yourself and want us to have some kind of reassurance...a reassurance that we will always know you’re ok so we won’t have to worry.”

“I won’t lie to you Dorian.”

“So don’t.”

“Not knowing where you, Solas, and Bull were...not knowing if you were alive...that you had survived the ambush...or died...was more painful to me than anything I endured in that isolation. Anything they ever did or could do to me...To lose all of you...to lose all of you simply because I failed in my duty to protect those I hold so dear...That desperation, I never want to feel it again.” she admits. “And I never want to know that I have made someone else feel it again, either.”
“By doing this, with at least you, I will never have to. Because no matter where we go, what will happen to us, we will always have each other.”

“You mean everything to me Dorian...you are, my very best friend, my soul mate, and I never want to lose or hurt you –ever again.”

“Alright.” he breathily answers, pulling himself from the bed and standing to look at her with a confirming nod.

“Is that a ‘yes’?”

“Yes,” he answers, convinced.

“Come then,” she orders softly, reaching her hand out to Dorian and offering to him.

The vision immediately dims around the edges as Dorian slips his hand into hers and follows as she leads him away from the bed and towards the balcony doors. She speaks no words as she waves her hand, breaking the seal upon their surface and throwing the doors open with the gesture. When they make it to the middle of the landing, Sarina turns to face Dorian and lifts their conjoined hands between them –spinning her grip so that they were palm to palm, finger to finger. With a gentle sigh, she slides her fingers between his and locks them together, before looking up at Dorian’s face.

“You must not let go,” she warns, and he nods in understanding.

“Are you ready?” she questions.

“Yes.”

Lifting her unoccupied hand, she rotates her wrist for half a turn and snaps her fingers. When she opens her hand once more, sitting in the palm of her hand is a small golden flame.

“The oath is in Elvhen,” she explains softly. “This will help you with the words.”
Dorian nods once more.

He watches her as she lifts her hand, turning it at she does, and how the little flame instinctually travels up her skin to the tips of her fingers, until if falls from view and he suddenly feels her touch upon his temple.

The flame instantly seeps into Dorian’s skin and for a moment he scowls and closes his eyes. When he opens them again, Solas can see the glint of a golden fire behind the man’s irises and knows that whatever spell Sarina had cast, had taken hold.

With a confirming nod, she drops her hand away from his face, then rotates it four times. As she moves it, she mumbles something under her breath; and though Solas is not but a few paces from where they stand he cannot make out the words. A few seconds go by, and as the last of the words fall from her lips, she snaps her fingers together again and her hand is instantly enveloped in a manifestation of a golden-colored glow.

“Your oath,” she commands as she lifts her glowing hand and settles it up the man’s chest—right above his heart. “Speak it now.”

For a split second Dorian does nothing, and then as if determined to see this through, he opens his mouth and begins to speak—in Ancient Elvhen.

“In the name of Hope and Faith, Truth and Justice, Compassion and Valor, I swear fealty to the heart of this woman for all eternity.”

“Bellanaris...” Sarina responds, as she flexes her hand against his chest—the magic instantly flaring.

“May my blade always defend her, in her hour of need...”

“Bellanaris...” Sarina repeats and so, too, does her magic.

May my voice always proclaim her greatness, every day of my life...”

“Bellanaris...” Again and again.

“And, may my love always protect the heart I hold so dear...”

“Bellanaris,” they repeat together.
At their affirmation of Dorian’s vows, the magic in Sarina’s hand instantly sinks into his chest and quickly spreads throughout his body—following his veins like the scattering of lightening across a darkened sky. Eyes immediately closing, his body jerks once before stiffening as if he has suddenly become paralyzed—the fingers intertwining with hers clenching in unison, knuckles going white. For a moment there is barely any sound echoing through the room, save for Sarina’s labored and worried breathing, as she watches him so intently that Solas can almost hear the frightened thoughts bouncing around her frantic mind.

The magic, coming to fruition, finally engulfs every vein within his body and at that moment his back arches involuntarily—the movement tugging on their clenched hands—as he cries out in distress.

Sarina instantly takes a step, pulls their connected hands towards her, and tucks them behind her. Closing the gap forcefully.

“Dorian...” she breathes out. “You mustn’t fight it. Listen to the song. Let it wash over you. Let it show you the truth that I know is yours.”

At her words, Dorian’s body jerks once more. This time towards her so violently that they collide. With their conjoined hands still behind her back, and her free hand now pinned between them, Sarina’s eyes flash wide as her panic suddenly flares.

“Please...Dorian,” she begs.

For a few more intense moments Dorian makes no sign that he is there, that the magic is either taking hold or finding him unworthy, and Solas immediately thinks that something has gone terribly wrong. But before he can put his thoughts to words—even though it would have had no affect—Dorian suddenly reaches up with his other hand, grabs Sarina by the back of the neck and kisses her. At that moment, at the contact, the magic flowing through his body shudders and then retreats back to his chest so fast that, had Solas blinked, he would have missed it.

The magic coalesces just under her palm, for what couldn’t be more than a fraction of a second, and then shoots across his chest, down his arm, and stops in the palm of the hand resting on Sarina’s cheek. At that moment, with their lips still pressed together, Sarina slides her hand from his chest only to bring it up to cup his other hand. When her hand makes contact, the magic in his palm flares, engulfs her own, and as if pushed apart by some vengeful force, they break the kiss.
Sarina’s eyes are the first to open, and as they do the magic encasing their hands vanishes—leaving behind a set of matching obsidian and silverite rings on each of their ring fingers.

Suddenly, the sound of an enormous boom echoes through the vision making it shake. Solas immediately looks around for the source of the sound and when he sees nothing he turns to look back at Sarina just in time to see the man open his eyes, embrace her, and then spin her around so that he is looking in Solas’ direction with a murderous glare.

The last thing Solas sees is the darkened, serpent-like shape appearing behind Dorian’s form and the shimmer of green in the man’s irises before the world suddenly goes black.

Chapter End Notes

Anything in bold is spoken in Elvhen and direct translated to English for you.

Sooooo, I have decided that I will be writing a sub-series for this story. It will contain scenes or scenarios that will be part of the Guardians of Bellanaris universe but WILL NOT be a part of the actual story. Meaning that though they will be based on the original story, they will not actual coincide with story. Complete drabbles that do not affect or actually happen in the story itself. Once I have post the first of this particular series, I will make sure you to make note with future updates!

**Also: I need to make an addendum to clarify some geography. Since the locations in which borders actually lay between each country within Thedas is a highly debated topic. I need to clarify the route in which Abelas and Solas are traveling. For my story, I have chosen the map that indicates that the remnants of the Arlathan Forest is located within the borders of Antiva—rather than within the Tevinter Imperium itself. With such a decision: the Hundred Pillars mountain range is the line demarcating the border between Tevinter and Antiva. So as they travel northeast (their refuge being in the southern area of the forest) they will come to the Tevinter border just north of Hundred Pillars mountain rage where it levels out at sea level (Some hundred miles or so, directly east, from Qarinus).
The Truth about Abelas: Pt. 1

Chapter Summary

Opening his eyes, Solas is haunted by what Sarina has done but nothing can prepare him for what Abelas reveals in the memory's wake.

Chapter Notes

Double update this week. ^_^

Hazy and disjointed, the waking falls into his vision as Dorian’s memories disappear from in front of his eyes. For a moment he can neither recognize, nor understand, the place in which he finds himself—far too troubled, confused, and completely disbelieving that everything disturbing thing that he has just witnessed could ever be true. His mind racing, his heart thrumming with fear and panic, he cannot believe that the woman he has loved for so long could be what he now dreaded to be true.

‘No, it’s not possible. She...cannot be. She couldn’t have. It has to be a lie. A trick. A falsehood set to deter me from my goal.’

But the world, it seemed, is not as he would have ever wished. For when his eyes come back into full focus, he is still looking down upon the tome in his hands and the words that had been there moments before he fell into memory, have vanished. Leaving behind one final sentiment from her beloved Magister—cruelly written in a mix of common and Ancient Elvhen.

“May...you never cross our paths, Fen’Harel! For the vengeance of our Eternal Brotherhood shall be swift and without mercy...

Grand Magister Dorian Pavus

Consiliare to Imperial Archon Radonis

Serpent Knight, First of the Eternal Covenant

28th day of Cloudreach, 9:45 Dragon”
“Dorian...” he breathed out.

“Was the first.” replied Abelas resolutely.

At his words, Solas jerked his head up and looked at his friend with a murderous glare tinged with disbelief.

“You knew!” he spat.

“I did,” he responded, his tone flat and without any emotion.

“You!” Solas condemned angrily, his eyes suddenly shimmering with power. “You...No. It can’t be true! You said you knew nothing of the Guardians. That there was no way she could call them from their eternal slumber. That she had no such ability. No such power... You...LIED!”

“Only by omission.” he replied, throwing Solas’ own words said to the Inquisitor so long ago right in his face with no malice. “For you never asked.”

“You...You’ve been plotting all of this from the very beginning...” Solas continued to accuse. “Before I ever set out on this journey, you knew what was going to happen. You knew that I would come to find out the truth about her. About what she did...What she chose to do. About the Guardians. And made me...you made me go through all of this when you could have just told me the truth!”

‘If you had just told me...’ echoed Sarina’s voice in his mind.

“Why?” he demanded.

“Because, I underestimated her,” he replied coolly, as he reached up and pulled on the tethers holding together the gauntlet on his right forearm.
Solas, confused by the movement, watched as Abelas tugged the leather cording loose and removed the metal guard from his arm, revealing the sleeve of his tunic underneath, without a word.

“How so?” he prompted, the fire in his eyes cooling ever so slightly.

“I had not expected...” he answered slowly. “That she would be so meticulous in her creation of such a relic.”

Adding no further details than that, he dropped the gauntlet unceremoniously to the ground and then reached up and tugged back the sleeve of his tunic with a nearly irritated jerk –revealing the bare skin of his forearm.

A deep sigh accompanied his next movement, as he turned his arm slowly and revealed a strange, blue and silver laced glyph; in the shape of a circle, with lines like that of a vortex, swirling down and culminating to its center, a silver sword branded at its epicenter; burned into his skin on the underside.

Solas immediately recognized the rune.

“A Fealty Seal.” he breathed out.

“My punishment.” Abelas answered.

“For my own foolishness,” he added.

“What did you...?”

Solas cannot finish his question, mind reeling at what his eyes can see, for there is no reasonable explanation for the manifestation of such a thing. Such magic had long since abandoned. Not used since the time of the Evanuris. And often came with a terrible price.

“Mythal?” Solas forced out softly. Suddenly believing that his friend from ages past was the responsible party.
“Sarina.” answered Abelas curtly. “Not Mythal.”

“How is that possible?” he asked incredulously.

“Because she lied.” Abelas replied.

“Lied?”

“About her abilities, about what she could truly do and truly conjure in this world.” he answered. “That the Amelanen’lin bloodline was far too weak – normal.”

“What are you saying?”

“They were never weak...” Abelas answered, reaching up and touching the glyph and watching it spark in defense. “Their powers, were never without a presence. Merely muted by time, missing knowledge, and lack of use.”

“The summoning of Idrillas’ spirit...the Serpent Aspect...the joining of his strength with the Magister.” he added softly, turning to look at his friend. “Being the catalyst that freed the magic within her she never knew she carried.”

“But...I never sensed anything.”

“A cursory illusion.” Abelas explained.

Solas flinched. Her words coming back to him as a memory flashed across his mind.

“A phrase she used often.”

“With the bonding of the Magister, the abilities that had been locked within her blood were unleashed. And along with it, came the knowledge of how to hide her true power from others...” he
scoffed. “An ability, it seems, that you both shared, apparently. As no mage within the Inquisition ever knew of what you really were.”

“Though, I suspect...” he added. “It was done not so much as a guise to keep her true self hidden but done because she had no way of knowing what she could be capable of.”

“You think she suppressed her powers because she feared that she would end up hurting someone – because she had never been told how to control them?”

“Perhaps.” Abelas sighed.

“How did you come by such a rune?” Solas questioned.

“By foolish belief.” he replied. “Believing that she would never be capable of harming me in any way...that she could never harm me because she was a mortal, and a shemlen. A disregarding belief that I am still paying for.”

“The book...” he sighed, explaining further. “I had not thought to be wary of it. When it called to me and I relented to its desire for my mind to know what it wished to show me, I never thought that it could be a trap deliberately designed to ensnare my help without prejudice.”

“What did you see?”

“The first memory you saw, the one about the relationship between her and the Magister, was not the first memory I came upon when I began to read.”

“What did you see?”

“The Fade.” he answered. “I found myself standing on the planes of the Fade, the blackened city of Arlathan floating dark and lifeless in the northern sky, and before me a simple graveyard surrounded by a decaying iron fence.”

“A graveyard?” Solas questioned softly as his heart suddenly sank.
“The very same.” answered Abelas. “But not. For the markers that you once described to me, the
ones the Nightmare had created listing off the greatest fears of all those she held dear, were gone.
Replaced by some ten markers of various shapes and sizes—all etched with no names, but emotions.”

“Seven of the markers; truth, faith, determination, strength, happiness, belief, and hope; had all but
been destroyed, broken and crumbled, scattered upon the ground like the last vestiges of a failing life.
And the three that remained, unlike the others which sat resolutely facing the planes of the Fade from
whence I had come, were facing one another in a strange formation that looked similar to the sides of
an arrow point.”

“Love, Duty, and Sorrow were all, that were left.”

The significance of the remaining emotions hit Solas hard. Not only because he knew that such
emotions were the only feelings she would, forever, carry because of him, but also because they held
a significance to something much more.

“We were all that remained.” Solas concluded. “Love: Sarina. Duty: Myself. Sorrow: You.”

“Yes.” Abelas answered. “A realization that I, too, came to know –standing within their presence.”

“And with it came the understanding of something more.”

“Something more?” Solas parroted, slightly confused.

“The manifestation of the graveyard…” Abelas answered. “Was not just a symbol of her life as it had
come to be, but a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

“For it, too, was a test.” he continued. “A test for those that would, or may, inadvertently come
across her Vallas Val and venture into its pages. For those who failed to recognize the significance of
the graveyard, the memory—I can only assume—would fade or not even manifest. But for those who
knew the truth of what they were experiencing, something far more precise would happened.”

“And as you understood its significance, you found out that ‘precise’ result, I take it?”
“Yes.” Abelas nodded. “And I paying the price for such a decision till this very day.”

“Explain.”

“Something about the words Love, Duty, and Sorrow had called to me.” he admitted. “And before I realized what I was doing I found myself walking toward where the stones so solemnly stood without even a thought. For a moment I paused, looking back and forth from each stone’s face. Running the words over and over in my mind like a litany or prayer to some unknown deity. And then –seemingly out of the blue –I stepped between them without a thought. The moment I stopped in the center of the formation, my entire world went white.”

“When I next opened my eyes, I found myself standing in a lusciously green meadow –a full moon shinning down upon me from a clear and star-filled sky. The air was calm, peaceful. And for time, empty.”

“I suddenly began to fear that I had somehow been trapped or imprisoned. That a compulsion had forced me to make those final steps. Not realizing until sometime later that I had been brought to such a place for a reason.”

“So I started to cross the meadow in search of something, anything, that would show me why I had come to such a place. I had only taken three steps, before I sensed someone watching me. At that moment, I stopped and turned to see a form I had not expected; sitting, quietly, under a large willow.”

“Was it her?” Solas questioned.

“No.” he answered. “It was you.”

“You were alone. Dressed a set of blue mage robes I have never seen you wear. And fast asleep.” he continued. “I called out to you, but you neither moved nor answered. For a moment I felt a flicker of fear as I thought that, perhaps, you too had been locked away in such a place but the feeling immediately passed when I noticed your visage shimmer.”

“It was an illusion.” Solas assumed.
“Not an illusion. But a construct from a memory. Specifically created, and placed in such a place, by Sarina herself.”

“For what purpose?”

“I cannot be certain.” Abelas sighed.

“It was when such realization hit me that I found myself no longer alone with just your image.” he continued. “As a presence suddenly manifested itself behind me.”

“I turned to see her standing there, looking upon me with a look that both told of her disapproval and of her disappointment.”

“Like a moth to the flame…” she had said. “So, too, are you drawn...to that which was never meant for you.”

“I suddenly found myself fearful of her for the very first time.” Abelas admitted. “Though I still do not understand why. Something about the way she stood there, looking at me. The sound of her voice. The air about her. The disdain in her posture. The resolve in her words. Unnerved me.”

“She had not expected to find me there, I think.” he continues. “Or, perhaps, more to the point, she had not expected to find me there at that time. For she seemed not only suspicious that it was I who was standing before her in such a place but surprised because of it as well.”

“But it wasn’t until she smirked at me, did I truly feel like an animal caught in a trap.”

“You have done well, Little Sorrow.” she had said. “For you have found the place I’ve left for you, far sooner than I expected.”

“Left for me?” I asked.
“Of those in this world, there is only but a few who would know the significance of the ruins of my life.” she answered. “But, it is you, and only you, whose courage was destined to find the true path.”

“Why?” I asked.

“It was then that her words fell into the common tongue.” he added. “As the smirk upon her face fell without explanation. And, at that moment, I suddenly began to feel as if our meeting had not been an accident.”

“You have found your purpose, have you not?” she had questioned. “A ‘place for you in this world’ that you were once promised?”

‘Meaning me...’ Solas thought.

"I have."

“Trading millenniums of service to one, for another.” she had murmured. “And never knowing true freedom.”

“Before I could reply, she leveled a gaze at me that both practically chilled and warmed my blood, all in the same moment.”

“I had thought...better of you.” she had added with a sigh. It was sad, disappointed. “But it seems that even an ‘Elvhen such as you’ cannot so easily break the chains of an eternity of belief and servitude.”

“I am no slave!” I countered.

“Yet you still carry your service to the ‘All Mother’ upon your face.” she had scoffed. “Do not take me as a fool, Little Sorrow. He may be the ‘Dread Wolf’ but he still carries your Mistress’s power. How can you be so certain that what you do in his name is not by your own choice, but by his will alone?”
“Is this why I have been brought here?” I retaliated. “So that you may undermine my trust in him?”

“No...” she had sighed softly, as she had turned to look at your form sitting beneath the willow. “No.”

“Then why am I here?” I asked.

“So that you will honor your oath.” she had replied.

“At her words, I had no idea of what she meant. Other than our encounter at the temple, I had never had any other interaction with her. Knew nothing about her—save from what you had shared. And could not understand why she would believe that I owed a vow that she must keep me to. Until...”

“Until...”

“Sahren...sends his regards.” she had added.

At Abelas’ mention of the Ancient Guardian, the rune upon his forearm instantly flickered with a silvery light.

“It was then, at the mentioning of the Lion Aspect, that I felt an excruciating pain shoot through my body like an explosion of fire and lightening. It twisted me. Crashing through my mind with an unbelievable force, forcing me to my knees as white-hot fire blazed behind my eyes.”

“I could see nothing, but the manifestation of the power that suddenly swam through my vision. Hear nothing, but the thrum of magic and the ringing in my ears. Feel nothing, but the pain flowing through me, the pulsing of magic that I had never felt before, as I suddenly felt as if I was being consumed; body and soul.”

“I sat there, pulled into myself, and suffering for...I don’t know how long.” he continued. “Trying to fight whatever it was that had come over me... when...”
“I felt a gentle hand land upon the top of my head.” he sighed. “And as it made contact, the pain that was tormenting me vanished. When I looked up, all I could see was Sarina crouched down in front of me, her hand upon my head, and a soft –yet mournful – look upon her face.”

“When I looked at her, confused and angered by what had just happened, she just shook her head in disapproval.”

“I found myself suddenly wondering why she would do such a thing, looking at me with such pity.”

“When I voiced out my thoughts...she gave me an answer I had not expected.”

”The Wolf...” she had answered with a heavy sigh. “Has failed you. And now you will have to pay the price of such a failure.”

“When I asked her what she meant by that...she pulled her hand away from the top of my head and touched my vallaslin.”

“Mythal...” she had explained. “Owes Sahren a debt. A debt that she has yet to repay. And, as I am now his new Mistress, such a debt becomes mine to do with it what I will.”

“And, I –as her sworn servant still –must fulfill any request you have of me in repayment,” I answered, knowing immediately what such a debt would require of me.

“I am sorry, Little Sorrow.” she had apologized. “I did not wish to burden such a responsibility upon you. For I would not willingly make a slave of any man. But since you did not take your freedom, when it was offered to you...and have ventured into this place in his stead...I have no other choice than to lay claim to what is owed.”

“Somehow she knew, looking upon my face –seeing that my vallaslin remained –and knowing that I was now in your service, that you had offered to free me from my oath to Mythal and I had refused.”

“For a few moments, still down upon my knees, I looked at her as I tried to process the words that she had spoken. And in that time of reflection, a sudden realization occurred to me that I had not had the presence of mind to notice before.”
“She...” he sighed, stopping to take a breath before he continued. “Looked to be in distress.”

“Distress?” questioned Solas.

“There was something strange about her. I could not put my finger on what exactly had given me such an impression at the time, but since then I have come to the conclusion as to why she was suddenly giving off the feel of such a barely-hidden emotion.”

“She was conflicted.” he continues. “Like she was being pulled into two different directions at once.”

“I could not ask her why she looked so unlike the woman I had known in my mind for so long,” he admitted. “Why she seemed, at that moment, as if she was constantly being needled by some pain in the back of her heart and mind; a physical pain like the constant twisting of a knife; and forcing the feeling back –hiding it–with a vengeful calm, as she spoke with me.”

“I think...” he added. “That in some way, she knew that what she would ultimately make me do would scar her soul forever. That forcing me against my will would be another regret, in the long line of regrets she would forever carry because of her love for you.”

Solas’ face instantly fell.

“She has suffered much because of my foolishness, my selfishness.” Solas admitted. “Had I not been the one, who encouraged her. Who, had not, indulged her fascination. Who, had not, allowed it continue...past the point of no return...”

“It would have happened, no matter how much you would have tried to deny it.” Abelas interrupted. “You know that as well as I do. Fate is not something you can easily avoid, my friend. That is why it is called fate.”

“The moment she was branded with your magic...” he added. “Her fate, as well as yours, was sealed.”

“Another sin upon my already sinful life.” sighed Solas regretfully.
“Love can never be a sin.” countered Abelas knowingly. “It is what you do with love, however, that can become one of the greatest sins ever known. Treat it properly, cherish it for the gift that it truly is, and you will have a righteous life. Ignore it, treat it casually, deny it, or throw it away over some tangible or intangible reason, and it will become a burden that will weigh heavily upon your heart – and upon your spirit – for an eternity.”

“But... you know that already, don’t you?”

Solas could do nothing but nod, admitting his failures without protest or justification.

There was time where they both fell into a muted silence. Each thinking of her. Solas miring away in his guilt. And Abelas contemplating the path in which their conversation should follow. For he knew that there would only be so much he would be allowed to say.

For Sarina’s orders were absolute.

“What did she ask of you?” Solas finally asked some moments later.

“Nothing.” Abelas answered. “And everything.”

“I don’t understand.”

“At first...” Abelas answered. “She spoke of nothing of what she intended. Instead, she asked of me.”

“I think, perhaps, due to guilt she would carry because of the task she would eventually put upon me, she believed that learning more of who I was, who I am, would somehow ease her heart.” he explained. “She asked me of my life, of my younger years. Of how I lived during the time of our People. And how I ultimately came into Mythal’s service.”

“And you spoke candidly of such truths?”

“Not at first...” he replied. “Knowing that she would make me do something against my personal will, to fulfill an oath Mythal had sworn millenniums ago, I could not bring myself to be unwary of
“I did not believe that she was being sincere in her curiosity, care, and candor.”

“That is, until, she began to speak of you,” he added. “With a forthrightness and honesty, I had not expected.”

“She admitted to me that she had known about who and what you really were long before you had been ‘forced by fate’ to admit the truth.” he continued. “She said, at first, that the recollection of her dream and the consequent realization of your true self, was something she was not ready to understand or believe. That she had nearly harmed Cole, and banished him from the Inquisition, in her disbelief and anger. But that when the truth of the matter finally settled in her mind, she had come to accept what you were; not because of your feelings for her, or her feelings for you, but because – in her mind and heart – you had proven that you were not the monster that the Dalish had painted you as.”

“I asked her, then, if she now saw you as such a monster.” he sighed. “Since she now knew of your plans to return our People to their former glory –and in the process destroy everything that this world had built over the centuries.”

“What did she say?”

“She could not.” he said bluntly. “When I asked her how she could still see you as a ‘good man’ she simply answered that ‘the mask you had clung to so desperately’, for all the time she had known you, had ‘failed far too many times to hide your true heart from her’. That, ‘she saw the truth behind the conflict in your eyes more times than she could count.’ but, ‘always knew that one day you would come to realize what you so adamantly denied.’”

“Which was?”

“That you were a man ‘whose failures in life did not define him.’” Abelas answered. “‘And would come to accept that there are some things better left unchanged.’”

“I asked her, then, why she had not confronted you about your secret. Why she did not accuse you directly of what she had come to know or outed the truth about you to her companions and advisers.”
“And her answer?”

“‘Because of hope.’ she had said.” he answered. “The hope of the world, of her people, of her friends, and the hope that lived in her heart. She believed, right up until the day of Corypheus’ defeat, that allowing you to stay by her side would not only give hope to those of our kind suffering under the yolk of oppression and poverty –by allowing them to see some of their kind not only exalted, on high, by the humans of this world, but also in a position of power, doing good for all the world – but also to those who would ever feel unwanted or unloved by those above them in station or in life.”

“She ultimately felt it was her responsibility, as well as yours, to show the world that one of the People could not only do right by all of the people of Thedas but also protect them all no matter the sacrifice.”

“You make it sound like she used me.”

“In a sense, she did. But, so too, did you use her. Did you not?”

Solas nodded, for he could not deny the parallel.

“For a time, our conversation lulled, as she continued to stare at your sleeping form.” he sighed. “And for a time, I was content in that quiet. But as time went on, I began to wonder a great many things –remembering questions I had always thought I would ask of her if I ever had the chance. At first, I did not know where to begin. Or how far she would be willing to concede the truth to me. But I could not squander the opportunity to try.”

“But before I could begin my questions anew...she turned to me and asked me a question I had not expected at that moment,” he replied. “She asked of you directly.”

“What did she want to know?”

“‘Is he well?’ was all that she asked.” Abelas answered. “The question caught me off guard, I’ll admit. I had not believed that after everything that had happened between you, she could still carry concern for your well-being.”

“She noticed the surprise on my face,” he added. “And actually smiled at me. When I asked her how
she could still carry such care and concern for you –after everything she’d been through, ultimately, because of you– she simply smiled at me again and stated that "love is a stupid, stupid thing."

“And with her answer, I found myself –unexpectedly– smiling back at her before I even realized.”

“But the comradery that had fallen between us, sitting upon the ground of that quiet place, did not last.” he sighed, the disappointment in its release unmistakably apparent. “For her smile faded, and the air around us changed. What calmness and openness she had carried, just moments before, had vanished. And with its disappearance, reappeared the woman who I had first met in that clearing.”

“She stood. Suddenly turned to me and lifted her hand. Before I could react, she called upon her magic and directed a cast at me in a blink of an eye. There was flash of light that overwhelmed my sight for only a second, and its wake...the rune upon my arm appeared.”

“I immediately shot to my feet and looked at her, expecting to see a coldness in her eyes –like that of a heartless mage who no longer carried a care for those beneath her –but what I saw was a woman whose eyes shown a resoluteness encased in sorrow.”

"'Abelas.' she had said. Her voice full of warning.” he recounted. "'In the name of Sahren, The Great Lion Guardian of Eternity, I call upon that which has been promised by thy Mistress and demand your obedience.'"

“The compulsion hit me so hard that I collapsed upon my knees, involuntarily, in supplication, and I could not stop myself from answering her command.”

“What is thy will?” I forcefully asked. “My Lady.”

“A great evil has poised itself to bring dominion over the land.” she answered. “That carries with it a Pride far greater than Thedas has ever known. If left unchecked, unchallenged, it will consume those I love with a voraciousness of a beast hell-bent to ruin all that is good and pure in this life and the next.”

“It must be stopped.” she continued. “For it cannot be allowed to bring to fruition its deepest desires.”
“Until such time that such a victory comes to pass...” she commanded. “I order you to swear fealty to me, follow any order I shall command of you, and covet my words beyond all others, until such time as you fulfill your duty and earn your freedom once more.”

“What say you?” she demanded.

“Unable to deny her, I accepted her command without question,” Abelas admitted. “And when it was all over, our covenant made, she calmly took a breath and looked at me apologetically.”

“Forgive me, Abelas.” she had sighed. “There is no other way than this, lest all that will come hereafter be forfeit.”

“I looked at her in confusion, not understanding what was meant by such an admonition. But before I could ask her to clarify, she spoke once more.”

“What I must do, is something that I must do alone, Abelas.” she had said. “For it is not something another can do, but a task put before me by my own actions.”

“The evil in which I speak, is my own doing.” she had admitted. “A calculation, miscalculated. A mistake, mistaken for something more. And if I do not remedy it, the world as we know it will be undone.”

“You do not seek my assistance in such an endeavor?” I asked, somehow understanding her inner thoughts. “To use my position within his ranks to aid your cause?”

“No, I do not.” she had answered. “I would not have you put yourself at risk. Nor would I put you in a position where you would ultimately have to choose between your fealty to me and your loyalty to him. For I know what he truly means to you, and what you truly mean to him.”

“I want you know that I did not wish to do this, to put you in such a place. To do this, to you, is unworthy of you, of the man you truly are, and I will forever regret this decision.” she had admitted further. “But I could not think of another way to protect that which I hold dear.”

“There are those in this world that mean far more to me than I had ever thought possible, those who
if I should lose, would destroy what little of me is left. So, with such an understanding, I wish upon you your assistance rather than your obeisance.”

“Meaning you will not implore our covenant's compulsion unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

“Yes.”

“What is that you wish of me?” I asked.

“Solas...” she had breathed out. Like a prayer upon her lips. “There will come a time when his resolve in his idyllic plan will falter. A moment when he will come to realize that there is more to his life than duty.”

“When that time comes, he will need you most of all. For he will know not how to process such a realization.”

“His life has been filled with so many regrets, that regrets are all he sees in front of his eyes. It is a tragedy, one that he will see as naught but a fate he deserves, and believe that the hope that blooms in his heart is nothing but a lie.”

“It is then that you must allow him to see that which you have been hiding from him. For it is the path that will help him when I cannot.”

“The Vallas Val?” I immediately questioned.

“Yes. He will wish to seek the truth of me, and though he will be unsure of what he learns, you must see to it that he continues his journey through that which was kept from him –for his sake, as well as mine.”

“For it holds within its pages the path that will ultimately set him free.”

“And if he should stray from the path?”
“Show him the way back.”

“And if he comes to know of our covenant, should I have no other choice than to explain my actions?”

“Do not lie to him.”

“You would see me give him the truth of our bond? To put before him, the knowing, that I have become a thrall to debt that was never mine?”

“He will not see you as the friend you truly are otherwise.” she had answered. “And I would not have him feel betrayed by what you have done, because of me. If he seeks retribution for what I have commanded of you, tell him to seek me out and I will gladly accept any punishment he would bestow upon you for such a slight.”

“And if he ignores my words...?”

“He will not.” she had answered adamantly. “Of that, I am sure.”

“And she was right,” confirmed Solas gently.

Before Abelas could comment further, or seek the forgiveness of his dear friend for his actions, a cacophony of fast approaching hoof beats thundered into their little camp –jerking them out of their thoughts—as a voice suddenly boomed out over the maelstrom falling outside.

“FEN’HAREL!”
A scouting party, seeking out their Lord, appear suddenly in Solas’ camp with the news that the Eluvian at the Tevinter border has been compromised by a monster who refuses to leave. A confrontation of old friends ensues, revealing a piece of information far more disturbing than Solas could possibly imagine.

As the unexpected, and nearly violently threatening, call faded from the din of the squall falling just beyond the canvas of their tent, Abelas and Solas tensed and shared a suspicious glance towards the noise as the sound of the encroaching hoof beats came to a sudden stop and fell away into the same silence seconds later. Grabbing his staff almost a second later than he would normally would have, had he not been so deep in conversation, Solas immediately stood with a defensive carriage. Abelas, following his movements, grabbed his bow –caring not for the missing piece of his armor laying upon the ground at his feet –and stepped to his friend’s side. Solas immediately took a step towards the tent flap, suddenly determined to face whatever, or whomever, had so abruptly entered their hidden camp, so brazenly, and Abelas instantly grabbed his arm and gave him a telling look.

“We must be careful, my Falon.” he whispered. “If they have a quarry...”

Solas nodded, understanding Abelas’ warning more astutely than he would have normally. There were few that knew of their journey, the route in which they would take, and to now have someone appear this far out from their sanctuary was suspicious.

“Let us see.” he replied.

“Allow me to take the lead, then.” agreed Abelas.

With another nod from him, Abelas exited the tent first with Solas on his heels. As they stepped into the incessant downpour, enveloped in the haze of the cascade falling over their uncovered faces, their eyes immediately fell upon three heavily armored, black as midnight, soaking wet and muddied, Amaranthine Chargers.

And their equally armored and hooded riders.

Unsure of what they were seeing, mistrusting their appearance, and unbelieving of their intentions, Solas instinctively took a half step back behind Abelas and pulled on the fade –calling upon his magic. At the sudden tinge of ozone, Abelas immediately steeled himself, gripped his bow tightly, and eyed the intruders with a sharpened glare lethal enough to kill.

At Solas’ movement, the farthest two hooded figures went for the pommels of their swords. Their reaction were quick, far faster than either of the two Elvhen had seen in centuries, and unbelievably subtle. Solas instantly flicked his wrist, calling forth a sphere of ancient magic as cold as death into his hand as Abelas took in a sharp breath and reached for his arrows.

For a moment everything was still, almost quiet under the squall, as each man surveyed the
combatant before them, holding their attack, as the tension they felt began to rise to a fever pitch. A few breaths exhaled. One. Then two more. Then another three. And still nothing. No man dared to make the first move, to take first strike. The formidable standoff ensued for only a few moments more before the lead rider gave off a simple sigh, almost as if he was practically irritated by the whole situation, and lifted his hand, briskly pushing back his hood.

Drawn to the movement, Solas looked upon the lead rider’s face; immediately noticing the solid black markings of Ghilan’nain –inked into honeyed, Dalish skin– and a very familiar smirk.

“Loranil?” called out Solas, snuffing out the cast that pooled in his palm, without hesitation, and stepping up to Abelas’ side. “Is that you?”

At Solas’ question, the man dismounted the back of his mare without any grace –his bound feet slamming in the mud with far more force than it should have for any Dalish, seconds before he took a knee and bowed his head.

“My Lord.” Loranil answered, his breathing labored and gruff.

“What is the meaning of this? Why have you come?” fired off Abelas; knowing full-well that the lead scout had been assigned to the camp near the Tevinter border and should be nowhere near where they currently were. “You are supposed to be guarding the...”

“Forgive me, General Abelas.” interrupted Loranil with a barely hidden groan lacing a severely forced tone. “But there was no other choice.”

“What has happened?” Solas demanded gently.

“The camp...” Loranil huffed painfully. “Has been attacked.”

“Attacked?” parroted Abelas. “By whom?”

Before Loranil could answer any further, his face suddenly drained of all color and he let out a gushing breath before unexpectedly collapsing, face-first, in the mud. In the split second where Solas or Abelas could not move due to such a surprise, the two remaining men on horseback instantly dismounted and came to his aid.

“What is wrong with him?” questioned Abelas as he came to the man’s side.

“He was injured.” answered one of the men, as he swept back his hood to reveal his pointed ears and face marked with the symbol of the All-Mother. The third rider followed suit a second later –his face scared with an incomplete marking of Sylaise – and immediately cradled Loranil’s head into his lap. “In the attack. Refused healing or rest. Said that Lord Fen’Harel had to know what has happened. Has to come. Has to help.”

“He waits...” mumbled Loranil, his eyes closed, as his hand held tightly to a hidden wound seeping blood from just beneath his chest plate near his hip. “Won’t leave....can’t use...can’t use while he’s there... won’t leave...won’t leave...will kill...all who try...”

“How old is this wound?” demanded Abelas, his eyes narrowing in concentration as he took a quick look under Loranil’s palm.

“A day...maybe more.”

“Get him inside, now.” he ordered. “It needs to be treated immediately.”
The second rider nodded, complying with their General’s order he picked up Loranil’s limp form and carried him towards the tent, as Solas looked upon the remaining rider.

“You two will explain.”

The rider, suddenly faced with the scornful look of his lord, immediately dropped his eyes and nodded as Solas turned his back to the man and headed for the tent. Once settled within, as Abelas and Solas peeled off the Loranil’s armor and began to tend to the man’s wound, the two riders began to fill them both in.

“It was quiet...” the first man intoned. “Daily routines had just begun. Loranil and I were gathering firewood on the edge of the forest when we heard the cry of alarm. We raced back to the camp, to the Eluvian, to find a man...a monster, adorned in strange—glowing—markings, attacking the camp.”

“One of the other scouts...that had been there when it all began...said that the man just strolled into the camp without care, a smile upon his face, and when the Captain confronted him...something seemed to snap, like a bowstring pulled way too tight...and before anyone could even flinch, he attacked without reason. Cutting the Captain down in one fell blow as if it was practically nothing.”

“Our second in command, Leyva, horrified and angered by what had just happened in front of her, attacked in retaliation—seeking justice for our lost leader— but, she too, was cut down without even a thought.”

“After that, the camp erupted into chaos and it turned into an all-out battle.”

“Our scouts and soldiers had him surrounded but no matter what they did, what strategy they used, how much magic or brute force they employed, they couldn’t take him down.”

“He just kept coming, and coming, with a rage and bloodlust like I had never seen.” he sighed with a visible shiver.

“He killed twelve of us before Loranil called the retreat.” the second man piped in. “To abandon the Eluvian and fall back. We set up a secondary camp half a league south from our original camp and kept a scout rotation to keep an eye on the man—hoping that we could find out what was going on, a way to take back our camp and re-secure the Eluvian. But...”

“But?” prompted Solas.

“Every time we attempted to take it back, the brute would merely throw his massive weapon over his shoulder, and ask: ‘Is this worth your death?’ with a glare so chilling that we were loath test his mettle again.”

“For two days we stilled our hand.” continued the first. “Watching, waiting, hoping that we would find some answer as to why he had not only attacked but also why he continued to linger.”

“But we found nothing. No explanation.” added the second. “For the last three days, he’s been sitting in the middle of the camp, drinking and eating our provisions—barely sleeping—and all the while he waits.”

“For what?” questioned Abelas, calling out over his shoulder as he bandaged Loranil’s wound.

“The Wolf.” forced out Loranil softly, before suddenly passing out without so much as a whimpering protest.

“What?” whispered the Sentinel, confusion echoing across his face.
“He’s waiting for Lord Fen’Harel.” answered the first man, turning to look at Solas pointedly. “Until the ‘Dread Wolf dares to show his face.’ He refuses to leave.”

“That’s why we have come.” added the second. “Why we did not try to retake the camp...and – instead– sought you out. In hopes that, in some way, this could be settled by your hand before any more loss of life.”

“Then why...?” questioned Abelas.

“Loranil...” the second scout interrupted –seemingly knowing the Sentinel’s train of thought. “He refused to send another scout to deliver the news, said Lord Fen’Harel would not trust the words of just anyone...you had to know so he had to go.”

“Even though he is injured.” the first intoned.

“I understand.” nodded Solas. “This man, this monster as you put it, who is he?”

“Don’t know.” answered the first, glancing at the injured man next to him. “Never gave his name...but...Loranil spoke with him. Swore he recognized the man; knew him from...from before.”

“Before what?” questioned Abelas.

“This...” answered the second, waving his hand out before him and motioning to all that were assembled. “This last stand...this...rebellion...our justice.”

“He is from the Inquisition?” question Solas, suddenly even more wary of this mystery man and his intensions.

“I think so.” answered the first man. “Probably so. Since he didn’t immediately cut Loranil down the moment he stepped into the camp to confront him. Must’ve recognized him too, I guess.”

“What did he say?” questioned Abelas. “Did he give a reason for why he had come?”

“Loranil...didn’t give us specifics. Not sure what was really said, or what really happened between them, but when he came back to our temporary camp he was hurt...and he looked...” the first answered with a strange look on his face and an inflection of questioning in his tone. “Disturbed?”

“Yeah. Disturbed...That sounds about right.” muttered the second.

“But...”

The first immediately stopped, leaned over to where Loranil’s prone form sat, slipped his hand into the man’s hip pouch, and pulled out a small wadded roll of cloth.

“He told Loranil to give you this...” the man continued, offering it to Solas. “Said you would understand.”

Taking the bundle, Solas looked at the scout with a flash of apprehension before he began to unwrap it. As the layers fell away, he began to feel something take shape and form within and something about its feel made his heart suddenly feel heavy as a sense of dread began to swim with in him. For a moment his heart and mind practically begged him to stop. To throw away the bundle without revealing what lay within. But he knew that such cowardice would serve no purpose. If this intruder had gone so far as to see it sent to him, then he must face whatever intensions it held.

When the final layer fell away, it revealed by its absence something that made Solas’ heart drop so
suddenly that it felt as if it had been pulled down to the depths of the Void, from his very chest, in an instant.

“What is it?” questioned Abelas.

Solas picked up the familiar object and sighed in near agony —his face drawing down into a deeply disturbed frown.

“Falon?” worriedly prompted the Sentinel.

“A white queen.” Solas replied, turning the alabaster chess piece between his fingers as the realization of who this monster really was hit him harder than any physical force could ever muster.

There was only one man in all of Thedas that would give him such a thing to prove a point.

“We’ll leave at dawn.” Solas stated resolutely, his voice firm, as he shoved down the suddenly subtle urge to throw the piece away, mixed with the whispering fear that begged him to flee, before they could both take root within him.

“Are you sure...my Falon?” replied Abelas worriedly.

Solas immediately nodded.

“I know this man. Until his demands are met, he will not stand down.” Solas added knowingly.

“There is no other choice. I must go.”

“Very well.” sighed Abelas as he pulled a blanket over Loranil’s sleeping form and motioned to the other two men to find a place to sleep. “Let us rest, then.”

Abandoning their tent, ordering them to stay until Loranil was safe to move, Solas and Abelas set out for the border camp just after first light among the warning protests from the worried scouts watching over Loranil’s sleeping form. He appreciated their concern; an appreciation that he, once, would have never carried; but he knew that hesitating even for a few moments would do him no good. The man that awaited him had come for a reason. A reason surely justified, for he knew that there could be only one meaning behind all of this. He had come for him. And would never just walk away without confronting Solas. He wanted his due. A debt owed, that he had come to claim. Not caring about what consequences would be laid bare, he would have what he came for. He would have his justice.

And Solas would not deny him the satisfaction he demanded.

As the midday sun hung overhead, peaking intermittently between the clearing clouds, their mounts rounded the final bend in the path and crossed the threshold of the temporary camp. Solas and Abelas were immediately met by a lithe, fresh-faced scout clothed in a light set of leathers and adorned with a sleek hunter's bow of Orlesian make.

“My Lords.” the scout bowed, his voice laden with a thick accent. “It is good to see that Loranil has found you. How does he fair?”

“Better.” answered Abelas. “What is the situation here?”

“No change.” informed the scout, as they dismounted from their horses. “The intruder is still within the camp.”

“So no interactions then? No skirmishes?”
“None.” the scout replied. “Under Loranil’s orders, we have done nothing to antagonize the intruder. Simply watching his movements, instead.”

“His demands, have they changed?” Solas asked.

“No, my Lord.” sighed the scout, almost irritably. “He still seeks your presence.”

“And, he shall have it,” he answered, before turning to leave.

Abelas’ hand, immediately shooting out from where it dangled beside him, grabbed Solas by the shoulder and halted him.

“You intend to go now? Before even attempting another scouting mission?”

Solas nodded.

“Then allow me...” Abelas began before being immediately silenced by a glare from Solas focused upon him.

“Stay here,” he ordered.

“But.”

“No man would dare make demands of me, save one.” informed Solas, his tone going almost cold. “And I will not deny him what he seeks any longer. Stand down, Abelas, and await my return.”

“You’re sure?”

“Time for such uncertainty, measured contemplation, and calculation has long passed. It is time to face what, in the past, I’ve avoided.”

“Which is?” questioned Abelas.

“He who had once been my enemy; in words, thoughts, and beliefs; but, through her, became –for a short time– an unexpected and treasured friend... A friend who I, too, betrayed along with all the others.”

“He comes to claim retribution?”

“Perhaps.”

“And you still intend to go?”

“It’s time for this avoidance to end.” sighed Solas.

“As you wish, my Falon.” answered Abelas; relenting with a sigh of his own –knowing full-well that if such a conclusion to this particular story must come to an end without his interference, he can do naught but let it traverse to its finality. For, in this, it was not his place to interfere. “If you must...”

Without another word, Solas left the camp and headed north.

Though the reality between him and his quarry was short, the distance felt as if it spanned thousands upon thousands of miles. His melancholy and dread, pooling deep within him, tugged upon his form like the weight of a great mountaintop upon his soul. Pulling him farther and farther into the guilt that he had tried so desperately to quell for the last few years. With every step that brought him closer to the inevitable –to the memories he would once again have to face, like a persistent and incessant
litany of his great sins– his heart ached for what was to come and his mind feared the consequences such memories would demand of him –much more than any adversary he had ever faced.

For what he had said to Abelas, what he had subversively revealed of that which awaited him, had been vague. But the truth of what was lingering within that camp was far more resolute than he had let anyone believe.

For, they both, walked the same path.

And shared the same past.

That past, as fraught with fallacies and falsehoods as it was, was more than just an anecdote in the history of their depravity and mistrustful natures. That had done a great many despicable things in their lives, hurt a great many with their evasions, their cleverly hidden truths, and outright blatant misdirections, in an attempt to guard their secrets so masterfully that none would ever see what they’d kept hidden. They, each, had honed their abilities so artfully, crafting a web of lies so succinctly impenetrable that not even the most intelligent of minds could undo it all.

Only to find, after a lifetime of success, that it would take only one woman to undo it all in a matter of seconds—with a simple tug at one solitary string.

His quarry had praised her for her cleverness and formidable insight.

While he had condemned her, to a life a loneliness and sorrow, because of it.

As the edge of the camp finally comes into view, Solas lets out a steadying breath –mentally preparing himself for whatever may come. He knew that what he would face would be brutal, to not only to his resolve and his guilt, but though he wished it to not be so, he also knew that he could no longer ignore it. He must bring this particular chapter of his past to close. End it a swiftly and as painlessly as he can. Or nothing that follows will ever exist unscathed.

The moment his eyes land upon his quarry, as he steps between two outlying tents and into the camp proper, his heart is filled with an almost unexpected sense of distaste and disappointment. Not because of the man, himself, but of the carnage left in his wake. The ground around him is bathed in the blood of his people. Broken weapons; swords, axes, shields, and bows; litter the ground in sporadic, far-flung piles of twisted steel, shredded leather, and splintered wood –shattered from the heat and fury of battle. The dead lay upon the ground where they were cut down –bodies and expressions twisted in horror, fear, and rage. While the smell of death and despair lingers in air and the fade trembles with echoes of the final screams of their souls’ last moments.

And in the middle of it all, the man responsible; the scouts’ monster; sits resolutely reclining across an ornately and intricately stacked pile of crates and sacks filled to the brim with provisions – splattered with blood, a weathered and dull great axe laying haphazardly across his lap, and drinking deeply from a large tankard of ale.

“Fenedhis!” growled Solas, his eyes immediately narrowing at the aftermath before him, as anger flared in his heart instantly and he slammed the blade of his staff into the ground at his feet.

At the impact, the man just lets out an amused chuckle.

‘Damn him’

Leveling a threatening gaze, Solas instantly gripped his staff and called upon his magic –filling the
air with tinge of ozone and a subtle charge of static electricity, before drawing upon his focus and pulling forth his strongest barrier.

It was then that the man, feeling the change all around him, finally lowered his empty tankard and eyed the wolf before him.

“She is not here...” the intruder informed, his voice deep and without even a tinge of fear. “So, there is no one here you need to impress. To preen and prance like a peacock, for. Strutting around in all your ‘Elvhen Glory’ to entice the unknowing and overly trusting. Or to be twisted around your finger with niceties and softly spoken lies meant to persuade and impassion.”

At such a twist of the knife, Solas’ anger cooled by thousands of degrees in an instant.

For the man always knew just where to stick the blade.

“So save it.” the intruder growled.

Realizing that his current behavior would not reveal any truth to what has happened or why the man had appeared here, Solas acquiesced by allowing his barrier to shutter and quietly fade before relaxing his demeanor.

“Very well.” he sighed.

When the tinge of ozone finally faded from around him, the man let out a sigh of his own.

“That’s better.” he breathed before cheerfully asking. “So how have you been?”

Thrown off by the man’s tone, Solas could not help but still.

“Come, come, now, Solas.” the man tutted, noticing Solas’ disbelief. “Must you look at me with such disapproval, even at this point in the game?”

“Must you always make light of everything?”

“It’s what I do...” he replied. “But... more importantly...Must you give weight to everything?”

“Only when the need arises.” Solas answered, making a point to grab the man’s attention before his own eyes made a sweeping gesture over the destruction before them. “Or there’s merit.”

“Don’t look at me.” the man defended, instantly recognizing the accusation on Solas’ face.

“You expect me to believe that none of this is your handiwork?”


“DAMN IT BULL!” Solas snapped. “Stop evading my questions!”

“Evading?” retorted the Iron Bull, sarcasm lacing every syllable, as he shifted in his makeshift seat, dropped his heavily armored feet upon the ground in front of him, and leveled a telling look at the wolf. “I wouldn’t dare. That’s your territory. Remember?”

_A twist of the knife._

Solas flinched and Bull smirked.
“Look...” he sighed. “The others may wish it. Crave it. Demand it to be so. But...on this day...I’ve neither come to kill you, nor to fight.”

“Didn’t come here to fight?” Solas questioned incredulously. “Then what do you call all this?”

“A misunderstanding,” Bull stated firmly.

“A misunderstanding?” Solas countered, disbelieving.

“Yes, a misunderstanding.” he confirmed with a tinge of irritation in his voice, before scoffing. “Never thought you would fall so low as to employ a damn Vint to guard one of your mirrors.”

“Vint?”

“Yeah... that fellow there...” Bull nodded in the direction of the bloodied corpse a few steps away. “The Captain.”

“T ook one good look at me, saw horns, and went straight for his sword without even a how-do-you-do.”

The flicker of surprise that crossed the wolf’s face was telling.

“Oh? You didn’t know, either, huh?” questioned Bull. “Better tighten up security, there, Solas, you never know what kind of spies you may have lurking in the shadows of your camp...”

“Or waiting in the wings to put a knife in your back when you’re distracted by a warm bath, heartbeat...” Bull added accusingly. “And a missing arm.”

*Another twist of the knife.*

“You’ve made your point Bull.” sighed Solas regretfully.

“Have I?”

“Many times over.”

“And there are far many more to come, I’m afraid.”

“I would expect no less from one of her staunchest allies and friends.”

“Then we have come to an understanding?”

Solas gave a simple, yet curt, nod.

“Well then, now that our terms have been settled in this matter...” prompted Bull, dusting his hands together for no real reason. “What say you to getting down to business?”

“Business?”

“I didn’t just come all this way to say hello...” scoffed Bull, a flash of anger echoing in his eyes. “To rub salt into old wounds...Or to pick at your pride, wolf.”

“As pleasing of a side benefit, as that might be.”

“Alright then.” he nodded. “Why are you here?”

“On a mission...” Bull admitted. “But this, this is a little side job I got stuck with.”
“Which is?”

“Errand boy.” the Qunari answered as he pulled his great ax from his lap, leaned it against the crate beside him, and stood from his seat.

“Explain?”

“It’s simple.” Bull scoffed, as he bent down and began rummaging through his pack by his feet. “Or, it would’ve been simple if a certain former Dalish Inquisitor and damn Dread Wolf weren’t involved.”

“Get to the point,” grumbled Solas. The barbs being thrown in his direction, though justified, stinging a little more acutely than he could tolerate.

“Fine!” growled out Bull as he plucked out what he was searching for, turned, and tossed it into the mud between him and the man before him.

Solas, his eyes drawn to the object, took in the unassuming and small, wooden chest—adorned with a large steel lock—with suspicious eyes, as Bull pulled himself up to his full height.

“What is it?”

“Something the Boss wanted you to have.”

“Told me to give it to you.”

“When...”

“Let see...it’s, what, midsummer now? So...” Bull contemplated. “Just over two years ago.”

“Two years?” questioned Solas in disbelief, before taking a calming breath and trying again. “Are you trying to tell me that she gave this to you, with explicit instructions to give it to me...two years ago?”

“Pretty much,” Bull answered noncommittally.

“Why?”

“Don’t know. Never asked.”

“Why not?”

“Because she made it perfectly clear that knowing was not in my best interest.” he answered. “Besides, her instructions were pretty specific enough not to warrant any questions on my part.”

“So it was simple. She asked. I countered, asking if it was an order. She said if it had to be. We shared a rare laugh. I agreed. She gave me the details...and the box...”

“We...” he continued, slightly choked up for a split second. “Said our goodbyes... and I left.”

“Traveled to the borderlands...I waited...Kill a few straggling Venatori...Busted up an illegal mining operation for some taciturn noble...Traveled some more. Broke up some slavers’ dens. Killed a bunch of Vints. Drank a lot of ale. Found a few lovely tavern girls along the way that were far more entertaining than I expected. Killed some more Vints....Waited some more...”

“Then the time came. And, now, here I am. Fulfilling her request as promised.”
“To what end?”

“I asked her that...” Bull laughed. “She figured that I should at least know why she’d asked me to do this...Cause I think she knew how distasteful I’d find this whole idea of sending off one of your best protectors to go play delivery boy to your estranged ex...”

“Who happens to be the power tripping, coldhearted, son-of-a-bitch-Trickster-God of Elvhen legend who ripped her heart out, abandoning love for a centuries-old duty that will ultimately end the world as we know it, and condemning her to a half-life filled with regrets –instead of...you know...doing something useful...”

Twist.

Solas flinched again, and so, too, did Bull smile.

“And what did she say?” he asked, once he’d recovered a moment.

“She said she needed to keep a promise,” answered Bull, crossing his arms over his chest. “And she needed my help to do it.”

“And that was enough for you?”

“Well...unlike you, Solas...” Bull retorted, with a tinge of venom upon his lips as he narrowed his eye at the wolf before him. “She was always enough for me.”

Twist. This one far deeper than all the rest.

Solas’ face instantly fell, a deep frown marring his face, as he closed his eyes and sighed as the weight of his guilt slamming into him harder than ever before.

“What must I do...” sighed Solas in defeat. “To undo all this?”

“Not sure you can,” answered Bull. “What you left in your wake, what you did to all of us, will never compare to what you ultimately did her...how you changed her...”

“But this, perhaps, is a good start.” he sighed. “Or, perhaps, it will do nothing but prolong her suffering.”

“The outcome of such things...only she can know for certain,” he added softly.

“What would you have me do?” questioned Solas. “If you had the choice.”

Bull immediately laughed, though it was more laced with self-deprecation than that of amusement.

“I have asked myself that very question, many times,” replied Bull. “But the decision of what is right, what is just, and what is warranted, is more muddled than not.”

“For her, I would wish that this could all be resolved. That the evil of which she spoke, will be defeated. That she will live through it. That we could go back to the days of the Hinterlands or The Dales, where she was content and happy. Where she truthfully saw a future worth fighting for. A future worth dying for...And smiled more brightly than the dawn...”

“But...A part of me...”

“If the choice was mine, and there was no bond between the two of you...” he sighed. “I would gladly see you join the land of the Fade –by my own hand– in a more permanent capacity.”
“You would see me dead?”

“In the eyes of many of my people...I may have betrayed the Ben Hassrath, and the Qun...” Bull answered with a scowl. “But...my reasons for sacrificing the Dreadnaught were just and without malice.”

“I did it to save the lives of my friends, people who I’ve fought alongside for years, who were...in the truest sense...the only family I had ever known...”

“I willingly gave up, everything, that I had been. The Nation, and the people, that I came from. The ideals and beliefs that had made me the man that I was...The path that I thought I should walk, with my head held high... All for something far more simplistic than anything else in the world.”

“The love of others.”

“But...What you did, your betrayal...there was no righteousness in it. It was cruel, unfeeling, callous, and exceedingly selfish.” Bull added scornfully. “For you refused to make the same choice that I had. Putting duty and belief above everything.”

“Including all that would call you friend...and Vhenan.”

“Giving up a future of happiness, normality, and peace for a quickening life filled with hate, destruction, and death.”

“All because of your stubbornness and pride.”

“And you called me the savage chained by misguided belief.” scoffed Bull as an afterthought.

“If what I was, was so horrid to you, Solas,” Bull questioned. “What does that make you, now?”

“The same,” he admitted. For there was no arguing the Qunari’s well-versed point.

“But as it was for me, so can it be for you.”

“You can turn from the path, make the right choice, and find a happiness that you both deserve.”

“I know.” sighed Solas.

“Is that what you wish?” questioned Bull. “To undo your mistake. To return to the life you should have had, had you not turned from it without remorse?”

“There was never a day without remorse, Bull,” admitted Solas. “As she has, I have lived with the guilt and pain that I have caused her...every moment, of every day...since.”

“But her anguish and despair was not strong enough to make you turn back...” grumbled Bull irritably. “Until now.”

“What would you have me say, Bull?” countered Solas, desperation and deprecation lacing his voice. “That I was a fool? A coward, so wrapped up in my past that I was blind to the future staring me in the face? That I destroyed the only good thing to ever come into my life, simply because I dared not to hope that I could have a life worth living. That I deserved a life full of life, rather than tragedy and death?”

“It would be a good start.” the Qunari scoffed.

“But, enough of this.” dismissed Bull suddenly, reaching down and slipping his hand into the pouch.
dangling from his belt at his hip. “I have indulged my curiosity long enough.”

“Time to get this over with,” he added, as he pulled out something.

“And what is that?”

“The key to what lay within,” he replied, opening his hand and revealing a brass key upon a thin golden chain.

“Her last request.” he declared mournfully before he closed his hand around and tossed the key to the wolf.

Taking a step, Solas immediately reached for it and as it landed in his palm a bright flash of light enveloped his eyes. Flinching for only a moment, he opened them and found a vision of the past surrounding him—almost real enough to touch.

Snow fell steadily, from a darkening sky, as the empty bailey of Skyhold shimmered into view with an air of loneliness; weighting down the atmosphere as if nothing lingered but despair; cascading silently around him with a solemnity unmatched by any vision that had come before.

The world was unnaturally quiet, unsteady. There was no movement. No merchants plying their trade. No runners delivering messages to and fro. No soldiers training in the distant courtyard. No whispers of gossiping nobles. No laughter of small children.

No signs of life.

Nothing.

Just silent walls, empty corridors, and still grass.

And then, as if called from a dream, the sound of a horse nickering echoed from behind.

Turning to the sound, Solas froze at the sight that greeted him.

Standing just outside Skyhold’s old stable, within mere steps from where he lingered, stood two horses tacked, harnessed, well supplied, and waiting, as two people stood facing each other under the falling snow.

A cloaked and hooded woman and a hulking Qunari.

“Are you sure this is what you must do?” Bull’s voice asked. “There must be another way.”

“I wish there was,” she answered. “But I can no longer hide within my fortress upon a mountainside, and claim ignorance to what must now come to bear.”

“Then let me help you.” the Qunari begged. “I would not see you do this alone...”

“You are helping me...” she replied. “For this will be just as important as anything that has come before or after.”

“You could die,” Bull warned worriedly.

“I am well aware.” she sighed. “But as I am the cause of this, so too, am I its solution. Only I can undo this, Bull. It is a task put before me by my own hand. And unless I face it, the world will perish because I dared not see what was right in front of me.”
“But for me to defeat an evil cause by my own actions.” she continued. “For me to claim victory...I
will need you to do what I have asked of you.”

“There is a promise I must keep...But I fear that what I now must face will keep me from honoring
it,” she admitted. “That’s why I need you to deliver the chest and its key...to him.”

“For what lies within will not only lead him to his redemption that must come to pass, but to mine as
well.”

“I understand.” Bull sighed, giving in. “I will help you keep your promise.”

“But...” he interjected. “Only if you promise me that you will survive this. That you will win, defeat
that which haunts you, and, one day, once again, sit with me in the Herald’s Rest and join me as we
drink ourselves into a stupor so deep that we’ll never walk alone again.”

“I promise.” she smiled, tears forming in her eyes before she reached out with her one good arm
and hugged the Qunari.

Bull, immediately wrapping his massive arms around her slender frame, buried his face in her neck
and sighed heavily.

“I will miss you.” she cried softly.

“As I will, you,” answered Bull. “My Lady Lavellan.”

“It’s time,” he informed softly, a long moment later, as he released her and stepped back.

With a nod, she gave one last look at Bull before climbing into the saddle of the nearest horse and
grabbing the reins.

“Please be safe.”

“I will.” her voice wavered, before nudging her horse forward.

Bull’s face, watching her go, could not hide the disappointment, worry, and sorrow echoing in his
heart. Nor could he stem the tears that pooled in his eye, and fell down his cheeks, as she
disappeared behind Skyhold’s portcullis, a few agonizing moments later, to the sound of a lone wolf
howling in the distance.

“You better come back.”

At Bull’s bitter words, the snow tripled ten-fold. Blurring his vision for only a moment before flaring
into golden sparkles that faded out of existence and fell out of his sight. Disoriented by the memory’s
exit from reality, Solas blinked his eyes heavily. Trying to not only push away the linger effects of
the memory but dismiss the errant feelings of sadness and dread that had pooled within his heart as
he had watch her retreating form.

Opening his eyes once more, he opened his hand and took in the small key with a sad reverence. His
mind awash with thoughts that spanned the gamut of possible quandaries.

From the moment he had set out on this journey to reclaim the past, he had come to know a great
many things about his beloved that he had never thought possible. And though, he had been resistant
to all the knowledge that had been lain out before him, a part of him begged for it. The glimpses into
her past, even at their worst, had invoked within him a myriad of destructive and self-deprecated feelings but with such feeling of worthlessness and guilt, also came a grain of hope that pulled at him from deep inside in his heart. He hadn’t wanted to know, would have gladly lingered in ignorance until the end, but now that he had begun to find out the truth, his curiosity had managed to over-run his complacency in a matter of days.

There were so many questions left unanswered. More truths left lingering the dark recesses of the past. And uncertainties of the future that couldn’t be ignored.

Of these, this evil in which she had spoken of had called to him most of all. At first, he had selfishly and ignorantly thought that such darkness; the monster cause by her own hand; had been him. That she felt so lowly of him, calling him a beast determined to destroy all that she cared for, that the purpose of her disappearance from the known world had been simply a piece of her plan to thwart his idyllic machinations to sunder the Veil for all time. To bring back the People, no matter what. But the more he learned of what she had endured since he had left her by the Eluvian so long ago, what she had always been capable of, and the determination that she still clung to even to this day, the more he began to realize that he was no longer her greatest enemy.

For, if he was so beyond redemption, she would have never set into motion all that had come before.

No.

There was something more. Something far worse than he could ever be. And she had chosen to face it alone. Without the aid of those sworn to protect her. Who were bound to her by time, by hope, and by love. All in an attempt to undo what she had done, without putting anyone else in danger. Without sacrificing another, upon fate’s alter. In hopes that, through her own self-sacrifice, she would be able to save the world one last time.

“You know...don’t you.” came Bull’s distant voice.

Solas immediately snatched from his thoughts, looked up to see that Bull was no longer standing in front him but lingering before the stoic Eluvian near the far end of the camp –his pack slung over his shoulder, his great ax grasped in one hand, and his back to the wolf without a care.

“I could have destroyed them both.” Bull continued. “And abandoned all of this long ago.”

“I know.” nodded Solas understandingly. “And, for what it’s worth, you have may thanks.”

“Keep your thanks.” Bull practically growled, lifting his hand to gently caress the mirrored surface before him. “It was not for you that I kept my promise.”

“I am well aware.”

“If you are, then you will know that –at first– my agreement to run her little errand was done for my own selfish reasons.” Bull continued. “I accepted her request of me, simply because I saw an opportunity that was a rarity among the rarest.”

“A time, and location, where I could face you on my own terms.” the Bull sighed. “And end this once and for all.”

“You intended to kill me,” Solas said flatly. An admonition from the Qunari that he first expected.

“I did.”

“Then what stopped you?”
For a moment Bull fell silent, as his hand fell away from the mirror, and he let out a deep sigh.

“No matter how much I may wish it...” the Bull answered. “I cannot break my oath.”

It was with those words that Solas suddenly felt the air shift as the smell of ozone rushed into the camp like a wave crashing violently upon the shore as a crescendo of ancient magic slammed into him so hard that he could not stop himself from taking a step back. Shocked by the feeling, his eyes fell away from Bull for only a moment, before zeroing back in on the Qunari once more and widening in panic.

His heart stopped.

Bull turned, leveling a glowing, cobalt blue gaze too unbelievable to imagine, and smirked triumphantly at the wolf before him as his full-bodied Vallaslin, etched in his skin, shimmered reverently.

*A Guardian of Bellanaris.*

“The Dragon?” questioned Solas, his voice strained and failing to hide the echo of fear within him.

“The Dragon.” nodded Bull sternly.
Chapter Summary

In a panic, Abelas rushes to the Eluvian's camp in search of Solas. Only to find the wolf devastated by a truth that Sarina had never -nor would ever- reveal to another.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lungs winded and burning, body numb and feet screaming, Abelas sprinted down the path towards the Eluvian’s camp just as the last vestiges of day disappeared beyond the horizon –his heart and mind racing with fear and worry.

It had been hours since Solas had left the scouts’ makeshift camp and headed to confront the man that had invaded their primary camp at the border. During that time Abelas had tried to distract himself, from the incessant worry that had plagued him from the moment Solas had disappeared out of sight, by tending to his duties. Dealing with reports. Checking on the injured. Getting updates from scouting parties. And reading over messages sent from all over Thedas by raven. But as more time passed, the more he found that he could not concentrate. His mind too centered on what was happening, and could happen, in the shadow of that Eluvian.

He would never admit it to anyone, not even to Solas, but he had always expected that there would be some confrontation between her allies and them long before they ever found her. That they would seek justice. For them. For the world. And for her. With or without her permission.

For his betrayal of their trust, and her love, had been far too great to ever be ignored –to be swept away and forgotten like a minute moment in the grand scheme of things– and, as formidable as each of them truly were, they would never allow such a horrible injustice just be forgotten.

Nor should they.

In the time in which Solas had been by their sides, though hesitant at first, he had developed a deeply seeded connection to all of her companions one by one.

Some were easily made. A perfect fit. Like with Cole. Or Varric. While some took time, and
nurturing. Like with Cassandra and Dorian. While others, tenuous at best, had still skated the lines of friendship. A bond not of mutuality but by proximity—a compromise. Like with Sera and Vivienne. But, slowly, methodically, and sometimes accidentally, he managed to cultivate bonds with each of them through their shared respect, understanding, and care.

And all because of Sarina.

For she had been their buffer. Their anchor, grounding them to what was here, now, and for the best. And she exceeded in such a role. Gladly taking that mantle and carrying it with pride. Creating a closeness where once was none. Binding them all to one another in spirit. With minds synched, hearts intertwined, and destinies joined protectively to each other till the end of time.

Almost like a real family.

And that was what hurt most of all.

For Sarina’s sanctuary in the fade, and the dream she kept within; a testament to her greatest lamentation and regret laid bare, for none but herself to see; spoke of that loss more clearly than anything in all the world.

But Abelas knew it wasn’t for herself that she sorrowed. That she desperately tried to keep such a dream alive for. Not truly. What Solas had taken from her had devastated her, but not as much as knowing—that by his own actions—he had inadvertently take so much more from himself than he could have possibly imagined. He had condemn himself to a life of loneliness, destroying a future that she had seen in her dreams far more often than not, by allowing what his heart truly desired to be overruled by nothing more than an unjustified guilt and his stubborn pride.

A pride that, thankfully, was finally beginning to bow to her whims.

For she was just as stubborn as he.

And she would never give up on him.

Because of such a truth, her fervent determination to right all that had gone wrong, Abelas hoped that whatever was going on, the purpose of such distraction this far into their journey to find her, was something benign. That, hopefully, it was just another moment in a long line of helpful nudges in the
right direction as she had done so many times before.

Because Sarina was meticulous in that way.

Though she would never divulge any of her true plans to him, during their rare meetings within the fade, he always knew that there was more to the things she set into motion all those years ago than he would ever know. She was so much like Solas, in that regard. Plans upon plans. Backup for backups. Contingencies countered with more contingencies. That trying to guess what she would do next was like trying to catch starlight. Absolutely futile and, even more so, frustrating.

But, such hope had faded when the day began to fall into twilight, and then to darkness, and there was still no sign of his friend.

Solas should have returned hours ago. The confrontation, even if it had been one of violence instead of peace or compromise, should have ended far more quickly than time had told. And now he feared that something terrible had happened. And that was something that couldn’t come to pass.

Sarina had charged him with only one mission. A mission bound by ancient magic that he could neither ignore nor break. And if something happened to Solas, if he had failed to protect him and keep him on the path that she demanded, his very life would be at risk –if not his very soul.

Neither of which he wanted to lose.

With pain flaring through every single muscle, and determination thrumming through him with the strongest of wills, Abelas picked up the pace; pushing himself to his limit; and barreled through the darkness toward the camp as fast as he could possibly muster.

The closer he came, the more of what was just an nagging echo of worry before became a hauntingly grandiose cacophony of tremendous fear and dread, as his mind fell into a chaotic cinematic of the infinite and horrible possibilities. He feared that he had failed. He feared that what was meant to come to pass, would not. That all Sarina had done, had gone through and suffered, had become all for naught.

And that his dearest friend, and her greatest love, had finally found death far too soon.

Finding the camp a few moments later, Abelas slowed his gate just outside its borders and tried to calm his racing heart. Pushing down the emphatic worry warring within him, he took a few deep breaths before walking apprehensively into it confines. Stepping between two tents, his eyes
narrowing and focusing on the scene within, he immediately scanned the near darkness for any sign of Solas. For a moment there was nothing, no sign of anything, and then his eyes widened as he caught the sight of the aftermath of the man’s intrusion from hours before.

Twelve bodies, bloodied and broken, laid side by side in a long row. Their still forms were placed in reverent repose, backs against the ground and arms crossed over their chests. And atop them, with an air of utmost respect, laid a layer of canvas pilfered from several of the camp’s tents –cascading across their forms delicately.

Surprised by such a grand gesture of respect for the dead, Abelas still could not find ease within his heart. A part of him questioned his eyes. Not because the scene looked so out of place, but because he was uncertain the number of bodies he first saw could truly be all that remained. So he counted again. A more thorough look, with purposeful strides –hoping that there was not one more that he’d missed.

Relief flooded through him by the time he made it to the end of the row. There was not another. But such relief was short-lived as his mind, no longer distracted by the dead, returned to the source of his worry. Turning his back to those whose lives had been cut short, he continued to scan the darkness of the inner camp looking for Solas. Only a flicker of a moment passed, and he found himself looking upon the form of his friend kneeling on the ground. His head bowed. His eyes closed. Shoulders slumped. Hands dangling at his sides limply and as still as the very dead that lingered around him.

And before him, a simple locked chest.

“Solas?” called Abelas tentatively, taking a step.

No answer.

Abelas’ heart immediately fell.

Letting out a steadying breath, he took another step and then another. Closing the distance between himself and his friend with his eyes locked on the form before him.

“Falon?” he called out, fear lacing his tone more succinctly than ever before.
And, still, Solas did not answer.

Coming up to his friend’s side, Abelas instinctively crouched and looked over his friend thoroughly. A simple sigh, escaping his lips a moment later, as he spied the nearly imperceptible rise and fall of a shallow breath.

‘He’s alive.’

Taking a calming breath, and letting in out slowly, Abelas steeled his will and reached out. As his hand fell upon Solas’ shoulder, he called out once more.

“Solas...” he said breathily.

A few tense seconds followed, and then like a breath of fresh air deep within the dank of an eternal chasm, Solas sighed and lifted his head just barely.

“Yes? Are you alright?” Abelas questioned softly, as relief began to fill him once more.

“No.” came Solas’ strained and gruff voice. The sadness and suffering within his tone screaming volumes. “Nor will I ever be...again.”

“I am such a fool.” breathed out Solas slowly, lifting his trembling hand and opening his palm to reveal the key within.

“What is it?” questioned Abelas, desperation in his voice. “What has happened?”

“I thought...” Solas choked up, his face contorting with agony. “I thought I knew everything...that there was nothing more...”

“I thought...” he added, his unoccupied hand immediately covering his mouth as he suppressed a sob. “She...she could never...understand.”

“But?” questioned Abelas tentatively, squeezing the man’s shoulder gently.
“She knew...and still...” he cried out. “She knew!”

At Solas’ fervent and devastated declaration, the Veil suddenly trembled around them and a strange mist rushed into the middle of the camp, tasting of the fade. Their air began to crackle with magic, so forcefully that Abelas could feel his heart rate spike as a sense of foreboding flooded him in an instant. Focusing back on Solas, he immediately caught sight of his friend trembling desperately as his irises began to glow just beyond the tears of his eyes.

“Falon, don’t.” Abelas warned, understanding more succinctly than any other of what was truly going on.

Solas was losing control.

“You mustn’t...”

At Abelas’ warning, Solas’ eyes flashed and in that instant the mist around them stilled and thrummed with a massive echo of the Fade’s eternal magic. The world around the immediately flickered, almost like it was disappearing from existence, and in the blink of an eye a manifestation of the recent past shimmered into view.

_The Iron Bull, standing resolutely before the Eluvian –with his shimmering cobalt blue Vallaslin glowing softly– and turning fully, looked upon Solas’ form with a scornful look._

“Joyful violence.” gasped Abelas, the Guardian’s aura unmistakable.

“Since...when?” questioned Solas, his voice strained.

“Af__er Adamant.” Bull’s voice resonated. “Before she knew...”

“What you truly were...”

“Why?”

“For Dorian’s sake.” he answered. “And hers.”

“I would not have him sacrifice that, which I would willingly give, on his own.”

“And the others?” Solas softly demanded. “Who else answered the call? Swore the oath.”
“What does it matter?” growled Bull, his markings flaring. “The result of your betrayal is still the same.”

“And, so too, is our need for vengeance.”

“Then do it, if you must.” declared Solas, this time his voice more firm. “End it, and let it be over with.”

“As much as we wish it...” Bull answered irritably. “You know we cannot.”

“She has forbidden it.”

“And our oath is unbreakable.”

“Then why show yourself?” questions Solas, his teeth instinctively gritting.

“So that you will understand.”

“Understand what?”

“That those who have sworn to protect her, are not those of the unknowing,” he replied, growling. “That each of us have felt the sting of your choice. The twist of your knife within our flesh. And know what kind of man you truly are.”

“And...”

“And?” Solas parroted.

“Only like this...” Bull explained. “In this form, can I show you that which she has refused to relinquish.”

“The memories that continue to be withheld.”

Solas immediately looked at Bull with curiosity.

“Her book tells only the secrets she wishes to tell.”

“And there is something she has not left behind that you believe I should know?”

“Yes,” Bull answered.

“Then show me.”

At Solas’ request, Bull lifted his hand before him –palm facing the sky. In the next instant his cobalt eye flashed, the Veil shuddered, and suddenly a ball of light –shimmering white –flickered into existence upon his hand.

“You’re sure?” questioned Bull softly, given him an out if he so wished.

Solas nodded.

“Please, show me.”

“So be it.” he sighed, before grasping his fingers around the strange orb and throwing it high in the sky.
When the orb managed to sail up into the air some forty feet, it instantly exploded. Sending white-hot, shimmering sparkles down around them. And, as they fell, the atmosphere within the camp changed.

First it was the temperature. Turning cold, like ice. Then the air suddenly stirred, changing from a warming and soft breeze to that of a blustery winter wind. And the sky above, which was once dark and full of starlight, shifted, turning from the night of a full moon to that of a new moon—darker than what had come before.

“Where is she!” demanded a familiar voice.

At those words, the shimmering magic faded leaving behind the stone walls of Skyhold’s War Room.

“I do not know!” answered Leliana.

Solas immediately looked at the War table to see Dorian and Bull facing off with their notorious and talented Spymaster.

“Don’t give me that shit, Leliana!” spat Dorian. “It’s been three fucking days!”

“You know where she has gone!” Bull added angrily.

“No! I don’t.” Leliana barked. “Do you think, if I did, I would still be standing here letting you two jump down my throat?”

“Because you are doing nothing!” countered Dorian.

“I’m NOT doing nothing.” she argued. “I have every scout at my disposal searching the whole of Thedas to find her. There has been no sign. Nothing. Not even at the ruins of Haven.”

“Haven?” Bull asked.

“I...I thought, perhaps...”

“That she would go there looking for Solas?” Dorian questioned.

Solas’ memory form flinched, and so too, did Abelas’—both understanding when exactly this memory was from.

“Yes.”

“And?” Dorian prompted.

“As there is no sign of him, neither is there a sign of her.”

“That bastard,” growled Bull under his breath.

“Bull...” sighed Leliana, warningly.

“What?” he demanded.

“I know you are worried for her, afraid for her. Just as the rest of us are...” Leliana answered, her voice sighing as well. “But you cannot blame her for how she is feeling.”
“But I can blame him!” countered Bull. “What he did…”

“I know.” she answered with a nod, cutting him off curtly. “And just as he must deal with the consequences of his actions, so too, must she.”

“You believe that she is trying to cope with all of this, by –what? Leaving without a word? Disappearing, after we put that fucking blighted monster down, naught but just two days after?”

“Did the two of you even look at her that night at the celebration?” Leliana countered spitefully. “Her heart is broken. More so than we could have possibly imagined…”

“Solas...his leaving…” she added with a disappointed sigh. “Has destroyed her.”

“That’s why we must find her with haste!” countered Dorian, slamming his hand upon the War table with fervor. “Before she does something to herself that she can never take back!”

Suddenly a massive boom of wood slamming into thick stone echoed in the room and all turned to see a hooded scout running into the room with a scrolled parchment in his hand.

“Mistress Nightingale.” the scout called, running up to the Spymaster’s side. “An urgent message.”

Snatching the scroll from the scout, and not even bothering to dismissing him verbally, she twisted the scroll in her hand and immediately recognized the crest stamped into its red sealing wax.

A giant spider surrounded by a wreath of raven footprints.

“It’s from Morrigan,” she informed before quickly tearing through the seal and unrolling it.

“What does it say?” questioned Dorian, as he and Bull instinctively rounded the War table and came to her side.

Leliana frantically scanned the parchment, her face contorting into a frown the further along her eyes roamed, and then she sighed.

“She knows where the Inquisitor has gone.” she declared.

“Where?”

“The Temple of Mythal.” Leliana declared sternly.

At that moment a great wind blew through the room, sweeping the vision away and replacing it with an ancient path surrounded by a thick forest. The vision barely stilled before the sound of thundering horses echoed all around. Turning to see, they caught the sight of five very familiar riders –armed to the teeth and prepared for battle – barreling towards them at breakneck speeds; their horses stretched to their limits; as the frantic energy of the fade trailed behind their memories like wafts of fade green smoke.

As they blew past them and disappeared into the distance, Abelas ticked off the riders one by one in his mind.

Cullen, Bull, Dorian, Blackwall, and Varric.
In that instant, almost as if it was pursing the riders, the vision shifted and followed as the forest suddenly fell into a passing blur for several minutes. Coming to a dead stop just as the rushing sound of a myriad of massive waterfalls; falling down immeasurable cliffs; echoed all around and the enormous doors of Mythal’s greatest sanctum appeared; splintered, barely hanging upon their hinges, and blown wide open; right before their eyes.

The five riders immediately dismounted. Rushing through the doors as quickly as their feet could carry them and before too long, the great courtyard appeared. They instantly came to a screeching halt as their minds caught up with what they were seeing.

The inner courtyard, with is double staircase at the farthest end, was nearly destroyed. All the vegetation that had encroached widely over the centuries was burned to a crisp leaving nothing but a fine dusting of ash and deep scorch marks upon the ground. The Vhenadahl, which once bloomed so beautifully, was nothing but a charred twisted husk. And the pool of water, which had once been clear as crystal, was gone –evaporated from the heat– leaving nothing but an empty vessel.

Abelas’ heart immediately sank as he eyed the destruction to that which he had called home for millenniums.

Suddenly a horrid, and agonizing, scream blasted through the quiet of the abandoned temple. Startling everyone. Every pair of eyes immediately shooting towards its origin, the five riders bolted towards the staircase in a burst of speed almost too quickly to be believed. Making it up to the upper landing in only a matter of seconds.

It was then that they all noticed the worst, and more poignant, of all the destruction. The murals that once lined the walls along the upper landing, mosaics that had been meticulously crafted and placed centuries upon centuries ago by Mythal’s greatest supplicants, that told of some of the greatest history in Elvhen legend, had all been irreverently destroyed –their hand-painted tiles smashed, burned, broken, and scattered like that of useless clay upon the ground.

At the sight, Abelas immediately whipped his head to the left, turning his eyes towards the outer most edge of the landing, and suddenly froze.

The statue of Fen’Harel, the epitome of his friend’s great promise and the physical embodiment of the man for whom she had truly loved, that had stood guard over the outer courtyard for hundreds and hundreds of years, laid torn asunder –no longer a reminder of the great wolf, but a pile of indiscriminate rubble.

A distant scream, heavy with pain and suffering, suddenly echoed over the din of silence and the group began to move again. Running through the temple on the swiftest of feet.

When the group hit the antechamber in which Abelas had first confronted them, Dorian suddenly came to a sliding stop and spoke up.

“She’s here!” he panicked. “I can feel her!”
“Which way?” demanded Cullen.

“This way,” Dorian answered, pointing to the path that they had once walked with the aid of one of the sentinels.

“The Well.” Blackwall inferred. “That’s where she is gone.”

“Come!” Bull ordered. “We must hurry!”

Taking up the rush once more, they trudged through the once traveled passageways from memory. The panic and worry so palpable that even Abelas could not stem the thrum of his own heart.

‘Not again.’ Solas suddenly begged from beside him, his eyes clamped shut with so much force that his face scrunched up in desperation and pain. ‘I can’t...Please.’

Turning to look at his friend, Abelas could do nothing but put his arm around the man’s shoulders and hold him as the memory continued to play out –without remorse– before them.

Her companions enter the inner sanctum a moment later, climbing the stairs to where the well was once held, in great strides, only to stop short a split second later as their eyes fell on their Inquisitor.

Her hair, once always so precisely bound, was undone. Falling to the back of her shins and stained with blood. She had disrobed from her usual attire; their remnants laying upon the ground some yards away; and wore nothing but a sleeveless, tattered and torn, shift and tight bloodstained leggings. As she frantically paced back and forth –one hand moving wildly as she muttered in hushed whispers of indistinguishable Elvhen– within the well’s recess; completely oblivious to everything around her.

She was in utter turmoil. Lost to her thoughts and feelings like a child lost in a forest with no means of escape.

Dorian immediately took a step towards her, his heart pushing him to go to her as he ignored the warning glances of his friends.

But he didn’t get far.

When his foot touched the ground before him the entire party was suddenly hit with a shockwave of force magic so strong that it sent them all reeling backward and slamming upon the hard stone beneath them.

“What the fuck?” growled Blackwall; from his place upon the ground; as he tried to shake the cobwebs from his mind.

“She’s lost control.” Bull informed as he shook off the shock of her blast, quickly pulled himself back to his feet, and reached to help up Dorian as the rest of their group righted themselves. “Of herself. Her magic is...”

“Unhindered...” answered Dorian, before looking at the group. “We have to calm her down or she will burn herself out.”

“How?” answered Blackwall.
For a moment all fell into silence, worry and dread marring their faces, and then Cullen softly spoke up.

“I could...” he barely choked out.

“No!” interrupted Varric. “Don’t you even think of it!”

“Even if it’s the only way?” the Commander countered, eyeing the dwarf.

“I will not stand here and let you fucking smite her, Curly!” barked Varric. “We have to find another way...before she kills herself and brings this damn temple down upon us all.”

“Dorian...” Bull ventured softly. “Use it...”

“What?”

“Use your bond.” he continued. “You are the only one of us that can reach her without words. Call to her. Make her hear you.”

“But...”

“It’s the only way Kadan...” Bull whispered. “You must try...”

"Alright...” he breathed out.

Squaring his shoulders, Dorian closed his eyes and let out a deep sigh before straightening his face and calling upon his magic just as the air around them all began to fill with the ozone of the fade. For a moment he was still, almost too still, before suddenly snapping his eyes open to reveal the emerald green power flowing just behind his irises. Bull, Cullen, Blackwall, and Varric immediately took a step back—retreating so that Dorian was the only one of them in the forefront, and waited with baited breath for any reaction from Sarina.

But there was none.

She continued to pace back and forth, her voice barely audible, as her chaotic mind continued to churn with unknown thoughts.

Leaning in a bit, Dorian eyed Sarina’s form and pulled upon the bond with force—immediately causing the entire space to fill with a slightly painful and perceptible charge of magic and invoking from his companions a physical recoil.

“Adora!” called Dorian suddenly, his voice no longer just his own as it reverberated with a sub-textual and timbered voice far deeper than he could ever utter. “You must stop!”

“NO!” she screamed, hesitating for only assecond before shaking her head and returning to her pacing. “No. No. No. No.”

“You must stop!” Dorian countered, his body imperceptibly flinching a second later as if he had been hit by some unseen blow.

“Dorian...?” Bull uttered worriedly. “What’s wrong?”

“She is...fighting me. Trying to push me back...Doesn’t want to listen...Doesn’t want to know.” Dorian struggled to explain. “Her mind is...too chaotic. Like a labyrinth. All I can see...hear...feel, is fluttering images of the Inquisition...and of him, the voices of thousands of whispering words of regret and despair, and pain. So much pain.”
“The voices are tormenting her?” questioned Blackwall.

“No...” answered Dorian, as he concentrated harder. “They are unleashed. Unrestrained. The barriers that she kept up to keep their words at bay are gone. Shattered by her pain. Her...loss.”

“This cannot continue,” Cullen said fervently. “We have to stop this.”

“Force your bond Dorian!” came Varric’s voice.

“You can’t be serious!” Cullen barked.

“I am!” countered Varric. “If Sparkler can push through whatever is running around in her head just long enough to calm her...then we might be able to reach her. The real her. And put an end to this before everything goes south in a damn hurry.”

Cullen immediately started to protest but stopped as Dorian answered.

“It could kill her.”

“We have to take that risk, Kadan.” Bulls said gently, his face pulled into a deep frown. “If we don’t she could kill not only us and herself, but level half of southern Orlais in her wake.”

“Very well.”

Taking a step forward, Dorian raised his hands from his sides slowly and called upon the ancient magic once more –muttering to himself in the oldest of Elvhen. As he spoke, his hands began to glow and fill with a strange orb of green flame reminiscent of Veilfire. Once the ball had come to fruition, Dorian glanced at Bull with warning in his eyes.

“Be ready,” he said sternly.

Bull nodded.

Pulling the orb towards himself, Dorian shifted his hand, reared back, and slung the spell at Sarina. The orb immediately transformed into a bolt of green fire, and shot across the distance and barreled right towards her. For a second, all who watched, held their breaths. Fear encroaching into their minds. The possibilities of what his spell would do worrying them to a thin edge.

But their fears, as justified as they were, were nothing compared to what happened in the next second as the bolt of magic that should have hit her square in the back suddenly hit something unforeseen and recoiled. Bouncing back in Dorian’s direction so fast, that he barely had a split second to dodge.

As the bolt spirited past him, Dorian suddenly heard Bull scream his name in panic. In the half a second it took him to turn his eyes back to where Sarina stood, Bull had managed to step in front of him. Confused, Dorian could not understand why Bull was there –since the bolt of his own magic had succinctly missed him. It wasn’t until his eyes caught the frightened and panicked looks of his companions, and saw Bull suddenly fall to his knees, did he realized that in such a minute moment in time he had missed something entirely. Grabbing Bull by the shoulder, he stepped around him and suddenly froze as the sight of a dagger appeared in front his eyes. Her dagger, buried into Bull’s chest –just inches from his heart.

“Bull!” cried out Dorian.

“It’s not over.” he grounded out, his eyes trained on Sarina.
Dorian immediately looked up and gasped at what he saw.

Sarina was standing in the middle of the well’s recess. Her movements had ceased; her hair – seemingly from her momentum of immediately turning in their direction – suddenly cascaded down around her right shoulder and her left hand; raised and sparking with magic; twitched softly as she glared at Dorian with a viciousness that none had ever seen in her before.

It was then that Dorian realized what had happened. That she, in her chaotic state, had somehow casted a barrier—deflecting his spell—and in instinctive recourse pulled one of her daggers she had always hidden in the small of her back and retaliated to the perceived attack in an instant. With Bull stepping in to take the dagger’s blow for him a split second later.

‘She tried to kill me.’

Pushing back that thought. The thought that his dearest friend in all the world had tried to end him. Dorian focused his mind and eyes upon her and instantly pulled on their bond.

Sarina immediately lurched forward, as if something or someone had struck her in the back, and let out a nearly devilish growl as her face contorted with hate.

“Adora!” called out Dorian. “We are not here to harm you. We would never harm you.”

“You lie!” she screamed.

“It’s not a lie!” Dorian countered.

“Harellan!” she spat, tears instantly falling down her cheeks, before suddenly going into a tie-raid of ancient Elvhen—accusing, condemning, damning everything and everyone so fast and so frantically that her words were completely unintelligible.

Until...

“You are just like him!” she screamed.

At that insult, Dorian immediately flinched.

And so, too, did the wolf in his arms.

“You let me believe!” she screamed with anger and despair lacing her tone. “That I could be happy! That I didn’t need to worry. That I was loved...”

“That I was enough!”

“You are enough!” countered Bull instantly, as a cacophony of affirmations rung out from everyone who stood before her.
“LIARS!”

“I WAS NEVER ENOUGH!” she screamed out at the top of her lungs.

“Sarina.” called out Dorian worriedly, taking a step. “Please.”

At his movements, Sarina raised her hand higher and called upon her magic, pulling into existence a dark miasma, as her eyes flashed with an ice-white flare of ancient magic.

“NO!” she commanded.

Dorian immediately jolted to a stop, almost as if he’d been hit with a massive freezing spell, and without another word fell to his knees –head bowed.

Bull, instantly realizing what she had just done –calling upon the compulsion that his Kadan could not defy – growled and stepped in front of Dorian.

“SARINA, PLEASE!” Bull called out, his voice nearly feral. “Please don’t do this. You don’t want to do this.”

“You’re wrong!” she countered, her eyes flashing, as she flexed her fingers and the miasma within her palm suddenly snuffed out –leaving behind a wavy-bladed dagger. “This is all that I am!”

“And all I will ever be...” she added before reaching for her hair with her other hand, bunching it up in her palm.

“HATED AND FEARED. UNLOVED AND UNWANTED. A MONSTER NOT WORTH CARING FOR!”

"NOTHING!” she screamed in agony, as she turned her eyes to her hand and without flinching ran the dagger’s blade through that which was the physical embodiment of not only her heritage, her past, and future, but all that she ever was or will be. “BELLANARIS!”

"NO!” Dorian screamed, watching in horror as the fine threads of her precious hair separated one by one and fell to the ground.

It was at that very moment that a sudden and massive wash of magic came crashing down upon them all, knocking everyone down upon the ground –save one.

“Cullen.” called out Varric, looking up from his own crumpled form upon the ground to see the ex-Templar –his eyes and hands, which were stretched out before him, both glowing like a golden sun – standing tall as he stared at Sarina’s crumpled and unconscious form.

“She left me no choice...” he sighed softly, with regret, as the timber of his voice wavered with a voice, not of his own.

“I had no choice...” he cried out in barely a whisper.
“She was never the same.” came Bull’s own timbered voice, the vision conjured by his Guardian power fading back into the real world at his words.

Abelas immediately looked up at the memory form of his friend to see his eyes full of tears and his body crumpled upon the grown –knees buried deep in the mud at his feet.

“After her break down.” he added. “It took nearly a fortnight before she opened her eyes again. Her memory, tainted by the chaos of that moment and blocked by her troubled mind, was barely aware of what she had done. Her hair the only reminder that she had been so lost that she had –by her own hand– abandoned everything she had ever been with one swipe of a dagger.”

“A reminder of all she had thrown away...”

Solas’ memory form instantly collapsed further, burying his face in his hands.

“Did you know?” questioned Bull leadingly.

Solas did not answer.

“That there was a reason behind why she never cut it or why she kept it away from prying eyes?” continued Bull. “That it was...”

“A promise,” answered Solas through his hands and tears.

“Yes.” Bull nodded. “A promise to the man that would one day own her heart.”

“A covenant of eternal love, a millenniums-old tradition, held in the highest regard above all others, never to be shown or shared with another soul until destiny revealed the one she would love forever.”

“The only mate she would ever have.”

“Her eternal Vhenan...”

“You!”

As Bull’s accusing, yet confirming voice, rang out the entire vision disappeared. Leaving no one within the confines of the Eluvian’s camp beside Abelas and Solas.

“Falon...?” Abelas immediately questioned worriedly, and then gasped as a realization hit him. “You didn’t...”

“I...I...” stammered Solas before suddenly sobbing.
“Please tell me you didn’t...” begged Abelas desperately, fear: wreaking havoc, in his tone.

“I...tried to resist...” cried Solas, crumpling further until his head and hands were touching his thighs.

“But...” he whispered. “It was too much....she was just too much...”

“I...I...couldn’t...”

“When?” demanded Abelas.

Solas did not answer.

“Damn it SOLAS!” Abelas immediately demanded. “WHEN?!?”

“Halamshiral.” Solas sobbed.

Chapter End Notes

I have to admit that I am having way too much fun with this story on my own. But, I would love to hear everyone's opinions on how its going so far. Especially any theories you may be formulating in your minds. It's always fun to hear (see) what readers are pulling from stories, if they are noticing any interesting parallels, or catching the subtext I often hide in my updates -because they are always hidden Easter eggs in each one. So, please feel free to comment.
During the confrontation with Bull, the Guardian gives Solas one final revelation and reveals a memory that he never knew existed.

The wind, gently rustling through far off trees, punctuated the stillness of the moment as Bull’s accusation rung out across the expanse of the camp.

Solas could not help but flinch, almost as if he had been struck by a massive blow, the instant those words fell from contempt-ridden lips.

Snapping his head up, leveling his gaze at the Guardian before him, he looked at Bull with reddened and tear-filled eyes to see that, with vallaslin still all aglow, he was looking down at him with a look of pure condemnation.

A sight that both confused and chilled him to the bone.

But within such a look there was also knowing there. Something deep. Something disconcerting. Something poignant. A look that spoke of both his hatred for Solas and hinted at something so much more.

Realization dawned on him in that moment. For something about Bull’s words struck a chord deep within his subconscious as his accusation suddenly and succinctly echoed across his grief-filled mind with real clarity for the first time.

‘The only mate she would ever have.’

“What are you...?”

“So it’s true...” Bull interrupted with a deep sigh. “You don’t remember.”

“Remember what?”

“The burden that was taking from you.” replied Bull.
At that moment, something about Bull’s countenance changed. It was subtle, and impossibly short lived. But it was there. For a second and then suddenly gone, but no-less unnoticeable.

It was pity.

Without a word, Bull immediately knitted his brows together and shook his head as if disgusted and disappointed by the whole affair. He seemed to be almost disparaged by the realization that Solas had no clue as to what had become of him so long ago, but that flash of disbelief flickered into existence and disappeared just as quickly as the intake and exhale of a single breath.

Looking resolutely at Solas, still kneeling in the mud before him, once more, Bull released one last sigh before the cobalt blue magic behind his eyes flashed almost violently. In that moment, the wind gusted through the clearing and with it came the disembodied voices from the past.

“Are you sure this is what you really want?” came Cole’s soft, almost mournful, voice.

“It must be done.” answered Sarina’s voice. It was sad, distraught.

“But is it what you really want?” countered Cole, his voice challenging yet tinged around the edges with a gentle hope.

“No.” she answered with a deep sigh. “I-I never wanted this...”

“To make this choice...”

“But...?”

“I will not have him live the rest of his life haunted by this night.” she answered with a sigh.

“I will not add another, to the burdens he already carries.”

At her words, a sudden flash of a memory not his own flickered across his mind. It was unbelievably quick but he was able to catch the moment in which it recalled.

*Sarina; sitting on the edge of a unknown bed and wrapped in a white sheet; with a deep sadness in her eyes, looked down upon his own sleeping form nestled under warm blankets as Cole stood beside her, one hand on her shoulder as the other stretched out over the man before them.*

“There are too many already,” she added, quietly.

Suddenly there was a bright flash, as the word ‘forget’ fell from the spirit of compassion’s lips. A flash that, in that moment, overtook the memory and appeared before Solas’ eyes obscuring everything he could see as a sudden and inexplicable warmth invaded his senses like a wave crashing upon the shore.
For several moments, moments that seem to last for centuries, the warmth cocooned him. Surrounding all that he ever was or would ever be again with an almost unnatural sense of comfort. But such feeling did not last. For the warmth grew stronger, and stronger still, becoming—far too quickly—a sense of heat that increased exponentially to the point that Solas suddenly began to feel almost as if he was on fire.

His head began to pound, a thrumming between his ears like the sound of far-off drums of war growing ever closer, until all he could hear was their constant and malevolent beat. The pain of its onslaught, becoming almost unbearable. To the point that he could no longer sense anything but the incessant heat engulfing his being and the pounding in his head.

Coming to its crescendo, after a few excruciating moments more, it was then that every sensation—from the brightness obscuring his sight, to heat flushing through his very being, to the sweat running down his face, to the pounding in his ears, and the panic rushing into his heart—suddenly vanished with an inaudible snap.

Without restraint, a strange sense of peace suddenly rushed in to replace the madness that once was there before and Solas opened his eyes—freezing at the sight that stood before him.

_A mirror._

But not an Eluvian. A simple mirror; trimmed in a deep mahogany; gently reflecting back his image in its own quiet manner.

He instinctively looked himself over, trying to place the moment.

_He was dressed in a clean—yet ornately—embroidered set of silken mage robes; muted in a soft—yet dark—blue; and matching leggings. His face was clean, his eyes: clear, and he smelled of rosewood and fresh soap._

Turning his eyes from the image before him, he scanned his surroundings. Quickly realizing, by the appearance of the finely decorated room around him, that he was standing in a room he knew well.

_His quarters. Assigned to him by the Inquisition._

At _Chateau du Monte Glass._

The home they procured to house those that were to attended the ball at the Winter Palace.

“Halamshiral…” he gasped softly.

‘But...this isn’t right...’ he thought. ‘This didn’t happen...’
At that thought, there was a suddenly flash of white light. Unbelievably quick. Almost never really there. And then, suddenly, he found himself standing before a wooden door –left quietly ajar.

Taking a deep breath, not bothering to knock, he slowly pushed the door open and stepped through without even a thought.

Almost as if he was meant to. As if he had no other choice.

He took merely three steps into the unknown, forgotten, room before his eyes fell upon Sarina standing quietly before a softly; and unfamiliar; burning hearth.

With hair bound, and feet unshod, she was dressed in an elegant and form-fitting white gown; running down her frame like water; that was embroidered around the hems with delicately depicted images of flowering peach blossoms in gossamer threads and carried a plunging front and back line that bared her honeyed skin for all the world to see.

She looked so beautiful. So refined. So reminiscent of a time so long ago.

And yet, there was something more.

Lost in her own thoughts, a slight frown marring her face, she said nothing nor indicated that she had even sensed his arrival. Rather, she continued to stare contemplatively at the fire before her as if its existence was all that remained in all the world.

Solas heard himself softly sigh, before he began to move and crossed the room. He embraced her. Wrapping his arms around her waist; a familiar movement; and sets his chin upon her shoulder and hugged her lovingly.

Content in such embrace, neither of them speak for several moments. Simply watching the fire before them. Until Solas felt the barely perceptible feeling of relaxation fall across Sarina’s form with a sigh.

“Something worries you?” he found himself questioning softly.

She hummed in agreement.

“If you need to speak of it, need an understanding and willing ear, know that I am always here to
“Did I do the right thing?” Sarina questioned, after a few more moments of silence. “Tonight. At the Winter Palace.”

“I’m sure Empress Celene would think so.” he answered. “You’ve outed and publicly humiliated her would-be assassin, protected her life and secured her rule.”

“That was the goal was it not?” he immediately added with a countering tone. “Or are you regretting your decision to keep her in power?”

“No.” Sarina answered. “Celene is a fine ruler. A diplomat, first and foremost, with at least some understanding of the disparaged lives those of the underclass suffer. Though I do not approve of her methods, the way she is so deeply entrenched in ‘The Game’, that does not make her unfit. She is the best hope Orlais has to find some sense of relative peace, now and in the future.”

“Gaspard, however, is a profiteer; a warmonger; whose only goal is to conquer Thedas and consolidate all under his despotic and tyrannical rule. He cares not for the People, the commoners he deems beneath him, the humans, dwarves, and Qunari living within his borders, or even the nobility set above them all by the royal line’s own appointments. He is selfish, callow, and unfeeling towards the plight of anyone; and cares not but for his own wants, needs, and desires.”

“Though his intentions may have been pure once, they’ve evolved into a methodology that leads only to more suffering and death.”

“Had I allowed him to take Celene’s place, we would have just had another war to fight –one that I fear would have been far bloodier than any we’ve ever seen before. Corypheus included.”

“It was best to end his villainy before it came to that.” she declared softly.

“I see...”

“Then, if it’s not the political machinations of Orlais...?” he questioned.
“It’s Briala.” she answered with a deep sigh. “Did I do right by her?”

“Briala’s fate, though not what she expected nor what you may had intended, concerns you?” Solas questioned.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I would say that I am not one to meddle...”

Solas immediately scoffed.

“If you’ll let me finish...” she scolded.

“Ir abelas, Vhenan.” apologized Solas. “Please continue...”

“I would say that I am not one to meddle...But that would be untrue.” she began again. “Having to ‘meddle’ in the affairs of others seems to be my chief duty these days, from the moment I became Inquisitor until now.”

“But –in truth– I had no intentions of getting involved with anything, any personable objectives, other than stopping the assassination attempt, protecting the Empress, and procuring stability within Orlais.”

“Celene and Briala’s little romantic squabble didn’t concern me –even though Leliana thought it useful.”

“But?” he countered with a sigh.

“But...in all honesty...” she sighed, disappointingly.
“Something about her, from the moment Leliana told me of her...intimate knowledge...of Celene, spoke to me. I had wondered, initially, how an Elf such as she could find her way into the heart of an Empress...only to be thrown away just as easily. The dynamic of their relationship, what actually happened between them to bring them together...what brought them to their end...all of it intrigued me.”

“But my curiosity, at the time, would’ve served no purpose –but as a distraction. For the task at hand held more importance than my interest in such gossip. So I put it aside. Until...”

“Until...?” Solas parroted.

“Until Briala and I spoke to one another.” she replied. “I had no intentions to question her about her relationship with Celene, but when I finally faced her...I asked anyway.”

“When Briala spoke of Celene’s rule, initially, there was this emotional disconnect. Almost as if there were no longer any feelings between them. An unnatural coldness. But, when I pressed her about her relationship with the Empress, her tone...changed. Her true emotions, though she continued to try and keep them hidden, showed themselves with every word she uttered.”

“There was pain there...so much pain... A heartbreak and sadness few could understand...”

“But there was also hope.”

“And you felt sympathetic towards her.” Solas assumed.

“Not sympathy...but empathy.” she answered. “Such pain, such sorrow. Having felt such feelings before, and being the person I am, I could not help but understand her loss. Nor could I stop myself from secretly wishing; even though I should have seen her as an adversary –according to my advisors – rather than a compatriot; that she could somehow find happiness once again.”

“It broke my heart...in truth.” she continued. “Briala’s love for Celene...it was strong. So strong, in fact, that even with her anger over how it ended; how she was betrayed; she still could not stop loving her.”

“I have no doubt that Celene loved her once.” she sighed in resignation. “Her reaction to my suggestion that Briala was instrumental in uncovering the plot against her life was unmistakable.
And maybe she still does. But should I have really gone that extra mile? Did putting Briala back in Celene’s good graces really help?”

“It would seem so—if the smiles shared between them during the rest of the evening are anything to go by,” Solas responded.

“Yes, they looked happy. But how long will that last?”

“They were happy once, too, you know? Before.” Sarina informed. “They were in love, spending their days in each other’s embrace. Content in their love. But…Ultimately, when Celene’s power and influence began to be threatened by the noble’s disdain for her relationship with an Elf; of all things; Celene didn’t hesitate to cast her aside—choosing to protect her place as Empress over her lover. Having her take all the blame, for something she had no hand in, and imprisoning her for over a year on a false charge.”

“Celene may have—eventually, when the controversy died down—had Briala released. But the damage was already done. Her true colors shown to not only the world but, more pointedly, to Briala.”

“And that’s why you’re so upset?” Solas questioned, understandingly.

“Celene has betrayed her once already,” she added matter-of-factly.

“I am worried that I have merely opened the door to even more pain.” she sighed. “Who’s to say that Celene has learned her lesson? If there was ever really a lesson to be learned from all of it to begin with.”

“Who’s to say that if, and when, the time comes when she will have to face the choice between her kingdom and her lover…that she will not choose the same once more? And, what does that mean for Briala if that happens again?”

“You’re afraid that Celene will repeat the same mistake again: choosing power over love, and that because you chose to meddle; to mend that which was broken; you may be condemning Briala to the same treatment? To the same heartache and betrayal, once more?”

Sarina nodded.
“Oh Vhenan...” Solas sighed lovingly. “You continue to surprise me.”

“The world is slowly tearing itself apart, piece by piece, yet you continue to bring to the forefront the smallest of hurts. From one man’s wish to honor his lost wife with flowers to trying to mend broken fences between brothers, and everything in between, you’re always hoping to help. Always trying to soothe hearts of all those you come across, to the best of your ability.”

“There is so much compassion within you...” he added with a sigh.

“But...?” she prompted, noticing the slight disappointment in his tone.

“The pain you take from others, the good deeds you do in hopes to heal the hurt or soothe the spirit...help... But...As they are changed by their hurt so, too, are you when you take it away.”

“You take their pain into yourself. Make it a part of you. And your mind and heart will always remember it.”

“I know...”

“Vhenan...” he said, with warning in his tone, as he tightened his arms around her. “I know you wish to help. That it’s in your nature to help all that you can. But you must remember you are not like a spirit. Like Cole: Who can take away a person’s pain but never be bound by it. Pain, no matter how small, cannot stick to him—cannot change him—like it can to you.”

“Every time you let a person’s pain affect you, you are giving it the power to stay with you,” he advised. “You must learn to let things go...if there is to be any relative peace in your heart.”

“But, I cannot do that.” she countered softly.

“Why not?”

“Because learning from your experiences, feeling the pain of others, having empathy and love, and
trying your best to do right by all those for whom you come across...is the very essence of living.” She answered. “We are not who we are simply because we exist, Solas. We are who we are by those we affect.”

“It is not what is said that is remembered, it is what you do that matters.”

“And when you do good...?”

“You will be remembered,” she answered.

“Is that why you’re so adamant about helping even the lowliest of society?” He questioned. “So that you will be remembered?”

“No...” she sighed. “My intentions are not that diabolical. Nor that altruistic. It’s simply a belief that all –no matter who they are, where they come from, or their lot in life – deserve to be happy. And if I can bring them that happiness, even in some small way, then it’s my duty...my privilege to see to it that happiness finds them.”

“It’s the same with the Breach...and defeating Corypheus.” She explained. “Had I not a care for the world around me, I would have vanished the moment I could slip away from Haven. Broken my shackles, and fled. Long ago. But, I couldn’t do that. Even when Cass threatened that I could be executed for the Divine’s death. I just couldn’t turn away.”

“Thedas needed me...”

“And...I think a part of me needed Thedas in return.”

“Meaning?”

“It’s no secret that in those first few weeks after I fell from the fade that I had no love for the humans around me...for the eyes that condemned me at every glance...or, for even those who would one day become my closest of friends...”

“Or the man who loves you.” He prodded softly.
“Yes. Or the man who loves me...” she replied. “But, even though I could not bear to bring myself to trust those around me, I still wanted to help.”

“Is that why you chose to stay?” questioned Solas. “To help?”

“No...” she answered. “Ultimately, I stayed...because I found....”

Sarina immediately pauses, seemingly contemplating whether or not she should finish her sentence, before letting out a sigh in resignation.

“Because of you,” she admitted.

“Me? Why?”

“You’ve, so often, called me unique, Solas,” she answered. “But you must know that I’m not the only one here that’s as such.”

“You are unlike any man I have ever known. Unique in your own way.” she said lovingly. “And so, too, is your pain.”

Solas immediately stiffened, and Sarina instinctively sighed.

“But fear not...” she assuaged with a gentle pat to the arms around her waist. “The pain you carry...I’ll admit...was, once, what drew me to you. Gave me the desire to know more of you.”

“It was like a winding path, carving through a dark forest of the unknowing. Frightening to see, yet somehow beckoning me to travel onward...And I fell under its spell, giving myself up to my curiosity, and faced my fear. Forging ahead until I found myself walking the path with my head held high.”

“And do you know what I found just beyond that path?” she questioned. “When I had thrown away my fear of the unknown and gave myself the chance to see past all the pain I sensed in you?”
Solas, unable to bring himself to speak, simply shook his head ‘no’.

“The love of my life,” she answered with smiling sigh as she steps away from him, just barely, and turns to face him.

“And...” she added, reaching up to caress his cheek, with nothing but love in her eyes. “A good man.”

“You shame me.” Solas accused quietly, dropping his eyes. “I am not...”

“No, my love.” she contested instantly, slipping her thumb under his jaw and lifting his face to look at her once more. “Your pain...clouds your judgement. You see only your failures. Your inadequacies. Your deficiencies.”

“But in here...” she continued, as she placed her other hand upon his chest above his heart. “You are a good man.”

“You say that with such conviction. Sound so certain...but how could...?”

“Because I know you Solas.” she interrupted softly, her eyes suddenly tearing at the thought.

“I may not know everything about you, your past, or what caused you to carry the burdens you bear...the guilt that weighs heavily down upon your shoulders every minute of every day...”

“But this...” she continued, pointedly, as she presses her hand upon his heart with a gentle nudge. “Your heart, I know it better than anything I could possibly ever know. In here, you are the man you were meant to be. The man who believes in the good of all people. That carries compassion for even those who don’t deserve it. That knows, deep in his soul, that the path he has walked could have been walked better. But still has hope. For your people. For others. For the world. And, more importantly, for yourself.”

“It’s because of you.” Solas admitted as his own eyes begin to water involuntarily; her loving declaration of his true character striking a chord within him once forgotten. “You...you change everything. Even, me.”
“I have changed nothing, my love.” she countered in loving disagreement. “I simply just brushed away the darkness...and found the right path.”

“For the 'real' you...was...always there, you simply needed to see it for yourself.”

“I love you, Solas.” she breathed out as she leans in to look him square in the eye; punctuating her point. “The good with the bad. The joy with the sadness. The pride with the humility. The love with the anger. And everything in between.”

“All of it...and...All of you.” she smiled happily. “And no matter what happens, what you have done or could do in the future, that will never change.”

“But...” he stammers.

Immediately interrupting Solas' words, Sarina shifts her hand to the back of his neck and pulls him down for a kiss. As their lips meet, Solas can feel his heart nearly burst with the love buried deep within him as his skin flushes with a warmth that only her touch can bring forth.

Any thought of protecting her from the pain he would cause her in the future suddenly becomes moot. Disappearing as his mind clouds over with the comforting sensation that flares in his chest. She, who he never expected to be come so important, in this moment, has become more important that anything that ever came before or will ever come again.

A place of peace. A place of love. A place of happiness he never thought he would ever know. Where the world falls away, and he can be just himself.


Not the man who destroyed the world out of guilt and an unwanted choice; who has spent his life mourning the loss of his people, by his own actions; or, who still strives to bring them back once more.

No.

Here, in her arms, he is Solas.

Just Solas.

Tightening his arms around her, pulling her flush against him, he deepens the kiss. Soft and inviting lips, plush and beloved, press against his with all the love she carries within her and his heart swells near to bursting.

‘How could have I been so wrong?’
The thought that this woman, this once insignificant and unknown quickling, carries within her a love so unrestrained, so pure, just for him...is a realization that he would have never believed in his long life. And, now, she is here—in his arms—without pretext or preamble. Unknowing yet unafraid. Declaring, without a single sliver of doubt, that she not only loves him but will love him—no matter what—forever.

It is almost too much to handle, too much to believe.

But, by the Void, he wants it to be true.

He wants.

Tongue slips between teeth, as his hands slide down her frame in worshiping caresses and breath quickens. A soft moan floats up between them. A marked hand fans out across clothed muscle hiding a pounding heart, as its mate slides from taught and tone back to soft cheek. Deepening farther still, the kiss grows needier, more desperate, as strong hands explore the lovely form encircled before him and the soft moans from his beloved intermingle with his own. His body reacts with every sound, every touch, and every swipe of their tongues until he can barely control the desire running rampant through every fiber of his being.

A moment of clarity rushes across his mind, just as the precipice of no restraint looms just around the edges of consciousness. He knows he must stop. He mustn’t give in to what his heart truly desires. He mustn’t betray her more than he will have to. To take advantage like this, he will not be a monster. Not to her. Never to her.

Pulling his arms from her waist, he reaches up and cups her face gently, and breaks the kiss. With a deep sigh of resolution marred in unbelievable guilt and sorrow, he leans his forehead against hers and closes his eyes—for he wishes not to see the pain of his rejection upon her face once more. Far too many times has it wounded her before, and far too many times was it too difficult to take.

She breathes out slowly, trying to wash away the cloud of desire muddling her mind. She says nothing, almost as if she had already resigned herself to the disappointment she knows is coming, and waits for the words she knows he will say.

“Ir abelas, Vhenan...” Solas breathed out in apology. “We mustn’t...I shouldn’t...have...”

At that moment, Solas is suddenly interrupted by a strange feeling brushing across the tops of his hands just as an unexpected sound of metal impacting stone with a high-pitch ting and rattle echoes throughout the room. Confused, not understanding what he has just heard, Solas slowly opens his eyes and allows them to clear. As the floor beneath them comes into full clarity, he instantly gasps.

There, laying upon the ground just a hair’s breadth from his own bound feet, is something he has never seen fully. It had always been obscured, hidden in plain sight. And now it was discarded without a care. Cast upon the ground, abandoned.

“Sarina...” breathed Solas out, in warning and worry, as he took in the silver pin, that never left his
beloved’s precious and always bound hair, with a strange feeling of near-desperation echoing across his heart. “Don’t do this...”

“It is my choice,” she answered, love, lacing every syllable. “And I have made it.”

“You don’t know what it is you are asking of me.” he countered, as his hands suddenly began to shake and his eyes started to moisten. “What it will mean for us...”

“What it will do to you in the end...”

“I have made my choice, Vhenan,” she answered again.

“Please...” begged Solas. “Don’t ask this of me... I beg you to change your mind. This, this cannot be the way. I cannot be your choice, Sarina. You must find another.”

“There is no other, Solas. You are my pride, my love, and there can be no other than you.”

Closing his eyes and breathing out a moan of pain, Solas shakes his head and tries to will away the world in that moment. He knows the truth behind the old tradition. What it mean for her tresses to always be bound. And what it meant for he who will one day see them free of their imprisonment.

It is a path he swore he would not take. Not with her. Never with her. She would be free of the burden of their love, left untainted. It is what he willed. Wanted but not wanted. Even though it must be.

“Solas...” her soft voice breathes out laced with understanding and love. “Look at me.”

“I cannot.” he countered, shaking his head. “I cannot do this to you Vhenan.”

“Then you condemn me to an untouched and unbound life, my love.” she counters softly. “Is that the fate you would wish upon me?”

“Never.”
“Then forget everything. All the pain. All the chaos. All that was lost. All that has been or ever could be.” she begged softly. “Let it all go...Be free and look at me.”

For a moment there was a pause, no one said a word, and then Solas felt Sarina shift ever so slightly. The movement, unexpected, causing him to inadvertently open his eyes just in time to see white linen trimmed in gossamer threads fall softly to the floor at their feet.

“Vhenan...” she breathed out softly.

That word, in that voice, reverberating deeply within him, is far too much to bear. He knows he cannot. He must resist. He must not sully that which he has sworn to protect. With all that he is.

But.

With a deep sigh, Solas slides his hands down to her shoulders, takes a half step back, and drops his arms down at his side limply.

“The consequences...” he warned mournfully. “Of what you ask...will you accept them?”

“I have already...” she answered. “Long ago.”

Letting out a deep sigh of resignation, Solas’ shoulders slumped. Knowing that there was no way out of this anymore. That he no longer had a choice. He nodded imperceptibly and raised his head. For a few tense moments he stood there motionless, as doubt sung a chaotic melody through his heart: screaming the warnings that his mind knew all too well, until they were all he could hear or feel.

He didn’t want to do this. He didn’t want to accept her like this. To take what was so freely given under false pretenses. He didn’t want...

But he did.

With one last sigh escaping his lips, Solas opened his eyes and looked upon the woman standing before him with nothing but love in her heart.

Pure, snow white, tresses untouched by another soul, cascaded down like a frozen waterfall rushing over bare, honeyed skin, caressed by the warm touch of candlelight. Eyes, beautiful and clear, shining with unshed tears and swimming with hope, looked upon him as if he was the only person in all the world she could ever see. And lips, plush and inviting, tinged with the slickness of tongue, were turned up in a soft smile.

The sight of her, the revelation of the true beauty that always remained hidden from prying eyes, hit him like an avalanche. Burying every shred of doubt and guilt in an instant. A dam shattered, the flood gates unleashed. His heart immediately throbbed in absolute joy and he knew.
He knew that he could not bear to deny her. Not now.

Taking a rushing step towards her, he reached out and pulled her into his arms with such force that she gasped. A gasp that was immediately smothered by his wanting lips, and impassioned tongue, as strong hands threaded through soft delicate strands and hugged her close. Pressing his advantage further that he had ever done before, he allowed the desire for her he had always kept bound in the deep recesses of his subconscious to be unleashed and worshiped her lips with all the love in his heart.

Delicate, nimble fingers slid slowly across deep blue, in search of the warmth underneath. The warmth buried by layers of cloth and the months of indecision. Slipping inside, finding their prize, they spread across pale skin leaving a trail of fire in their wake so intense that Solas couldn’t fight back the moan that escaped his lips. Spurred by the feeling, her hands caressing his skin like it was the most precious thing in all the world, Solas reached up with one hand freed himself of the robe’s ties —allowing the garment to fall completely open—before pulling her flush against his chest. Breaking the kiss, at the contact, he immediately began to trail kisses down her neck and across her shoulders, as her hands explored his skin with loving attention and her pleased moans echoed all around them.

“Solas...” she breathes out, her voice laced with the deepest of desire, as she pushes him back to see his face. As his eyes fall upon her once more, she smiles softly and touches his face gently before sliding her hand down one arm and grabbing his hand. With a gentle squeeze of encouragement she tilts her head and pulls him towards the bed without another word. He follows, letting go of her hand just as she reaches the bedside, and slipping off his robes. As they hit the floor at his feet, he steps into her once more. Lips meet in a passion-filled embrace, arms wrapping around her beloved form, as tongues dance and explore what was once so forbidden. He presses against her, reveling in the feel of her warm honeyed skin against his own as his body reacts almost violently to closeness of her.

Slender hands trail softly, slowly, down his feverish skin; as their passions seems to triple tenfold; until they reach the pliant hem of his leggings. For a few moments, they tease and tantalize. Slipping, just barely, between fabric and that which was underneath. With every moment, Solas can feel himself slipping further and further away. His mind becoming more and more hazy with the intoxicating feeling of her, so willing and wanting, that he can no longer tell where he ends and she begins. They are one, so beautifully one that nothing mattered anymore.

Unable to wait a minute longer, Solas shifts their bodies and lays her upon bed before them and presses her down into the mattress with just enough force for her to moan in absolute joy...

It is then that the memory suddenly and viciously dims conspiratorially, almost as if it has been altered or distorted from memory by some unforeseen machination, and suddenly disappears from his mind as he finds himself standing a distance away from where he was just poised. A split second later, hours pass through the vision of his blurry memory. All he can make out is the bed before him, and two barely perceptible and unfocused figures within writhing in ecstasy. For several seconds the memory reveals itself as such and then, as if on cue; or preordained; it once again comes back to focus with a strange humming resonance that makes him wince.

When he opens his eyes, and settles them upon the bed once more, he’s sees himself naked and fast asleep under warm blankets. And beside him, wrapped in a white sheet, is his beloved staring down at him with tears quietly streaming down her cheeks. The look upon her face one of both enduring love and torment. Moments of silence pass uninterrupted for several minutes and then she releases a deep sigh laced with regret and resignation. Clutching tightly to the fabric bunched in her hand
hovering over her heart, she reaches out tentatively and gently caresses the cheek of the man before her before sniffing back her tears.

“I hope you can forgive me,” she whispered, her quiet voice breaking. “For...”

Cutting off her own words, she pulls her hand back and turns her eyes away. The moment is suddenly tense, as her emotions seem to overtake and oppress the room around her. She is happy, blissful even. It is light, calm. But behind it, smothering it to where naught but a sliver remains barely detectable, is an indescribable guilt.

She had coerced Solas to give in. She had broken his will and removed the chains that held him forever from her waiting arms, but in doing so she had also placed another burden upon his already heavy heart.

And she knew it.

Unable to stay by his side in that moment she stood, turning her back on the man she loved, and strode across the room towards the small balcony that looked out over the garden of the Chateau. But before she managed to reach the doors, something odd crossed her face and she came to dead stop. For half a breath she was still, and then as if struck by a massive blow, the look of excruciating pain exploded across her face. She immediately clutched her head with both hands –her makeshift shift falling to the floor at her feet instantly. Slamming her eyes shut, trying to force away the sensation that had suddenly come over her, she collapsed to her knees upon the hard stone floor beneath her and cried out in torturous pain. Doubling over so far that her face hovered mere inches from the ground, she cried out again and again; her tone unbelievably shrill and heart-rending; as excruciating pain seemed to flush through her whole being.

For several long moments she writhed and suffered under the yoke of the strange feeling. To the point that Solas could not push away his worry, could not see it as nothing more than pure torture, as his heart throbbed with panic and fear. For he was afraid, so very afraid. He could not understand what was happening in that moment. What it was that had come over her. Or, even more so, how he had managed to remain sleeping only a few feet away when it had all happened.

Compelled to help, to stop the pain practically pulling her apart, Solas immediately took a step toward her form. But before he could make any distance, she suddenly fell silent. The tears that were streaming down her face, ceased. Her screams, snuffed out. And the trembling that had overtaken ever bit of her form, stilled. Confused, Solas stared at her unable to understand what had suddenly changed. A moment later, she drops her hands from her head and slams her palms down on the floor before her with so much force that he couldn’t help but flinch.

“Tell me it’s not true!” she suddenly demanded. “Tell me the man I love is not...that he is not...!”

For a few tense moments, there was no reply. No voice echoing through the room, save her own.
And then.

“I cannot.” came a very familiar and humming voice echoing from the balcony doors.

Solas immediately turned to see Cole standing quietly in the entryway, his head bowed so low that his hat obscured his entire saddened face.

“You knew! You’ve known all this time! That...that he was...Fen...”

Unable to finish the name, Sarina suddenly began to cry once more.

“You made me forget. Didn’t you! You promised you would never do that to me. That you would never alter my memories, no matter what. And...You did. Because...because...”

“Why!?” she immediately demanded.

Cole did not answer.

“Damn it, Cole! WHY!” she screamed, finally looking up at the spirit-boy.

“He only wanted to protect you,” Cole answered softly.

Sarina suddenly stilled and grew quiet as tears continued to stream down her cheeks. For a few moments, Cole watched her and then with a deep sigh of resignation he crossed the room and crouched before her. Reaching out, he grabbed her shoulder lovingly and squeezed reassuringly.

“I am sorry.” he breathed.

“I never thought...” she bemoaned softly. “He...could...That I could....”

“How can this be true?” she questions, confusion and panic lacing her tone. “They’re all supposed to...”
be dead. Gone. Locked away. The...the wolf is supposed to be a myth! Based on a person, long-since dead. How can he be...How can Solas be...?

“You said it, yourself, once...” Cole answered lovingly. “The waking is a strange place. With even stranger truths than anyone could ever hope to know or believe.”

“You’ve always known he was different.” Cole pointed out softly. “As you are different.”

“Different? Yes. But, a God?” she countered. “Of everything he could...he could possibly be...I never thought...”

“What should I do?” she questioned, her voice breaking with every word.

“Choose.”

“Choose?” she parroted.

“Choose to accept the truth, and deal with the consequences of such a choice,” he answered. “Or choose to forget....and live in ignorance for as long as you can.”

“Whatever you choose...” he added softly, grabbing her gently with his other hand and pulling her into a loving embrace. “I will protect you to the best of my ability. Always.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for such a long delay, everyone. I was having a creative battle with my self over how to do this chapter properly. I am still a little uneasy about its flow but I finally got it
the way I wanted it (for the most part). I would appreciate your feedback on this update, if you have the time.
Thanks.

And, sorry for the tease.
A Glimmer of Hope

Chapter Summary

Abelas contemplates the affect of what Bulls revelations will have on his dearest friend as Solas falls from the void of a dreamless sleep into the arms of the fade and a spirit who has been waiting for far too long.

Long after the last vestiges of sunlight faded from the world, Abelas sat quietly under the cover of darkness and stared silently at the fire before him contemplating the revelations that had made themselves known through the dragon aspect’s apparent punishment.

For punishment, he realized, was exactly what it had been.

He knew from the many stories recalled to him by Solas that the Iron Bull was a man who –though at times, seemed reckless and short-sighted – never did anything without thinking. A man who calculated every outcome of every situation thoroughly before ever making a move. He who watched; with eyes seeking, noting, and knowing; and plotted until all the veritable outcomes had been sorted and filed.

Solas had once said that that was the Ben Hassrath in him, but Abelas never really believed such an assumption. Something about the way others spoke of the Qunari hinted at a different story. Almost as if he was something much more than just the spy-turned companion-turned traitor-turned guardian. A man, driven, not by suspicious and calculating natures, as most believed, but by earnestness and a willful passion to see the world find its way back to the way it should have been all along.

And, because of it; that desire to see all the wrongs done be undone; Bull had kept his word –his promise– to Sarina, but had also done so much more than he should have to the man who no-less deserved such a fate than himself.

It was unfortunate, sad, and disappointing. To see that over the centuries and millenniums that have passed, that one’s pride could still not only exalt someone on high but could also still destroy all that one held so dear.

Solas had always been the embodiment of pride. Even from the very beginning. A man strong in his belief, his determination, and his dedication. One who would do all that he could to see the world be free. Never realizing that, above all else, it was he –and not truly the rest of the world –that was the one who needed true freedom.

He was a slave to his very self.

For pride imprisons the soul, the life, and will always be a shackle not so easily broken by hope alone.

After the vision of Bull had faded, and Solas declared the truth he would have never admitted otherwise, Abelas found himself taking pity on his beloved friend for the first time in his whole life. Seeing him, there, crumpled upon the ground, lost in his own pain as the realization of how badly he
had broken her all those years ago tormented him viciously; how he had ruined everything that had been – once – good and pure about the heart that commanded legions and swayed the minds of the powerful all over the world with a simple smile, and condemned her to nothing more than a heartbroken, shattered, and meek shell of a woman mourning the loss of the only man she had ever truly loved; had become too much to endure at his side.

He would pay for his decision eventually. He had no doubt about that. But to see Solas in so much pain, unable to control not only his own emotions but also his magic, was just something that Abelas could not bear to witness. Sleep was the only outcome of such a feeling, such a sense of hopelessness – an inability to alleviate the pain nor the suffering his dear friend now must endure with such knowledge – so a forced reprieve would have to suffice.

It was simple enough, a spell to cast the consciousness into the darkness of a dreamless sleep so that the body and subconscious mind could once again find peace. Completely on instinct. And with no remorse. He did it without a thought, without deliberation. Solas would sleep, incapacitated and undisturbed, for as much time as it took; as such magic would always demand; in the faint hope that when it finally waned his friend will wake once more and his mind would agonize no longer.

“It abelas, ma Falon.” sighed Abelas, glancing over his shoulder at the tent behind him where his beloved friend now slept. “I had no choice.”

And so Solas slept. And nearly two days passed. On the night of the second day, Abelas sighed heavily with worry. For he knew that the reckoning for his actions would soon be at hand. That Solas would soon wake and realize what he had done. A part of him fretted over the anger he would face; the disdain and wrath; but mostly his worry stemmed from how much of the Solas he had always known would still remain.

The revelations so succinctly given by the Dragon aspect had been hard for even him to swallow – knowing what he already knew of her through their interactions in the fade. He could not begin to imagine what kind of effect they would have on his friend. Who had known her for years; loved her for years.

It was a tragic irony in some respects. To save Sarina from the darkness that now holds her prisoner, the one man in all Thedas that should have always been kept in the dark must now come to terms with everything that was kept from him. That he, who had been so dishonest to so many under the guise of keeping his identity and machinations a secret, would; in turn; find out that the only person he could have ever said he truly trusted had secrets of her very own. Secrets that she had no choice in keeping and that could potentially affect not only his very own fate but the fate of the People and the world.

For she had felt compelled to lie, on so many occasions, yet deep in her heart she abhorred lying above all else.

It was this disconnection that bothered Abelas the most. Through his knowledge of her, from what he had himself learned from her Vallas Val and what she had somewhat candidly spoken of her own volition, he had come to know that many of the secrets she had kept from most had not been by choice or of want. Her earnest regret was always palpable, no matter how she tried to hide it. There was always something, hiding in the background, just around the edges, that spoke of her own pain. A pain that for the life of him he couldn’t understand why she carried.
Darkness now clouded her every step, when once she had become the very light that showed the path.

When those of the Inquisition had spent their days in the pursuit of the saving of their world, she had been happy. Almost euphoric and blissful in her existence. Though it didn’t really start out that way. The years of indoctrination in to the skewed beliefs of the Dalish, how they both hated and feared those not of their own, were like great sentinels blocking the path to acceptance and understanding. Stopping her from taking even a moment to allow a different point-of-view to penetrate all that she had been taught. But over time, through her interactions and adventures, those sentinels had slowly began to part. Allowing her to see more and more. Until, she had become more open-hearted and more open-minded than she could have ever thought possible. Accepting those who would have once been immediately seen as a threat, or even killed, not on the assumptions of their kind or beliefs but by their words and deeds.

So great was their influence that she who should have always remained wary had turned from the suspicious and fretful behavior so ingrained in her by her upbringing and became not just their leader but a trusted friend who trusted them all in return.

They had changed her. Affected her so deeply.

So what was it that tore down all that progress? What was it that turned her from the honest Inquisitor that everyone trusted and adored to that of a lying and scheming charlatan with far too many secrets to keep? What was it that destroyed all the good they had done in her life?

_Was it because she fell in love?_

_Was it because she was betrayed by love?_

_Or, was it something else entirely?_

“Perhaps, it was all of it.” Abelas mused quietly.

She had once had no trust, no belief that any of those at her side truly saw her for who she really was. For, in her eyes, she was not the Herald. Nor the Inquisitor. Not something to be feared. Or, worse, worshipped.

And she had looked upon them all through such a distorted view. Secretly, and subtly, hating them just a little. Wincing every time she heard such monikers fall from the lips of the people who had become her traveling companions. Hating every time she was looked upon as some divine creature when she saw herself as nothing but a small, insignificant, woman who had been thrown into a chaotic life full of misfortune. Constantly wishing in the back of her mind that all of it, every terrible thing, was just a dream she would one day wake from.

But the others, they had all managed over to time to make such a time of it bearable. To help her find some semblance of peace in such an unfortunate existence.
But, above it all, it had been Solas that had made every painful moment worth it.

Solas would probably never truly understand how drastically falling in love with him had changed her. And Abelas was sure that she didn’t either. But he could see it. As a man standing around the edges looking in.

The happiness that she allowed herself to find, to have, had lightened the burdens the world had put upon her shoulders so roughly. The friendships she developed with them all were like a salve to festering wound of distrust and disbelief. Giving her more hope than she ever thought possible. And though Solas would test her hope time and time again, her love for him grew and grew until there was no denying that the man was all she could ever want. He became the light in her ever-darkening world. The sun rising just behind the horizon every morning. And the moon illuminating the path through the unknown. He had become her center. The place where she truly felt at peace. A place where her dreams lingered happily and joyously, forever.

The future she had always hoped she could have.

But, as fate would have it, she never got the chance to live such a life. To hold him in her arms forever, as she’d wantonly hoped.

Blissful in her ignorance, unknowing of the fate that would be thrown upon her shoulders years after they met, she had allowed herself to trust him. Allowed herself to let him in. And when she truly believed that she could finally have the life that the Breach and Corypheus had put on hold, the rug was so succinctly pulled out from under so cruelly that her that her whole world crumbled.

Only to then crumble once more just two years later.

Abelas had always known that if and when Solas and Sarina stood before one another once more, after the death of the magister, that Solas would feel compelled to tell her the truth of who he really was. He had never forgotten how he had once warned his friend that if he did so he would be condemning himself to her hate for all eternity.

But his warning had fallen on deaf ears, for Solas swore that the time for lies was over.

‘I have hurt her deeply, far deeply than I ever intended.’ he had replied. ‘I cannot deny her again. She will know the truth of me and if, in doing so, I earn her endless hate then I will gladly accept it. As it is what I truly deserve for the lies I have told and the heart I have broken.’

Admittedly Abelas could not understand, at the time, why Solas had been so adamant of laying his burdens bare but, in time, he came to believe that Solas chose to tell the truth not out of a feeling of responsibility for what he had done but out of hope. A hope that somehow, in some way, Sarina would understand why he had done what he did and would maybe even have a bit of forgiveness in her heart for the man who still loved her.

But, in the end, did she ever understand him? Did she ultimately forgive him, even a little? He didn’t know for sure but what he did know was that before all was said and done he would finally know the answer one way or another. Her true intentions behind all the machinations she put into motion all those years ago were soon to be revealed. Of that he was sure of. The quickening pace of Solas’ interactions with both the memories in the Vallas Val, and now the appearance of a Guardian in the flesh, foretold that the end was close at hand. To what end they were striving toward, he did not
know. But, in his heart of hearts he still carried a small sliver of hope that everything that had gone wrong would right itself once more.

For both the lady trapped by despair and the man shackled by pride.

“Wake up...” whispered a reverberating, disembodied voice through the nothingness, as Solas’ conscious mind began to stir. “Little wolf....”

“The darkness of the void...is not your place....”

“You mustn’t linger...”

“For that place holds not your purpose...”

“You must...must wake.....”

“Open your eyes and find the land of dreams once more.” the voice pleaded softly.

With blurred vision, and a heaviness soaking through his very bones, Solas slowly began to open his eyes. Groggy, feeling almost as if something or someone had sapped every bit of strength from his form, he could not stem the small moan of discomfort that escaped his lips as he tried to clear the feeling from his mind.

“What happened?” he muttered. “Where am I?”

He tried to remember, pulling on his most recent memories, and for a time his mind found nothing but emptiness. But as the minutes passed, he slowly began to see the flickering images of the Eluvian’s camp, of the destruction wrought upon his men, and the enormous Qunari standing between them all. As Bull’s visage flashed across his mind, a flood of memories from their interactions filled his head like a cascading waterfall. Flickering and filling him so fast that if he had been a goblet he would have long since overflowed. The flashes continued on for only a few moments, but seemed more of years than of seconds. Until, his consciousness suddenly settled into a crystal clear clarity and his eyes snapped open.

Solas instantly froze. For what was before him, was unlike anything he had seen before.
He was in the fade, of that he was certain. But in a place; a memory or a dream or a machination; that he was not familiar with. He found himself laying upon the ground, on his side, staring out across a verdant field covered in flowering clover as a gentle, warm summer breeze brushed across his skin and a pale, blue sky lingered overhead. His arm stretched out before him within the clovers, was adorned in a strange shimmering blue fabric, and in his open palm quietly sat a white queen.

“Have you returned?” came the disembodied and echoing voice.

Startled, Solas immediately clutched the chess piece in his hand and shifted himself towards the sound; looking up to see a spirit hovering near his feet. Shimmering gently, barely colored by the lightest of blue, with a form reminiscent of a small child with both long flowing robes and hair; and half the size of any normal spirit he had ever encountered in his wondering of the fade; it looked back upon him and smiled gently from an, abnormally, clearly defined face.

A face that he did not recognize, yet did.

“You have found the way!” the spirit giggled.

“It would seem so,” Solas answered softly as he slowly began to pull himself up into a sitting position.

“Careful.” the spirit warned. “You have been through much Little Wolf. Haste will lead to your destruction. Patience is the path.”

“You know of my pain, spirit?” he questioned.

“You carry it with you, upon your very being for all of creation to see. It calls to us. Loud. So very loud. That it cannot be ignored.” it answered.

“Compassion?” Solas' question softly, taking in the form before him a little more. “Is that what you are?”

“We are of the same mind, of the same belief, but Compassion we are not.”
“Then what are you?” Solas countered. “What virtue do you exalt on high?”

“For I have never met one as you.”

“Pride cannot know us,” it answered bluntly. “For we have no place with it.”

“Pride smothers us. Makes us weak. Dim...Snuffs us out like a candle in the wind. Like clouds that block the dawn. In its presence we shall fade into nothing. So we cannot go to its side. To help. To show a better path. To bring it back from the edge of the abyss.”

“Instead we must know patience. Accept. And wait for when Pride wanes. Dims. No longer so strong. So we are no longer weak. A moment in time. Short. So short. But possible. If we wait.”

“And when Pride wanes?” Solas questioned.

“It is our time. We become strong. We become able.”

“Able to do what?” he countered.

“To show the path that Pride should now take.”

Solas suddenly fell silent as the spirit’s words seem to hit home. Though it has not named itself, from its own admission there could be only one virtue that it embodies. For only one virtue can be smothered by Pride.

“Hope...” he accused gently. “You are hope.”

“Yes,” it answered, as he pulled himself to his feet and it swayed back from him.

“We have waited, so very long. Waited for the day when our Pride would finally fall. Would finally realize the path he walked carried him to his doom.” the spirit continued with wistful joy lacing its tone. “And the time has finally come.”
“Waited?” questioned Solas.


“A cycle of Pride’s folly seemingly without end. While the little ones wait.”

“Little ones?”

“We and Freedom,” it replied.

“We both wish to help. To save. To bring you to happiness.” it offered. “Wish to see you walk the path we wish you would.”

“Is that why you have come? Why you have appeared before me now?” Solas questioned. “To put me on the path that my pride kept me from?”

“Yes,” it answered.

“And, if I am not ready?” Solas tested.

“Then we would have never come,” it stated.

For a moment Solas falls silent, as the spirit’s own words seem to settle around him like a warm blanket. It had been far too many years since the last time he had ever seen even a glimmer of hope in the fade. For they rarely made themselves known. Lingering just along the edges of existence, they would always watch and wait and wish and want for a great many things. As was the nature of hope in all its forms. Never interacting directly, they would push and pull the conscious thought of mortals now and then. Nudging them towards their goals of a greater happiness. But never once had he ever known a spirit of Hope to blatantly and directly materialize and make its presence known to anyone. They were the peacekeepers, the gentle advice whispering in the back of the mind, an unseen hand pointing out the path, and a guide through the darkness of a chaotic life. A meddler of sorts, but never an out-right instigator.
It was unprecedented. Far too rare. And far more telling of his struggle to find Sarina than anything that had ever come before.

And that fact that was not lost on Solas one bit.

“Why have you come to me?” Solas questioned slowly. “You wish to help, correct? What can hope now do that before it could not?”

“You seek the daughter of Compassion’s greatest gift, do you not?”

“You know of Sarina?” he immediately countered as the spirit’s non-descript question was understood immediately.


“She fights and fights. Till her muscles ache and her mind numbs to that of the dullest of blades. Night after night. Month after month. She fights.”

“For the people. For the children. For the humans. For the Elves. And Elvhen. For the Dwarves and Qunari. For the spirits beyond the veil...”

“For her friends. For her Guardians. For the future...For her love...”

“She will fight...and fight...and fight...”

“Because she must. Because that is who she is. Because she will not allow another to die because of
her. No more blood. No more deaths. No more suffering. No more cries in the dark. Wails of sorrow. Screams of terror. Tears of heartache.”

“Not because of her. Never again because of her.”

“For there has been far too many already.”

The spirit suddenly pauses, almost as if something was suddenly interfering with its clairvoyance, and after a few moments pass it lets out a slow sigh.

“A sacrifice, willingly given, in hope.” it continues. “Hope that the world will find its peace: Its safety, Its happiness.”


“But simply because of a hope desperately clung to.”

“And so she fights...and fights...and shall until the bitter end.”

“All alone,” it added, opening its eyes once more.

“But she doesn’t need to fight alone.” Solas instantly countered.

“And that is why we have come.” the spirit replied. “For we cannot bring ourselves to stand and watch any longer. We must do.”

“What do you intend?” questioned Solas. “How do intend to bring an end to her suffering?”

“We cannot. The daughter of compassion has chosen. Chosen to suffer rather than putting those she loves in danger. We are hope. Her hope. Your hope. Their hope. We are everyone’s hope. But we cannot influence her. We have no power. Her compassion is far too strong. Far too bright. We cannot get near. Whisper in her ear. Show her the path that will lead to the destruction of the darkness. An end to her sacrifice.”
“And that is why you have come to Me.” sighed Solas knowingly.

“Yes,” it replied. “For you are the key.”

“Have always been the key...” it whispered softly.

“But the key to the lock of despair is troubled, is it not?” it questioned. “The secrets that hide. Hidden. Yet, now revealed. Torment you. Pinch and twist at your heart. And mind. Making you wonder.”

“A great many things, yes,” Solas answered.

“You doubt. You worry. Yet, behind it all, pride falls and hope rises...” the spirit continued. “More and more. Minute by minute. Hour by hour. Day by day. Your hope grows as does your worry.”

“You wish to help, save. Protect that which you love and set her free. But you are afraid. Afraid that you will fail. That she will fall. That you will never again hold her in your arms and speak the truth of your heart. A last chance. Desperate. Wanting. Wanting to believe. But fearing, so desperately fearing.”

“Can I save her? Does she want to be saved?” the spirit continued; quoting the thoughts that had been running around Solas’ mind ever since this journey began. “Will she accept my help? Will she trust my words? After so many lies? Can I undo all that I have wrought? Is it in my power? Or will I fail once more? Will she finally find her end because of the darkness? Or because of me? Will I have to watch her...?”

“Yes.” Solas interrupted, unable to allow the spirit to finish that final question, as he sighed deeply.

“We can help.” Hope seemingly smiled. “If that is what you desire.”

“But our help comes with a price.”
“Very well. Whatever price you ask of it, I will gladly pay.” Solas immediately answered. “If it is in my power to give.”

“We shall see...” Hope said with disbelief and skepticism lacing its tone.

“What do you wish of me?”

“A question; simple but not so; answered.”

“A question?” parroted Solas. “Curious. What could Hope wish to know from me that it could not already see on its own?”

“Your true purpose,” Hope replied. “Why do you seek freedom for the daughter of compassion?”

“Because I love her.”

“Pride’s ever spoken lies will not help you, Little Wolf.” Hope accused. “Lie to yourself if you must but our price cannot be paid with a clever ruse. Honest. Honesty is the only path.”

“You doubt my feelings for her?”

“We do not doubt. We know of love. Its gentle touch. Its caring whispers. Its everlasting presence.” Hope answered. “We see it lingering just beyond the edge of shadow, its voice hiding just beyond the surface. It walks beside you. Knows you. Carries your burdens as its own. Yet you see naught but its glimmer. A glimmer that should be a blaze that encompasses sight, thought, and feeling. You’ve ignored it, pushed it away, and forgotten it. Yet it still clings to you. A testament to that which you have held close but never wanted to acknowledge. Determined. Determination to see it through to the end. To show you the life you were meant to have. The love you were meant to know.”

“Yet it is diminished. Not because it is unhealthy. Weak. Or unknown. But because you seek to cling to it only when you fancy. It is an opportunity to you, not the blessing bestowed upon you by fate’s caring hand. Something to be used, and used again. A toy. A tactic. A way to find what you seek.”

“And that is why love has failed you. For you have failed love. Another failure. One of a great
many. Yet one you can rectify with one simple act.”

“To help you, to help her...we must help Love as well.” the spirit sighed. “For without love, Hope cannot hope to end the suffering of the daughter of compassion or the wolf of pride.”

“I see...” sighed Solas as he closed his eyes for a moment, mind mulling over Hope’s words with a sense of wonderment running through his mind. He would have never expected a rare spirit like hope to be so profound.

“Why do you seek to save the daughter of compassion, Little Wolf?” the spirit asked.

“To undo what I have done,” Solas answered honestly, for he no longer had a choice to choose posturing and evasions. “I have harmed her. Betrayed her. Broken her. It is a regret that I have always carried and a regret that I must rectify before...”

“Before you tear down that which keeps my kind locked away.” Hope interrupted immediately.

“But is that what you still intend?” questioned Hope. “To save her life only to use her once more. To trick her into allowing those sworn to protect her to make the sacrifice necessary to open the heart. To break the bonds of trust and of love only to reach your goal? To destroy the last vestiges of her love so that the People will rise once more?”

Solas instantly froze. Startled by the bluntness of Hope’s line of questioning, he hadn’t seen the spirit’s curiosity coming. Nor had he foreseen how such question would suddenly make him feel. He hadn’t thought about it in so very long. When he began his quest, his mind was clear. His goal certain. But as time passed, as the complexity of his beloved’s past came more and more into focus, the more he became engrossed in the knowledge of her. Allowing his goal, the reason behind his journey to slip completely from his mind.

His priorities had changed. So slowly, that he had never noticed.

But why? He still wanted to bring down the veil. To give the Elvhen people the second chance that they should have had long ago. To rectify all he had left in his wake the day he locked the Evanuris away. He had the means. With a simple spell, the heart, and the power of the Guardians the veil would fall in a matter of hours. And his new world would begin again. It was simply a matter of when and how. Sarina’s predicament was nothing more than a bump in the road. A detour that would only take a matter of moments before he returned to the path of his goal. But somehow, in just
a matter of a few short days, that detour had managed to bypass everything he had been determined to bring to fruition so smoothly that the transition was unnoticeable.

“Can you still be that cruel?” questioned Hope suddenly.

Snatched from his inner turmoil, Solas immediately flinched and look up at the spirit hovering just steps away.

“I...I don’t know.” Solas replied slowly.

“My people...they need me. This life...this devastation wrought upon them by mistake, must be undone. They must be free to live the life they have always deserved. And I must give it back to them.”

“But do they deserve such a life...Or even want it?” countered Hope.

“The young ones... those in the waking have lived through the millennia as mortals. It is all they know. All they would ever want. Yet you seek to take it from them.” the spirit inferred. “The sleeping...lost in dreams... no nothing of time and of the great wars that have raged on without them. The suffering. How the world has changed. Or how it will change them. They are not a part of this world. They are apart. And apart is where they must stay. Their time is gone. Lost in the annals of time. Swept away by the winds of change. Yet you seek to bring them back. To sacrifice the living for the sake of the dead or lost.”

“Do you not care for what they want?” asked Hope; a challenge. “Or is the suffering each will face in the wake of your decision, not of your concern?”

“I care about what will happen.” countered Solas, his tone almost angry. “I have never stopped caring about the fate of my people.”

“But what about those you would willingly sacrifice for YOUR PEOPLE?” retorted Hope; its voice rising and falling in inflection with every spoken word. “Do they not matter? Do their lives mean nothing to you? DOES HER LIFE MEAN NOTHING TO YOU?”

“I...” stammered Solas.
“You seek to save your people but have yet to realize that her people are your people too.” Hope stated bluntly. “For you cannot have one without the other.”

“The veil will fall and the mortals will die. Leaving the ancients alone to navigate the sea of time unaided. War, suffering, disease, and death will ensue. Chaos and confusion will rain down upon the world like the greatest of monsoons. Unable to be stopped. Unable to be quelled. And so many more will be lost...”

“And in the end, the blame will be placed at your feet once more. Blame that will once again be earned.”

“Is that what you want?” Hope questioned.

“To destroy the last of her hope?”

“To undo all that she has bravely done. To sacrifice she who was the only peace your heart ever knew...”

“To die, to sacrifice your pride, your hope, and your love, only to condemn the fate of the people as you have done so before?”

“NO!” Solas answered forcefully as the full weight of his path suddenly hit him dead in the chest.

“Then the little wolf’s path much change. Must find another way. For the path you now walk shall end as such. And the world will be forever diminished because of it.”

“How can you be so certain?” questioned Solas.

Solas nodded.

“I understand.”

“Do you? Truly?” questioned Hope, its voice suddenly lighter than before.

Solas nodded once again.

“Then answer our question, Little Wolf.” the spirit smiled. “Why do you seek freedom for the daughter of compassion?”

“Because...” Solas replied, his voice strong. “She and the world have suffered enough.”

“Very good...Little Wolf.” Hope bowed, conceding to his answer reverently. “Very good.”

In the next moment, Hope suddenly shimmered and turned from Solas. Floating farther into the large field in which they stood, Hope then stopped near a small pool of water that immediately appeared near its feet.

“Our question answered,” Hope called out, its voice suddenly echoing. “Our price paid. Now see the path you must take to save that which you hold so dear.”

In that instant, the pool immediately disappeared just as Solas felt a massive barrier, so large that it encompassed the entire clearing, snap around him with a thunderous boom as the field, before him, darkened and decayed in the blink of an eye. Darkness surrounded him in a flash of macabre and malevolent energy, and his world instantly went black. So black that not even a speck of light could be seen. For several breaths, Solas stood there unable to move or even think.

Unsure of what was happening or what Hope had done, he took a single step and immediately called out to the spirit.

“HOPE!”
As his call echoed through the darkness, he instantly felt a warmth fill the area just to his left. Turning his head, he caught the very moment when Hope materialized. Relieved, he turned to face the spirit and waited for it to speak once more.

“The darkness...” hope began, and the moment it spoke the fade around them both suddenly grew excruciatingly cold. “A being, once the eternal embodiment of love, whose sacrifice saved an innocent life, is ancient.”

“Losing its life in ages past...It accepted oblivion willingly. Having lived a virtuous and blessed life. Dwelled happily in the void. Lost to time. Knowing that it had brought happiness to all around it...”

“It never wanted to return. Accepted its fate. Accepted its existence. Accepted its end with an understanding and knowing heart...But...”

“But?” Solas parroted softly, as his eyes suddenly caught movement in the distance. A dark mist swirling just beyond the edge of sight.

“It was forced,” answered Hope. “Not intended. Not wanted. Not expected.”


“And it was corrupted. Changed.”

“Sarina...” gasped Solas softly, turning his eyes back to the darkness. “She summoned it.”

“Not out of malice but out of desperation and misdirected desire.” Hope repeated.

“I don’t understand,” Solas replied.

“Protected. She must be protected. One is not enough. Two is not enough. Not even three or four. The circle must be complete. They Guardians whole...He must be my fifth. He is my fifth. The
embodiment of my heart and my pride. Vhenan. Ma’vhenan. He is the one. The only one. My only....”

“But he will not accept. Will not swear the oath. For he fears. He hides and defers. Struggles. He struggles. Regrets. So many regrets. Knows not. But should know. Cannot speak the truth. Say the words. Show him the truth...make him understand. Want.”

“But he must be the last. He is my love. My only...”

At that moment a bright ringing light flashed near Solas’ hand. Looking down, he instantly noticed that the ring that Sarina had given him years ago was suddenly glowing softly.

She had called it a gift. One of remembrance, so that no matter what happened, where they went or how they would end, he would never forget her. And he foolishly believed her.

“No...” Solas whispered softly, instantly recognizing its similarity to the rings that Dorian had once worn years ago and the one that Bull still wears to this day. “It’s not possible.”

“Tell me it’s not true!” he immediately demanded, spinning towards Hope. “Tell me that Sarina did not try to bond me to one of the Eternal Guardians.”

“That would be...” he added, trailing off as horror exploded across his face.

“The end of existence as we know it...” Hope answered, raising its hand and lighting the darkness instantly.

“The darkness that haunts her...” came a very familiar, yet tortured, voice echoing through the stillness of the moment.

Turning, he caught the very moment when an image of Sarina; being held by the throat by a shadowy and smoky figure dressed in shimmering black mage robes; appeared before them.

“Ir abelas, ma’vhenan.” she cried out, tears streaming down her face in absolute sorrow.

“The darkness that haunts her...” Hope mourned softly, looking upon Sarina’s tormented form.
“That traps her and that she fights...”

“Is... The embodiment... of love gone wrong...”

“Love corrupted by the greatest of pride.”

“And forever changed....”

“By the wolf’s very own deceit.”

“To become nothing more than...”

“Vengeance.”
Chapter Summary

Hope reveals more details about the darkness that has become Sarina's compulsion and offers Solas the way out. A way to save her. But what price such an act will cost, the sacrifice required, is a choice that he would have never thought he would have to make.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"How do I kill it?" demanded Solas, his eyes narrowing almost viciously at the dark creature holding Sarina’s visage hostage.

“You cannot,” Hope replied.

“Are you saying that it cannot be killed?”

“No...It is not immortal. Undying. But, the hand of death, cannot be dealt, by Pride’s own hand."

“Why?”

“As you are Pride changed by Love, so too, is it Love tainted by the greatest of Pride,” Hope replied. “A mirror. Linked. Bound. Bound by magic. Different but not. Two halves of the same whole.”

“Half?” Solas questioned softly, glancing down at the ring upon his finger, and then back to the creature. In that moment the shadow seemed to shimmer and take a familiar form. A form that only a mirror could truly create.

“It is....me?” Solas questioned, dread pooling in his heart like a maelstrom, as he looked upon his very own, yet shadowy, face.
“Yes...” replied Hope. “But not. It is both you and something else. An ancient soul from ages past whose connection to her is seeded in the blood of her people.”

“I don’t understand,” Solas replied.

“Those who protect, do so by the blessing of those that came before. That in ages past protected a beauty unlike any other with nothing but love in their hearts.” Hope began.

“Loyalty, Justice, Faith, Redemption, and Valor.”

“Five indomitable, virtuous spirits with a determination like no other, who sought the world of the living through immortal men in hopes that the White Queen’s life may be changed. That she, with a purity and compassion unlike none that came before her, could live to see her life anew; and so her precious bloodline could stand the test of time. As a testament to her kind.”

“It was Loyalty that first made the journey....”

At Hope’s claim, an echo of thunder clapped across the dark sky and a gust of wind –carrying with it the smell of fresh earth and rain –blew through the darkness. At the sound, and feel, Solas turned to see a glowing figure manifest itself just off to the left of where they stood. For a moment it resonated chaotically, holding no shape except that of a coalescing mist and then, in the blink of an eye, it solidified leaving behind the image of a man-like spirit trapped in the coils of a great serpent.

“So struck by her beautiful heart, her determination to protect those she knew and did not, setting the path for those who would follow.”

It was in that moment, that the wind picked up, gusting harshly in several directions at once. Solas watched in awe as each stream of flowing air swirled around one another before scattering into four separate streams and crashing down upon the ground all around him. Turning slowly, taking in each coalescing maelstrom, he watched as each turned as the first had done. Beside the serpent, appeared a man-like spirit cradled by the body of a cobalt blue dragon. The next, riding astride a golden Lion, stood across from the serpent, and beside it, a man standing –his arms crossed resolutely across his chest –with a fiery bird perched upon his shoulder.

And standing between them, dressed in shiny regalia and armored for war, was a great white wolf with no rider.
Solas immediately understood the reason behind their manifestation. A creation of Hope’s own words in spirit form. To illustrate its defining point. It was symbolism at its finest. A glimmer of the past so that he would not forget.

But among them all, it was the wolf that had struck him deeply.

For the true form of Valor, unbound to another, had been revealed.

‘The Wolf...’

“Or so it thought.” the spirit sighed.

At its admission, each of the spirits vanished leaving only the visage of Sarina clutched in the darkened grasp of his mirror.

“For one had crossed the barrier between the spirit world and the living, long before.”

“One who gave its blessing upon a man, with such integrity, that she who was to be protected could not ignore that which pulled her to him. A man that owned her heart long before he ever laid eyes upon her, or she, he. The embodiment of Love, in immortal form, blessed by the spirit of Love itself.”

Again Hope’s words came to life, as another gust of wind bolted through the clearing and struck the ground with a thunderous boom. This time kicking up dust and the ambient magic of the fade instantly –forming a cloud of particles that shimmered and radiated with a strange pulse before fading away. In its wake, stood a man dressed in a strange armor that flickered in a strange blue hue.

“Her first true protector.”

“Tiar!” Solas suddenly exclaimed, as the memory of Sarina telling the story of the Guardians to Dorian flashed through his mind and he took in the image of the man with long white hair and strong, resilient features standing before him. “Tiar, her husband, was...a Guardian?”

“Yes and no,” replied Hope. “Love did not cross the beyond to protect her. Its reasoning was at the base of its true nature. Love loved her. Wanted her to be happy. And sought a way to make it so. It
searched for years, among the immortals of the world, until it found the one that would be the man that would be her beloved for all time.”

“And, he was so. Did so. Far stronger and for far longer than Love would have ever imagined. Taking his love for her to his very grave. His last moments, thoughts and words of her, crossing into oblivion with nothing but love in his heart and an enduring thankfulness of having lived a life blessed by her presence.”

“His death...” Solas sighed softly.

“Was the catalyst; for all that followed,” Hope answered softly, Tiar’s image disappearing at its words. “Loyalty, so moved by Love’s gift, the happiness that it brought...and so moved by the despair that followed its loss, chose to touch her mind and give her the knowledge that would lead her to the spirit world’s greatest of blessings. And so, too, was she then, moved, determined to accept their gifts as they saw fit.”

“And, so, the great Queen was blessed by the five virtues. And the guardians came to be.”

“And Tiar?” Solas questioned, turning to Hope.

“Slept happily in the void, knowing that he had spent his immortal life blessed by a love so great that peace eternally reigned within his heart.” Hope intoned. “Until...”

“Sarina...”

“Yes.” Hope nodded. “Her love for you is strong, Little Wolf. So, strong that it called to him. Made him see her. Made him want to help her. To bless her with the joy of the life he had lived. It pulled, tugged, at his heart until he could no longer ignore. And so he crossed the endless void to bestow upon her that which had brought him such an eternal comfort.”

“But, Love was met by Pride.”

“Yes,” Hope replied with an errant groan-like sigh. “A pride so strong that Love could not break it. Like fists pounding upon the stone, it fought. Pushed, pulled, tear and tore, shake and shook. Fought to shatter its shield. Fought to break down its walls and find the heart within. But it could not get in. Could not pass the barrier of pride’s own will.”
“Pain, so much pain. So much heartache and sadness.”

“He must help. He must get through. He must give her what she truly needs. She must know the joy that pride keeps from her. That pride denies her.”

“And so it fought... for mere moments, what seemed like ages upon ages, and in the end, the fight changed him. Tainted him with pride, anger, frustration, fear. Until, hate and vengeance, was all that he knew.”

“A determination that became a detriment. A love changed. Turned. Twisted. Corrupted by the wolf’s pride, it is now trapped, yet not so. Locked in its existence. A prisoner of its own emotions. Its own wants, desires, demands. Its memories, a mirror. The same but not so. It seeks to find its freedom. Yet. Unable to see its way out.”

“Save, for her.”

“For she is the door that keeps it locked away.”

“She is the embodiment of its desire; its want, its need.” Hope continued. “But as it loves her, so too, does it hate her. Wishes to keep her at its side, but pushes her away all the same. Anger. Betrayal. Lust. Hate. Love. Fear. Desire. Want. Need. Twisted and warped as one. It torments her. Honeyed words on honeyed lips mingle with sorrowful words on viciously uncaring ones. Wanting her but hating her, it tortures her with the things she cannot have, things she cannot change. Entices her with all that her heart bleeds for. Promises that she will have all that she desires. Yet, they will never be.”


“Goal?”

“To break her. To fracture her will. To shatter the last of her spirit. Numb the mind and ensnare the senses. To coerce, confine, change the mind...So that she will give in. No longer fight. No longer hold it back.”
“And when that happens, when she no longer has the will to fight?”

“The door will open. It will be free. The prison she has built to keep it locked in the fade will fall. And Vengeance will be set loose upon the land of the waking to flow as freely as water rushes over a broken dam.”

“Allowing Vengeance to wreak upon the world what it has, so too, wrought upon her.”

“That cannot happen.” Solas declared. “The destruction Vengeance would cause....”

“How do I stop it?”

“For every door, there is a key, Little Wolf,” Hope replied.

“Key?” Solas questioned softly. “You’ve said that before. Said that I was the key. What does that mean?”

“A door has many uses. It opens. It closes. It welcomes. It bars. It secures. It reveals uncertainty. Protects from the outside. Holds all within. A symbol of both acceptance and not. Inviting. Excluding. A barrier to be crossed, by choice or by force. To keeps all close or set one free...”

“But a key has only two. It has not the ability to take from the world nor give. But it can choose.”

“Choose?”

“To trap those within or set them free.”

“Hope...” sighed Solas deeply, frustration lacing his tone. “If you would please, speak plainly. I know it is your nature. To speak with innuendo and hyperbole. But now is not the time to be unsure. If there is a way for me to save Sarina, I beg you, please tell me.”
“Very well,” replied Hope. “You are the key that must choose to open the lock. Whether or not to set her free.”

“To defeat the darkness that taints and ties both you and the Ancient one, known as Tiar, that torments and tortures your beloved, you must choose to sacrifice...Your determination and drive. What you want most. And choose her, and only her.”

“Only then can you truly be free. Only then will Vengeance fade, and Love return. Only then will the daughter of compassion finally find peace.”

“She has been betrayed by belief.” Hope stated bluntly. “A trick of the mind. A fallacy. An old story, spoken by a non-believer, written in a coveted text that has lived throughout the ages, that warns of the darkness and its existence. A warning that, while partially true, is false.”

“And she has accepted such knowledge. Taking it as truth. And by doing so has chosen to suffer rather than to destroy that which haunts her. Out of fear, that with its death, so too will death find you.”

"The link between the wolf of Pride and Vengeance...bound. Cannot have one without the other. The same. Together. To kill one, the other must die.” Hope quoted wistfully.

“He cannot die.” Sarina’s voice suddenly echoed in the distance. “I will not take his life. He must live. He must know the truth. I must fight. Vengeance will not cover the world. I will hold it back. I will keep it locked away. But I will not destroy it. I will not choose to lose that which I love most.”

“So, you choose...suffering instead?” came an ethereal voice echoing from far away, its voice sounding like that of Hope’s.

“I will not speak the words. Give the order!” Sarina’s voice answered adamantly. “I will not take its life. I will not take HIS life. I will keep it contained. Locked away. For as long as it takes. For as long as I am able.”

“And when you are no longer able?” the same ethereal voice questioned. “Will you banish the darkness then?”

“I will never be UNABLE!” Sarina’s voice shouted before it suddenly faded into nothing.

“You came to her...” breathed out Solas.
“We all did.” came a familiar voice, sounding off just behind him.

Turning, Solas immediately caught sight of a spirit he knew all too well.

“Cole?” he questioned, looking at the spirit with curiosity. Something about him seemed off. In the Fade, he should have been corporeal. More solid. But, strangely, he seemed: barely there, like a whisper.

“Many times.” continued Cole. “But she will not listen. She wants to fight. Needs to fight. Because she doesn’t want anyone to die.”

“We must make her understand.” came the echoing voice of Hope, but not from the spirit standing in the fade at Solas’ side but a vision of the past flickering just beyond the edge of sight.

Solas immediately understood. It was a memory. Hope’s memory. Of a time when Compassion had come to her.

“She believes that Solas will die if she destroys the darkness,” Cole spoke plainly. “That they are so, too, bound that no other outcome will come to be. The darkness. The corruption. She knows how to destroy it. To restore Love to the way it should be. It would only take a simple act. One simple command. But she will not speak the words. Her friends will suffer, to protect her. But she will not force them to do what they do not wish to do. Nor will she force them to take upon the burden that she has, herself, created.”

“So she hides. Masks her presence. The wolf at her side the only one who knows.”

“They search. Search for her in the far-flung corners of the world. Pull upon their bond. Call out to her in the darkness of the night. Search the beyond. Their hope and worry strong. But, still, she hides. She doesn’t want them to know. To worry more. Or, worse, to offer a way out. She will not allow them to give up apart of themselves to set her free. Sacrifice that which has made them whole. A family.”

“They have suffered enough.”
With those words, Cole’s visage suddenly faded leaving Solas alone with Hope once more.

Taking a moment to sift through all that had been revealed, Solas closed his eyes and tried to understand what Hope was trying to tell him. With so much at once, his mind was a cacophony of thoughts so chaotic that it was hard to settle them all. For a few minutes, he tried to put two and two together but before he could come up with a simple determination, Hope spoke again.

“Now do you understand, Little Wolf?” questioned Hope. “Your beloved has always known how to destroy the corruption that has tainted the man once called Tiar. But has chosen not to do so for fear that your bond with it will take your life as well.”

“But that is not what will happen?” Solas questioned.

“No,” answered Hope. “Yet she believes it still. And will not accept anything other than the possibility of your death as truth.”

“Fear. It is her fear that truly keeps her suffering. That demands her sacrifice.” Hope continued. “But it is unneeded.”

“You said she knows how to destroy the corruption, but chooses not to do so because of me?” questioned Solas. “But how can it be destroyed?”

“The Guardians have the power,” Hope answered bluntly. “They have the ability. A simple spell, but not so. That can banish the corruption and restore Love to its proper place. But to do so, they must sacrifice the bond with the daughter of compassion. Break the chains that bind them to both her and the Ancient Virtues, and free the magic that contains them.”

“In other words, they must relinquish all that makes them what they now are.” sighed Solas.

“And return to the world as mortal men. Unbound. To she...that once was everything.” Hope answered.

“But to be done, a price must be paid,” it added.
“A price?” parroted Solas.

“Paid not by those that protect, but by what the daughter of compassion protects most.”

“The price...” Solas intone. “Is mine to pay?”

“Yes.”

“And what price does such a decision ask of me?” he immediately countered questioningly.

“Within your grasp, you covet close a relic of a forgotten time. A relic found hidden in a place so ancient that none but the first ones could ever have known it existed. Kept safe, a promise fulfilled by the last of the blood...stolen from your very own keep as they fled from the greatest tragedy their world had ever known...”

“A precious thing, one of a kind, a stone of immense power. Asleep. Dormant. Yet, not so...”

“That has retained the ability to return the world to the way things were without losing a single life...to bring peace to the world once more...”


“Yes, so it is called. But it is more, so much more. Something beyond all that has come before it. Or will ever come after....”

“A soul...the solidified remnants of an ancient soul...Of the fade’s very first spirit of Peace, Atishalan, born at the dawn of time...” Hope added knowingly. “Who was the last to fall, sacrificed itself in hopes to save, when the great city turned black and fell from existence...”

“You know of the stone’s origin?”

“We know a great many things, Little Wolf;” answered Hope almost sarcastically. “And we also know that even the power of the All-Mother, which you now horde, is not enough to awaken its
“For only the power of an ancient blessed by the fade’s gracious hand can summon forth Atishalan’s greatest wish.”

Solas immediately sighed.

“And the Guardians have such power...” Solas admitted. “That’s why...”

“We are well aware of your intentions, Little Wolf.” Hope practically spat irritably. “Your true purpose, the original truth behind your journey. You sought to find, and persuade your beloved – dangling her final words to you before her very eyes, her very heart– in hopes to convince her to help you find the Eternal Guardians, so they may sacrifice themselves and set peace free upon the land. Tearing down the Veil and restoring all that which was lost.”

“Never knowing that it was she, who now commanded them in this time,” Hope added, eyeing him with a look of both irritation and sympathy. “Or that there would come a time when this world would require something so much more of you that you would have ever thought.”

“Require of me?”

“The price you must pay. The sacrifice to make. It is the one thing that has guided your steps from the moment the eternal dream set you free. The one thing, above even her, that you wanted the most.”

“For every choice has a consequence.”

“Consequence?” Solas questioned, unsure of Hope’s words. “I...I don’t understand.”

“The magic you wish to invoke, to shatter the Veil and save your people, can only be set loose...Once!” Hope concluded bluntly.

“So the choice is yours, Little Wolf.” sighed Hope.
“Sacrifice your goal: Choose your beloved, over the Veil, and convince her to destroy the darkness and set Love free....and save her life. Or, call upon the Guardians yourself, abandoning her once again...to the monster who torments her, and coerce them to set Atishalan’s greatest wish free upon the land.”

“For you cannot have both.”

“Cannot save both.”

“You must choose.”

At Hope’s final declaration, an unfathomable scream rocked through the fade pulling Solas’ eyes toward where his beloved was held imprisoned, only to watch in horror as his mirror suddenly –and unmercifully– ripped her throat out with one steely, ichor-covered claw.

Solas awoke screaming in terror; his mind awash with a chaotic panic that overwhelmed every bit of him; thrashing violently against the makeshift bedroll he had been placed in. For several harrowing moments all he could see, hear, and feel was the utter agony, heartbreak, and all-encompassing fear of Sarina’s inevitable death.

So lost to his emotions, the air all around him began to hum; turning unbearably cold yet almost electrified with a torturous surge of his magic; building and building, inching ever-closer to the precipice. Nearing the edge of all restraint. Looming just before all would be lost.

And then, nothing; as a strange sense of an immutable peace immediately washed over him like a torrential downpour from out of, seemingly, nowhere.

His mind instantly cleared, like that of someone dumping ice cold water upon his head, and he finally registered the feel of a warm glowing hand sitting upon his shoulder.

Solas turned, letting out a settling huff as his eyes fell upon a familiar form.

“You were in pain,” informed Cole. “I had to come.”

Without a word, Solas’ face contorted into a grimace of torment and heartbreak before being buried within in his own hands.

No tears fell. No wails of sorrow or regret filled the air. As Solas seemed to fall into the dark chasm
of thought of what was to come.

For several long moments, Cole only watched the man before him. Choosing not to speak until he knew he should. It was Abelas who broke the tension in the small space, entering the tent in frantic worry –seemingly startled from his own dreams from Solas’ devastating cry in the middle of the night. Noticing the Sentinel, Cole motioned for Abelas to be calm and wait. Understanding the spirit boys wordless request, Abelas let out a shaky breath and joined them both on the tent floor.

For a few more moments, all was quiet –save for the intake and release of breaths shared between them all and then, Cole spoke.

“Hope is not always the most kind.” sighed Cole. “I am sorry, my friend.”

“You expected it...?” Solas questioned through his hands, as he tried to come to grips with what he must now do.

“It is not subtle in its ways.” Cole reply. “Evasive. Perhaps. But not subtle. I knew there would come a time where it would no longer be able to stand by, content to watch.”

“Then you know what it revealed?”

“Yes,” answered Cole with a nod.

“Then why did you not tell me, Cole?” countered Solas, finally raising his eyes to look at the boy suspiciously.

“You know I could not,” he answered. “Sarina...She would not allow me to speak of it. Would not force me to take sides. To be caught in the middle. A promise I had to keep. No matter the outcome...”

“Do not interfere. Do not become a part of this. I don’t want to see you hurt...changed because of my foolishness...she said.”

“He can never know...until the time is done...she said.”

“Time is done?” Abelas parroted immediately. “What did she mean by that?”
“It means...” Solas answered. “Until she died...Cole could not insert himself into her destiny. Could not change what was meant to happen.”

“But not in the living...” Cole added, a slight smirk upon his face, looking like the cat who stole the cream. “Only when the fade shows her death, her real death, to him, can I seek to bring peace.”

“Cole?” Solas asked with both suspicion and confusion lacing his tone.

“But not in the living...” Cole added, a slight smirk upon his face, looking like the cat who stole the cream. “Only when the fade shows her death, her real death, to him, can I seek to bring peace.”

“Cole?” Solas asked with both suspicion and confusion lacing his tone.

“Not now. Time is short. The days of her sacrifice dwindle.” Cole answered. “No longer am I bound to keep silent.”

“I don’t think that is what she meant,” muttered Abelas.

“It matters not.” Cole replied. “She is my friend. I watched. Waited. Like Hope. In hope...that she would see reason. But she will not. Not long as she believes that Solas will die. The others. Those that love her. Guardians. Call out to me from their dreams. Dreams full of worry. Of fear. Of regret and heartbreak...Dreams that some never had till before becoming hers. But they call out still. Begging. Begging for me to help them. Help them find her. Help them save her. And, I could not. But no longer. Not anymore. I will help save my friend. My sister.”

“Your heart.” Cole added pointedly as he looked Solas dead in the eye.

“You were never supposed to set our path to Tevinter, were you Cole?” questioned Abelas. “You were never supposed to help us.”

“No...I was not.” answered the spirit boy. “But Varrie said that not all rules are hard as stone. Some can be bent. Especially for those we love.”

“She is...Family. The only family I could ever know...” Cole added resolutely. “And I will not allow her to die alone.”

“Then help us now, Cole,” Solas begged. “You know where she has gone. ‘The place of Pride’ where is it?”
“Solas...” answered Cole with a sigh before falling utterly silent.

For a moment, Solas and Abelas waited for Cole to finish what it was he had begun to say but as minutes passed they realized that there was nothing more.

“I don’t understand Cole,” replied Solas. “Where has Sarina gone?”

“Solas...The place where pride lines the streets. Soaks into every building. And graces the minds of every resident...Solas.”

For a few seconds Abelas and Solas say nothing, and then if somehow struck by some strange urge, the Sentinel mutters ‘It can’t be that simple.’ and immediately bolts up from the floor and darts out of the tent. He is gone for only a few breaths before he reenters carry a rolled up piece of parchment. Dropping to his knees, he pulls the scroll’s leather cording loose and opens it to reveal a somewhat detailed, yet very old map of Tevinter and begins to search the map with both his finger and his eyes. And then he sees it. What his mind had barely registered a moment before. A faint memory of an old map from so long ago. Seen in the halls of Mythal’s temple.

“Here!”

Abelas instantly pointed to a tiny spot on the crumbling map. A dot. Almost so insignificant that had he not remembered of its existence it would have never been seen. Marking the whereabouts of an obscure, forgotten village nestled just beyond Nevarran borders, in the silent sands of a great desert.

A place which was once lush and green. Forever changed by a corruption far greater than any the world would ever forget.

“Solas...” Abelas breathed out.

Solas leaned forward, his eyes zeroing on where his friend now pointed and suddenly froze as the name of the village stared back at him with its very own Pride.
“The Place of pride.” breathed out Cole. “The village lost in the sands of silence...”

“The village of Solas.”

Chapter End Notes

A question (for curiosity sake) did anyone realize that the 'Place of Pride' mentioned at the beginning of the story was actually referring to the village of Solas in southern Tevinter before it was revealed? I'm curious to see if it was too obvious from the get go.
Sahren Demands Justice.

Chapter Summary

Solas and Abelas pass through the Eluvian, and crossing into Tevinter lands with an urgency like no other, they race towards their goal. Never knowing that, all the while, the will of a Guardian is stalking their very steps.

Alternate Title: The whisper on the wind.

Fast, frantic, and more feverishly than the wind, Solas spurred his mount with a determination unlike no other as he raced towards the woman he loved as the environment around him settled into an indescribable blur around him.

After Cole’s admission of Sarina’s true location, a panic and a hurriedness had enveloped his every thought. He had to get to her. He had to make this right. He had to save her.

They had left that very morning, just after daybreak. Passing through the Eluvian before first light and materializing on the border of Tevinter in the eastern foothills near the base of the mountains just as a thunderstorm drenched the world in wind and water. Undetermined, taking naught a second of hesitation, they mounted their steeds and immediately headed west, towards their nearest outpost some hundred miles south of Qarinus and more than a half a day’s journey from the eastern border.

“We’ll need fresh horses if we are going to traverse the Sands of Silence.” Abelas had said.

And he was right. The mounts they now used were not built for such harsh conditions and they would not last in the all-encompassing heat of the day, nor the frigidity of the night that the great desert would bring. They would have to stop. That was certain. But he had no intentions of stopping or staying for very long.

For Cole’s words, his declaration that his beloved’s time of sacrifice had grown short, tormented him constantly. As did the vision of her demise so succinctly provided by Hope’s incursion into his dreams.
But the horror of what would happen if they failed, if he failed, haunted him most of all.

The vision of her death, at the forefront of his mind, was all that he could think about. From the moment he had come to know of the darkness that haunted her, the spirit that held her prisoner and how she had taken upon herself to protect the world from something far more dangerous than his very self, he could not stem the growing worry that quickly morphed into undeniable panic.

A panic that thunderously roared the moment he learned of the dark spirit’s origins.

And...its true name.

Vengeance.

He had always known his beloved to be capable, sometimes even miraculous, in her ability to overcome almost anything. That she had the strength of will to face anything, head on, and come out the other side victorious. But this, this was something that not even she could defeat on her own.

For Vengeance was far more powerful than any creature that ever, or would ever, exist.

Such a malicious and destructive spirit had, only once before, been unleashed upon the world. Set free from the deepest depths of the void itself, by the act of an innocent who could have never known how their very actions would have condemned them all. A condemnation that, controlled solely by its own twisted and vicious emotions with a voraciousness and madness of a rabid animal, desired nothing more than the complete and utter destruction of all of creation.

In the span of days, its touch had spread across the whole of Thedas; decimating entire families, cities, and countries in its wake; as it poised itself to destroy all of existence in a flurry and fury of insurmountable darkness. Until, by an act of chance, it was mysteriously destroyed by the most unlikely of heroes. Gone. Dead. Banished back to the void from whence it came.

But not. For it was a spirit whose memory, even centuries upon centuries after its defeat, still lingered upon the trembling lips and horrified minds of the whole of Thedas to this day. Whose touch still mars the land where it once roamed and whose essence still taints all who come across it.

For Vengeance was the beginning, the progenitor of the greatest threat to all life.
The true source.

The epitome of death and decay.

An unyielding end.

That has yet to be truly destroyed for all eternity.

*The Blight.*

“No,” Solas swore, shaking his head adamantly. “It will never touch this world again. Vengeance will never come to reign once more. Not as long as I still draw breath.”

“Not again.”

Digging in his heels, Solas spurred his mount with fervor—crying out for the creature to find its wind—with a desperation he had not felt in the entirety of his life. A feeling far more foreign than he would have ever thought. It now consumed him, body and soul. So much so, that in his indescribable desire to find her, to save her, he could not even fathom how he would be able to do such a thing.

How would he be able to convince her that her path would lead her to her bitter destruction? That she must see reason? That she must fight this feeling, this belief that her life was worth far less than the world? Than his? And understand that this choice, this fight, was not just hers to bear?

That it had never been.

He didn’t know. He didn’t know, but he must find a way. He must. For she could not die. Not like this. Not because of him. She would not be lost to the world. Not because of love. Not because he dared, for glimmering moment, to find peace in a destiny that would snuff out such a moment before it could take root. Not because he dared to hope, for one glorious moment, of a life lived happily in her arms.
Not because he dared to love her.

No.

Vengeance will not have her!

As the monsoon continued to drench the world around them, Solas and Abelas barreled into the southern camp around mid-afternoon to a flurry of activity. Jerking the reigns, Solas pulled his mount to a skidding stop and jumped off effortlessly only to be immediately met by a scout; an elder Dalish Bowman. Solas instantly relayed the situation, of what he was willingly going to concede, as concisely as possible. In a manner of minutes, two young scouts appeared holding the reins of two large, Taslin Striders tacked and supplied with food and water rations fit for more than a week’s journey. With the horses provided, Solas immediately began removing his belongings from the saddlebags of his horse that had carried him thus far and packing them away with the new mount as Abelas did the same.

Such moments passed by quickly, but not quickly enough in Solas’ eyes. He need to leave soon, should have long since been gone, for time waits for no man.

Opening his final saddlebag, Solas removed the small chest that had been delivered to him by Iron Bull that fateful night just a day ago, and –for a moment –took it in with a much clearer mind than he had that night. It was small, but not minuscule. Held some adornment but not much. And was far lighter than he had expected. It was a puzzlement, but not so much as its contents. He had not dared to open it as of yet. Far too distracted by the news of Sarina’s location to pay it any mind. But he had not forgotten it. Nor the key that now draped around his neck.

But there was no time. No time to open it. No time to reveal what secrets it may hold. Finding her now was far more important. It would have to wait.

As he tucked the chest into the rear saddlebag of his new Strider, a flash of movement flickered in the corner of his eye causing him to turn to look in Abelas’ direction. The man had long finished moving his belongings and had already mounted his steed by the time Solas had looked up. But that was not what had caught his attention. It was Abelas’ hand, and how he had been flexing it with a barely hidden hint of pain on his face.

“How do you fare?”
Solas did not miss the moment Abelas realized he was being spoken to, nor did he miss how the Sentinel immediately tucked his hand out of sight the moment he heard Solas’ words.

“Well,” answered Abelas, before he looked up at the sky and quickly changed the subject. “The storm is expected to clear before daybreak, tomorrow, and there is no change to the area’s relative safety since the last report.”

“So we shouldn’t encounter any obstacles between here and the desert’s edge,” he concluded, looking back at Solas. “With luck, it will only take four days before we reach her.”

‘He’s knowingly avoiding the question.’ Solas realized.

But before he could question further, or call out the Sentinel for his blatant attempt at misdirection, he noticed how Abelas’ eyes suddenly looked up and past him. Turning to see what had caught his friend’s attention, he immediately noticed something he had not expected coming towards them.

Cole: mounted and set to join them.

“You intend to follow?” questioned Solas as the spirit-boy gently pulled his horse to stop a few feet from where they now stood.

Cole nodded.

“Time is growing short.” the boy answered, tightening his grip on the reins. “The time for watching and waiting is over. My time is now. I am needed.”

“Very well.” accepted Solas before setting his foot in the saddle’s stirrups and climbing atop his mount. Abelas’ avoidance quickly forgotten. “Then let us be off.”

They set off, once more, with haste. Heading west through the southern grassland, they followed an old trail once only traveled by farmers and venturing traders –making sure to avoid the heavily traveled King’s Road.

For Solas was not fool. His name, his likeness, and his legend were all well known in Tevinter. As
were the rumors of his intentions these last few years and his perceived guilt in being the mastermind behind Elven slaves disappearing from their Master's homes in droves. If he were to be recognize, or worse captured, he would be forced to make a decision that was already made. He would do anything to save Sarina. Even if that made him have to choose killing all those who dared blocked his path. Even innocents. If it came to it.

Even if, in his heart, he didn’t want it to be so. He would not allow another to stop him now. Not now that he was so close.

Hours passed in a rush and a blur, and soon night blanketed the world. Undetermined, dismissing the several attempts made by both Abelas and Cole to convince him to stop and rest for the night, Solas pressed on without restraint. His determination blinding him to everything but his goal.

*Never noticing what was going on within his band until it was too late.*

Several hours had passed since the moon, high above, had reached its peak. The storm had finally lulled into dull and listless intermittent showers that foretold of its coming end. The wind had died down. And the group’s hastiness had slowed with it. No longer fast and furious, yet still steady, they continued across the darkened grassland with only the light of the moon shining down upon them through slowly clearing clouds and the glow from Solas’ staff to guide them. In the silencing din of the night.

“SOLAS!” suddenly came Cole’s panicked voice.

Surprised by the call, snatched out of his deep thoughts, Solas jerked up his head from where it had settled with a start. As Cole’s words hit him, he immediately yanked the reins of his horse and turned to look behind him. In the darkness, eyes straining, he could only see the outline of Cole’s rider-less horse and the strange silhouette of someone standing beside Abelas. Grasping his glowing staff, Solas swung his leg over and swiftly dismounted his horse before venturing the noticeable distance between where he had stopped and where they now lingered. As the light from his staff chased away the shadows between them, he began to realize that something was wrong. By the time he made it within feet of both of his dear friends he saw something that made his heart drop.

Abelas’ slumped and unconscious form, collapsed; half hanging from his saddle and partially in Cole’s arms.

“Help me,” Cole begged.
Jamming the blade of his staff in the soaked earth beneath him, Solas took a step and grabbed Abelas by his breastplate and tried to steady him with worry flickering across his heart.

“What happened?” he questioned as he took in the Sentinel’s pale and shadowed face.

“Tired.” breathed out Cole, closing his eyes and concentration. “So very tired. Need rest. Must stop. But can’t. Time is short. She will die. Must get him there. Must save her. Must keep my oath. For her. For him. For them. For them both. For us all...A little longer. Just a little longer. I can. I can. I must...”

Solas’ heart instantly dropped deeper into his chest as Cole’s words seem to echo all around him and the Sentinels requests for rest hours earlier suddenly echoed in his ears.

Abelas had been suffering all this time, and he hadn’t even notice.

“I’m sorry, my friend.” sighed Solas, shaking his head at his own disappointing actions.

“Cole.” he immediately continued, wrapping his arms around Abelas and holding the man more securely as he spoke. “Get the bedroll from my pack so I can lay him down.”

“You intend to set camp?” questioned the boy.

“There’s no longer any choice in the matter,” answered Solas. “Abelas’ health demands that we must.”

“Ok,” replied Cole.

Gathering the horses quickly, as Solas pulled Abelas from his mount, Cole lead them off the side of the path and quickly laid out the bedroll just as the light drizzle falling from the sky finally stopped. Half an hour passed before he had managed to secure the horses, set a tent, and gather the driest wood for the fire he could manage.

“The fire,” muttered Cole as he dropped the last piece of wood on the pile.
Too centered on checking on Abelas’ condition, Solas merely motioned toward the pile absentmindedly, flicking his wrist and calling forth the fire without even bothering to look. As its light began to encompass the space, Cole nodded softly to himself before joining Solas at Abelas’ bedside. Squatting down by the man’s shoulder, he reached out and placed his palm against the Sentinel’s forehead and sighed.

“He’s resting,” Cole informed with a soft sigh.

“Yes.” nodded Solas, looking down at his friend’s unconscious face and sighing deeply. “He tried to warn me.”

“Yes,” answered Cole. “But he understood. Shared the same worry. The same desire. The same hope...”

“But pushed too hard. Past his limit. Until the limit fought back.”

‘How long has it been since you slept, my friend.’ Solas thought sadly.

“Days,” Cole answered with a sigh, his clairvoyance picking up on Solas’ thoughts instantaneously. “A few hours in thrice as many days.”

“You knew?” questioned Solas. Cole’s words sounding far too precise than he expected.

The spirit-boy nodded.

“My time is now. I am needed,” he answered.

“Yes, Cole. So it seems.” Solas found himself agreeing. “Thank you. If you had not been here...”

Cutting himself off from such thoughts, Solas shook his head.
“One day...” he sighed, looking at the sleeping man. “I will make this up to you my friend. I promise.”

“You should follow his needed example,” Cole advised, reaching up and dropping his hand on Solas’ shoulder. “And rest. Your fight will ask much of you. You must be prepared.”

“I will keep watch.” the spirit-boy added. “And keep an eye on him.”

“Thank you, Cole.”

Laying out the bedroll from Abelas’ pack, Solas settled in and tried to get some sleep but his mind would not find enough calm for him to drift off into the Fade. Chaotically shifting from moment to moment, his consciousness flickered between thought after thought. Mulling over everything he had learned, everything that happened thus far, and over every piece of knowledge he had been gifted by not only Hope and Iron Bull, but also Cole, Abelas, and Sarina’s Vallas Val. Trying to piece everything together. Trying to determine how he would now deal with all that was set before him. And the consequences of each action if taken. Plans upon Plans. Contingencies upon Contingencies. The ‘what-ifs?’ and the ‘what-if-nots’ playing over and over like a litany or prayer repeating many times over. Until his mind settled in a deep din of countless thoughts and ponderings, as the world around him seemed to dim out of existence and time seemed to stop.

A scream; piercing and heart wrenching, shattering his chaotic thoughts no more than an hour later; Solas bolted up from his bedroll in a flash of panic. Turning his head immediately, his eyes widened as he took in the frantic sight before him.

Cole: straddling Abelas’ waist, using his full weight, and pinning down the man’s hands as the Sentinel screamed and writhed in agonizing and torturous pain. Convulsing violently.

Solas scrambled toward him, dropped to his knees harshly, and immediately grabbed Abelas by the shoulders. Trying his best to keep the man still, he pushed hard. Succinctly slamming the man’s arched back upon the ground beneath as he let out a scream once more.

“What happened?” Solas demanded, looking up at Cole.

“Smother his aura,” Cole demanded in return, not even bothering to answer the question. “The...disconnect...”
“What are you talking about?” he countered. “Abelas is healer...but no mage. I can’t...”

“He is Elvhen....tied to the fade...as all Elven are...” Cole countered in broken sentences, as he continued to grapple with the writhing man beneath him. “Snuff it out! Send his mind into the fade. As you’ve done once before! ”

“It won’t...”

“Do it now, SOLAS!” interrupted Cole harshly.

A strange sense of fear immediately flickered across Solas’ heart. He had never seen Cole so adamant. Almost angry. And so forceful.

“HE WILL DIE IF YOU DON’T!”

That was all it took, for Solas knew that Cole would never say such a thing unless it was inevitable.

Calling upon his magic, delving deep into the powers that he had once pulled from so long ago, he coalesced all his might tightly into his own aura before pushing it outward toward his friend. In hopes that Cole’s claim of Abelas’ connection to the Fade would be enough to recreate that which he had only done to magic bearers in the past, he pressed his aura against the man. For a moment, a sliver of second, there was doubt. For Abelas had never held real magic. Showed no signs of still harboring an attachment to the time from when the waking and fade were one. Save for the one lingering ability of healing arts, granted to him by Mythal centuries ago, he could cast no element in offense, not barrier in defense, nor manipulate the fade any manner.

Or so he thought.

Suddenly Solas felt the minute shimmer of magic glance off the edge of his aura. It was slight. Like a feather’s touch. But it was there. He pushed his aura further, in an act to both find and flush out that which he had just felt. For a few seconds there was nothing, and then –like a tidal wave crashing upon the shore –something hit his aura so hard that Solas felt as if it had been physically be pushed back. In that moment there was a rush, like water falling over high cliff and barreling towards the ground, and then his aura was suddenly, and nearly, overwhelmed by the feel of a separate aura, other than his own, desperately fighting back.
“Smother it, Solas,” Cole demanded again.

“I...I’m trying...” Solas strained, in answer, as he pushed back against the man’s aura. “What is this? How can it be so strong...? This...this magic is unlike anything I’ve ever felt!”

“Because it is not his!” Cole suddenly answered.

“Not his? Then whose is it?”

“Sarina’s,” Cole answered bluntly.

“What?!”

“The magic that binds. The oath, sworn. Mythal’s debt has not been repaid.” Cole suddenly recited. “His time is short. Sahren demands justice.”

It was with those words that Cole reached down and tugged back Abelas’ tunic upon his arm and revealed the state of the Fealty Seal etched upon the man’s skin.

Sparking and shimmering with a mix of black, blue, and silver hues, the rune hummed with a soft resonance barely audible as the design seemed to morph and move. No longer was it defined. Clear. No longer where the line concise and precise. No longer was it just a mirror to its ancient predecessor. For it had change. And drastically so.

The lines that once swirled with in the circle, down to the center just behind the sword, were now thick. Like giant swaths of black, they edged further and further in as if chasing the line just before it. The skin, unmarred between suddenly swallowed up nearly whole, as tendrils spilled out from the circle and crawled down the arm; pooling in the palm; and up the arm well past where they could see. Keeping the press of his aura steady, Solas took a second to let his eye wander up Abelas frame and to his face. And that’s when he saw the extent of the magic course. For the black lines had carried themselves pass the shoulder and had crept up the side the man’s neck.

“DO IT NOW!” Cole screamed.
Taking naught another second of hesitation, Solas called upon every bit of his magic and the sliver of Mythal’s very own magic now within him and slammed his aura into Abelas with all the force his ancient self could muster. For a few seconds, there was a nearly chaotic battle of wills. As each aura lashed out and defended, until with one final blow Abelas’ aura vanished into thin air and the man instantly stilled. Snatching his aura back harshly, breathing frantically, as sweat rolled down his temples, Solas immediately tempered the surging of his magic and dispersed the strength of his aura until everything fell into a swift sense of calm.

The sigh that fell from Cole’s lips was nearly deafening.

Releasing his grip upon the Sentinel, the spirit-boy reached up and placed his hand upon Abelas’ forehead, stilled for just a moment, and then nodded.

“He is in the Fade.” He concluded. “The connection is severed for now.”

“But for how long?” Solas replied, before looking down upon the rune etched upon the man’s arm – noticing that it still seemed to thrum softly yet the encroachment of the magic’s will seemed to still.

“But...?”

Before Cole could answer, a strong wind suddenly rushed through their small campsite. Bring with it the smell of the Fade, the sweet scent of blooming flowers, and a gently spoken voice.

A whisper, on the wind.

“Abelas...” it echoed.
“That voice...” Solas breathed out, jerking his head up—eyes instantly searching the sky.

“She has come,” replied Cole, closing his eyes and concentrating. “Called to her. A compassionate heart. Heard his cries. Felt his pain...”

“Must find him...”

“My little Sorrow...”

“Sarina.” breathed out Solas.


“Not because of me...”

‘She’s come to save him?’ Solas questioned in his mind. ‘Why?’

“The Fade. You must go now!” Cole demanded, his eyes snapping open and leveling a nearly pleading gaze at Solas—his voice full of urgency. “The field of clovers. Where the wind sways with the gentle caress of a lover. And the moon smiles down upon the world. A place of peace. A place of wishes and dreams...A place of sanctuary...”

“They linger there...”

“But...The moment is short. Small. Minuscule. But there is time. Time to see her. Time to speak. Time to heal the hurts. Mend the bond. Save the heart.”

“Your heart...”

Without even bothering to wait for his reply, Cole immediately reached up and placed his fingertips
upon Solas’ brow –right between his eyes.

“Go now,” ordered Cole as a flash of blinding white irrupted in front of Solas' eyes and his consciousness vanished into a forceful darkness.
Sanctuary: Pt 1

Chapter Summary

Solas awakes in the fade to search for Sarina and Abelas. Never knowing that what he would see and learn there would shake not only his friendship with Abelas but his love for his beloved.

Chapter Notes

As always, any words written in BOLD are spoken in Elvhen and instantly translated into common for the reader.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In a dazing dream, Solas’ eyes opened slowly to the chill of a deep dark forest. A lonely path stretched before him. Enclosed on both sides by dark, ancient trees: reaching high above, blocking out the sky; the path before him and the surrounding forest was eerily quiet.

Not a sound. Nor murmur. Nor even the echoes of creatures big or small could be heard.

Turning his head from side to side, he tried to gauge where he was. His mind quickly running through his memories trying to ascertain if such a place existed in his memory or in his past. But no such recollection came. For it was a place he had never seen before, in the land of the waking or upon the plains of the Fade.

Looking off into the distance behind him, he saw nothing but an endless path that stretched farther than his eyes could see. Dimming into the black of oblivion just behind its horizon with a cruel coldness that made him shiver. Righting himself back the way he once faced, he looked ahead. Seeing a mirror of the retreat. Nothing to discern the right direction from the wrong. No sign of traversing. No inclination that its destination did not reach the same end as that which was behind him.

Letting out a deep sigh of frustration, Solas could not understand where he was or why. Cole’s urgency, his demanding order that he enter the Fade so quickly, had surprised him. But no more so than that moment when he saw the spirit-boy cast a spell that forcefully sent him into the darkness of
dreams.

‘He should not be able to do that.’ Solas derided. ‘So, how?’

The confusion of such an event lingered in his mind. A question that would need to be answered eventually, he knew. But with his current situation, it would have to wait.

Cole had sent him to the Fade claiming that Sarina was there. Had heard or felt the call of Sahren’s magic and had sensed that the seal would take Abelas’ life. To save him. To stave off death that such a bargain would demand if not kept, she had broken her chains. But why? Why would she come to save Abelas? And how could she? These months and years that had fallen between them since the last time he had seen her face had been so many. A great many things had changed. But some had not. What was it that had changed between her and Abelas that would make her forcefully remove herself from the prison she built to contain Vengeance –and what she was willingly enduring there – for the stray Elvhen that she had only met once in the world of the living and once in the land of the Fade?

“Is there something more I’m missing?” he questioned softly. “A connection I do not know?”

‘It cannot be just the seal. The oath.’ he thought. ‘There’s something else...but what?’

Suddenly, from the northern path, Solas felt the Fade shiver faintly. A pulse of gentle, calming magic.

It was slight. Barely there. But, not. For the wave of magic carried with it the caress of a soul, he knew all too well. A magic that strummed at his very heart.

Unmistakable.

And weak.

Fear flooded Solas’ mind at such a realization. It was certainly Sarina’s magic he had felt. For it was a recognizable as his own, and solely hers. And the faintness of its touch heralded only one true conclusion: It was waning fast.
Taking off a full run, he sprinted north. Following the path as it twisted and turned through the dark forest. Using only his limited vision in the dark and the horizon of his aura to help him navigate, he traversed the path as fast as he legs could carry him. All the while, stretching out his mind and his thoughts hoping that he could sense her magic once more. For minutes upon minutes he felt nothing. Not a whisper. Not an echo. Nothing. As fear flooded deeper into his soul. His mind conjuring up many numerous and horrifying reasons as to why not with each passing moment. Until all he could hear, and feel, was an unyielding dread and roaring panic.

It was then that he heard his horror echo all around him, as the sound of deep, rumbling –and screaming –roars lit up the deafening silence all around him. Coming to a skidding stop, breathing harder than he had in his eternal life, Solas immediately looked all around him. Looking for the source of the multiple echoing voices sounding off in a flurry of angry, frustrated, and rage-filled voices with no discernible words. For a second there was nothing but such a horrendous and excruciating cacophony of emotional violence and then his heart suddenly seemed to stop as one grounding voice suddenly overshadowed the din.

The earth-shattering roar of a powerful and frenzied Rage Demon.

“No.” cried out Solas suddenly, as a flicker of her magic hit the edge of his aura a second later.

His mind finally registered, what in his heart he had already known, in that moment, he began running with more fervor than he ever had.

‘Demons...’ he cried out in his mind, as he advanced closer and closer. ‘Hundreds of them...’

‘She is weak...and surrounded.”

‘I must get to her...’

For several harrowing minutes the path stayed true as it had been and in then, in the blink of an eye, the horizon changed. No longer black. No longer endless. It parted and held the soft glow of firelight.

‘There!’

Advancing to the edge of the tree line, and entering the clearing, at a full run, a few moments later,
Solas suddenly skidded to a stop as his eyes fell upon the horror within.

A field of clovers, it once was. But no longer. For decay, rot, and the scourge of rage fire scoured the land. The gentle firelight he had foresaw, was not that of warmth nor of comfort, but that of a bloodied moon shining high above. The 'place of peace,' 'of wishes and dreams,' and of 'sanctuary' Cole had described before he fell into dreams, was now nothing more than a place of nightmares.

And in the middle of it all, surrounded by hundreds of vicious demons and a failing barrier, knelt Sarina.

Her long, unbound, hair flowed around her as her eyes looked down upon Abelas' unconscious form laying in her lap. Her brows knitted in concentration, seemingly oblivious to all else, her right arm coddled his head delicately as her left –intact and glowing faintly –held the wrist of his right arm. Her focus solely on the dying man in her arms, she spoke no words, made no movements; almost as if the horde of demons clawing and beating upon her barrier did not even exist; and concentrated upon the spell she had been casting with a drive and determination unlike no other.

Solas could not stop the flicker of betrayal that echoed in his heart at that moment. Seeing the tenderness she was giving him, the fear and concern in her eyes, and feeling the desperation falling off her in waves, it was just too much to ignore. Too much to completely brush aside as just simple care and worry. But he knew that he must. If he were to solely linger on the strange feelings suddenly swelling in his heart at such a scene he would become too ensnared by it and unable to help her. And help her must.

For the demons had sensed Abelas’ weakening soul, and her failing strength, and had come for them both.

Solas knew that there would be no way out of this without losing one or the other. Or –at worst – both. Without his help. Even if Sarina could manage to heal Abelas. Stave off the death that now hastened with every moment. Neither she nor Abelas would have the strength to fight off the horde once the spell was complete and her magic maintaining the barrier failed.

And it was going to fail. Of that Solas was certain.

“There’s no choice,” he concluded.

Closing his eyes, Solas took in a deep breath and let out it slowly. Letting his chaotic thoughts settle
softly in the back of his mind, and allowing himself to calm, he called upon the ancient powers locked deep within him. Willing the power of the wolf to come forth. As his skin slowly began to glow, and intensify, he allowed his consciousness to fall into himself –accepting the power he had kept at bay for so long –and succumbed to the form that would grant him the power to destroy all that would willingly take what was undeniably his.

When the light faded, the Elvhen, once known as Solas, no longer lingered. In his place, the smoking black, red-eyed, monstrous form of the Dread Wolf remained.

But Solas’ transformation did not go unnoticed. The surge of power, strong and unyielding, had immediately pulled the attention of every demon that swarmed his beloved and his Falon. Their eyes now trained upon him, the demons snarled, growled, and wailed at he who would dare trespass upon their invaded and stolen territory. Their threats, like flies upon a horse's back swatted away, were nothing to the Wolf as it narrowed its eyes upon his prey.

“Be gone or die.” the Wolf growled a single, solitary, warning.

A warning that he knew, would never be headed.

Immediately the clearing became a flurry of movement as pockets of the demon horde rushed upon the Wolf. Fire and fury, blood and ash, enveloped the space in a manner of seconds as they lashed out with the intent to kill, only to fall in droves with each slash of the Wolf’s claws, or snap of his massive jaws. One by one, two by two, five by five, they fell. Disintegrating into wisps of smoke and nothingness.

All the while, Sarina’s vigil at Abelas’ side never faltered.

Waves and waves of demonic attackers fell upon him, more and more. Yet the Wolf did not tire. Did not rest. For he could not.

Taking one final swipe at three rage demons advancing on his position, and watching them vanish into dust, the Wolf drew in a strengthening breath and howled with all his might. The sound reverberating through the fade like an explosion echoing across the sky, stilled the remaining demons in their tracks. Lowering his head, his eyes narrowed once again, he eyed those that had yet to fall with murderous intent. An unspoken warning that their existence would end here and now, should they not stand down. The moment was intense. Drawn tight like a bow stretched to its very limit. Awaiting the release. As the demons cruelly glared at the Wolf. A low growl fell into the air. Subtle. But demanding. As the Wolf’s eyes scanned the horde before him once more. One final warning. That there would be not another.
“Your end is upon you...” the Wolf growled out. “Do you still wish to claim it?”

The moment drew quiet. Lingering longer than it should. And the Wolf took an advancing step. Showing that he would not stand down, no matter how many dared to try and make him. It was with those movements that the tension in the clearing seemed to snap as slowly; at first, then quicker still; one by one, the demons began to vanish in retreat of their own accord. A few tense moments lingered however, as several of the more powerful of creatures watched and waited. Still sizing up the Dread before them. Seemingly contemplating their options. Until, realization seem to dawn upon them and they, too, vanished. In a matter of minutes, the remaining horde was no more. Retreating into the far-flung corners of the Fade to live another day.

Taking a moment to put aside the murderous emotions running rampant within him, the Wolf closed its eyes and let out a huffing breath. Stilling the chaos. When he opened his eyes once more, they quickly found his beloved in the clearing once more just as her barrier shuttered and disintegrated into nothingness.

A deep sigh fell from her lips at that moment. The magic pooling in her palm that held the wrist of his dearest friend fading with her exasperation.

The sound was like music to Solas’ ears. For it was not a sigh of disappointment, but relief.

Shaking off the form of his ancient soul, Solas’ body returned to normal as he watched Sarina lay Abelas’ arm down upon the man’s thigh and reach for his cheek. Stroking it, almost lovingly, with her thumb she looked upon Abelas with worry lacing the corners of her eyes. For a few quiet moments the Sentinel neither moved nor opened his eyes as her anticipation and hope seemed to fill the entire space around them all. Solas’ heart had come to standstill. A moment of doubt echoing within him with fervor.

‘Is he...?’ Solas suddenly thought.

But before he could finish such a devastating questioning, Abelas suddenly took a breath and opened his eye –slowly.

For a moment Abelas’ seemed completely lost. Unknowing of where he was or what had happened. The confusing on his face contorting his visage once, then twice more, before it finally seemed to settle as he realized that he was being held. Turning his face to the woman by his side, he looked up into the stormy eyes he knew all too well and let out a nearly contented sigh.
“There’s my Sorrow.” Sarina breathed out.

“You saved me…” he breathed out in response, reaching out to touch her cheek to only stop as she nodded. “Why?”

“Because…” she began –only to immediately stop as she sensed movement out of the corner of her eye.

Dropping his eyes from Sarina’s face, along with his hovering hand, Abelas quickly noticed Solas standing several yards away. The shock of seeing Solas in Sarina’s sanctuary struck; sharp, like a lightning strike; and was all too real.

‘What have I done?’ he thought in a panic, as he reached down and pushed himself up. ‘He’s never supposed to come here.’

“My lady.” he breathed out, in apology. “I...I have failed you. I am sorry.”

When Sarina did not immediately answer, he turned to look at her again.

The look upon her face, that he had found there, was not one of anger but one of sorrow.

It was, in that moment, that Solas chose to take a step towards them. And Sarina’s reaction was immediate. A barrier, strong and unyielding, encompassing the majority of the clearing, snapped into place right in front of Solas –making him take a stumbling step back.

Sarina, her movements graceful and elegant, stood without even a glance in Solas’ direction. Her eyes still focused upon the Elvhen Sentinel before her as he slowly pulled himself upright.

“The rune’s magic...” she began, ignoring all but Abelas in her focus. “Has been calmed. It will not demand its consequence in the near future.”

“How much time do I have left?” Abelas questioned.
“Unknown,” she replied, almost coldly, before continuing. “I do not know how long Sahren’s magic will stay satiated. His demand for justice is strong—as is his nature. You must not dally any longer, my sweet Sorrow.”

“Do as I have asked of you, and your debt will be repaid. Justice will not seek you out, then, for you will have committed no crime.”

“I understand.”

At that moment, Sarina’s barrier flickered. But not because of failing strength. Abelas recognized the signature reverberation it made and immediately turned to see Solas’ prodding at the machination with his magic—trying to get in.

“And what of your Wolf?” Abelas questioned. “Will you not speak to him?”

“There is nothing more to say, Abelas.” she dismissed. “My sanctuary is despoiled. And the darkness calls to me once more. I must return.”

“And so should you,” she added.

“You are free to leave, the barrier will not halt your exit,” she advised gently. “So please return. And take the Wolf with you.”

“But, My Lady?” countered Abelas, pleading lacing every word.

“Do not defy me in this, Abelas.” she cut in. The anger in her voice telling. “Now go.”

Without another word, Sarina turned her back on them both and began to walk away. For a few seconds, Abelas watched her retreating form in dismay. Her wolf was here. Only a few feet from where she had stood. Yet she would not speak to him. Not allow him to end this. Why? He couldn’t understand. This is what she had demanded of him. What his oath required. To keep Solas on the path that would lead him to the future that existed within her sanctuary. And now, he was here. Right in front of her. And she just coldly turned away.
‘No!’ screamed Abelas in his mind.

He would not let her do this.

Taking a hurrying step, Abelas immediately caught up with her and grabbed her by the wrist—halting her retreat.

“Please, Vhenan’ara ...” he whispered.

“NO!” she screamed, shaking his hand off of her and turning to him with a hateful glare.

“JUST DO AS YOU’RE TOLD!”

“NO! This is what you wanted!” Abelas shouted, deterred no longer. “What you asked of me. Demanded of me. To put him on the path. THE PATH THAT LEADS HERE!”

“And you will not speak with him? Not allow him to make amends here and now?” he continued, his anger flaring. “Then tell me why!”

“He is not ready,” she answered.

“Not ready,” he repeated in an exasperated tone. “What the hell does that mean?”

“He has yet to see, yet to know,” she replied.

‘What I am I supposed to see, supposed to know?’ thought Solas. ‘What is she talking about?’

“Can’t you hear them, Little Sorrow.” she continued, adding insult to injury. “The thoughts that spin and spin.”
“Even now he questions. Unsure of what I speak.”

“The world cannot be held up with Hope, alone, my little Sorrow,” she stated knowingly. “Its Freedom cannot be bought with injustice. And neither can it be saved by ignorant Pride.”


“Then help him,” begged Abelas, bearing his open hand in Solas’ direction for emphasis. “Show him the way. Tell him what he must know. And end this, all of this, before it is too late.”

“I am sorry, my sweet Sorrow,” she answered with a deep sigh. “But I cannot do that.”

“Then, you’ll leave me no choice,” he warned.

“It will be your undoing,” she warned in return.

“And it will be worth it!” he shouted so all could here. “Even if I must forfeit my life, this must end...Vhenan’ara!”

As that term of endearment seemed to echo all around them, Solas’ could not stop the gasp that escaped his lips as it finally hit his ears.

‘Vhenan’ara...heart’s desire.’ Solas’ mind whirled. ‘Why...would he call her in such a way? Does he...? No...He couldn’t. Could he? Are they? Does he love her?’

“Do not ask this of me!” Sarina suddenly demanded, her voice desperate. “Do not ask me to choose!”

“Then what would you have me do?” Abelas countered immediately. “Do you still intend to curse me with the knowledge that I will have to watch you both suffer till the bitter end -denying me, even
the slimmest chance, to try to make this right? Or will you set me free from that which stops me from speaking of what I know?”

Before Sarina could answer Abelas’ fervent request, something seemed to flicker in her eyes sending pain rushing through her chest like a lightening flash. In an instant, she both conjured a staff in which to steady herself upon and clutched the front of her gown, right above her heart, with shaking hands, before doubling over.

“Vhenan!” shouted Solas.

“Vhenan’ara!” mirrored Abelas, before stepping close to her and reaching out.

“Don’t!” she warned, slamming her eyes shut and taking a few deep breaths –which, when released, came out in pain-filled huffs.

“Can’t you see...?” Abelas implored after a few, tense moments of watching her suffer –crying out in pain –knowing full well the source of such agony. “You will not be able to endure this much longer. Your strength is failing you more and more as the demands of Vengeance grow stronger. The more he calls to you. The more he steals from you!”

“This cannot be allowed to continue!”

“So, Vhenan’ara, please...PLEASE, let me help you. Help me to help you both end this.”

“He must know what I know. See what I’ve seen.” he pleaded. “He must know what he truly fights for!”

“I...I...” she struggled, trying to push back the pain of Vengeance’s call.

“Please...don’t force us to watch you die...” Abelas begged, breathing out softly.

“I...” she answered, suddenly nodded through heavy pants. “I...release you...”
“From...your promise,” she allowed. “My beloved Sorrow.”

“Do...as...you...will,” she added softly, unable to fight the call any longer and suddenly vanishing in a puff of obsidian smoke with one final exhalation.

“VHENAN!” cried out Solas in desperation.

“Thank you, Vhenan’ara.” breathed out Abelas as the last wisps of her faded softly from view and her barrier, barring her beloved, disappeared with them.

The sound of hurriedly approaching footsteps registered to Abelas nearly a second too late before a right hook hit him squarely in the jaw –forcing him to take a stumbling step back. Looking up immediately, all he could see was the fierce and angry face of his friend and her beloved.

“Abelas!” demanded Solas. “Why did you let her leave?!"

“Calm yourself, Falon,” he replied, rubbing his chin.

Reaching out, Solas snatch Abelas up by his tunic and bared his teeth.

“Tell me, now, why I should not kill you. Betrayer!” he demanded.

“You’ve been lying to me this entire time. All of this, this whole journey, has been nothing but a deception. A diversion from my goal. A fallacy. A ploy. A tactic.”

“You’re wrong.” countered Abelas, reaching up and grabbing Solas’ hand that had a hold of him.

“There is no deceit here. Not by me. There never was.”

“Then explain yourself!” he growled. “Before I kill you where you stand!”

“The path...you must take.” Abelas struggled. “Was not set by me. I was only to be your guide. To help you along the way. This night, what transpired here was not within my knowledge. Not preordained. Nor predestined.”
“It wasn’t supposed to happen.” he stated desperately. “It is my own failing. My failure. I waited too late. Took too much time to find my place in her service. Took too much time to set you on the path. And because of it, my oath’s consequence tried to take my life. That’s why she came. The only reason she came. And, nothing more.”

“What are you to her?!” Solas countered. “If not her minion? A device set in place to destroy all of what I’ve set out to undo. Then what?”

“Nothing. I am nothing,” he replied.

“DO NOT GIVE ME SUCH WORDS!” he yelled.

“I heard what you said. Saw how you spoke to her. Felt the tremble of your voice as you called her your heart’s desire...”

“No!” interrupted Abelas. “You’re wrong.”

“Then tell me you do not love her!”

“I cannot do that, my Falon.” breathed out Abelas, before immediately continuing. “But, I can assure that I mean nothing to her.”

“DON’T LIE TO ME!” Solas screamed angrily. “I SAW THE WAY SHE LOOKED AT YOU!”

“You mistake love for pity.” he immediately countered.

“She does not love me. She loves only you!”

“I don’t believe you,” stated Solas flatly, frustration lacing his words, as he released Abelas with a shove.
For a few moments, all was quiet –except for the exhalations of their fevered breaths –as Abelas coughed violently and rubbed his throat and chest. As he tried to come up with an explanation for all of this that would make Solas understand. He knew in his heart, however, that there would be only one way Solas would truly believe him. He had known it from the very moment he stopped Sarina from retreating –but had feared what such tactic would do. Both to Solas and to himself.

For there was one thing that Abelas knew that no other but Sarina did. A future that could come to pass if they did not fail.

Letting out a deep sigh, Abelas straightened and eyed his friend warily.

‘I guess... ’ he thought. ‘I really have no choice.’

‘It’s the only way he’ll truly understand why this path was set before him.’

“If my words will never be enough to assuage your fears, your anger...” Abelas spoke with gentle determination. “Then, allow me to show you...the truth.”

“Show me?” Solas questioned, turning to look at the Sentinel. “How?”

“The Fade reflects a great many things. And to a dreamer like you, can be shaped by thought or intent. No matter where in the Fade you may go,” Abelas explained. “But I have no such inherent gifts. No ability or affinity for such abilities.”

Solas nodded in understanding.

“Except for...” Abelas added with finality. “When I am here.”

“Here?” parroted Solas questioningly.

“This place. It is Sarina’s sanctuary.” Abelas explained, looking around at what remained all around them. “A place where she has found respite from the monster that torments her and the world that hunts her. Has hunted her since the end of The Exalted Council. The disbandment of the Inquisition.”
“A place where she can be free. Be at peace,” he continued, turning to look at his friend. “To live out her dreams without restraint. Without interference. A place that, up until tonight, has been protected from everything. Including you.”

“Then why are we here?”

“Her desperation to find me, to save me, led us both here,” Abelas answered. “It was the one place that she knew could maintain its shape and purpose long enough to protect me before she could materialize.”

Solas immediately raised a brow.

“Cole...” he sighed.

“Yes,” answered Abelas. “Though I had not known it to be true until I awoke here. He was the fail-safe. Put in place by Sarina herself...So.. If the rune turned. Tried to take my life. It was Cole’s duty to see that I was force into the Fade to stave off death just long enough for Sarina to stop the magic from consuming me.”

“That’s why Cole told me to sever your connection to the magic of the rune. Not to stop the pain. Or delay the inevitable. But to send you...here.”

“Yes.”

“But as this place has a special connection to Sarina...I, through my interactions with her, have created a connection of my own.”

“Meaning?”

“I am no dreamer,” Abelas stated flatly. “But here, I can be. The experiences I have had, I have shared in this place can be reflected if called upon. If need, be. And, it seems...since you cannot nor will not believe my words after what has transpired here tonight...that such need now exists.”
“There is something, you feel, will help me understand the truth between you both?”

“Not a feeling. A knowing.” Abelas replied. “For once you see it, and learn what I learned that night in this place, you will understand why I feel about her the way I do. And why I am no threat to you.”

“That...I have always been, and will always be, your friend.”

“That, through all of this, all I’ve ever wanted was for you both to be, finally, happy.”

“Then, show me,” demanded Solas gently.

“Very well,” he replied. “But, first, a warning.”

“What you will see will not be what you’re expecting,” he warned. “It will confuse you. Hurt you. And possibly shatter what you truly think of who you really are.”

“But know, that this –what you are about to see –is not set in stone. And cannot be set in stone unless you choose to take the path that leads you toward it. It is a choice you must make on your own. It cannot be forced. Or taken lightly. It must come from the heart with conviction. Or it will never come to pass.”

“I understand.” nodded Solas. “Please, show me.”

“As you wish, my friend,” Abelas replied, before crouching down and placing his hand upon the ground beneath him.

As his hand met the charred ashes of what remained of Sarina’s once coveted sanctuary, magic suddenly flared all around them and the entire space was filled with a bright, blindingly white light.
Sorry about all the delays with fic. It’s been quite hectic lately.
I put this update up rather quickly so there may be some grammatical errors.
Also, if I have any readers who are actually keeping up with this story on the regular, I
would really love your comments. I can’t get a good read on whether or not this story is
truly being enjoyed just by kudos and view count.

Thanks.

Side note: I have a new fic I’ve just started writing (if you’re interested.) It’s called
'Shades of Lavellan.'
Sanctuary: Pt 2

Chapter Summary

Furious that Sarina refused to tell the truth to Solas as they stood in the ruins of her sanctuary, Abelas uses what little power he possesses in the Fade to send Solas into a memory from his own mind. So that the wolf may learn the truth behind Abelas' words and the truth behind Sarina's actions. Her truest purpose.

Chapter Notes

8800+ words! to make up for my very long absence from this fic. I wont give any excuses. I will only say that I hope you all are still with me. <3

As before: all words in bold are spoken in Elvhen and immediately translated to the reader into common.

An unbelievable warmth, the earthy, slightly sweet smell of rich soil and fragrant blooming flowers, and the feel of a gentle spring wind caressing his skin registered quietly within his consciousness in that moment of peaceful silence.

‘Sanctuary.’ his mind reminded.

Opening his eyes slowly, blinking back the blur and thrum of catalytic magic swarming through his form, Solas took a long moment to allow his eyes to clear. All the while wondering what he would now learn. What it was that Abelas had demanded that he know. Until the world; the dream, the memory; finally came into view and confusion blindsided him in an instant as his eyes landed upon a strange sight.

With hardened earth beneath him, and his view obscured to everything but right in front of him, his right arm; surrounded by flowering clover and covered in the plushness of a deep green, embroidered set of mage robes accented on the cuffs with a spiraling scrawl of silvery ivy leaves; was stretched out languidly before him.

Suddenly, before he could even begin to grasp his situation or even move, Solas heard the sound of
quickly padding feet a split second before his whole body flinched as the feel of something hitting his legs resounded through his form completely out of the blue. A thump and huff echoing a second later. Surprised, he pulled his outstretched arm closer to himself, pushed himself partly up, and immediately looked at his feet. His eyes instantly widened at what he could see.

A young elven boy with dark brown hair; barely eight winter’s old and dressed in a soft, light green tunic, matching leggings, and bare feet; laying face first in the clovers.

A warm breeze immediately blew swiftly through the air, rustling the young boy’s hair and stirring the smell of blooming flowers, and for a moment the boy did not move. Flooding fear into Solas’ heart in an instant. His mind suddenly worried that the young one was injured. But before he could voice it, ask if the child was alright, the boy suddenly grunted in irritation and pushed himself up with a slight hint of animated frustration. Falling back, his rear end plopping down on the back of his thighs, he reached up and quickly brushed away the thin film of dirt clinging to his cheeks in a nearly comical and over-exaggerated manner before blowing a raspberry through his lips for good measure.

Amusement instantly hit Solas so hard and so fast that he could not help, nor stem, the barely audible chuckle that passed through his lips.

At the sound, the young boy immediately spun his head into Solas direction with a start. Seeming more surprised than expected, with a slight tinge of confusion and fear lacing his features, the boy just stared owlishly. Almost as if he was just as shocked to see him and Solas was at seeing the boy. Or that he could not understand what he was seeing before him. And, then, as if hit with a suddenly realization, the boy slightly flinched and instantly beamed a bright, elated smile.

“Uncle!” the boy exclaimed, clamoring on his hands and knees just enough to throw his arms around Solas and hug him tightly. “You’re here!”

So surprised by the boy’s sudden change in behavior, and his unexpected assault of affection, Solas could not bring himself to speak. Completely flabbergasted and speechless to even form a coherent sentence.

“We didn’t think you would come!” the boy began to ramble, with the speed like that of a very excited chipmunk darting from place to place. “They’d said you would come. That we would see you. That we would finally get to meet you. But I didn’t believe. It’s been said many times. Promises made over and over. We waited for so long. So very long. Didn’t think you would ever come. But...you’re here. You’re really here!”

“Yes...” Solas stammered. Confused by the child’s excitement yet feeling that he somehow needed to
settle the young one’s worries. “So it would seem.”

At his response, the little boy instantly let go of Solas, leaned back, and leveled an aggravated look at him.

“Where have you been?” the boy scolded. “You’re late.”

“Am I?” Solas countered.

“Yes!” the boy breathed out sarcastically.

“What were you doing all this time?” he questioned with disappointment.

“I am unsure.”

The little boy broke eye contact for a moment, searching the area all around them with curiosity and then suddenly sighed.

“Were you lost in the clovers?”

Solas looked around for a moment and nodded.

“So it would seem.” he admitted.

With a nearly amused look upon his face, and a wry smile gracing his cupid bow lips, the little boy opened his mouth to say something. But before he could speak, another voice echoed within the clovers.

“Revas...”

‘Freedom.’ Solas thought with a start.
“His name is Freedom?”

The little boy’s pointed ears immediately perked up, and he turned in the direction of the sound.

“Revas....” the voice echoed once more, resounding more clearly and with a gentle sweetness and kindness that only another child could mimic.

“Over hear.” the boy called out.

As his words rang out the sound of padding feet upon sweet earth, hit both of them gently. A moment later, a young elven girl; looking around the same age as the boy, with long silver hair, blue eyes, and dressed in a little white dress with peachy flowers embroidered upon the hems and neckline; poked her head up from just over the edge of hill toward the east.

“There you are!” the girl exclaimed in a kind yet exasperated voice. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere.”

“Look who I found, Hope!” the boy replied, ignoring her worry and concern.

‘Hope!’

The little girl’s eyes widened as she caught sight of Solas and suddenly rushed to their sides.

“Uncle Abelas!” the girl practically squealed in surprised elation. “You’re here!”

‘Abelas?’ Solas suddenly thought, as he eyes trailed across the girl’s form –noticing a silver locket dangling from a thin chain around her neck.

It was at that moment, that Solas caught a glimpse of his reflection and saw his friend looking back at him.
'I am Abelas here.' he thought. Understanding immediately. ‘That is who they see...’

‘As I should be.’ he reminded himself. ‘It is his memory...’

“Hello.” Solas answered, feeling himself smile involuntarily.

“We’ve been waiting for you! Did you get lost or something?” the girl named Hope asked, with a disappointed and nearly scolding tone, as she instantly put one hand on her hip and leaned in with a sense of mocking. “In the clovers?”

“Yes!” the boy named Revas answered, with a roll of his eyes. “I found him sleeping!”

“Found?” Solas felt himself ask in a surprised tone. “You ran...”

“Silly, Uncle.” Hope interrupted with a shake of her head, before turning her attention to Revas. “I’ve been looking for you.”

“Oh?”

“It’s nearly time for supper.” Hope informed. “I came to get you.”

“We need to go back.” she added with a nod in Solas direction. “Even more so that Uncle is finally here.”

“Ok.” Revas replied, immediately standing and brushing off his knees, before reaching out and offering a hand to Solas.

“Shall we go, Uncle?”

“Y...yes.” Solas found himself nodding, as he reached out –without thinking –and took the boy’s hand.
At the contact, Solas felt an odd sensation echo within him: Warm yet cold. Familiar yet foreign. Comforting yet obtrusive. It felt as if it was something he had always known yet never had—but wanted. Completely oblivious yet all-knowing. Something so much more. And, all, strangely familiar.

Unsure of the sensation, Solas mind was instant awash with questions. More questions than he would ever, possibly, get to answer in that instant.

‘The answers will come.’ he reminded himself. ‘Abelas would not have sent me here, otherwise.’

Pushing his curiosity aside, and re-centering himself to learn all that this memory intended to teach, he allowed the boy to help him up without a word.

Hand in hand they began to walk. After a few steps, Hope joined them. Slipping her hand into Solas’ free one as if it was the most natural thing in the world and smiled.

“Home is just over the next hill.” she informed.

“Lead on.” Solas found himself replying.

As they continued to walk, Solas reminded himself over and over that he was reliving one of Abelas’ memories. That his words and actions would not be his own. Nor would he be able to affect what would be replayed for him while there without altering the memory substantially. He would need to keep his own thoughts to himself, and allow the memory version of Abelas to interact with the memory as he had once done. Otherwise, he would learn nothing.

For what seemed like hours, through the quiet, moonlit clearing they walked, speaking not to one another, as a calmness and serene feeling lingered happily around them. Time passed differently in such a place, Solas realized. Not unlike the Fade itself but somehow different. The peace contained in such a place; somehow untouched by the true nature that was the raw Fade; was unbridled and so pure that no harmful thought, emotion, or even malicious spirit could enter. There were no lingering doubts. No unforgettable regrets. No Love, lost. No Fear, feared. No actions left undone. It was as if the world was as it was always meant to be. In perfect balance. A harmony of hearts and minds and spirit. Where all that could have been, could be, or could ever have been exists in perfect synch with the true essence of the Fade itself.

An impenetrable place of solitude and solace.
‘How can this be?’ Solas thought. ‘How can such a place exist...here...like this. Untouched by the hearts of men or evils of the waking?’

He did not know. Could not know. But the one thing, above all else, that he couldn’t understand was how and why it existed in the first place. Both Cole and Abelas had said in their own ways that this place was Sarina’s sanctuary. A place where she would flee to when the darkness became too strong and her heart grew weak. Where she would hide from the perils and monsters of the world that sought her out for evil purposes. To use her. To hunt her. To kill her. A place where, above all else, she could be safe for even the smallest glimmer of time. A place where her heart knew true peace. Found Solace.

‘But why does she need such a place? When had it been created? How did she create it? And for what purpose did it truly serve? Was it truly, simply a place of comfort? A place of respite? Or did it have some other function? Some other purpose?’

“There it is!” Revas called out, his hand pointing down toward the tree line.

Snapped out of his circling thoughts, never unending questions rattling through his mind, Solas looked up and could not stop the gasp that fell from his lips as he realized what he was looking at.

Near the edge of the clearing a darkened forest towered high into the sky. At its base, along the wood line, stood a small, quaint little house made of earthen stone, mortar and wood, with a thatched roof, several small windows, an awning of straw and wood lingering just above an open doorway, and one, lone chimney smoking gently. Just in front of the door, in a patch of flattened earth, sat a long wooden table, with some eight chairs placed sporadically around it. And, in the distance just past the edge of the wood line –barely visible yet clearly there –stood a matching stable occupied by a very familiar Hart.

‘Sarina!’ Solas heart leapt.

“Let’s go.” Hope added. “She’s waiting.”

“Wh...Who’s waiting?” Solas heard Abelas’ voice waver –mirroring his own.

“Mamae. Of course.” Revas smiled before tugging on Solas’ arm and pulling him towards the house.
They traversed the final leg of their walk quietly. None saying another word until they reached the small, quaint homestead a few minutes later. As Solas feet met the edge of the flattened earth surrounding the space, Revas released his grip upon his hand and scurried toward the home’s door.

“Mamae!” the little boy chirped with happy excitement, peaking his head in the doorway.

“Come. Look it! Look it!”

A mumble came from inside.

“Come. Come.” the boy repeated, bouncing in his spot. “Look it, Mamae. Look it!”

For a few tense moments there was nothing, as Revas continued to try and coerce his mother’s hasty exit, and then, almost when it seemed like she would never come out, a lone figure dressed in a simple blue maiden’s gown stepped through the doorway and revealed herself.

‘Sarina!’

With her long white hair pulled back neatly at the crown of her head, draping down her frame softly, and a tray covered in fruit in her hands, she smiled down at Revas bouncing before her with a tilt of her head.

“What’s got you so excited, my little one?”

“Look! He’s here, He’s here.” the boy announced turning and pointing in Solas’ direction.

Sarina’s eye quickly followed Revas’ movements and smirked slightly as her eyes met the form of their visitor.

“There’s my Sorrow.” she breathed out softly, sounding almost relieved.
“Though my call had clearly reached you...” she said wistfully. “I had nearly believed that you would not come.”

“Hello.”

“It is good to see you again, Abelas.”

“Even though you are late,” she added with a huff.

“Am I?” he questioned with a smirk.

“Nearly.” she answered as she took a step and placed the tray upon the table before them. “Where were you?”

“Lost in the clovers!” giggled Revas.

“As it should be then.” Sarina nodded slightly.

‘What does that mean?’

“Well, now that you have arrived we can have dinner.”

“Yay!” Revas cheered.

“Should I go get Babae now?” questioned Hope curiously.

Solas flinched.

‘Father’
“Yes. Please Hope.” Sarina replied. “And take Revas with you. You know how your father loves it when you both fetch him.”

“Yes. Mamae.” nodded Hope. “Come along, Revas.”

As the children walked away, hand in hand, towards the east, Solas wanted to demand for an explanation. The children had been an aspect of his confusion, seeing Sarina acting like a mother had been another, but the mention of a father figure for the children meant that Sarina had another lover – a man that she saw herself bonding and breeding with was almost too much.

“Have a seat, little sorrow.” Sarina said gently.

“My lady....” he answered disappointingly.

“Please, Abelas.” she interrupted, extending her hand to motion to a seat.

“But...”

“Allow me my own delusions, Abelas.” she softly demanded. “And sit.”

“As you wish...” he nodded, understanding her tone as a veiled warning.

As he took the nearest chair, Solas felt Abelas’ sigh –mirroring his own bewilderment.

“This place...” Abelas sighed after a few moments, trying to lighten the mood that had suddenly become thick with tension, glancing around him as Sarina busied herself setting the table. “...is extraordinary.”

“Was it always here?”

“Yes.” she answered softly.
“You’ve kept it hidden from me?” he questioned.

She nodded.

“Why?”

“The world is a dangerous place Abelas.” she sighed. “A place where friend can become foe in the blink of an eye, in a heartbeat, and betrayal lingers around every turn...So you must forgive me for my caution.”

“This place is special to me.” she whispered, as a gentle breeze softly tousled her hair –accentuating the feeling of nostalgia and loneliness lacing her voice, as she looked up at the sky wistfully. “A sweet dream come to life. Uncorrupted by the reality of the living. The realization of my hope...”

“And....a place that...I was not, yet, willing to share with anyone.” she continued, dropping her head back to the table before her without looking at him.

“Then why am I here?”

“Time is growing short. That which was set to move has begun to do so. I can no longer hesitate to act. The time has come for me to take the next step.”

“I see...”

“What do you need of me?” Abelas questioned.

“I...” she began before stopping suddenly and looking toward the east. “That can wait.”

Surprised by her strange reaction, he turned toward the direction she looked just in time to see the children reappear around a large tree in the distance. Smiling; walking hand in hand with a very familiar, tall, bald, elf dressed in a scruffy green tunic –a familiar wolf jaw necklace hanging from around his neck.
Solas’ heart nearly stopped.

Speechless, unable to even conjure a sentient thought, he watched the children and their father walked closer and closer. The smile on the children’s face as bright as the smile on the man’s face. A mirror. His mirror. Looking far more at peace, and happy than he could have ever thought he could have been.

“Vhenan...” his mirror smiled, coming to Sarina’s side.

“My love.” she smiled in return, placing a gentle kiss upon his cheek. “How was your reading?”

“Peaceful.” he answered. “And informative as always.”

“That’s...wonderful.” she smiled again.

“It good to see you again, my Falon.” his mirror smiled, turning to look at him and reaching out to shake his arm.

“It’s been a quite long time, Fen’Harel.” Abelas answered after taking his arm and shaking it in solidarity with his friend.

“Sorrow!” Sarina’s scolding voice echoed.

Abelas looked toward her only to see warning in her eyes.

“Forgive me.” Abelas suddenly huffed in apology, realizing her irritation with just a simple glance, and turning his eyes back to Solas’ mirror. “Old habits die hard. I apologize, Solas.”

“It’s alright, my friend.” the mirror smiled. “A name that carries such a weight is harder to put down than most. It will take many years before that name will lose its meaning...So I do not fault you for such a mistake.”

“Mamae.” Hope interrupted. “Can we eat now?”
“Oh...yes, da’len.” she answered, breaking eye contact with Abelas and looking at the little girl.

Without any words, everyone sat down quietly and began to eat a meal of meat, bread and butter, fruit, cheeses, and cooked vegetables set before them. Abelas, however, only sat quietly; eating nothing; and watched the scene play out before him. As he watched, so too did Solas’ subconscious. Taking in every little detail. Noting that everything before him seemed far too unbelievable to even be possible anymore. Sarina was far too calm, completely happy and stress free. His mirror looked as if all that had happened since the day he awoke in this era had never happened. And the children looked far more loved than any child had ever been. A perfect life, with perfect love. Untouched by the world and safe from all that would threaten it.

At that moment, a thought that suddenly flickered across Abelas’ mind flickered across his own. A suspicion. A curiosity. About her sanctuary. About her little family that lived there. About her delusion as she so called it. And before Solas could even think, he suddenly heard Abelas speak his thought.

“So...” Abelas questioned leadingly. “How long have you been here Solas?”

Before Sarina could react, the fade version of her beloved spoke.

“Many years.” he answered. “Ma’vhenan prepared this place just after the war was won. So we could finally live in peace.”

“The war?”

“Yes. The war between the Templars and the Mages. After Corypheus.”

“Really?” Abelas countered.

“You sound suspicious. Do you disbelieve me?”

“No...Of course not.” Abelas immediately assured.
“It’s...just.” he tried to explain, grasping at a way to lead the conversation towards the information he was looking for. “After the Temple of Mythal...I lost contact with the two of you. So I was just curious as to how your relationship managed after I saw you last.”

“There’s nothing really to tell.” his mirror answered, reaching out and grasping Sarina’s hand with a comforting squeeze. “After Corypheus’ defeat. Ma’vhenan stepped down from the roll of Inquisitor –leaving the Commander in charge. We left to seek our future; far away from those who would interfere, and find our happiness together.”

“The twins were born a year later.” his mirror added with a smile.

“I...see.”

“And are you?” Abelas countered.

“Are we, what?”

“Happy?”

“More so that I ever thought possible.” his mirror replied.

Before Abelas could question further, there was a sudden sigh from the end of the table –grabbing his attention. Looking in that direction, he saw Revas placing his empty glass on the table.

“All done.” the boy announced with a smile.

“Me too.” chimed in Hope.

“Already?” Sarina chuckled. “That was fast.”

“We were really hungry...” Revas complained. “We’ve been waiting all day...”
“For Uncle.” Hope added, finishing her brother’s sentence.

“I am sorry.” Abelas quickly apologized, feeling somewhat guilty that the children had been put out because he had been lost and so very late.

“Revas, Hope.” Solas’ mirror scolded gently. “Don’t be so inconsiderate towards your Uncle. I am sure he did not realize that we were waiting patiently for him. So don’t fault him too much.”

“You’re Babae is right.” Sarina agreed. “It is my fault. I did not tell him that all of us would be waiting.”

“Ir Abelas, Uncle.” the children apologized in tandem.

“It’s alright, little ones.” he replied.

“Now that, that is settled.” Sarina piped up a moment later, making to stand. “It is getting late. Hope, Revas, it is time to get ready for bed.”

“Allow me.” Solas’ mirror interrupted gently.

“I can...” Sarina began only to be cut off once more.

“Abelas has come to speak with you, has he not?” the mirror countered. “You’ve made him wait long enough, I think. Allow me to tend to the children tonight, in your stead.”

“If that is what you wish, Vhenan.” Sarina sighed.

“It is.” he nodded. “Tend to what business you must, and leave the children to me.”

“Very well.” she nodded.
“Does that mean we’ll get a story tonight?” questioned Revas happily.

“Two stories.” Solas’ mirror replied. “One for each of you.”

“Yay!” the children cheered before clamoring to their father’s side and following him into the house.

For quite some time, Sarina and Abelas sat quietly at the table and watched Solas’ mirror and his children get ready for bed through the open doorway until the children were snuggly settled into a shared bed and Solas sat down on its edge with a book in his hand. As he began to read to them, Abelas finally spoke once more.

“You paint him well here.”

“Perhaps.” Sarina answered. “But with no more paint than was already there.”

“You think so?”

“Even though he could never see it...” she replied with a saddened sigh. “This Solas was always there. Hiding just behind his pride.”

“Pride...” Abelas sighed. “Yes...”

Sarina made to stand once more, with a weary sigh.

“It is time.” she announced softly. “Let’s take a walk, little Sorrow.”

“As you wish, my Lady.” Abelas nodded, knowing full well by the tone of her voice and that term of endearment that the time to get down to the business of why he was really here had come.

Coming side by side at the end of the table, Sarina slipped her arm around Abelas’ forearm naturally.
“This way,” she said softly before leading them in the direction that Solas’ mirror had come from.

They walked for some time, as the environment passed by them slowly, in a nearly contented silence. Though Solas himself wanted to demand answers almost immediately, he knew that he would have to wait until the remainder of the memory continued. It was frustrating. But there was nothing he could really do without corrupting the memory as it once was.

“Do you come here often?” questioned Abelas after a very long pause.

“As often as I am able....though such times are growing more few and far between as it once was.” she answered.

“How long has this place existed?” he wondered.

“I am unsure...of the moment of its first creation.” she answered. “For there is none of it’s like in the Fade nor the waking. I’ve wondered many times of where such a place came from. What it could, perhaps, be a memory of. Or where, perhaps, it is an echo of. But there has been no real, definitive, answers.”

“It is reminiscent of a meadow of my childhood. A glen near where my clan once roamed. But, even that is not even close. It more an amalgamation of both reality and imaginary, I think. Real and unreal. A mix of the waking and the Fade’s imagination.”

“Imagination?” questioned Abelas. “Does the Fade have such a thing?”

“The Fade is infinite. Its ability and power, just as infinite. So, I can neither accept nor deny; believe or disbelieve; what is true and what is not. It just is. And that’s enough for me.”

“It just is?” he questioned. “What do you mean by that?”

“This meadow, this quiet place, has been here for as long as I can remember. I have always felt safe here. It is a peaceful place. Undisturbed by the maliciousness of life or by the chaos of the world beyond the living. Spirits corrupted by emotion, the desires and demands of life, cannot cross its borders. Affect its reality. Or effect its purpose. And any who dare try long forget its very existence.”
“As it should be.” Abelas suddenly repeated.

“Ah, yes. You heard that.” she answered with a nod. “But, did not understand my meaning, I take it.”

“Yes.”

“It’s the clovers.” she explained, turning to look at the field of flowers. “Though they are beautiful, and bring an air of serenity to this place, they are also the protectors of my sanctuary. A blocking spell in a sense. That wards off any intruders. Their scent masks their true purpose. And it is their scent that is their power. All that enter here, uninvited, fall victim to their scent and are cast into a sleep that sends them farther into the Fade. Far from this place. With no memory of it ever existing.”

“But why defend it so strongly?” Abelas questioned. “You sought him out in your dreams for a very long time, did you not? Seeing him but never truly seeing him. Why would you put up such a defense if your goal was to find him? To find out why he...?”

“After the wolf left my side to leave me to fend for myself so long ago....” she interrupted, and admittedly sighed. “I fell into a spiraling depression that nearly consumed every last piece of me. I became withdrawn and lost–blaming myself for every horrible thing that had befallen me and those I cared about. I took into myself all the guilt that I had pushed away. That I’d buried. That I had justified simply because of the war.”

“The deaths I had caused. That I’d ordered. That I had allowed, with every decision I had made. I blamed myself for everything...”

“But, most of all....I blamed myself for his leaving. Believed with all my being that it was because of me that he walked away without even saying goodbye. That...that I had ultimately done something wrong. Something so wrong that made him stop loving me. That I, that I was never, enough for him and that all I did only proved that I never could be. No matter how hard I tried. No matter what I did or said, that he would never chose to stay by my side. That he would never truly love me as much as I loved him...”

“Those feelings, that chaos, cause me to spiral out of control until my control finally snapped.” she admitted as she unknowingly touched her own hair. “And I did something that I never should have done.”
“Upon waking from such a break, I realized that all the emotions I had been feeling, all the disturbing thoughts that had been circling in my head for so many months, had done something to me that I never thought could happen.”

“Which was?”

“I became cold. Distant. And for a time accepted no comfort, no care from anyone.” she sighed. “Not even from Dorian, who—above all others—is the one person in the whole of Thedas that I could always count on.”

“But it wasn’t because I no longer cared for those around me, that I no longer loved anyone or wanted to keep them safe...” she continued. “It was because I did not have the confidence I once had. I no longer trusted myself. My decisions. My actions. Or even my own thoughts.”

“The way I became...my lack of being my true self that I once was... effected every bit of my life—even my dreams. So I put up the protection to seclude myself from others even more.”

“It was very unnerving to say the least. To be so unsure of yourself. To doubt every thought and action. To second guess everything you believed or felt. But while I knew it was by my own doing, the others didn’t see it that way.”

“My condition, being so lost that I no longer knew who I was or even my own purpose, stoked the flames of hatred within my own circle. Dorian blamed the wolf. Bull, Cullen, Blackwall, Varric, did so as well. As did many others...And they all wished for his death as punishment...But.”

“But?” parroted Abelas.

“It wasn’t his fault, in the end.” she answered. “Though he may have been the catalyst to some degree, ultimately my fall from grace was caused by my own foolish nature. I had put so much of my hope in the wolf. Planned my future many times over living happily in his love. That when that love seemed to shatter like a broken mirror, so too did I.”

“I saw myself as naïve after my realization. And foolish. To believe that I could not quantify my own existence without him. Perhaps it was because I was so young in comparison to all those around me. To unexperienced in a world much older than I ever could be. Or, maybe, it was simply because the wolf was the first person I ever loved. But, in the end, I realize that everything I had felt, everything that I had, not only, put myself through but others, had been simply because of my own insecurities.
My own lack of understanding.”

“What did you misunderstand?”

“Solas...” she sighed.

“I had been so blinded by love, that I did not see what was truly standing before me. I saw only what I wanted to see. Even when I learned who he truly was. And I ignored everything that blatantly screamed of his true nature. His true intent.”

“Which was?”

“He...did not expect to come to care for me as he did.” she answered knowingly. “Of that, I am sure. Perhaps, in the beginning, he only saw me as a way out. A way to undo what he had cause by giving Corypheus his orb. A tool to hurdle a setback he had not foreseen. As he’d, once, said. But, in time, the way he saw me, changed. Until this very day, I cannot say for certain what it was I did or said that changed his thoughts of me. Nor can I say when they did so. But when his outlook towards me changed, so too did our relationship. And that change, as beautiful as I may have seen it, was something that threw everything he thought into chaos.”

“Looking back at all the time we spent together. His reactions to every little thing that happened between us –both in public and private –I can see now how much of who I was affected him. It made him doubt who he was. And his purpose. His choices and his beliefs. On such an astronomical level that he could not see a way out.”

“His hesitation. The way he would withdraw from me from time to time. The way he would circumvent certain conversations about who he was, where he was from; his past, his history; or even more intimate conversations about how he felt about me, were all signs of his fear. His fear of what loving me would or was doing, not only to himself but also his plans for the future.”

“And, all the while, I stood there smiling. Never knowing how much of a burden I truly was to him. How much pain I was truly causing him each and every day.”

“He never saw you as I burden.” Abelas defended. “At least...I don’t think so.”

“Meaning?”
“For a time after the two of you parted ways... He was broken too. Leaving you was the hardest thing he had ever done in his very long life. And seeing you again those years later only made his guilt and heartache so much worse.”

“Is it strange to hear that and feel a sort of happiness at hearing such a thing?” she questioned.

“No.” Abelas answered.

“I had always thought that, though he may have regretted leaving or regretted having to leave, that – in the end – he had accepted what we’d had as a mistake. And, thought no less nor more of it.”

“He regrets it till this day, my Lady.” Abelas answered. “And has every day since. You are not far from his thoughts. And never have you been. A part of him, I’m sure, still wishes that he could have stayed. That he could have given you the life you wanted. The home and family that you’ve dreamed of your whole life. But...”

“But Pride got in the way.” she finished for him.

Abelas nodded.

“It’s always something...” she chuckled softly, breaking the tension of such a serious conversation. “Isn’t it?”

“I am afraid so, my Lady.”

“Well, enough of this.” she sighed. “Rehashing the past will bring no more closure than has already come. It is time to get to the root of why I summoned you here.”

“Yes.”

“What progress has he made?”
“As you predicted he has found the ancient mentions of the Heart of Elvhenan and has figured out the location of the forgotten refuge.”

“When does he leave?”

“He left earlier today by Eluvian. I suspect that within three days he will return with it in hand.”

“Good.”

“Then nothing of significance has changed. When he returns, you will do as I have asked. Make sure he learns of the Guardians and what they may be able to do to further his goal. And that I, alone, know where in all of existence they reside. He will be forced by his desires to seek me out. And when that times comes, when the time is right, see to it that he takes the journey he is set to take.”

“Do all that you can to help him; along the way. But, under no circumstances, are you to allow him access to my Vallas Val – until the most opportune moment.”

“And when will that be?”

“That will be completely up to you, Abelas.” she answered. “Though I know a great deal about the wolf, there are some things that even I don’t know. As the same can be said of you. It will be up to you to determine if and when he has earned the right to know. When he has proven that his heart searches rather than his head.”

“It is up to my discretion?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because I trust you to do what is right for all of us,” she answered.

“Even though you were at first forced to abide by my will, you have accepted all that I have made
you do without protest. Without disobedience or disdain. And have come to understand that what I
do, I do not do out of malice, cruel omnipotence, or falsity. But by hopes demand. I seek the
protection of the whole of Thedas, and its people. No matter where they came from, their station in
life, or their bloodlines. Whether they know of me or not. Whether they wish for my happiness or
even my death. It is all the same. I seek the protection of those who I have never met, those who I
have touched in some way, and those I have come to love—even when fate seems to try to deny me.”

“And all I ask in return is that the man I love finally know the truth...the final piece of the puzzle to
which he has been trying to solve, from the moment he first laid eyes upon me.”

“Is that too much to ask?”

“No, my Lady.” Abelas sighed softly.

“And if he comes to suspect me?” Abelas questioned after a short pause of silence.

“As I have said before, do not lie to him. Tell him the truth if he confronts you. Even if you fear that
he will retaliate against you for your subterfuge."

“He could kill me for such a betrayal.”

“He will not.” she stated knowingly. “The wolf is a malicious creature from time to time, but even he
knows of the sincerity you carry towards him. He will not lash out—especially if you tell him the
whole truth.”

At that moment, the two, walking arm in arm, came across a large path cut through the trees at the
edge of Sarina’s sanctuary.

“This way,” she said softly, turning them towards the path.

“You never did tell me why you want to send him on this path.” Abelas noted gently.

“I know.” she sighed. “It is not my intentions to keep you so in the dark, my Sorrow. But some
things must be left unknown until the time comes.”
“What I can say is that the journey Solas must take is a journey that will set him free,” she answered.

“Set him free?”

“Freedom and Hope are all we can wish for in this life.” she answered cryptically. “I have my hope, my freedom. But so long as Solas remains tied to ignorance and his past mistakes, his heart will never find all that he truly deserves.”

“The children.” Abelas gasped softly looking back over his shoulder.

“Are mine.” she answered. “A manifestation of my hope and my freedom, which I have found by realizing the truth of my past that was locked away for so many years. They come to this place; Hope and Freedom, veiled in a vision of children; because that was once my greatest wish. They do it out of empathy, and of sadness that what I wanted most in all the world I can never have. To bring me comfort in times when my heart is heavy with what my actions now require of me. To revitalize my determination and help me find the strength to carry on when everything seems lost. Protecting me from choices; done out of desperation or futility; that would end my life far sooner than it is meant to end.”

“They see it as a kindness. And, though I should see it as just another failing, I have come to accept their presence here as acknowledgement of a moment lost that should never been forgotten. And a reminder of what I am truly fighting for –even when my very own heart begins to doubt.”

“And I am grateful for it.”

“And Solas’ mirror? Is that, their doing or yours?”

“Mine.” she smiled. “He is a reflection of a moment in time that feels so long ago, used as a reminder to never lose hope even when my whole world seems to falling into ashes all around me. A reminder to never forget the man I always knew was there and the happiness we once had and may have again.”

“A reminder...to never give up. Even when all choices seem dire...that there seems to be no end in sight...No end where happiness stands waiting...
“And to always keep fighting.”

“And what are you fighting for, exactly?”

“To protect those I love from a monster of my own making.”

“The darkness you spoke of, yes.” Abelas nodded. “And how does that battle fare?”

“Battle?” she chuckled. “Yes, I suppose it is.”

“The situation has changed.” she answered, seriousness in her voice for the first time in a while. “The darkness has grown stronger, and stronger still, since the moment I’ve learn of its existence. And as its strength grows, so too does the need for more and more magic to maintain the barrier. Its prison.”

“I am doing all that I can to weaken it. The fight, though grueling, has maintained a stalemate until as of late. It has found a new outlet to increase its power, an outlet that I cannot block. Drawn from a fear which cannot be abated nor forgotten. Which drains more and more of my strength at every passing moment.”

“I fear unless I find a way to shift the balance of power into my favor once more, that I may not be able to maintain the barrier for much longer.” she admitted. “If that happens, if I fail to either keep it contained or find a way to destroy it safely, I will have no choice but to sacrifice all that remains of me in order to see to it that it never gains its freedom.”

“For the world will suffer far more greatly than it ever has been before, if I fail.”

“But you know a way to destroy it, do you not? Or have I misunderstood the undertones of your words spoken in subtlety?”

“There is no guarantee that such a choice would truly destroy the darkness.” she answered. “Not without taking its very mirror in living along with it. Too many have died because of me already, Abelas. I will not sacrifice that which I love most in this world when I can shed my own blood in its protection myself.”
“And what happens after? If you allow yourself to be taken by the darkness...sacrifice yourself in the protection of the waking and of him, what becomes of the world you leave behind? Have you not thought of how the people you will leave behind will feel? How heartbroken and devastated they will be? How lost they will become without you?”

“I have felt their pain many times over, Abelas. I know that my decision will affect a great many, that what I will eventually have to do will shred was little happiness the others may have because of me for a time. But...But allowing another to die in my stead is not something I can allow to happen anymore. My hands are stained with far too much blood already.”

“Too many soldiers died at Adamant.” she said, desperation lacing her words. “Even more so at the Temple of Mythal. And, even though I have come to grips with their deaths, sacrificing another on the altar of fate simply to save my own skin...is something that I cannot do again. I must pay for what I’ve done. The magic I invoked out of carelessness. And if that requires me to end my life to settle such a debt, I will do so without hesitation.”

“But, even in doing so, your death may not stop Solas’ plan.” Abelas countered. “Though he will mourn your death, truly, there is no guarantee that it will be enough to stop him from proceeding with the resurrection of The People after you’re gone.”

“I know that.” she sighed. “Nor was that ever my intention.”

“I’ve accepted the outcome of my choice long ago. And even if my death cannot sway him from the path he has bound himself to take, at least I will be able to leave this life knowing that for the rest of his life he will always remember that every choice he has made since the moment he abandoned me to my fate will be forever shadowed and stained by my sacrifice. And with such a stain he will know, deep down in his heart, that with every step I took –every hardship I had faced, every scar I had carried, every tear I had shed, had all been to keep the man I love safe.”

“That, in the end, my sacrifice was not a choice born from martyrdom but born out of love. A love that will never end.”

“He will know that my love was never false!”

“It’s a cruelty. To leave him in such a state.”

“Perhaps. But, no more cruel than the alternative.” she sighed dejectedly.
“Taking his life.”

“Yes,” she answered.

“I realized long ago, after learning of his intentions with the world, that—even though the world may demand it of me—I could not, cannot, take his life. At first, when the wound was at its freshest, I mulled over the possibility of striking the final blow. In my mind’s eye I saw the confrontation. Calculated all the possible ways I could find my advantage. How I could defeat him. But in every scenario, with every choice I made, when that final moment came...in the end, my hands would not obey. My heart wouldn’t allow it.”

“Is that why you set him on this path?” Abelas questioned. “Instead of trying to end his life?”

“Yes,” she answered. “For his sake, as well as mine.”

“You’ve said that before. What do you mean?”

“Solas...” she sighed again. “And I...we both had secrets. For me, they were simple secrets. Secrets of a bloodline so close to his beloved Elvhenan that, at times, I thought that he would welcome such a similarity between us. I wanted to tell him so many times before, yet I could not bring myself to say it.”

“Because I, too, was afraid. Afraid that he could see me as a threat instead. Something unnatural. An abomination not fit to live in this world. That fear stopped me from showing him the truest part of me. And I regret that.”

“The path he will soon take, what he will soon learn, will absolve me of such guilt—at least, in part. He will know the truth. All of it. And when the time comes that my life ends, I can go to the beyond knowing that Solas truly knew the real me.”

“Whether it be for good or ill.”

“The lies I told, the truths I withheld, will come to light. And all his worries, all that he wondered about, all the questions he never thought to ask, will be answered. An absolution of his misdeeds and
mine, all in the face of what was lost.”

“You intend to set him free...” Abelas realized, his eyes opening in surprise. “From you.”

“From the burden that I have become and the burden I’ve created.”

“And what of your delusion here?” Abelas countered. “Is what lives here not your truest hope? A future that could possibly still come to fruition?”

“It is. And its truth, that possibility of existence one day, is not yet lost.” she answered. “But with every day the darkness grows stronger, and with it; so too; does the hope of this place fade more and more.”

“Soon it will be too late.” she sighed. “And when that time comes, my choice will be made for me.”

“And the future that you wish for the two of you will vanish...” he breathed out.

“Forever.”

“That is why you must complete the tasks I have given you.” she said firmly. “So that I can go to the next life without any regrets. And Solas can understand that the choices he made in this life were a burden he never had to carry alone. For he never did.”

“Do you have no faith in him, my lady?” Abelas questioned softly. “Do you not believe that if there is a way to save you; to destroy the darkness and spare your life; that he would not hesitate to move the very heavens to do so?”

“I have no doubts that if there was a way to save me from my very destruction, he would do everything that was absolutely necessary to save me.” she answered. “And that possibility troubles me more than anything that has come before or will come after.”

“Saving me, it is something I do not wish for him to attempt. For the choices he will have to make to do so will inevitably lead this world down a far darker path than even his endeavors for The People ever could.”
“How can you know that?” countered Abelas.

“How can you know that?” countered Abelas.

“Some things are inevitable, little Sorrow,” she answered. “And, my fate, is such.”

“Has been…” she whispered. “From the moment I dared to accept the power of a bloodline I did not fully understand, out of fear of simply being left alone in this life.”

“Solas carries that blame right along with you!” argued Abelas. “It is his fault that you’ve become this. That you are bound to a fate you don’t deserve.”

“Had he been honest with you from the very beginning, none of this would have happened!”

“No.” she sighed softly, the acceptance in her voice almost chilling. “Only I carry the blame for such a fate. It was my choices which led us here. And the fate that is so bestowed upon me can only be squarely lain my feet.”

“Is that why you have commanded me to say nothing?” Abelas questioned in frustration. “Why you refuse to allow me to tell Solas everything now?”

“There is a time, and place, for everything, my little Sorrow,” she answered. “And he is not ready.”

“Ahh. It is time,” she announced softly after a long pause.

At her words, Abelas—who until that very moment had kept his eyes trained on the woman at his side—looked up to see a large, blackened Eluvian standing before them in a small meadow shrouded in shadow.

“What is that?” he questioned, turning to look at her worriedly.

“The gate back to where I must go.” she answered. “The moon has set on our time here and the time has come for me to return to the barrier. To fight once more.”
“Must you go alone? I could...”

“No Abelas, your place is in the living. At Solas’ side, in my stead. This fight is mine and mine alone.”

“But...”

“Please, Abelas. Do not make this parting any harder than it must be. I have shown you the truth of the path before you. What you must do to ensure Solas’ safety. And that is the only path you must take.”

“I can’t just stand here and let you go back there alone!” he countered immediately.

“You must.”

“But, please, Sarina...”

“Abelas,” she replied with a suddenly teary smile. “Please.”

“You are a credit to the people, my friend.” she sighed.

“What are you saying?”

“I had not expected that you would come to fear for my safety. Nor worry on my behalf.” she answered. “After all that I have put so harshly on your shoulders. But it warms my heart to know that you have come to care for me, even the smallest bit. It is a pleasant feeling. One I will cherish, truly. So, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you. And thank you still, for wanting to be my white knight—even though you cannot.”

“I just wish...I wish there was a way to stop this.” he answered desperately. “A way to save you both.”
“I know. And I am grateful for it,” she answered before turning toward the Eluvian and walked away.

“One last question, if you please, before you leave me.” Abelas quickly spoke, hoping that she would wait for just a moment more.

“As you wish.”

“You intend to sacrifice your life to save the living and Solas, but there is one fundamental question which has still been left unanswered.”

“Which is?”

“Is this the only way?”

Sarina flinched.

“There is, isn't there.” he immediately countered, her tale-tale reaction enough for him to realize that there was still something she was keeping from him. “There’s another way to stop this. All of this. Isn’t there?”

“Please...” he begged, love suddenly lacing his voice. “Just...just tell me the truth.”

“I have burdened you too much already,” she answered.

“Isn’t that my decision?” he countered again. “I want to know, Sarina.”

“I cannot tell you.” she sighed, before suddenly resuming her way towards the Eluvian.

“Why!??”
“I care too much for you, to endanger you further.”

Coming to a stop in front of the gate back to the darkness, she sighed heavily before looking over her shoulder at Abelas.

“I am sorry...my sweet Sorrow...but...It is not by your hands that my fate can be forever changed,” she answered before turning her back fully to Abelas and disappearing into the Eluvian without another word.

“Sarina!” screamed Abelas.
The Village of Solas

Chapter Summary

Waking from Abelas' memory, Solas learns more about his beloved and the truth of those who swore their oath, before resuming the path that leads him to her. In the village, he comes across the place where Cole says she now rests, only to come face to face with -not only- a cloaked stranger with a formidable presence but the realization that Cole may not be the ally he had always seemed to be.

Chapter Notes

Put this up fairly quickly, so, if there are any type-o's let me know.
This update is shorter than the last simply so I can set up the next plot twist coming NEXT CHAPTER!
I hope you're enjoying it so far. Make sure to leave some comments.

Update: 07/15/2018

With the rush like that of a pounding wave receding from a desolate shore and sudden clap of thunder, Abelas' memory faded from Solas' mind. Blinking back the sensation, for only a heartbeat, Solas opened his eyes to find himself staring up at the star-filled Tevinter sky and laying quietly upon a bedroll. Taking in a deep breath and letting it out slowly, he tried to settle his mind from the emotional turmoil Abelas' memory had churned within him and re-center himself into the here and now as hundreds of questions tried to needle his thoughts far more quickly than had ever happened before.

“That...” came Abelas’ interrupting voice, hesitantly. “Save for tonight...and once before, that was the last time I spoke to her.”

Turning his head and looking up, Solas caught sight of Abelas. With his knees pulled to his chest, his marked arm draped over them, and his chin resting quietly upon it, he sat quietly staring off into the distance unable to look at his friend. As Cole crouched down beside him, a comforting hand on the Sentinel’s shoulder.
“When?” questioned Solas with a sigh, as he pulled his eyes away from his friend and looked back up at the sky.

“A few days ago,” Abelas admitted. “The night when you read her Vallas Val for the first time.”

“I...don’t know why...or how I managed to stumble into her sanctuary, though.” Abelas quickly added. “I was...I don’t know. I just opened my eyes to the Fade and there it was.”

“You sound surprised by it.”

“I was,” he replied. “I’ve never appeared in such a place without her summon, or machination. So, I don’t know how I managed to find it again.”

“Emotions affect everything.” came Cole’s quiet voice.

“You were worried: for yourself, for Solas, for her...” he added. “And that worry manifested itself.”

“I see.” Solas sighed. “Then, why can’t...”

“Her wards are too strong,” replied Cole. “Specifically created to deter the wolf above all things.”

“But they do not deter you, do they, Cole?” Solas suddenly realized.

“Compassion is not Pride,” Cole answered gently.

“I see.” nodded Solas.

“That’s how you managed to send me there.” sighed Solas.
“Yes. For we are one in the same.”

With those words, Solas now fully understood how Cole could send him into the Fade as he had done just hours ago. It was not because he carried within himself a great magical ability, or had been bestowed with some gift, but simply because Sarina’s sanctuary carried no bars for those of her own kind. The daughter of Compassion’s greatest gift, Hope had called her. A descendant of a spirit of Compassion made flesh. A sister to all of Compassion’s forms throughout existence. And, to Cole, true family.

“Cole?” questioned Solas with a sigh. “How much longer does she have before time runs out?”

“At most?” he replied. “A few days.”

“Vengeance.” the spirit-boy added. “Has grown stronger with each passing day. More and more. And moreover still. Has learned a path to cause her more pain than he has inflicted thus far. And that path gives him a greater advantage.”

“Her words spoke of such a shift in power. Often.” Abelas sighed sadly. “I had hope that she was giving it more weight than what actually existed. But...”

“But?” questioned Solas as he sat up and turned towards Abelas and Cole.

“It has been several years since you have seen Sarina’s face...” he answered. “But for me, her image has been a constant in my dreams for years. She is much frailer than the woman I met in the Fade so long ago. Thin. Battered. Drained. Merely a shell of the woman you once knew.”

“The darkness has taken its toll. Much more than can be seen or felt in her presence. Every time I lay eyes upon her she has lost more and more of that which makes her, her.”

“I fear that what Cole says is truer than anything that has been said before.” he sighed. “That her time is almost done.”

“What changed?” questioned Solas, turning his eyes to the boy.
“Every night,” sighed Cole. “Vengeance searches for a way to sway her determination. A way to change her conviction. Find an exit to set it free. And does so with no regards to how it will scar her. How destructive it will be. Horrid, horrible things done and said to gain its goal. Terrible. Cruel. Unfeeling. Uncaring. Hateful. Evil deeds and thoughts to melt away what strength she has. But to no avail. She would not give up. Would not give in. Fought. Fights. Because she must. But...”

“But?”

“He has found a source, a thought, and feeling, which she cannot withstand. A dream corrupted into a nightmare. Cruelly and carefully twisted to inflict a pain she cannot endure.”

“What is it that he has found? That he has corrupted so cruelly that it threatens to break her?”

“I...can...not speak of it.” Cole hesitatingly replied, as his face suddenly crumbled with a deep sadness as his mind remembered such a sight. “To give it words would only hasten its realization.”

Suddenly Solas’ heart seemed to drop to the pit of his stomach, as his mind tried to conjure images of what Cole could have seen to invoke such a look of tragedy upon the spirit boys face. Cole was never one to sugar-coat his words. To leave things to interpretation, surely, but never one to withhold information of such vital importance unless absolutely necessary. His hesitation to even speak of the horrors that Sarina was now facing spoke more to its true savagery than any descriptor ever could.

“What must I do, Cole?”

“She wishes you to do nothing. Simply to learn of the secrets she kept from you. So that you may know the real her before she must leave this world forever....”

“I know that...” interrupted Solas. “I’m not asking you what she needs me to do to bring her the peace she seeks. I am asking you what you think I should do.”

“Finding her...” Cole answered slowly. “Finding her in the living, the place of pride where she now lingers is your nearest goal. But it is not the only one. You seek to convince her, do you not? To make her understand that you do not wish for her to sacrifice herself for your sake...”

“Yes.”
“But are you willing to sacrifice your goal to save her?” he questioned. “That is a question you must answer for yourself or everything you have endured from the moment you left to search for her until the moment you find her will all be for naught.”

“You are referring to what Hope spoke of?”

“Hope?” questioned Abelas curiously.

“Yes,” answered Cole.

“I understand the choice I must make,” Solas replied. “That the power of the Guardians can only be invoked once. Said power, being the only power in the whole of Thedas strong enough to both open the Heart of Elvhenan or destroy Vengeance once and for all. And for me to save her, I must choose her over The People.”

“I don’t understand.” Abelas suddenly stated. “What are you saying?”

“Sorrow doesn’t know.” sighed Cole, before turning to look Abelas. “She could not tell you. Because she does not wish to be saved.”

“Why?”

“She will not sacrifice another for her own sake,” Cole answered knowingly.

“And that includes The People.” Solas sighed knowingly.

“Precisely.”

“She would rather die, alone, than allow others to die to keep her safe,” he explained further. “She does not wish for the future of The People, be it those who live in this time or those who now slumber lost to time, to lose their lives for her sake. Nor does she want Solas to lose his life for the sake of the world. She would rather die so that none are lost because of what she has done. She
seeks atonement for her misdeeds, her greatest sin, by saving the world and everyone in it. A martyrdom, done out of love, not out of pride.”

“She believes...If Solas chooses her over The People, they will continue to be lost to time or the slaves to the unworthiness cast upon them after Solas’ choice so long ago. That neither can be saved. And that if he chooses to save her and destroy the darkness, his life will be lost for all time. But if she sacrifices what remains of herself to banish both Vengeance and she who created it to the Void together. Only her future will be lost. Trapped together forever in the nothingness. A willing sacrifice so that the man she loves and the people who her heart yearns for can live on. Free from what she has done. Leaving Solas to protect the people in her stead –be it those who live now or those who find life once more.”

“She wishes to leave the fate of The People in Solas’ hands?”

“But why?” questioned Abelas.

“Because she knows she cannot save them both,” Solas replied. “That she cannot stop me.”

“Her heart won’t allow it.” Abelas suddenly repeated in realization.

Cole nodded.

“So she wants to do die,” Abelas answered softly. “Rather than having to make that choice. Or having to see the world end because she failed to act?”

“No.” answered Cole. “She wants to live. More than most. But she sees no other way out.”

“She still believes to this day that if Vengeance is truly destroyed, Solas’ link to what remains of Tiar will kill him as well.” Cole sighed. “She knows that a part of herself is merely being selfish. That she is choosing to die to save the man she loves because she cannot bear the thought of living a life without him in some way or bring herself to take his life by her own hands. But she knows that allowing him to sacrifice the fate of The People for her sake is also selfish. She doesn’t want to Solas to have to make that choice. Adding upon so many of the regrets he already carries. So she’s making it instead.”

“She is far too afraid to see reason.”
“Not completely,” answered Cole, turning to Solas. “But her time is growing shorter still.”

“The choice to sacrifice your goal must be made if you intend to save her from her choice,” Cole stated flatly. “But, if you so choose to do so, and before you will even be able to attempt to save her, you will come face to face with a final challenge that will be harder than anything that has come so far.”

“The wolf at her side,” Abelas answered softly.

“Yes.” nodded Cole, before looking straight at Solas with a piercing look. “The Guardian Wolf of Valor guards her as a lone wolf guards his one, true, mate...”

“He will not be an easy foe to defeat, nor will he be easily swayed from his primary objective. For him, her safety is paramount and the Wolf of Pride is his greatest enemy.”

“Who is the Wolf of Valor?” questioned Solas, breaking eye contact with Cole to level a look at Abelas.

“I do not know.” replied the Sentinel. “I have never seen his true form in the living, only the mask of the Great White Wolf he wears in the Fade. And only once.”

“And the others, have you seen them in her presence before?”

“No,” Abelas replied. “No guardian has ever stepped foot into her sanctuary. She said so herself.”

“Because she does not wish for them to become aware of her choice. She walked away from her Guardians years ago, taking only the wolf with her, blocking off their connection to her thoughts and her heart, leaving them to search for her since.” Cole explained. “Because she does not wish for them to interfere.”

“Why?”
“Because they can save her. And she knows that. Just as they, so too, will know.” Abelas replied. “If they truly become aware of what has happened, if they learn of the plight that has befallen her and the choice she has indiscriminately made, they will do all they can to save her—even if it’s against her will.”

“And if such a moment in time happens, she will be forced to stop them...” Cole finished. “Because she wants to protect them as well...and will invoke the compulsion she promised she would never use again. Forcing them to stand down and watch her as she sacrifices her life for us all.”

“She has left them in the dark,” Cole added softly. “Because she does not want to lose them as well.”

At that moment a realization crossed Solas’ mind. A realization that, aside from Cole, it was Abelas who was being more forthright than ever before. He wondered for a moment as to why, and then Sarina’s words in the Fade suddenly echoed in his ears.

“I release you...from...your promise...”

“Abelas...” Solas called out gently. “Sarina set you free didn’t she?”

“From the promise I made to her, yes.” he nodded.

“What did you promise?”

“That I would not speak of the things I knew. That I would keep her secrets forever.”

“And now you no longer have to...”

“Yes. So if there is something you wish to know, my friend. I am no longer bound to keep silent. Ask, whatever you wish. And if I can answer, I will do so.”

Solas’ first choice was immediate.

“The Guardians: name them.”
“That answer is simpler than you think.” chuckled Abelas derisively. “For they are not unknown to you.”

“Dorian Pavus was her First Knight, the Serpent Guardian of Loyalty. And The Iron Bull came immediately thereafter: The Dragon Guardian of Justice. As you, well, know. It was the human Commander, Cullen Rutherford, who next swore the oath and became the Lion Guardian of Faith after the death of her clan. And, Ser Blackwall: Phoenix Guardian of Redemption took his place as her forth after she saved him from the gallows and gave him a new chance at a better life.”

“You were set to be her fifth, having chosen both Blackwall and Cullen long before they took their oath.” he continued. “But when that failed. She was lost as to who could claim Valor’s place.”

“When did she find a suitable host for Valor, then?”

As that question fell from Solas’ lips, Abelas immediately looked at Cole.

“He does not know;” answered Cole.

“But you do?”

“Yes.” Cole nodded. “But, I am bound to a promise of my own.”

“To not speak of Valor’s true name?”

“Yes.”

“That is something you must learn in time,” Cole added gently. “For his identity is paramount to knowing all truths that were once kept from you.”

“And that truth will come when it has been preordained to do so. And no sooner.”
“I...” sighed Solas acceptingly. “Understand.”

With his curiosity satiated for the time being, and Abelas life no longer in danger, the three friends broke camp the next morning, after a well-needed rest, and continued their journey toward the village of Solas on the edge of the great desert. For the next three days, they traveled west through southern Tevinter with barely a word spoken amongst them. Each of them, too singularly focused on the journey and the desperation to find Sarina before it was too late.

Just before sunup on the fourth day, the little band came across the outskirts of a small span of desert that marked the boundary of the Sands of Silence. The first ray of hope in days. Signaling that their journey was almost over. By nightfall, the village of Solas would be in their sights. And, so too, would be Sarina. And such a truth was not false. For, as the last vestiges of the sun’s rays disappeared behind the horizon, hours later, the small, quiet little village finally came into view. At its appearance, it was Cole who finally spoke after nearly an entire day of silence shared between them all.

“We must use stealth,” he advised.

“Very well.” Solas sighed.

Dismounting their horses, they readied themselves to enter the village as Cole gathered the horses one by one and tethered them to a nearby, old tree some hundred yards from the Village’s eastern border.

“Alright Cole,” Abelas said gently, turning to look at the boy. “What approach should we take?”

“Sarina...” he answered, closing his eyes to concentrate on her for a moment. “Rests in the old, abandoned house near the northern gate. The gate that leads the last remnants of the great forest that once resided here so long ago.”

“And Valor guards over her,” he added, opening his eyes.

“We must not be seen,” he advised, before turning to Solas. “Your magic must not be sensed.”

“If Valor is alerted to your presence, you will never lay eyes upon her.”
“I will try my best to mask my aura.” nodded Solas.

“Very well,” replied Cole. “Follow me.”

With those words, Abelas and Solas followed the spirit boy through the small village quietly. Traversing its small layout by maneuvering through the silent streets and back alleyways making sure to no rouse suspicion or observance, they did their best to not only blend into the shadows but internally ready themselves for what they would inevitably face.

Such pursuits, however, were more difficult than Solas would have believed. With every step he took, closer to the woman he loved, the more his mind began to fight against what his heart truly desired. Fears and doubts swam through his thoughts. Drumming up a fear of failure unlike any he had ever felt before. The moment was drawing near, nearer and far sooner than he would have expected, and a part of him felt unbelievably unsure. A hurried panic tried to set in. His mind screaming reminders of all the times he had tried to do the right thing only to truly fail in the end. How many of his good intentions had turned to ash and dust in the palm of his hands. Slipping through his fingers without restraint. And how many lives had been ruined simply because he had tried to do something that Pride thought was good, honorable, and true. That fear, so palpable that his very heart pounded heavily within his chest, felt almost oppressive in its intent. His apprehension; mixed with his hesitating thoughts and his anticipation of finally seeing his beloved after so very long; pressed upon his heart and mind a feeling of utter desolation. A feeling, whose emotional pain seemed to manifest into the physical. Causing his whole body to ache with a thrumming echo of desperation and longing.

It was at that moment, when the pain grew stronger, that Solas suddenly thought of Hope and of Freedom as they smiled back at him during Abelas’ memory of her sanctuary. How happy they looked. How content they felt. And how Sarina smiled from her heart at their portrayal of the children she once could’ve had. And how blissful she seemed living a life of a wife and mother. How her heart seemed to sing with loving pride and happiness as his mirror came to her side smiling as if not even a sliver of unhappiness or regrets had ever graced his heart. And how happy they all truly seemed to be. Even though such a manifestation was just a machination of her own hopes and dreams, in its presence it felt so unbelievable real, but more so, more attainable than anything.

And it was that, in of itself; the possibility that such a future could truly come to pass; that suddenly forced every divisive and troubling thought to suddenly disappear from his mind in an instant. Suddenly he felt re-energized. Hopeful. And determined. As a desire to see to it that Sarina would have the life she had always dreamed of. He would see to it. No matter how much he would have to fight. No matter how much he would have to give up. Even if that meant his very life, she would have the happiness she truly deserved.
He would return to her the happiness that he had foolishly denied her out of selfish pride.

“The way,” whispered Cole as they came to a fork in the street, pointing towards a darkened alleyway heading northeast. “It’s not far now.”

Tense minutes passed by in a blur of indiscriminate and dilapidated homes until, after stepping under a rush covered awning, Cole came to sudden stop. Instantly raising his hand. Signaling for all to hold.

“Stay here,” he whispered, sternly. An uncommon yet resolute order, before he suddenly vanished in a puff of smoke.

Solas, taking in a breath and letting it out slowly, nodded to himself in understanding and acceptance as a quietness and stillness settled around them the moment the spirit-boy disappeared. Taking a moment to take in their current surroundings, he realized that place in which they had come to a stop had been the remnants of a long-since-abandoned stable. The thatch roof above had seen many winters since its last repair and the ground was littered with the very last slivers of field grasses and grains once used to feed its last inhabitants and a thick coating of desert sand. Near the northeast, chest-high, wall; which surrounded the small space; stood a stack of crumbling, brittle firewood left to the elements piled as high as the wall’s upper most railing.

“How do you fare?” whispered Abelas softly.

“I’m...ok...” Solas replied.

“Are you ready for this?”

“No...” he sighed. “But I will not allow this to continue. I will do what I should have done long ago.”

Abelas smiled softly.

“Remember, you are not alone in this, my friend,” reassured Abelas. “I will do all that I must to make sure you both succeed. That you will finally find the happiness you both truly deserve.”
“I cannot thank you enough, Abelas...” Solas sighed. “For all that you have done, done for us both.”

“Nor do you need to.” the Sentinel replied. “As you have your reasons for doing this, so too, do I.”

“Still...”

All of a sudden, as Solas’ words disappeared into the shadows all around them, an unexpected gust of wind blew through the abandoned space of the quiet stable –bringing with it a strange sound of metal sliding against metal echoing from just beyond the confines of the wooden walls around them. With his curiosity piqued, Solas moved from where he once stood and took a few hesitant steps until he managed to maneuver his way to the pile of firewood just past where Abelas stood. Hoping to get a view of the source of the sound.

“Falon,” Abelas warned. “Cole said not to move.”

Ignoring Abelas’ warning, Solas placed his hand on the wood pile before him and peeked over the edge. What he saw, in that moment, seemed almost innocuous. Before him, stood another home; damaged by the summer sun and wild winds of the desert; falling into a disrepair; that mirrored the aesthetic of the entire town. A single story affair, the home –from his vantage point –held only a few small windows, one lone chimney on the northern most side, and awning about the length of two horses jutting out towards the street just before a single, solitary, front door. But the unoffending structure, mundane in its purpose and condition, was not what suddenly made his heart stop a second later.

Just under the awning, no more than four steps from the small home’s door sat a figure cloaked and hooded, partially obscured by the shadow a lone candle lamp hanging a few feet away. On an old wooden stool, the figure perched quietly. His tall, thin, lithe but muscular frame not distorted by his position left no thought of imagination as to his prowess nor apparent strength. Nor did that which he held before him.

In one hand, gloved with silverite gauntlets laced in noticeable glyphs, a broad sword of unbelievable make was gripped with care, and in the other, a sharpening stone sparking gently as it was drawn meticulously against the blade’s edge over and over.

Solas immediately narrowed his eyes, trying to force his vision to take in every little detail he could see and those that could not be seen. His mind suddenly wondering who the figure was. Or his purpose. As the darkness around the man seemed to dim even more. Almost as if it was protecting him. For a moment more he watched, feeling almost irritated that he could not discern friend from foe, and then a thought occurred to him. Cole’s words ringing in his ears. Pulling his eyes away from
the figure for only a moment, he quickly took in the scene before him and all around him. Catching
sight of the village’s northern gate just a hundred or so paces from the small home’s very doorstep.

‘Valor.’ he immediately thought, instantly training his eyes back upon the figure seemingly standing
guard. Somehow already knowing in that split second that the man he saw before him was the great
Guardian’s living embodiment.

Lifting his hand slowly, determined to glean the truth of the man’s purpose and confirm his
susicion, Solas slowly began to call upon his magic. A simply spell to detect other magical auras.
But before the spell could even flicker to life, he suddenly felt Abelas grab his wrist and yank his
hand down.

“Have you gone mad?”

“Don’t,” warned Abelas.

Solas immediately looked at his friend, and saw the fear and worry there.

“You promised.” the Sentinel whispered sternly.

“I...” stammered Solas before sighing quietly as Abelas let him go. “Yes, you’re right. My
apologies.”

“There...” Solas revealed hesitantly. “There is someone standing guard.”

Without a word, Abelas took a quiet step and looked over the edge of the woodpile and immediately
noticed the lone figure.

“Who is he?” Solas questioned.

“I...”

Suddenly, before Abelas could finish what he was about to say, the front door of the lone home
opened. Allowing the flood of light from inside to spill into the darkened space under the awning and illuminating the man a little more. The flash of light instantly reflecting off, not only the man’s gauntlets, but his strange armor hued in aged brown leather and folded Silverite and Stormheart blended steel, immediately drawing Solas’ attention. As his eyes trailed the man’s form he suddenly had a sinking feeling. A sinking feeling that the man standing just before him was someone he once-knew. Someone who truly was a real threat.

Then again, more movement came. Drawing his eyes from the man. As the shadow of something large crossed in front of the source of light from inside. For a few tense moments the shadow seemed to still and then in the blink of an eye, it began to move once more. A second later the form that had produced such a shadow exited the door. Its snow-white fur glistening in the light.

Sarina’s words suddenly echoed in his mind, from a story told and a cursory illusion shown so many years ago, as he took in the form of the large, living, breathing, white, alpha wolf that had strode from the confines of the house, and made its way to the man’s side. As he watched the man reach down and pet the wolvhen as if it was a mere mabari pup, Solas suddenly realized who or what he was truly seeing. And what the appearance of such a spirit bonded animal truly meant.

For only one woman in the world had laid claim to a snow-white predator such as he.

Movement, once again, came from the illuminated home, and a moment later a figure cloaked and hooded stepped from its confines. At the moment of their appearance, the wolf immediately joined them. Heeling obediently as if trained to do so, as the figure reached down with its left hand and gently ran their gloved fingers the softness resting there.

As the sight of the newest figures movements suddenly registered in his mind, Solas’ suddenly blanched.

‘Not possible.’ he instantly dismissed, as he deliberately scanned the figure again. Noticing that he had not been seeing things. That the new edition had its left arm. Whole. Intact. ‘It can’t be her.’

Before his mind could even comprehend who the figure was, or even debate that it somehow could or couldn’t be his beloved any further, the figure released her grip on the wolf at her side and took the few steps left to come to the hooded man’s side. The conversed quietly for a moment, their voices far too quiet for either Solas or Abelas to hear, and a moment later the man suddenly nodded before reaching up and brushing back his hood –revealing his face.

Solas suddenly gasped, as his eyes saw a flash of warm skin, deep green eyes, and long snow-white hair a second before he felt the Fade instantly shudder at his side. He only had a second to turn, to
notice that Cole now stood by his side, before the spirit-boy instantly grabbed him, spun him around and pushed him so hard that his back connected with the side of the stable in the blink of an eye –his head hitting the wood with a nearly massive thud. Solas immediately saw stars and shook his head as confusion and concussion muddled his thoughts for a moment. The very second his vision cleared from the force of the impact, he felt, rather than saw, Cole’s hand bear down on his chest with a force that he could not possibly possess.

“Cole,” Solas called out desperately, dropping his eyes to the man before him. “What are you doing?”

Without an explanation or the thought to do so, Cole pushed harder upon Solas’ chest, pinning him in place so that he could not escape. A few intense seconds followed, and then before any could dare blink, the spirit boys hand suddenly began to glow. The heat from the magic suddenly called immediately passed through the layers of his mage robes, instantly burning like a white-hot brand searing into his flesh. The pain bursting to life as it registered. Solas’ gritted his teeth, trying to push back the pain and keep his mind clear. He must endure. He must know why this was happening. And why it seemed that Compassion, above all things, was doing this. Taking in a breath, Solas steeled his mind as begged for Cole to stop but the boy just shook his head no.

“Why?” begged Solas.

“My time is now.” Cole suddenly repeated. “I am needed.”

“I must keep my promise.”

At those world Solas’ felt the magic pushing into his chest flare exponentially, encompassing every thought and feeling until everything he could hear, feel, and –ultimately see- suddenly disappeared in a flash of bright light and the smell of the raw Fade slammed into his senses like a massive tidal wave crashing upon the world to destroy everything as his world went completely black.
A Mysterious Stranger

Chapter Summary

Suddenly thrown into darkness, Solas opens his eyes and finds him standing within Skyhold’s walls as a memory of unknown origin takes root before his very eyes.

Chapter Notes

Second Update this week. ^_^
Update: 07/19/2018

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The darkness faded, almost as quickly as it had come, and Solas opened his eyes to suddenly find himself standing on the stone bridge overlooking the bailey at Skyhold. Night had fallen, what seemed like hours ago, and a harsh wind blew as a flurry of snowflakes fell from the sky heavily. All was quiet. Still. As if the entirety of world before him had been abandoned and left for the unstoppable march of time and the winter snows to reclaim once again. Solas allowed his eyes to roam, hoping that something—anything—would make its presence know. Allow him some hint as to why he was suddenly standing there, alone, in the darkness of a place that the Inquisition once called home. A place where her happiness, and his, reigned for such a short, yet, unforgettable time.

He thought of Cole in that moment. The look upon the spirit boy’s face as he pinned him to the wall of the stable just steps from his beloved and the Guardian that protected her. The look of determination, bordering on near frustration that creased around his stone cold eyes as he nearly glared at the wolf looking back in confusion. And the words that fell from his lips.

Cole had said once before that he had been needed. That his time was now. But Solas had never thought that such a statement could ever mean more than just the moment when the boy saved Abelas from crashing to the ground from atop his horse, or helping Solas into Sarina’s sanctuary to learn what he had learned. But, it now seemed, that there was something so much more to the boy’s reasoning for being at his side than he could have ever imagined.

*But, to what purpose?* That was the truest question of all.

Shaking the thoughts of Cole away from his mind, determined to not allow his suspicions of the
boy’s true purpose all this time take hold, Solas pushed away his growing feelings of a betrayal left unknown and quietly convinced himself that he should not condemn the boy as a traitor just yet. He had never known Cole to be cruel. Nor manipulative. Nor impure in his very thoughts, much less actions. And he knew, above all else, that no matter how much what had just happened had rocked his trust in the boy, Cole would never do wrong by him –no matter what was at stake.

Scanning the scene before him once more, Solas tried to discern when such manifestation –probably a memory, though whose he was unsure –came from or its true purpose. The ramparts were his first choice of inspection. Yet he noticed very little. Save for the lack of standards hanging from their high walls. That, in of itself, was vaguely unusual. From the moment they took up residence in Skyhold all those years ago, until the very day he left, those great walls had been the bearers of the Inquisition’s largest battle standards. Proclaiming to all who come within miles of the formidable fortress of what lay within. And for them to be, somehow, missing spoke of a time unknown to him.

‘Perhaps, after I left.’ he thought before allowing his eyes to roam down to the lower bailey.

It was there where he saw the proof of the snowstorm’s true touch on the world. The ground was fully covered in layers upon layers of such accumulation. So much so, that mounds and mounds of it had been shoveled many times over to clear the paths of the lower level, yet the ground still lay thoroughly covered and any footprints, had there been any, to begin with, had long-since been buried and lost to the winter’s blustery chill.

Movement out of the corner of his drew his focus a second later, and he turned to find a not-so-strange, yet somewhat strange, scene before him. Near the gates of Skyhold, just inside the bailey, and barely past the portcullis that would bar all who would dare enter uninvited, stood three men dusted in snow. Dressed in heavy leathers, covered by even heavier, deep red, winter cloaks, two of the men stood alertly –the burning torches in their hands glowing strong –as they flanked a third man; a soldier; dressed in a heavy set of plate armor covered by another heavy cloak. This one, tinted a deep, deep green. The plated soldier, his posture almost aggressive, held his sword in his hand and was pointing it at a fourth man, cloaked and hooded in black –his face and body nearly completely hidden.

As the soldier began to speak, the wind gusted taking away any chance for Solas to overhear the man’s obvious demand as his posture seemed to change to nearly violent. The man cloaked in black, however, did not move. Did not take a defensive stance. Only stood their almost patiently as the soldier barked orders and then, again, barked more. For a moment, the soldier stilled his voice, and a tense standoff of unknown or understandable proportions ensued. And then, as if a bow string pulled tight finally found its release, the tension died with a whimper as the black hooded man simply nodded and raised his hands in submission.

The soldier then spoke once more, quieter than before, and Solas still could not discern his words. But, he needn’t need to, for a moment later the black hooded man slowly reached into the folds of his
cloak and produced what Solas could only guess was a sealed letter. The red, stamp wax barely visible through the falling snow from his vantage point. Handing it to the soldier a moment later, the man stood still as he watched the soldier break the seal on the letter and read it under the torch lights. As his eyes roamed the page, his face was like that of steel. Unmoving. Unresponsive. However, the moment he reached what seemed like the end of the letter, his eyes immediately shot up to look at the hooded man before him.

What happened next; surprised Solas. The soldier, turning to the leather-bound man at his side, handed over the letter, barked an order, and the scout instantly bowed, turned and began running across the lower bailey towards the castle. Solas kept his eyes trained on the scout, watching him as he climbed the barely hidden stones steps up to the upper bailey and then up the main staircase of the castle until he vanished into the entrance of the Great Hall. Moments passed, slower than he would have thought, and before Solas could lose any hope that he wouldn’t glean anymore from such a scene, the scout reappeared onto the main staircase with a very familiar form in tow.

Dressed in his usual garb, with the addition of a heavy winter coat, and with his trusty crossbow strapped to his back, Varric followed the scout down the staircase quickly and made his way to the main gate hurriedly. As his former friend passed his vantage point and carried onto the main gate, however, Solas did not miss the look of worry upon the master storyteller’s face. Something was wrong, if not definitely out of the ordinary.

By the time Varric had managed to come to a stop before the man, he seemed practically out of breath. His chest heaving noticeably. For a moment he tried to catch his breath, and then with what looked like a huge sigh, he steadied himself and turned his eyes to the dark cloaked man before them all. It was then that Varric spoke, his voice lost to the winds as well, and Solas could not tell if there was surprise or suspicion in his words. The man, however, did not answer nor showed any signs that he could have. It was then that Varric took a step, sidestepping the soldier still standing guard and looked up at the man from his vantage point. Whatever he saw there, looking up into the darkness of the man’s cloak, seem to bring forth an echo of shock to the dwarf’s stance and he immediately looked away –pulling his eyes to the sky for a brief moment. He leveled a deep sigh once more before looking back at the man before him and shaking his head. Varric then turned to the soldiers behind him and suddenly waved them off. Dismissing them as if their visitor was no threat. As if he was truly meant to be there.

The soldier, and his accompanying scouts, hesitated for only a moment before acquiescing to the dwarf and standing down. With one final look, and a jerk of the head; in Solas’ direction of all things; Varric motioned for the dark hooded man to follow as he turned and began to walk away. The man fell in line behind the dwarf, as Varric made his way across the lower bailey towards the stables. From his vantage point, Solas watched them closely as they came toward him and then disappeared out of sight below him, only to reappear on the other side. For a second, Solas thought that perhaps the man had simply been a courier sent to deliver a message to the dwarf and that he was now going to the stables to be given a mount to return from whence he had come. However, as Solas soon realized; as the two suddenly made a turn and began to climb the stairs that led to the ramparts; that was not going to be the case this time.
“This way.” came Varric’s voice, looking back at the man behind him, as they came to the mid-stair landing and began to climb the last set of stairs towards the top. “He should be in his office.”

At the mention of ‘he’ Solas immediately knew where they were headed. For only one person within the Inquisition had an office directly on the ramparts. An office; set in a lone tower; that fortuitously was merely a few steps from the end of the very bridge he now stood on. Moving without even thinking, Solas crossed the remainder of the bridge and entered the tower office a split second before he heard a knock echo into the room from one of the two doors leading to the ramparts. Settling himself quickly into the corner of the room, he waited for them to enter. Immediately noticing that the Commander, who rarely left his office during his time in the Inquisition, was nowhere to be seen. A second knock followed, and when it seemed that there was to be no answer to those that had called, the door finally opened. Varric, entered quietly, looking for any signs of the commander, as the hooded man followed him in and closed the door behind him.

“Curly, are you here?” Varric called out, scanning the room before turning his eyes towards the single ladder that led to the small upper floor where the man would rest. “Are you awake?”

When no answer came, Varric called a second time. No answer still. And the dwarf just sighed.

“We’ll have to wait,” Varric informed turning to look at the hooded man who had taken up a position near the door –leaning on the bookshelf that stood there, his heavily gauntleted arms crossed across his chest and revealing a mostly obscured glance at his armor underneath. “Until he returns.”

The man did not answer. Merely nodded.

Minutes passed. Quiet. Still. As the unknown man stood there, waiting. As Varric seemed to dislike the quiet and stillness of the room and began to meander around. Glancing at the Commander’s desk before sitting on its edge with another, almost tired, sigh. It was then that a noise echoed from the last of the three doorways that led to the Commander’s office –this one to the north. Grabbing the attention of everyone inside a moment before the door swung open and crashed against the wall. What it revealed suddenly shocked Solas to a degree. There, standing in the doorway was the Commander of the Inquisition’s forces, being nearly forcibly carried by another man –a scout –that looked vaguely familiar.

“Good grief.” Varric sighed in disappointment at the sight.

“Apologies, Master Varric.” the scout called out, visibly straining over the weight of the man in his arms, as he escorted him inside. “After what happened at the gate, I figured you would come looking for the Commander.”
Varric immediately moved from his perch to allow the scout to deposit the Commander on the edge of his desk.

“Where was he?” the dwarf questioned, before looking at the commander’s slightly rosy complexion and then suddenly coughing from the strong smell of booze emanating from the man.

“Where he always is.” the scout sighed, as he finally managed to settle the man safely on the desk with no fear of him suddenly falling. "These days."

“Again?” sighed Varric disappointingly. “How much has he had?”

“Quite a bit, according to Cabot.”

“It wasn’t that much...” Cullen suddenly slurred sleepily. “Just enough...”

“Just enough to make sure you couldn’t walk on your own power.” Varric retorted, a hint of both anger and disappointment lacing his words.

“I’m fine.” the man muttered. “Just tired.”

“Tired.” Varric nodded. “And drunk.”

“I’m not drunk!” Cullen immediately replied, his eyes deliberately closed.

“Then why did you need to be carried back to your rooms?”

“That...” answered the Scout. “Was my fault actually.”

“How so?”

“When I found him, in the tavern, he was asleep. Cabot said for at least two hours or so. And when I
woke him, I...startled him. He fell out of his seat, and managed to fall and twist his ankle. Figured Lady Sarina would be frightful mad if I just let him walk back here on his own...if he was really hurt...”

At the mention of Sarina’s name, Solas’ heart thumped hard.

‘She’s here.’

“So you gave him a hand.” nodded Varric, accepting the scout’s report before waving him off. “Alright. You can go.”

“Yes, sir.” the scout bowed immediately, before turning tail and leaving.

As the door closed behind him, Varric leveled a telling look at the commander.

“I don’t want to hear it Varric.” Cullen responded, glancing up at the dwarf for a second before closing his eyes and trying to force back the obvious pain in his head. “I know what you’re going to say. You’ve said it a million times already. I know. Ok. I know.”

“Just as long as you’re certain that I don’t approve, understand that I’ve never approved, then I will let it go.” sighed Varric in defeat. “This time.”

Something told Solas, then, that this had become a regular occurrence and he couldn’t help but wonder why. Cullen had always been a straight arrow. The sense standing against the senseless. The rock among the waves. And to see him in such a state, and sensing that Varric had seen this so many times before, was strangely unnerving. He found himself wondering what could have happened to make Cullen turn to a bottle to cope. And why?

“But, I didn’t come to scold you on your current past time,” grumbled Varric. “We have a situation.”

“Situation?” countered Cullen, his eyes immediately opening and catching sight of not only Varric but a hooded man he did not know.

A stranger.
The Commander immediately jumped from the edge of the desk ready to defend and went for his sword, hand shooting to its pommel on instinct as he leveled a threatening look upon the unknown man. But before the seasoned general could pull it from its scabbard, Varric jumped between the Commander and the hooded man—blocking any attack.

“Whoa, there, Curly.” Varric immediately intervened. “Calm down. Everything is alright. There’s no need to worry. He’s a friend.”

“A friend?” the Commander parroted skeptically.

“Yes,” Varric answered. “Sent as a courier to see Lavellan.”

“No!” growled Cullen immediately, his hand not leaving the pommel of his sword. “No one is to see her. Not after what happened.”

“I understand your concern, Curly,” Varric said gently, trying to calm the man. “But this situation is not that one. She is no danger, I assure you.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I just am, ok,” Varric replied. “You’re, just going to have to trust me on this. You do trust me, don’t you?”

“You know I would never do anything to hurt her...And, to this day, I never have.”

After a few tense moments of the Commander looking at Varric, at the courier, and back he finally gave in—letting out a deep sigh of acquiescence and releasing his sword.

“Very well.” the Commander sighed. “What’s this about then?”

“He’s been sent to see Lavellan.”
“By whom?”

“I...I’m sorry Curly, but I cannot tell you that.” Varric stuttered to answer. “It’s a secret communique only the sender, the courier, and Lavellan are supposed to know about. The details of which, if known, will severely hinder his assignment.”

“Then how did you come to know about it?” countered Cullen, turning to look at the courier with suspicion. “And why does he not speak on his own behalf?”

“His instructions were clear. To not speak a word to anyone, save for Sari. Lest he give himself away.” replied Varric, before digging into his coat and producing what looked like to be the very letter that had been handed over by the courier just a short while ago. “This letter explains it. All.”

“His instructions are clear.” Varric continued as Cullen took the letter and began to read. “He was ordered to come to Skyhold. To speak with Lavellan. If he was accosted by any guards he was then order to produce that letter, written to me. Knowing that I would recognize the penmanship almost instantly.”

“It says here: That you are to bring the courier before the Inquisitor no matter the cost, Varric.”

“Yes.” the dwarf nodded. “That is why I came to you. Further down it asks that the courier’s identity and, therefore his existence, must be kept a secret at all cost. As he has so been instructed to deliver the contents of what he is set to deliver, directly into her hands and only in private.”

“Demanding a private audience with the former Inquisitor in person?” Cullen responded, seemingly coming to the end of the letter and slightly growling in disgust. “How dare...”

“Curly.” Varric interrupted. “Please.”

“I know this is unorthodox.”

“You can say that again.” the Commander retorted forcefully.

“I know. But you have to trust me on this one. The sender of this letter, I know that penmanship.
Would know it in my sleep. And they would not dare to circumvent protocol unless it was not absolutely necessary. That, I can assure you. If they sent him all this way, what he has to say and do is vital to us—and to her. She must be allowed to see him.”

“And what if his instructions, all of this, is merely a ruse to get him alone with Sarina just so he can kill her?” countered the Commander almost angrily. “There have already been too many attempts on her life as it is, in as many days. I will not put her in a situation like that again. Nor will I allow her to put herself in such danger again.”

“This time you must. It is not up to you. And you know that.” retorted Varric almost forcefully. “Sarina will want to know that he has come. Of his purpose here. And if you deny him access to her without her permission. Taking the choice away from her....”

“Fine!” growled Cullen. For he knew the dwarf was not wrong.

“What do you need from me, then?” he sighed.

“It’s simple. Clear the Great Hall of guards. Dismiss her personal guards standing at the entrance to her rooms as well. So he will be allowed access to her unnoticed and undeterred. Speak will Sari, tell her of his presence here, and if she so wishes to see him—as I suspect she will—escort him to her rooms.”

“Then leave them be to speak in private,” he concluded.

“It will take time to clear the Great Hall.”

“I am well aware.” nodded Varric.

“Very well,” muttered Cullen, handing the letter back to the dwarf. “I’ll see to it then. Wait here until I return.”

With one last sigh, Cullen made his way across his office, headed for the door that led to the stone bridge that connected the tower to the main castle. Opening the door, he took a step only to look back at the dwarf pointedly.
“Don’t make me regret this Varric,” he warned.

“You won’t,” he replied.

“We’ll see...” Cullen countered, before quietly exiting the tower and closing the door behind him.

Shaking his head, Varric turned towards the desk just a step from where he stood and immediately turned the corner of the letter over the candle burning gently there and watched the parchment slowly be consumed by the fire. As the last of it disappeared in his hand, he heard a voice from behind him.

“That man is a disgrace.” the courier muttered in a deep, accented voice. “Not fit to lead.”

“He is more than fit,” replied Varric. “Just a little lost.”

“Lost?” the courier countered softly.

“Yeah. You would be too.” the dwarf sighed. “If the only woman you ever loved, and can never have, nearly died two nights ago. By an assassin’s blade, no less. In the comfort of her own bath water, of all things.”

At those words, Solas’ heart dropped in the pit of his stomach. For now, he knew from whence this memory came.

Three months after the Qunari plot in Halamshiral. The assassination. Contrived on its own. Attempted by one of his followers wishing to curry his favor. Believing that with the Inquisitor gone, no one would be able to stop him.

Something he would have never ordered. No matter what.

For the next hour, and then some, Varric and the courier took their rest in the small confines of Cullen’s office and waited for his return until the door leading to the bridge finally opened and
revealed the man once more.

“Well?”

Cullen just nodded at the dwarf before turning to the courier.

“She’s agreed. I have done what you’ve asked. Follow me.”

Varric immediately looked at the courier.

“Go on a head. I have a feeling that if I follow I will only add more suspicion should we be seen.”

The courier simply nodded, spoke not another word, and followed the Commander out the door with Solas hot on their heels. They crossed the bridge quietly, entered the base of the library tower and came to stop as their eyes immediately searched the upper floors of the rotunda for any movement.

In that moment, Solas could not stop himself from taking in what remained of his former home within Skyhold. He had spent his time here. So much time. And so much time with her. The memories of such a place still fresh as the day they were made.

The layout was still the same. The chaise where Sarina would sit and read as he studied his research. His desk where he’d sat and listen to her go on about this or that mission. The scaffolding where he would perch painting quietly. And even his great frescos; lining the curved walls, still remained. Undisturbed. Left exactly as he had left so long ago. And completely untouched. Not even the books he’d left on the corner of his desk, sitting open and unfinished, has been moved. It was almost as if, in this room, time had utterly stopped the moment he left. And such a thought, moved him in a strange almost unsettling way. He had expected her anger. Her need to exact a sort of revenge. And for that to be cast upon all that he once held dear within the walls here. That his things would have been moved, thrown away, or burned till there was nothing left. That his frescoes would be destroyed or painted over. But nothing, absolutely nothing, had been touched. Everything was still the same. As he had left it. Years and years later.

“This way,” Cullen ordered softly.

They began to move again, crossing the rotunda and entering the Great Hall quietly. Solas made a scan of the space quickly, as they moved towards the throne –noticing that there was not a soul to be
seen as Varric had asked. And, yet, he secretly wondered why it felt so barren. In the days of the
Inquisition, the Great Hall was never quiet. Every minute of every day, there was always someone in
the space. Even in the middle of the night, soldiers or servants or nobles would be entertaining,
eating, or playing a game or two within its confines. So to see it so empty, so quiet—it was almost
unnatural. Sad, even. To see a place, once so full of life, utterly abandoned to a quiet emptiness.

Solas couldn’t help but sigh a saddened sigh and wonder, truly, if this was all simply because the
Inquisition was no more or, more likely, simply because of him.

A moment later they came to a stop at the door that led to the private staircase, and to Sarina’s private
chamber just beyond. It was then, with a deep sigh, Cullen turned to the courier and spoke once
more.

“She has agreed to speak with you,” he said firmly. “But that does not mean that you have free reign
to enter her rooms unescorted. I will take you there. Announce you. And then, as your instructions
dictate, I will leave you to speak in private.”

“Understand this, however. Under no circumstances are you allowed to touch the Inquisitor. You
will keep your distance at all times. Follow any instructions she gives you without a second’s
hesitation or refusal. Speak to her with respect. And do not attempt anything that would be
considered aggressive.”

“The consequences would be dire, for you and you alone.”

“As for your weapon, I would normally confiscate it.” Cullen made sure to note, his eyes floating the
silhouette of a large sword just under the courier’s cloak. “However, she has instructed me not to do
so. Against my better judgement, I might add. Yet I did not debate it with her. Her point was fully
made simply because of who she is.”

“You must be well aware that the Inquisitor is a formidable mage. And I have no doubts as to her
ability, should she wish it, to subdue you if you get out of line. So, see to it that does not happen.
Otherwise, your safety and the completion of your mission cannot be guaranteed.”

The courier nodded solemnly.

“Very well, then.” Cullen sighed. “Let’s go.”
They climbed the stairs quietly.

Solas had trailed behind them when they had begun to climb but when they passed the second door and neared the top he could not stop himself from stepping past them and reaching the top first. When his feet hit the warm stone of the upper landing, his eyes immediately searched for his beloved. Finding her, almost instantly, sitting in a large chair facing the entryway near the hearth. Dressed in a white, floor-length gown, unadorned with any frills except for a thinly veiled cape that draped over what remained of her left arm; obscuring it slightly; and a glass of red wine cupped gently in her right hand, she stared at the burning fire just to the right of her in quiet contemplation. Not even bothering to look up at the very sound of footsteps as Cullen and the courier crested the stairs a moment later.

Cullen immediately waved at the courier to stop and then took three steps into the eerily quiet space.

“Sarina...” he breathed out, the love lacing his voice more obvious than it had ever been. “I have done what you have asked.”

Slowly pulling her eyes from the fire, she looked up at Cullen –her face marred by a flicker of sadness.

“This is the courier I spoke to you about,” he informed, motioning to the man several feet behind him with his hand.

Sarina nodded.

Without another word shared between them in that moment, Cullen bowed and excused himself. But, before he could take his leave fully, barely three paces down the stairwell, her voice called out to him softly.

“Cullen?” she whispered gently, turning her eyes back to the fire.

“Yes, my Lady,” he replied without looking back.

“The tavern...” she whispered in a stern tone. “...is no place for you.”
“As you wish. My lady.” Cullen nodded, fully understanding an order when he heard one. “Never again.”

“Good.” she sighed.

With those words, Cullen descended the stairs and left the room. For a quiet moment, Sarina waited as he went and when the last door to her stairwell echoed at its close, she gently placed her goblet on the table beside her chair and snapped her fingers. The gentle surge of magic that moment conjured was not unnoticeable. Nor was its purpose unclear. For a second after her snap, Solas heard the iron and steel locks riveted into both sets of doors to her quarters slide into place and lock on their own accord.

“There...” she breathed out, turning her attention to the courier for the first time.

The man tilted his head at her with slight curiosity.

“Your instructions were very clear, were they not?” she countered his curiosity. “If privacy is what you seek, then you have it.”

“None can pass my wards without my permission,” she explained gently.

At that moment the courier finally moved. Taking several steps in the space, until he was several arm lengths from the woman before him, and then bowed respectfully.

“Varric tells me, through Cullen of course, that you have come with an urgent message.” she began as the man righted himself slowly. “That aside from the necessity of meeting with me in private that it must also be in secret as well.”

“An explanation, its seems, as to why you have made your presence known to me in the dead of night, under a cloak of darkness, amidst an impenetrable storm, without notice.”

“After my forces have all but long-since returned to their former lives, and I am left alone in my tower reminiscing of the times when once my halls were filled to the brim with the laughter of companions and the love of friends.”
“But...have you come as a friend, I wonder?” she questioned airily. “Or, as Cullen suspects, have you come to take my life instead?”

The courier instantly bent a knee, the sound of his armor hitting the stone echoing through the chamber as he bowed his head low.

“No...” he answered in a deep, accented voice. “My lady.”

“Then, such an answer begs the question. Doesn’t it?” she countered, a soft challenge in her tone, as she drew herself from her chair. “Why one would dare to disturb me in such a way? Under a cloak of such secrecy without even a raven to give notice?”

“I do not know, my Lady.” the courier answered gently. “I only know that which was told to me. My purpose.”

“And what purpose, is that, pray tell?” she countered, challenge still gracing her tone.

“Simply to deliver.”

“A delivery, from somewhere unknown. From a mysterious stranger, who does not bother to even see to it that their very courier falls under no suspicion?” she wondered aloud. “Very strange, indeed. And unfortunate.”

“Unfortunate?” the courier parroted curiously.

“It is not often that people come to this place. Long since, has Skyhold been a refuge for anything more than a lonely woman clinging to the memories of the past,” she answered. “And those who still desire to serve her.”

“Ravens: when once there were hundreds coming to and fro, have now dwindled to nearly none. And the world has gone silent with their disappearance.” she sighed mournfully. “In truth...It would have been a small joy to have received a single one. If not, merely, just to speak of your coming.”

“But, alas, time marches on. I suppose,” she mumbled softly. “And, such things, were not meant to
“My apologies.”

“There is no need for apologies,” she answered, extending her hand and motioning for him to stand. “Nor is there any need for you to continue to show obeisance to me.”

“Please, stand.”

The courier did not move.

“Forgive me, my Lady,” he replied. “But I was instructed to show you the utmost respect in your presence.”

“And not by any master’s or employer’s order, I suspect. Cullen’s doing, most likely,” she sighed before looking at the man before her with a slight determination steeling her eyes. “He’s a good man. Strong in his ideals of what is right and what is wrong. His faith sustains him in his times of need. But even that, sometimes, does falter. Causing him to feel lost. And when such times arise, he becomes sturdier than stone. Inflexible. Almost immovable in his convictions.”

“So, please, do not fault him for his behavior,” she begged softly. “He is at a loss for the first time, in a very long time, and he blames himself for a great deal.”

“The attempt on your life...”

She only nodded.

“But, that is not why you are here. Is it?” she dismissed.

“I am curious as to why you have come,” she admitted. “Your familiarity with Varric teases such curiosity. But does not rule it.”

“It is not often that my dear dwarf would stake his life, and livelihood, on such a mysterious stranger.
And that stokes my curiosity. Even more so.”

“Then allow me to sate your curiosity, my Lady.”

“But, you already have. In, at least, a small way.”

“How so?”

“When Cullen spoke to me of your arrival, I had wondered a great many things. He had been skeptical. Apprehensive. And defensive. Warning me of danger. But, I was less inclined to entertain such ideas.”

“There are very few, aside from my dearest of friends and closest companions, who would be so brave as to send a courier to Skyhold after the events in Halamshiral,” she informed gently, taking a few steps before settling within arm’s reach of the man kneeling before her. “Each knowing full well that such an event would not only draw the suspicions of those who’ve have chosen to protect me but, also, currying doubt of those who stand by my side. Yet, someone has.”

“I had not known, could not guess, which of those whom I’ve cared for would do such a thing,” she admitted as she looked down at him. “That is, of course, until now.”

“For there is only one person, in the whole of Thedas, that would send you to me.”

“You know who I am?” he questioned, daring for a moment to look up at her and allowing the light of the fireplace to illuminate his face partially revealing a set of stunning green eyes.

“Yes,” she answered, with a tender smile. “So, please, stand so that I may look you in the eye with the respect that you also deserve.”

Unsure, yet steady, the courier pulled himself up from the floor and stood tall.

“Your hood, you may remove it.” she urged gently. “So that I may see the face of the man I know you to be.”
The courier hesitated.

“Please.” she breathed out. “Do not make me ask again...”

“I was instructed not to do so my Lady,” he replied cautiously.

“Why?” she questioned gently. “Because those who sent you feared of what I may say or do should your true identity be known?”

“Perhaps, even warned that I may do something untoward to you simply because of who you are?”

“I will not lie to you,” he replied.

“And you need not do so.” she countered, care lacing her words. “I know what the world thinks of me. And, to those unknowing, it would not bode well to allow such comfortability in my presence. But what those dare fear, what those dare to believe, could be nothing farther from the truth.”

“I would not harm another of my own kind.”

The man seemed to flinch at those words and took a step back.

“You need not retreat,” she informed lovingly. “And the apprehension you now feel because of such words are unwarranted.”

“Through no fault of your own, I have come to know your true self,” she admitted, reaching for him and clutching softly the edge of his hood. “Such eyes that you hide, through the darkness I have seen. For they are not unknown to me.”

“Nor is the magic that sings in your blood,” she added softly, before tugging it down gently. “Little Wolf.”
Letting go, and allowing the camouflaging fabric to fall away, Sarina took a half step back and looked into the face of the man before her. With his deep green eyes, warm skin, and pointed ears hidden beneath a waterfall of white hair that smelled like the very fade itself, he looked almost far too real than she could’ve imagined.

With a smile, she reached up and touched his face uninhibitedly. Sighing as it made contact.

“I have been waiting for you...” she whispered gently. "Dear one."

“Welcome home....”

“Fenris.”

Chapter End Notes

dun dun dun!

*excuse me while I howl at the moon for no apparent reason*

And, before you ask, yes. And yes again. I cant wait to reveal the next chapter so you all may learn exactly why....and how.
Bearing Gifts

Chapter Summary

As the unknown memory continues, Solas watches the interaction between the strange man, known as Fenris, and his beloved and hears of events kept hidden from his sight.

Chapter Notes

It has only been days since my last update, the third is just over two week's time, so I hope that my readers are keeping up. This part of the story, I'll admit, has been planned thoroughly for quite some time. Having been mulled over for many hours. Because of this, the updates are coming faster than normal. The appearance of Fenris, as you most likely can already tell, foretells the nearing of the end of this story. So I hope you all will stick with me, through to the end. And will let me know how, and if, my story has affected you so. Comments are always welcomed.

Update: 7/25/2018

“How...” he breathed out as he looked at her with complete astonishment.

“Can I know the name and face of a man I’ve never met?” she countered with a smile and a gentle chuckle. “The answer to that is far simpler than you would dare to think.”

“The lyrium...” he slightly muttered in disappointment, lifting his hand and turning it over to reveal the lines burned deep into his skin showing through the open palm of his gauntlet.

“No.” she breathed out; reaching for his hand and grasping it gently, allowing her fingers to graze the lines there with a kind gentleness, before using her mild strength to make him close his hand around hers.

Something about her touch, made Fenris close his eyes and sigh.
“The marks you bear.” she sighed almost lovingly. “Do not define you, Little Wolf. Nor are they what makes you truly special.”

“So fear not. I do not know you by the cruelty cast upon you all those years ago. Nor do I dare to entrust the foundations of our first meeting under such a terrible assumption. You are who you are simply because you are who you are. And I would know another such as you easily without relying on such observations.”

“For you and I share a commonality that most do not dare to hope to ever have.” she smiled again, watching him open his eyes once more only to look upon her face. “A past, laden with a very real pain...:

“And...” she added with gentle, airy tone that gave levity and a softening brightness to her words. “A unique bond with a very chatty dwarf.”

“Varric.” he practically growled, his eyes growing hard as he glanced toward where the inner part of the castle stood as if he knew in that very moment where the dwarf dared linger, and let go of her hand without a thought.

“Why do you show him such aggression?” she questioned, taking in his reaction with a flicker of curiosity. “Does the thought of your inclusion into his stories make you cross?”

“Or is it simply because you do not trust the man, no matter if he believes you a dear friend or not?”

“I’ve never claimed to have trusted the dwarf fully,” he answered. “He is sly. Slick. And his words speak of both truth and falsehood within the same breath.”

“That, my dear Little Wolf, is the mark of a true storyteller,” she answered knowingly. “To be able to speak both truth and lies only to make them sound both false and true at the same time.”

“It is both a gift and a detriment to his heart, however.” she supplied. “Though he may not know it, what makes him a great storyteller also conjures doubt within those who would call him a friend...or even lover.”

“Lover?” he countered, that word striking a strange curiosity within him.
“Are you...?” he suddenly presumed.

“Heaven’s no.” she laughed, with a joyous amusement reminiscent of the happiest of birds, before countering in a slightly astonished tone. “What in the world have you been told about me, I wonder? Such a conclusion is...silly at best.”

“My apologies,” Fenris answered, his face falling a bit in remorse. “I did not mean...It just...”

“My choice of words...” she interrupted gently. “Made you misunderstand me.”

Fenris nodded.

“Then I must strive to be clearer of that which I speak in your presence,” she answered. “For I do not wish to confuse or distort your impression of me.”

“As for Varric, do not fault nor condemn him because of his actions,” she added reassuringly. “If you wish to be angry with anyone, be angry at me for whatever betrayal of your confidences you may think he has done.”

“You?” he questioned.

“Yes.” she nodded. “Varric is a good friend. One a very small handful of souls in this world that I’d trust my life to without question. And such a trust does, he too, feel towards me. Giving him encouragement to speak of those things he would not normally divulge in other company.”

“I rather like his stories. A fact he well knows,” she admitted lovingly. “They have often times brought me not only comfort in times when I needed it most but also, when a distraction was needed to change how my thoughts diverged or the way my emotions swayed, they gave me an escape that was sorely needed.”

“Your history, truth be told, I found more interesting than most of Varric’s stories.” she continued, turning away from him and moving to grab her glass from the table behind her, only to then, again, turn her attention to the man looking upon her with a veiled sense of suspicion. “Your life before Kirkwall, as well as your life within its walls, has always been a subject of fascination for me. And
though our paths in life may have been quite dissimilar in many ways, I cannot dissuade my belief that you and I have more in common than one would initially believe.”

“Your time as a slave in Tevinter...” she continued with an obvious sadness lacing her tone. “As tragic and heartrending as it was...Hardened you to the thought of any Mage having even the slightest bit of decency. Of control of their deeds. That they could never be a good person. That no mage could ever truly be good or do good, simply because of the temptations that having magic affords them.”

“That all mages, no matter how good and honorable their intentions may be, would someday become the monsters the Chantry, the world, and you thought them to be. That it was inevitable.”

“Becoming vicious and uncaring monsters hell-bent on destroying everything that the world thought good and pure. Simply because magic flowed in their very veins.”

“Yet, over time, and by being at Hawke’s side, you have come to slowly realize that what you once thought impossible can actually be true,” she continued. “That there are some mages in this world with not only the strength of will but the where-with-all to stem the lustful pull of the power that such magic conjures within us. That there are mages who have the heart to know what is just and right, in the eyes of the world, and make that their path in life.”

Fenris looked at her with even more suspicion, as his face shifted with a flicker of even more distrust.

“It bothers you to hear?” she questioned, not missing his change in posture. “That someone you have not known until now, knows of your history deeply enough to simplify it as I have done?”

“I find it unnerving,” he answered honestly.

“I wish you would not.” she sighed. “For just as your history has, up until Kirkwall, dictated how you were to see the world, so too, did my history do the same.”

“You were Dalish were you not?” Fenris countered sternly.

“Aye,” she answered. “And Dalish still. But such differences between you and I are not as dissimilar as it would sound. Not so simplistic.”
“How so?”

“You lived a life of servitude. Doing that horrible man’s bidding, for so many years, without even the slightest sliver of hope that you could one day be free of his chains. And yet, one day, you opened your eyes to see your way out. A moment in time you never thought would come. And, so, you took it. Fled, not for the life you had but the life you wanted. Boarded a ship and searched for a place where he could not follow. And for a time you found peace, or what peace the world would give you, in the company of those who were destined to call you friend and companion.”

“Yet you were never truly free. For the man who kept you bound would not allow such a slight—losing something so precious, so unique—and so he hunted you. And continued to hunt you until the very day you struck him down. Taking your own freedom with your very hands.”

“I know no such servitude such as yours. Have not lived it in its full potency,” she admitted. “But I know of the feelings of being trapped with nowhere to go. A slave to the winds of change that carried me on a path I did not want.”

“You see, I was born into a Dalish clan. And though I was considered one of their own. In truth, I was nothing like them. I was treated poorly as a child. Beaten and beguiled. And was shown no mercy by those I thought of as my Dalish family. Right under the noses of those who should have kept me safe.”

“Simply...simply because I was different. My hair, my eyes, my history, my magic. All of it so very different from the blood of the people that they had come to know. And expect. And so I lived my life in a solitude thrust upon me through no fault of my own. Choosing servitude to the will of the clan rather than forging my own path in spite of them. Having accepted my lot in life simply because I did not believe I deserved anything more. Simply because I could not see a way out.”

“Never realizing that what made me different, also made me quite special as well.”

“The only ray of sunshine in my life was the few that shared my bloodline: My father and My Grandmother,” she added. “But even the love of real family, the protection those of my bloodline tried to afford me, could not stem the hatred, ridicule, and disdain the others of my clan had for me. They saw me as strange, and something that would ultimately bring disaster upon them all.”

“I knew no true freedom, within the circle of my clan,” she added. “I felt trapped. Unloved. An unwanted. Except, that is when magic was needed. Then, and only then, was I, not such a monster.
Such a plague upon the people.”

“They used me, and my abilities, without question. Stretching me to my limits without fear. Without care. Without worry or remorse. And I had no right to refuse. No matter how much I suffered. No matter how their cruelty stained my soul. No matter how many times I begged for them to stop...”

“And so, a slave to their whims I became...”

“In truth, I never expected them to let me go. To set me free, ever. I fully believed that I would remain, for the rest of my life, in service to the clan. Never knowing anything more than what had been forced upon me. Their teachings that chained me to a belief that I was nothing. That in the world there was nothing lower than I. That I was merely created to do nothing but serve...”

“Trust was something I did not know. Could not know. For no one had dared to gift me with such a thing or instill it in me. So, I trusted no one. No one.” she concluded softly. “Just as I was never trusted to be nothing more than a monster. A monster to be kept on a very tight leash.”

“And so, I hated the world as I hated my clan,” she recalled sadly. “Believed that I truly deserved all that had been put upon me. And feared everything and everyone. Believing that no allies, could I have. That I was truly alone, unloved, unwanted, and useless. And enemy to the world, as the world was an enemy to me.”

“That is until the Inquisition,” she added with a reminiscent smile.

“Just like you, as time passed, I came to realize that what I thought I was and what the world knew I could be were more different than I ever thought it could be. Through my actions and my interactions, I came to realize that I was not the monster they thought me to be. That, I could do good. Be good. Have a life where my thoughts and actions were my very own. That I could now choose my path. Without fear. Without looking over my shoulder every moment of every day. And that with my deeds, done with kindness and care, I could bring a sense of comfort to those, who until I was free of my clan’s influence, I’d never realized suffered as much –if not more –than I ever had.”

“I learned...That the world wasn’t as horrible and unfeeling as I had believed. That there were others in this world that were kind. Loving. Helpful. And would treat me as the woman I should have been treated from the very beginning. Giving me hope that I could be something more than just a battered slave to a destiny that was slowly destroying all that was good and kind within me...”
“It was the love and trust of others that, ultimately, change my outlook on life.” she smiled. “Just as it has done for you.”

“Is that why you do not fear me?” he questioned gently. “Why you would allow me here, of all places, without even a guard to watch over you?”

“Precisely,” she answered. “Varric may be a liar and a thief, but he does not color his words when speaking from his heart. With a sincerity rarely shown... And, that, I know all too well.”

“He would not dare to speak on your behalf if he ever thought you were inclined to harm me.” she smiled. “He knows you. Knows you well enough to know that you would not have traveled all this way –and announced yourself as you have done –had you meant to take my life. Nor would you have made your presence known to him, knowing of his affection for me, had that truly been your lone purpose within these walls.”

“Varric is no fool. Though he masks himself in such a façade on occasion. He knows the hearts of men better than most. And yours, my dear Fenris, more than most.”

“He trusts you.”

“I find that hard to believe. Varric trusts no one,” he grumbled.

“Then you do not know him as well as you should,” she replied.

“Varric can be quite a complicated man. I’ll admit.” she continued. “But he is not so complicated a puzzle that it cannot be solved. It merely takes patience. Something, that I hear, you often lack.”

For a moment Fenris looked almost insulted, his face mirroring a mix of both disagreement and disillusionment, and then, suddenly, he just sighed.

“I should object,” he admitted with a dismissing shake of the head. “To such an assumption of my character...But it seems you know enough about me to know that such objection would merely come off as a self-service unworthy of truth.”
“Do not think ill, of yourself, because of it Fenris,” she answered caringly. “We all have faults, and as impatience goes it is not the worst sin a person could carry.”

“Anger. Hate. Jealousy. Envy. Vengeance...Pride.” she sighed softly, only to get choked up on the last word as she unconsciously moved the remaining part of her left arm. “...are far worse sins than any lack of patience or understanding.”

“Pride...” replied Fenris, softly -seemingly understanding how much such a sin had hurt her. “Can be the cruelest sin of all.”

“A lesson I learned well,” she answered with a mournful look before downing the last of her wine.

“I will beg your pardon, Fenris.” she sighed as she turned to the table beside her chair, put down her glass upon its top, only to bend over and retrieve the half-drunken bottle of Aggregio Pavali sitting quietly on the floor.

“Interesting choice,” he mentioned softly, catching sight of the label as she poured herself another glass.

“And apropos, don’t you think?” she smiled slightly, sitting the bottle down on the table. “That I should be drinking one of the last bottles of such a vintage, within these walls, the very night you come to call upon me?”

“Care for a glass?” she offered, before taking a sip.

Fenris merely shook his head no.

“Very well.” she sighed. “Perhaps, then, it would be best to turn our attention from such a thing to the reason of your visit?”

“Yes.” he nodded.

Letting out his breath gently, Fenris reached into the folds of his cloak and; after what looked like several flicks of his wrist, and the echo of a latch of some kind coming loose; produced a small,
“What have you there?” she questioned, eyeing the box in his hands as she placed her glass on the table once more.

“The purpose of my visit,” he replied, cradling the box in both hands.

“And its source?” she countered as she cleared the distance between them in a few steps to look at it more closely. “Hawke, I presume?”

“Not precisely,” he replied. “She is merely the middleman, I’m afraid.”

“Oh?”

“She received it via secret courier more than two fortights ago,” he explained further. “From none other than Neria, herself.”

“The Warden?” she questioned curiously. “But how? Isn’t she still traveling the unexplored outskirts of the western desert?”

“Yes,” he replied. “I am unsure when she sent it, however, or from what destination, only that it arrived in Kirkwall as I have said. With strict instruction that it be delivered to you as fast as possible.”

“May I see it?”

Fenris nodded, handing over the unassuming small box without protest. Turning quietly, Sarina took a few steps to place the box on a thin long table sitting quietly in the middle of the room just steps from both her and the hearth.

“It is warded, yes?” she questioned gently.

“Yes,” he replied. “At first by Neria, then strengthened by Hawke once it came into her possession.”
Sarina lifted her hand over the box and called upon her magic gently as both Fenris and the silently watching image of Solas looked on. After a few quiet moments the magical runes upon the box’s surface appeared, only to disappear with a soft hum a second later. At that moment, the sound of the box’s lone steel lock clicking open echoed softly.

Taking in a slow, steadying breath and letting out softly a second later Sarina reached for the box’s lid and quietly lifted it. Pushing it back as far as it would go, allowing it to fall flat against the surface of the table, she then turned her eyes to the contents within. In its recess sat an unknown object, covered by a piece of deep green, velvet fabric that matched the soft interior lining of the entire box. And, on top, a folded piece of parchment bearing the seal of Clan Surana—a leafless tree standing tall against a full moon. Without hesitation, she immediately picked up the folded letter, broke the seal and began to read.

“Dearest Sister of the Blood,

In the lingering quiet of the night, when all seems lost, the light of hope still lingers. Just around the edges of thought and belief. We only need to be strong, and determined, to not let the darkness rule. Then and only then may the light return. And happiness reign once more.

The pain you now feel, fresh as it is, will fade in time. And the reminders of such heartache will diminish in the eyes of those who will forever love you. Be strong my beloved sister of the blood. And know that there will always be at least one of the People who will stand by your side forever.

Take this, my dear friend, and I pray that with it you may reclaim even a small part of what was lost.

May the blessings of the Heaven’s strengthen your resolve, May the love of others lift your soul, And may the hope that my gift shall give you, help you find the courage to once again meet the world as the woman I know you to be.

----Neria----”

As she found the end of the page, Sarina instantly turned her attention back to the box before her. Her curiosity thrumming through her. Absentmindedly placing the letter from the Hero of Ferelden on the table, to the side, she inspected the box for only a moment before reaching for the piece of fabric obscuring the box’s contents and lifted it away. What she saw there made her eyes widen. She gasped in surprise. And then immediately shook her head.

“Not possible.” she breathed out as she took in the circular, woven gold band adorned with a single, solitary, deep blue, oval gem that seemed to sparkle even in the lowest of light.
Without a word uttered, she suddenly looked up in surprise, turned, and then hurried to her large desk sitting quietly in the corner of her quarters. Instantly coming around it and snatching a lower drawer open without restraint. Rifling through it for what only seemed a heartbeat, she quickly found what she was searching for, and stood with a dark green, leather bound, book in her hand. Clutching it her chest, she quickened her paced and returned to the table in three long strides. Dropping the book on the table beside the box, she quickly muttered a phrased in a language that Fenris did not understand and snapped her fingers. The surge of magic such an action called was slight. Yet he did not miss the flow of green magic that seemed to echo across the book’s cover or the writing and pictograph that appeared in a blink of an eye.

She waved her hand over the book, magic lacing her fingers, and Fenris watched as the book opened on its own accord and the pages began to turn so fast that his eyes could not keep up. For a moment more they turned, and then turned again, only to come to a sudden stop somewhere near the back of the volume as her hand suddenly slammed down on the book with force. Sliding her hand away from the center of the book where it had landed, her eyes immediately began to fly across the pages –taking in the words faster than Fenris had ever seen. And then she suddenly closed her eyes, hung her head, and let out a deep, almost painful, sigh.

“Fenris...” she breathed out. “Do you have any idea what you’ve been carrying all this time?”

“It carries the markings of June,” he answered softly.

“More than carries...” she clarified gently. “This band...this band is the Blessing of June.”

“A relic...from olden times. Believed to be a myth, from ages upon ages past. A story once told to those who were lost, to give them hope. Hope that one day they would once again find their path. Their place in life.”

“It is said that the Blessing of June has the power to bring back that which was lost. Not matter...no matter what was lost. Restoring the heart, the mind, the body, the spirit of the bearer. Repairing all that was broken. Lost. Blessing them with the joy that they once knew...”

She immediately shook her head as those words fell from her own lips.

“But...it’s...supposed to be a myth...” she breathed out in disbelief.

“Perhaps not,” Fenris replied, snatching Sarina’s attention.
She instantly looked at him with suspicion.

“What do you know?” she demanded in a stern tone.

“Only what Neria relayed to Hawke via a letter addressed directly to her – that accompanied it.”

“What did it say?”

“She believed as you did. That the band was of ancient Elvhen origin, and could possibly be the relic that you mentioned.”

“She was unsure?” Sarina interrupted.

“She had her suspicions but knew she could not be for certain without your help. Believed that only you would truly know for sure. And would know what to do with it.”

“What else did she say?”

“Only of where she’d found it. She had been exploring the western outskirts of the great desert and wondered past the known borders of Thedas for many days only to come across a ruin in the sand that shouldn’t be there. An Elvhen ruin, where no elves had ever traveled, buried by thousands upon thousands of years of sand. Only one entrance did she find, and only because of a sandstorm that swept the desert so harshly that she had to find shelter. Within its bowels, she said, she came across a trapped door and a staircase leading down into a large antechamber. There, she said, she found the band as you see it now. Sitting, lined in a velvet case, hiding in the dark.”

“Did she find anything else?”

“She did not say,” he replied. “Only what I have repeated – however...”

“However?”
“She did mention something about The Mother of the Halla,” he replied. “But, neither Hawke nor I understood what she was referring to.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know much of Elvhen lore,” he admitted softly. “And her knowledge of such a subject is rudimentary at best.”

“It’s...it’s a reference to the legend of the Blessing of June,” she answered, slowly, trying to explain. “According to Myth, June was fond of Ghilan’nain –Andruil’s chosen. And when she was maimed; blinded by a hunter, and he came to learn of her story, he felt pity for her. For she was kind and beautiful and did not deserve such a fate. So, with his great skill, he crafted a band –and armlet– of unbelievable make. Endowed with the magic of restoration. The ability to restore that which was lost. And he gifted the band to Ghilan’nain. Hoping that she would accept it and take back her sight which had been so cruelly taken from her...But.”

“But?” Fenris parroted.

“Ghilan’nain refused his gift.” she sighed. “Not because she was ungrateful. Not because she did not take pleasure in knowing that the Master of Crafts had a care for her. But, simply, because she did not wish to remove the scar from her body that led her to the life she now lived as a favorite –or lover, history is unclear –of Andruil.”

“For it was because of her injury that Andruil came to care for her more deeply than she had ever cared for another.”

“But how Neria could even know of such a story, is beyond me,” she added softly. “The only, known, retelling of that story –and references to the band –are contained in my family’s own oral and written history. No other clan even knows that story. Nor is any reference of it within any library known to humans.”

“Perhaps she found more in the temple than what she supplied. Perhaps some writings that gave her the inclination as to what the band might be?” Fenris wondered aloud.

“Perhaps...” Sarina sighed. “But that does not explain why she would send it to me of all people. Why she would believe that I would be the proper caretaker of something...so unique.”

“Doesn’t it?” he countered.
At his words, Sarina’s eyes slid from the jeweled band before her and toward Fenris –only to notice that he was not looking at her directly. His focus had settled on what remained of her left arm.

“You can’t be suggesting?” she questioned incredulously.

“I am not. But, I also cannot deny that if I was in her place –and I cared for you as she does –that I wouldn’t think the same thing. That I would not hope you would use the band to undo what his magic did to you.”

Sarina sighed heavily and shook her head.

“I will not deny that it is not a tempting thought...but such a choice has consequences,” she replied. “It has been several millennia since its creation. The magic certainly lost to time. I doubt it could conjure even the slightest magical signature...let alone work as it, once, was intended.”

“What if it still does?”

“No.” she dismissed, not even willing to entertain such a line of reasoning. “It is an unknown. Unpredictable without assurances. It would be too much of a risk to attempt to use it. And the consequences of trying to could be far more disastrous than what we wish the outcome to be.”

“But if there’s a chance...a chance to restore your arm and give you back the ability you once had...isn’t that worth even the slightest risk?” countered Fenris. “Mayhap that is what Neria intended all along. From the moment she found it. Perhaps she felt that if anyone in Thedas deserved what its magic could possibly do...it was you?”

“But if there’s a chance...a chance to restore your arm and give you back the ability you once had...isn’t that worth even the slightest risk?” countered Fenris. “Mayhap that is what Neria intended all along. From the moment she found it. Perhaps she felt that if anyone in Thedas deserved what its magic could possibly do...it was you?”

“Or, has her gift reached you far too late? Only to find that you’ve given up any hope of reclaiming the life you once had...” he urged challengingly. “Even when the world still needs you?”

“I have not given up...” she barked, irritation in her voice.

“Haven’t you?” he countered again, his voice morphing to a more accusatory tone. “By your own admission, you have done nothing but remain within your castle walls reminiscing over the past. Mulling away the hours lost in memories. Still and stagnant. With not a direction forward been chosen.”
“Is that not, in of itself, the very definition of giving up?”

Sarina shook her head, and without looking back up at Fenris closed the wooden box with a deep sigh.

“Sarina...” he breathed out almost desperately.

“Fenris...” her voice full of warning before she let out a steadying breath. “I understand your point. I do. And I do not fault you one bit for taking the side of Neria.” her tone turning calm. “In part, agreeing with her intentions. But, you cannot possibly know everything that this world has heaped upon my shoulders. Or the pain I’ve suffered. Or...how fractured I’ve become since...since.”

Shaking the thought away, she stilled her words only to take a deep breath and change the subject.

“Is there anything else?”

Fenris looked at her suspiciously.

“Did Neria...or Hawke...”

“Yes...” he answered, drawing her attention once more.

“There is something...else, I must deliver to you as well.”

“Which is?” she countered gently, sounding almost tired at that moment.

Fenris immediately knelt, the sound of his armor once again echoing throughout the room, before he bowed his head respectfully.

“Myself,” he answered.
“You?” she replied as her eyes widened slightly in shock.

“I was asked to remain here at Skyhold, to see to your protection,” he explained.

“By who?” she cut in, demanding.

“Hawke,” he replied.

“For what purpose?”

“She believed your life to be in danger. After the events of Halamshiral...”

This time it was Sarina’s turn to grumble Varric’s name.

“She could not, in good conscience, allow you to remain at Skyhold without a proper guard.”

“I’m not alone here, Fenris.” she countered.

“A fact that she, as well as I, are well aware,” he answered, refusing to look up at her. “But that did not dissuade her worry. She fears that with the unmasking of your former companion, his identity known, that now you will be in even more danger. More than ever before. That fear. That concern is why I am here.”

“No.” she replied immediately. “I will not take another protector this way. I will not make you a slave to her whims. Just like I will not allow you to come to my service simply because she has asked it of you. No matter her intentions. No matter her true concerns for my well-being. I WILL NOT make another follow me without question. Without choice. I will not suffer under the guilt of such a choice. Nor will I ever allow another to become bound to me against their will.”

“Not again.” she sighed miserably.
“You misunderstand my intentions, my Lady,” Fenris answered with surety in his voice. “I did not come here under duress. Nor was I forced to abide by Hawke’s request. Her concern, though strictly her own at the time, was warranted. Is still warranted. And I could not fault her for wishing to keep you safe.”

“However, she did not—nor would she ever—force me to do something I did not want. She merely asked. A personal favor she called it. Something that she has never, in all the years I have known her, ever tried to invoke. And I knew then, that her concern was far more palpable than any fear I had ever seen in her eyes. And that I, could not deny her feelings.”

“Guilt is a powerful motivator.” Sarina suddenly insinuated.

“There was no manipulation.” he defended instantly. “She asked it of me. And left the decision up to me. Asked me to think upon it as I traveled to Skyhold. And promised, that no matter what I chose, she would not think less of me should I refuse—as I intended on doing.”

“What are you saying?” she asked gently. “Are you saying that you had no intentions of doing what she asked?”

“Aye,” he answered.

“Then why would you offer yourself into my service?” she countered. “What changed your mind?”

“You did,” he answered, finally looking up at her.

“I will not deny that until the very moment my eyes beheld Skyhold, I intended only to deliver Neria’s gift and then leave,” he explained further. “But...” he sighed. “After being here. Within these walls...I cannot deny that I, too, became concerned for your safety. Your Commander...he disappointed me...”

Sarina made to defend Cullen but Fenris immediately lifted his hand, begging her to let him finish.

“I could not understand why the man whose sole purpose was to keep you safe was knee deep in a bottle, such as he was. It was then that Varric explained.”
“I see...” she sighed.

“But even so. With such information on the lack of security within these walls. And you’re near death that nearly went undetected...”

Sarina’s raised a brow, silently questionning how he could know that.

“Varric’s tone gave away much...” he offered before returning to his train of thought. “I still intended to do as I had chosen long before I came here. However.” he sighed. “Now that I have seen you in the flesh, heard your words, and felt the sadness in your soul...I can’t just walk away.”

“I will not ask much of you my Lady,” he added quickly. “Only that you allow me to stay for the time being. Allow me to be of service to you in any way you would see fit. And if you continue to feel that you do not wish me to be here. That you do not wish for my help. I will leave without protest and return to Kirkwall.”

“But why?” she countered again. “You owe me nothing Fenris.”

“I owe you a great deal.” he immediately stated. “Had it not been for you...For all that you suffered. It is likely that Thedas would no longer exist as we know it to be.”

“The world and everyone in it owes you a debt that can never be repaid in kind. And though you have done so much for the entire world, you have been given nothing but silence in return. That is an unkindness that I would see rectified. If only with what I can manage on my very own.”

“You will not find happiness here.” she sighed. “This place is nothing more than a graveyard of what once was.”

“Nay.” he sighed, standing slowly to look at her with a gentle look. “It is merely dark. And the sun will eventually rise once more.”

At those words, Sarina managed a smile for the first time in quite a while.

“Are you sure that you want to do this?” she questioned softly.
“As sure as I have ever been.” he nodded.

For a moment Sarina just looked at him. Taking in every part of him as her heart battled with her head.

It would be wonderful to have another of her kind within Skyhold’s walls once more. But the thought of taking Fenris from his home in Kirkwall simply because she was too stubborn and too broken to try and make sense out of her life any more, seemed to be too much of a disservice to the man’s honest concern. And, by extension, Hawke’s.

She had kept only a small handful of people at her side after Halamshiral. And even those would eventually move on to greener pastures. As Dorian, reluctantly, did. And Varric would do so, soon. She feared for a moment that she would be condemning the little wolf to a solitary life. Devoid of the happiness she once felt. Surrounded by companions. Loved ones. And that left a terrible taste in her mouth. That’s why she had denied him, truthfully. Though her points were still valid. Her feelings on taking in another protector who had a life outside the cruelty she had endured, true to her heart. But, again, she could not deny that the thought of having another companion to spend time with. To get to know and bond with. Seemed very pleasing indeed. Yet, she was still conflicted.

“Sarina,” Fenris called out gently.

“Very well.” she agreed with a deep sigh, her hope winning the battle over logic.

“You may stay.”

“You will not regret this...” he smiled tentatively. “I promise.”

“We shall see...” she breathed out.
The Truth about Fenris: Pt 1

Chapter Summary

The memories, forced upon him by Cole, continue and Solas witnesses the beginning of something that had been hidden from him all this time.

A secret, deliberately withheld.

"Until the most opportune moment."

Chapter Notes

Sorry, it took so long for an update. I live in North Carolina and Hurricane Florence did a number on us. But everyone's safe, so no need to worry.

I hope you like this latest update and I hope you'll be looking forward to the next. Cause its about to get very very interesting up in this business.

Would love to read your thoughts on how you think the story is progressing. Please leave a comment!

The images of Fenris and Sarina speaking quietly within her private quarters fade, and are immediately replaced with the interior of Skyhold’s tavern. It is quiet. Too quiet. The memories of the raucous nights; filled with drinking, merriment, and song; are long-since gone. Faded with time under the dim candlelight. Leaving it emptier than it was ever meant to be. And colder than he remembered.

Solas allows his eyes to adjust to the low light and scans the room to find Fenris and Varric sitting quietly at a lone table near the hearth.

“How did it go?” questioned Varric, eyeing the elf before him as he lifted his mug of mead to lips and took a sip.

“She has agreed,” Fenris replied with a solemn sigh.
“So, you do intend to stay?” Varric replied with a slight dismay lacing his voice.

Fenris nodded.

“Well,” Varric sighed. “I suppose it’s a good thing, then.”

Fenris looked at him.

“Meaning?”

“Now, I can return to Kirkwall.” the dwarf answered. “Without a worry.”

“Eventually, at least.”

Before Fenris dared to ask for clarification, Varric did so on his own.

“That’s why I have been delaying my return...” he supplied. “I need to get back to Kirkwall. Should have left ages ago. But,” he sighed. “I just couldn’t...couldn’t leave. Not with her like this.”

“It just didn’t feel right...to...”

“Abandon her in such a state?” interjected Fenris, looking at the man with narrowed eyes.

“It’s not abandonment, Broody.” Varric countered gently. “She knows I need to return. Has insisted that she is fine and that I should...”

“There is much that still needs to be done, and my position as Viscount demands that I go back. But...she is my friend.”

“After everything that happened in Halamshiral...and the assassination attempt, I just couldn’t leave her here unprotected. Without knowing she would be safe.”
“I am the last of her companions left within these walls,” he admitted. “Dorian has already returned to Minrathous, having left just after the Council. Bull and the Chargers are currently on a mission in northern Fereldan and not due back for nearly two months. Both Sera and Blackwall are in Orlais, dealing with a situation near Montsimmard that will take quite some time. Vivianne is wrapped up with the new Circles. And, Cole’s vanished.”

“The Commander is still here.” Fenris pointed out.

“Aye,” Varric nodded with a frown. “And so is Josephine, but not for much longer, I hear.”

“With her state, such as it is, I couldn’t just leave her,” Varric admitted truthfully. “And the thought of having to do so pained me to no end.”

“How long has she been...?” Fenris questioned in an almost mourning tone.

“Melancholic?” he questioned for clarification, only to see Fenris nod.

“Since Halamshiral?” he answered before shaking his head, dismissing his own words. “No. Wait. That’s not entirely true...”

“Meaning?”

“Her melancholy has been going on for quite some time.” Varric clarified. “This is just another bout of it. Worse than before, I’ll admit. But not a new occurrence, I’m afraid.”

“The devastation that bastard elf caused, this time, just compounded her pain from before.” growled the dwarf, his eyes cutting away harshly.

“Before?”

“It all began some time before we ended Corypheus’ life. Sari, for a time, was happier than I had ever seen her. She and Solas had become quite close. They were in love and spent all their time
together, even when on missions. They seemed content. Happy together. Like all was right and good in their little world. And her smile was as permanent as the rising sun.”

“But?”

“That all changed one night. Just days, in fact, before our incursion into the Arbor Wilds. Sari and Solas disappeared for a few days. A respite sorely needed, they said. But when he returned without her, all hell broke loose because he could not say, would not say, where she was. Cullen demanded answers, even threaten the bastard’s life if he continued to keep silent. The entire keep was in an uproar. Terrified that he had done something to her. Or some terrible tragedy had befallen her.”

“Many demanded scouting parties be sent out. Many more demanded Solas’ head...”

“There was tension everywhere you looked.”

“It was chaos. And, all the while, Solas said nothing. Gave no hint of what had happened. Where they went. Or what had become of her.”

“It was one of the most intense moments ever felt within in these walls, I can tell you that.”

“And then...well...” he continued, with a sigh, after a long pause. “she returned on her own, without explanation, just as he did.”

“We expected an explanation, a reason for her disappearance so close to our incursion in the Arbor Wilds, but she, too, said nothing. And that silence spoke volumes.”

“She wasn’t the same as she had been before she had left. That spark that had made her, her, was gone. Something had changed. And changed drastically. Her smile faded. As did her enjoyment of life. And she fell into a depression that she tried to hide, but couldn’t.”

“But she kept on.” he continued. “She did not let whatever happened, while they were away, affect what she knew she had to do. But after the deed was done, Corypheus was dead, and Solas disappeared without even a word, Sarina fell apart.”
“It was...” Varric tried to explain, only to hesitate for a moment and change his words. “It took months for her to find some semblance of normal again. Though her pain was always there, hiding around the edges. Her smile came back. But it was different now. Not as bright. Not as true to the feeling it should convey.”

“A mask of happiness donned to mask the pain in her heart.”

“Aye,” Varric replied –seemingly remembering something so heartbreaking that he closed his eyes and sighed heavily. “And a terrible one at that.”

“And then, one day, something changed again.” he continued. “And she was different than she had been. When once she was terribly sad, hiding in her rooms and taking no visitors other than Dorian, Cullen, Bull, and Blackwall for months on end, she was suddenly, very much engaged in the world once more. It was almost, as if, the real Sarina had returned. Her smile was as bright as it once was. And she seemed happier than I had ever seen her.”

“What happened?” questioned Fenris.

“I am...unsure,” replied Varric, his face morphing in confusion for a moment as his brows knitted together in concentration. “Not long after Solas left, Sarina had a mental breakdown. She fell into a deep sleep that lasted nearly a fortnight. When she awoke...things in Skyhold began changing.”

“Changing, how?”

“It was after her break that Sarina secluded herself in her rooms. She did not come down to the Great Hall, visit with any dignitaries that had come to see Skyhold for themselves, leave for any missions, spend time with us, or even talk to anyone other than Dorian, those closest to her, and occasionally, her advisors.”

“We were told that she was recuperating from her break. That she didn’t want to be disturbed by anyone. And she would run the Inquisition from her sick bed.”

“I tried to find out why she would not come down. Why she refused to leave her rooms...but even my little spies heard nothing.”

“Dorian and Bull did their best to keep any rumors that surfaced contained or dismissed. But, they
were not willing to supply any explanation as to why all of it was going on as it was. Not even to me.”

“Cullen and Blackwall were just as eerily silent about the goings-on. Blackwall claimed that there was nothing truly wrong, that she was simply recovering. While Curly was unusually mute on the subject. And, truth be told, that bothered me more than anything.”

“It is no great secret that Cullen had carried, and still carries, a torch for Sarina. His feelings for her had always been quite clear. Yet, he seemed almost distant and uncaring of the situation at the time. And that, alone, was very disconcerting and completely unlike him.”

“It left the rest of us literally scratching our heads trying to figure out what was behind it all. To what purpose all that secrecy was for.”

“We all began to worry for her. Fearing that she had been stricken with an incurable ailment that would take her life. Some feared that she was already dead and that her advisors had created such a preposterous situation to hide that fact. While others feared that Sarina was not even within Skyhold’s walls. Again, the entire situation a façade to hide what was really going on.”

“And, you?” urged Fenris. “What did you think was going on?”

“Something was very wrong,” he answered quickly.

“At one point, I even tried to sneak into her rooms to see for myself...” he sighed. “But I couldn’t even get past the threshold. She had guards stationed at the door from the Great Hall and at the inner door to her room. And the doors were warded at all times.”

“Nasty ones, too. Gave a hell of a shock,” grumbled Varric.

“Then how did her advisors get in?” Fenris countered.

“I am unsure. I assume there was some sort of communication going on between her, the inner door guards, and the Great Hall door guards. So they knew when she would be expecting visitors. However such communication was, most-likely, not handled by her. For the majority of the time she stayed locked in her rooms, Dorian was always there. He rarely left. And when he did, it wasn’t for very long. Why Dorian practically lived in her room for so long, for so many months, however, I still
“And then, one day, all of that secrecy stopped. It wasn’t a gradual stop either. It was almost instantaneous. It was like night and day. One minute she was hiding from the world, the next minute she couldn’t get enough of the outside.”

“Did something, anything, strange happen that day?” questioned Fenris. “Anything out of the ordinary?”

“I...am...unsure,” Varric replied after trying his best to remember.

“Unsure?”

“The memory...” he sighed. “Is a bit fuzzy, to be honest. That whole day, in fact, is barely a memory I can recall. But, considering it was years ago...that is to be expected, I guess. The only thing I really remember is that gate guard sounded the horn that morning –announcing that visitors had arrived at the keep. But I don’t remember who it was.”

“What happened after that day?” Fenris questioned further.

“That’s the thing...everything was completely back to normal. Like really normal. Like...before Solas disappeared, normal.”

“She was completely fine. Back to her old self. And just a determined as she ever was.”

“Smiling, laughing, joking, telling stories...all of it, was just like it used to be.”

“Didn’t you find that strange?”

“Of course I did!” retorted the dwarf, without hesitation. “But what good would it have done to bring it up? Drudge up the pain that she had, somehow, managed to get over?”

“Sarina was happy again. Everything seemed to fall in to place. And nothing was amiss. Seeing her
Varric stopped and shook his head.

“After seeing her so broken for so long, I –honestly –just couldn’t make myself bring it up,” he admitted. “And, then, after a while, my concerns just slowly faded away. And I let it go.”

“She was like that for well over a year and a half. Nice and happy.” he sighed. “And then the business of the Exalted Council came to the forefront...and...Well, you know how that ended.”

“Yeah...” sighed Fenris, looking down into his untouched mug of mead. “Hawke filled me in. A terrible damn business that was. She goes to try and save her cause. Discovers a Qunari plot to blow up every major city in Ferelden and Orlais, and manages to stop it. Only to find out that that the man she fell in love with was a damn Dalish God, who did nothing but lie to her the entire time they were together, and whose very magic is quickly killing her.”

“Aye. He’s a sorry piece of work, that one.” groused Varric. “A damn Elvhen legend in the flesh, masquerading as a normal elf. Manipulating anyone and everyone he came in contact with, while not one of us was the wiser.”

“Strutting around here like he was always better than us, only to do everything he could to get us to trust him. And all the while he was twisting us around his damn finger, just so we would do what he needed us to do.”

“And, Sari got caught in the crossfire.” he sighed, anger clearly lacing his words. “Ended up falling for all his tricks and falling in love with the bastard, to boot.”

“Did he love her?”

“That’s a hard question to answer,” Varric replied. “I’d like to think he did. And, maybe he really did. But, that just makes what he did to her so much worse.”

“I’m not sure how much of her history you know...” the dwarf said gently. “But, when Sarina first came to the Inquisition, she wasn’t very friendly to everyone. Or anyone, for that matter. Like a shell, closed and unyielding, she kept to herself and didn’t talk to anyone. For a time I thought her rigid. So opposed to being in contact with those who were not her clan that she despised every one of us and
was refusing to even bother to show us any empathy, sincerity, or even a sliver of care.”

“She was cold.” he sighed. “To everyone.”

“But over time, that changed.”

“It was slow. Hesitant. But she began to change,” he nodded to himself. “And, I believe Solas had a lot to do with that. She felt a kinship with him, I think. Maybe that was why…”

“Perhaps, it was simply because he was another elf.” Varric sighed. “Another of her kind. And she could trust that. Or, maybe, it was because he did not refuse her when she reached out to him or treated her unkindly when she called upon him for advice. I don’t know…”

“He was distant in the beginning as well. Just as cold. Untrusting.”

“But, as they both grew to know one another; through thoughts, actions, words, and deeds; they became more open with one another. And she opened up. To him, and then to the rest of us.”

“But I won’t give him all the credit,” Varric added sternly. “I think Dorian had a lot to do with that too.”

“Dorian…the Tevinter?”

“Aye.” Varric nodded. “She was only beginning to come out of her shell when Dorian joined our little group. But, after she met him –and after all that business in Redcliff was over – she and Dorian became so close it was almost remarkable. And quick, too. Within days of that event, she and Dorian became thick as damn thieves.”

“Did something happen in Redcliff? Something that would make them feel so close to one another.”

“Probably. That whole mess was a serious disaster, all around.”

“You don’t know?” countered Fenris, one eyebrow raising in slight disbelief.
“She didn’t talk about it much afterward, and none of us really wanted to pry. She had come back to us...disturbed...and haunted by what she experienced. Though she tried to hide it. She spent many days in seclusion or at Dorian’s side in quiet conversation. Finding comfort in each other’s presence. And after a time, seemed to have dealt with –or gotten over –the emotional turmoil the whole situation had stirred within them both.”

“For the rest of us... We were just glad she was safe and we could get back to the business at hand.”

Fenris nodded.

“Tell me more about this elf, this Solas.” Fenris requested. “What was he like?”

“I really don’t know.” Varric sighed into his mug as he took another drink. “I don’t think any of us really knew him, in the end. He had so many secrets. And kept them so well...”

“But, what I do know is that he is a heartless bastard who deserves every bit of evil this world can heap upon him.”

“I’ll never forgive him for what he did to Sarina,” he grumbled hatefully. “And neither will anyone else.”

“You want him dead, I take it.”

“As soon as possible.” Varric practically growled. “With as much pain, cruelty, and suffering that can be mustered.”

“It is strange to hear you speak of someone in such a way,” Fenris admitted. “After all this time. It is unlike you.”

“I know.” the dwarf answered, his eyebrows knitting in disappointment.

“His betrayal changed a lot of things,” he admitted sadly. “And, none of us were immune.”
The vision shifts again. Falling into a flutter of images showing the passage of time. Scenes of Sarina walking around Skyhold’s grounds with Fenris at her side—seemingly showing him around. Scenes of them both sitting in the Great Hall for a meal and chatting quietly. Scenes of sporadic interactions between them both in the tavern, in the garden, on the practice field, atop the ramparts. Over and over, more and more, all while time marched on.

The flicker of their first days and weeks shared at Skyhold suddenly ends a moment later. The stone walls of the war room appear and, along with it, the visages of Sarina, Cullen, and Josephine.

“I’ll do it,” she answered.

“No.” replied Cullen harshly. “We will send someone else.”

“Who?” she countered, frustration lacing her words. “We do not have enough available troops to spare. Bull and the Chargers are still on assignment. As well as Blackwall and Sera. And Varric’s left for Kirkwall already.”

“If need be, I’ll go.” Cullen volunteered.

“Absolutely not!” she fired back. “You are needed here. Skyhold must always be protected.”

“These cultists need to be dealt with as soon as possible,” stated Josephine, her thick Navarran accent laced strongly with her own frustration. “We must stop arguing. We need to make a decision quickly.”

“The decision’s been made,” Sarina answered. “I will go.”
“And do what?” countered Cullen angrily, not willing to allow her to do this. “You are not...you can’t attempt such a thing on your own. It’s been nearly half a year since the last time you stepped in the field. You have not trained in months. And...Your...physicality...”

“Cullen!” scolded Josephine haughtily –offended that he would dare speak of such a thing.

“My apologies...” he sighed, turning his attention to Josephine. “But, you can’t –honestly– believe that this is a good idea. She wants to travel all the way to the Emerald Graves, ALONE, to deal with a group of cultists trying to resurrect a High Dragon and bind it to the BLIGHT!”

“THAT’S SUICIDE.” he yelled, slamming his hands on the war table in frustration.

“Maybe it is,” Sarina replied, trying to find her calm with a slow breath. “But we cannot just do nothing. And I cannot just sit here and allow their intentions to come to fruition. A blighted dragon could easily become the spark that stirs the darkspawn...that have been quiet for the last two years. If we hesitate, wait much longer, or do nothing we could be allowing another catastrophe to occur.”

“I have sat idle for far too long, Cullen,” she added, her voice nearly pleading. “I cannot stand back on this.”

Dropping his head, and closing his eyes, Cullen let out a deeply tired and frustrated sigh as a silence fell around them and the tension in the room; which had nearly reached a fever pitch; grew thicker and thicker. He is conflicted. And adamant. He wants her to be safe, but he knows that her words are true. He wishes she will say no. Deny that part of herself that always felt the need to do all she can. And listen to reason. But, he knows she will not. That there is nothing he will be able to do to sway her mind. Not now.

Yet, he tries again.

“Sari...” he breathes out slowly, dropping his shoulders in reserved capitulation. “You won’t be safe.”

“No one is ever truly safe, Cullen,” she answered. “And the people of the Graves will not survive if the cultists succeed.”

“I understand your fear. Your worry. But, I have to go.”
“You know this,” she added softly.

“Will you entertain a suggestion?” interjected Josephine, looking up over her writing board at both of them. “I believe I have a solution that will solve both your concerns.”

“Please.” nodded Sarina.

“That elf...Fenris, he’s an accomplished warrior, is he not?” Josephine questioned. “He traveled exclusively with the Champion of Kirkwall for years and came to Skyhold by her recommendation, did he not? To protect you, correct? Perhaps if you travel to the Graves with him as an escort, our fears can be assuaged to some degree and you can be free to attend to the matter without fear of our protests.”

“I made it very clear to Fenris when he joined us...that his acceptance here was temporary.” Sarina sighed. “That I would not include him in our operations because I would not take another protector into our fold...”

“I cannot be responsible for another life. Nor can I force another into my service.”

“It would not be forced, Sarina,” Cullen countered gently. “Not really.”

Sarina raised an inquisitive eyebrow.

“Fenris and I...We have spoken several times since the night of his arrival,” Cullen admitted. “And he has made it perfectly clear, on numerous occasions, that he is here of his own volition. he is sincere in his conviction...That he wants to help you any way he can. Because he feels that it’s the right thing to do.”

“Still...” she sighed.

“It wouldn’t hurt to ask,” Josephine advised.
For a moment Sarina grew quiet, contemplating the situation and Josephine’s suggestion- all before sighing deeply.

“If taking Fenris with me will ease your hearts and worries, I guess I have no choice.” she agreed. “I will speak to him.”

“But, make no mistake,” she added swiftly. “No matter his answer, I will be leaving at first light tomorrow. With or without him.”

The vision shift once more, and suddenly it’s the next morning. The sky is overcast. A gentle wind stirs all around. And Solas is standing on the ramparts above the main gate looking out over the frozen wasteland that is the Frostbacks. For a moment it is quiet, still, and then he suddenly hears the sound of hoof beats echoing beneath him. Peering over the edge, he notices the very moment when Sarina’s horse; tacked and packed for a long journey; steps out onto the wooden bridge that crosses the ravine in front of the castle. He watches her as she traverses the bridge and, for a moment, he suddenly worries that she had –in fact– left for the Emerald Graves alone as she had warned. But such fears are dismissed almost as instantly as they had come to his mind, seconds later, as he catches the sight of the elf, known as Fenris, following her from a few paces behind.

He is dressed as he had been the first night he’d come to Skyhold. His strong and resilient armor hidden under a hooded cloak as dark as midnight itself. His weapon’s pommel clearly visible within its folds. And his face obscured from all who would dare look. All the while his eyes’ train, dutifully, on Sarina’s advancing form. Watching her intently.

The intensity of Fenris’ gaze, makes Solas look back at her. It is then that he noticed that she seemed to be weaponless. No staff to concentrate her spells upon her back. No sword or shield to block an attack strapped to her saddle. Not even a dagger to free her from bonds should she be captured resting in the hidden scabbard she had always tucked neatly in the small of her back. Not a single weapon, nothing, on her person or within her belongings that she carried.

The thought that she would dare go into battle so unprepared makes Solas’ heart drop. He shakes his head. Unwilling to believe she would be so brazen. So foolish.

*She wouldn’t.*
The vision shifts again. This time through small scenes of the route Sarina and Fenris take on their journey.

The first flash is the pair stopping at a small inn, that very night, in a rural village along the King’s Road just west of the Frostbacks. The next is them sitting quietly within, having a meal among the townsfolk who seem to be watching them warily. Then it changes to a small room within the inn as Sarina sleeps quietly in the room’s only bed while Fenris dozes off-and-on from a rickety wooden chair placed by a hearth that is slowly burning out.

Then, again, it shifts. This time to the moment the pair veers off the main road and ventures into a large forest, somewhere around midday the very next day.

Solas recognizes the crossing. They had taken it many times when they had to venture south. It was an area that had been relatively safe during the days of the Inquisition. A path traversed by few. But a quiet stretch of land that seemed almost peaceful in its existence. Where only the stray bear or wolf pack would disturb the journey. And, only rarely.

The vision shifts, once again, falling into night. The stars shine brightly against the darkness above. And Solas is suddenly looking at a quaint campsite. There is a softly burning fire in the middle. Surrounded by a small ring of stones. The horses are tethered to a large oak just paces away. And a single tent sits quietly off to the side. Solas allows his eyes to roam and notices the visage of Fenris sitting on the ground just outside the closed flap of her tent while she, seemingly, rests within. Standing vigil. Alert. And attentive, his hood is pulled back revealing his long white hair and his tired eyes hardened with a strong sense of protectiveness as he keeps watch. His broadsword sitting readily in his lap.

The vision flashes again. Showing the very moment the pair enter the edge of the great forest known as the Emerald Graves. There is a flicker of the moment they cross the river in such wilds and then the vision settles on another small camp around midday. This one he recognizes.

Just south of the nesting area of the high dragon; an icebound dragonkin, known as a Greater Mistral; the old camp; surrounded by a natural rock formation and built on the bones of an old temple; looked like it had been abandoned long ago. Long-since picked clean of any usability left behind -where not even a sliver of evidence had been left to ever indicate that it, once, was a crucial part of the Inquisition’s efforts in the area. Her tent had been positioned near the eastern rockface. Under its shadow. The horses were quietly mulling over a mix of hay and oats; from one of their saddlebags; left quietly on the ground before them. As Sarina and Fenris sit near the campfire, a piece of rolled parchment laid out before them.
“How should we proceed?” Fenris asked, his timbered and deep Tevinter accent full of concern.

“According to our scouting reports...” Sarina answered, looking intently at the map before her. “The cultists’ camp is northeast of our current position.” She pointed to the map, indicating the location, only then to slide it to another point a second later. “And this is the nest. According to the raven I received this morning, our spies have learned that the cultists intend to proceed with the ritual to raise the Mistral tonight. Under the cover of darkness and during the height of the full moon. So we will need to prepare, and strike quickly if we are to succeed.”

“What do you suggest?” questioned Fenris, looking up from the map at Sarina with curiosity.

“The surrounding area is usable.” she nodded.

“The nest sits upon the ruins of a former temple on the edge of a cavernous ravine. And is surrounded by several trees on three sides, both around the ruin proper and some hundred paces or so on the outskirts.”

“According to the report: there are six sentries positioned around the ruins.” she continues, pointing to the map as she speaks. “Three here. One here, here, and here.”

“Within the ruins themselves. There will be four acolytes, tasked with helping during the ritual when it begins. Along with their leader, a necromancer.”

Sarina suddenly takes a breath and lets it out slowly.

“Unfortunately with my current physical state, and our current numbers, I won't be able to employ our standard plan of attack: Command and Conquer. So, a more subtle approach is necessary.”

“What do you have in mind?”
“Subtlety and sabotage first,” she answered, before admitting. “Though...Stealth is not my forte, so I will need to amend that strategy as well.”

“First of all,” she continued. “The sentries must be dealt with. Take them down as quickly and as quietly as we can. One by one. And, hopefully, not alert those within the ruins to our presence.”

“Once that is done...We can use Sera’s favorite strategy.” she breathed out.

“Which is?”

“The Sniper’s Distraction,” she replied. “We implemented it often. She would find high ground; usually, in the tallest tree or building she could find; and take down our targets from her hideaway – while we engaged them head-on. She: the sniper, and the rest of us: the distraction.”

“To do this, however...I will need to find a tree that I can position myself in. One that gives me a clear view of the ruins. If my memory is correct, and it usually is, there is a tree on the southwest corner of the ruins that will be perfect for what we are attempting. The branches are low enough to the ground that I should have no problem climbing it...even in my current condition.”

“Once I am in place, however, it will be up to you to engage them directly,” she informed, finally looking up from the map and to Fenris. “While I offer support from my perch.”

“But...” questioned Fenris, his brows knitting together in worry.

“But, what?” she countered.

“How do intend to lend support with no weapon?” he questioned. “You brought no staff to use. No focus to channel your magic. And...without one, you won’t be able to concentrate your power enough to do as your intentions’ wish.”

Sarina instantly smirked.

“Yes. You’re right. A normal mage would not be able to control their magic well enough to be of any use in this situation without one. Even, more so, a mage...maimed as I am...however.”
“However?” he parroted.

“There are ways around such disadvantage,” she answered, as she reached into a hidden fold of her cloak and produced a small cloth bag tied with a violet string and showed it to him.

“What is it?” he questioned, watching her offering it to him and taking it slowly.

“A contingency plan,” she answered.

“The lack of my available physicality and utility in battle,” she admitted with a sigh. “Has never been far from my thoughts, from the moment I lost my arm. Knowing the limitations it would give me, I had to figure out a workaround for my inability to both hold a staff and cast.”

“So I had Dagna make me something that could compensate for such inability.” she smiled, motioning for him to open the bag. “Something that would both help me focus and leave my hand free from any burden so that I could cast any spell, within my ability, without being hindered by a lack of focus or stress upon my mana reserves.”

“Something,” she smiled as she watched him open the bag, slip his fingers inside, and begin to pull the object out. “that could channel the Fade for me, leaving me the ability to cast at will...”

“For as long I willed,” she added as the object came free of its seclusion for all to see.

Solas trained his eyes on the object now dangling from Fenris’ fingers.

“A necklace?” questioned Fenris, looking at the dainty silverite chain attached to a pendant with a faceted golden stone sitting in the middle.

“My new focus,” she answered, reaching out and grabbing the pendant to show him. “Made from the focusing crystal of one of the strongest staffs I had.”

“And one that has great sentimental value to me,” she added with a soft sigh.
It was then, at that moment, Solas recognized the stone. And, immediately thereafter, it's significance. For the stone was not unfamiliar to him. It had, for a time, been the centerpiece of a staff he knew all too well. One that he had carried from the very begging. Once encircled by two silverite dragons. That he had left behind out of respect for her when he had turned and walked away.

“Have you tested it?” questioned Fenris. “Will it work?”

She nodded.

“It works quite well,” she confirmed. “I just simply need to wear it. As long as the stone maintains contact with my skin, the connection stands. And I can cast freely without any hindrance.”

“I simply need to put it on,” she smirked, with a raise of her eyebrow. “So, if you wouldn’t mind...”

“Of course,” he replied.

Once the necklace was settled around her neck and secured, Fenris made sure to free her hair from the confines of the chain before letting her turn back around and face him.

“Well...” he prompted gently. “Go on then...show me.”

Without a word, Sarina let out a steady breath and called forth a flame into her hand. The spell instantly coming to fruition without even the slightest hint of distress.

“See.” she beamed.

Fenris nodded, seemingly pleased.

“Well, then...Shall we get on with it?” she questioned, snuffing out her cast as she began to rise.
Fenris immediately moved, standing swiftly, and grabbed Sarina by her arm to help her up. Once she was standing, he looked at her for a moment and then sighed.

“Are you sure you still want to do this?” he questioned. “I could...do it alone.”

“No.” she stated flatly. “This is my responsibility. I can't stand down from this. And I can’t allow you, and you alone, to put yourself in danger.”

“Besides, you will be going up against mages. And a necromancer,” she added. “And...As good as you are Fenris, it would be dangerous if I were to allow you to go one-on-one against such odds. Without backup. Without barriers and silences. Without someone watching your back.”

“Alright.” he acquiesced.

The vision shifts again, and night has fallen once more. The moon is high. Full to the brim. And the stars are shining brightly against the dark backdrop of the heavens stronger than ever before. Solas finds himself standing near the front of the ruins. In a position where he can see the entire area far more clearly than any other could. His eyes immediately turn toward the southwest. Finding the tree she spoke of after only a moment, he scans it until he catches sight of her sitting on a high branch under the cover of shadow. She seems tense. More so than he had ever seen her. And her face carries with it a sense of doubt rarely there. Her eyes are trained in his direction. Watching the ground with hawk-like precision for any movement or moment where she may need to intervene.

Suddenly there is a barely audible sound of shuffling coming from his right. Solas turns and catches the very moment Fenris pops out from the shadows of one of the ruin’s dilapidated columns and takes out the sentry standing just there. A small blade, his choice of weapon, slices through the sentry’s throat effortlessly a second later. And in the blink of an eye, they are gone. Disappearing into the shadow once more. The body seemingly left there to bleed out while he heads to his next target.

In a manner of minutes, Fenris manages to take down all the sentries without raising the alarm.
It is then that Fenris makes a point to look up in Sarina’s direction. Searching for her with his eyes until she is found. Something passes between them at that moment and Solas can feel both the barely restrained tension and apprehension between them. But there is something more there. Something he can scarcely discern. Yet, it is palpable. Strong.

For a second there is a pause, and then Fenris nods in her direction. Solas looks up at her to see the nod returned. And then Fenris charges into the ruin without hesitation.

He gets the drop on the first cultist. Catching the entire group off guard. And impales his sword deep in the man’s back, right through his spine. The area immediately falls into chaos. As the remaining cultist engage their intruder.

The necromancer barks an order, his eyes knitting in concentration.

“Kill the intruder, the incantation must not be interrupted!”

Solas pulls his eyes from Fenris, in that moment, to look at Sarina. Who –thanks to her new focus –is aiding the battle below with little strain. She is attentive. Her eyes full of motion as she watches the battle before her –ever ready to lend aid. A moment later he sees her hand move, suddenly laced with a very familiar spell, and the feeling of her distinct magic washes over the space.

It is calm. Comforting.

And, far more powerful than he’d ever remembered it to be.

He turns to look at Fenris once more, only to notice that a second cultist has already found his demise. And, that the warrior seemed much more energized than he had a moment ago as he engages the final two in combat. More minutes tick by. Offensive spells thrown in the elf’s direction; meant to kill, maim, or stun; are easily snuffed out before they can land –by both the barrier kept resolutely around his form and the nearly immediate barrage of silences and counterspells coming from Sarina’s perch.

Counterspells that she should not know.

In the blink of an eye, the remaining cultists are taken out and Fenris engages the necromancer. Having to dodge the elf’s first strike, his incantation is immediately interrupted. He calls forth a spell
of shadow, and Solas’ heart drops in recognition.

_Touch of death._

But the spell suddenly vanishes as a countercell from Sarina instantly slams down on to the necromancer without restraint. Realizing that he is outmatched, and most-likely outnumbered, the leader of the cultists immediately brandishes a sword from within the folds of his cloak, casts a shield of his very own, and the echo of the unmistakable sound of metal upon metal rings out. The duel begins. Fenris cleaving heavy blows. While the leader counters.

The fight is grueling. Each taking a blow here, a slice there. And the strain of the fight is telling. The necromancer’s skills at swordplay, while somewhat quick and agile, are rudimentary at best. He holds his own against Fenris’ expertise, but just barely. His strength, awareness, and sharpness of mind are fading fast, however. And the frustration of his shrinking advantage is ever apparent as his strikes become less and less precise as moments pass by.

The degradation of his strength suddenly turns the tide of battle a few moments later as Fenris cleaves a heavy blow to the man’s left arm just as the necromancer attempts to cast another barrier. He screams out in pain and rage and swings his swords wide –aiming for Fenris’ face. He manages to dodge, but just barely. And the tip of the blade catches him across his right cheek. But Fenris is unphased. And sees, just as quickly as Solas does from his position, an opportunity. He immediately takes a step forward and kicks the necromancer dead in the chest. Sending the man stumbling backward for several steps more.

It is in that moment, as the two square off at one another, that Solas notices movement out of the corner of his eye. It is subtle and quick. But certainly there. He turns, just as Fenris and the necromancer engage each other once more, and instantly notice a figure standing just beyond a ruined column to the north. The silhouette is slender and short. Not feminine. Yet, not overly masculine. And Solas could swear he noticed the hint of armor.

Fear flashes through him at that moment. A fear that perhaps there had been one more sentry that had not been reported. One that they had succinctly missed.

A cry of pain echoes in the ruins once more, and Solas only glances at the battle to notice that the necromancer is losing. And losing fast. Before he forces himself to look back toward the unknown intruder. As his eyes land in the spot where the figure had been noticed, he sees what was hidden in shadow step out into the moonlight.

An elven man. Once Dalish. An eerily familiar vallaslin etched upon his skin. A bow; knocked and
pulled taught, within his hands. And, trained directly at Sarina’s perch.

Before Solas can even think, Fenris drops the necromancer with a massive blow so precise that the offending mage’s head is completely cleaved off and he instantly makes a beeline for the archer. But he is too slow. And before his lunge can make contact with the archer’s chest, the arrow is loosed.

It instantly screeches across the distance and, a split second later, Sarina’s scream echoes through the night with an excruciating and world-ending call.

*NO!*
The Truth about Fenris: Pt 2

Chapter Summary

The final truth about Fenris is revealed and with it comes the realization of Vengeance's true plan.

Chapter Notes

This update is around 2k word shorter than my normal updates, simply because the previous update was so long. The cut-off here was necessary to leave the proper pacing for the next update that will preface Solas' journey into the very Fade itself -to finally save his beloved once and for all -maybe.

Very Important Note At The End Of This Update- PLEASE READ!

***Warning: Emotional Mayhem***

Tissues may be required.

(If I did my job well enough, that is.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The heart within him stalls with a horrifying thud. The world suddenly crawls to a standstill. As his mind comes to the realization that his beloved is surely dead. Frozen in place, Solas cannot move. Cannot think. Cannot breathe. Panic swells in his chest. Fear intensified beyond his limits. So swept up in the moment that rational thought secures no hold. Lost in the terrifying moment of uncertainty and death.

His eyes: train on his beloved, searching desperately for the lie that he knows is not there. He sees her. On her perch. Her hand cupping her chest. Most of her still lost in the shadows. And she is still. Silent. Unmoving, until suddenly her whole world tips. Slipping from the branch unhindered, she falls like a stone off a high cliff barreling the world below. Making contact with a lower branch, slamming into it hard, her head reels as her body rolls over itself and her ribs connect with another branch, cracking with a vicious snap before she plummets to the ground with the speed of swooping carrion.

“VHENAN!” Solas screams, terrified, as a blur instantly rushes past him so quickly that his eyes barely capture its existence until it settles below his beloved mere seconds before she hits the ground. The loving arms of her future guardian, her only savior from the hardened earth and certain death.
Fenris; frightened and furious; knees buried deep within the grass and mud beneath them; breath heaving in panic and horror; cradles her body close to his chest and he lays her gently on the ground and turns her over to face him. His eyes widen. The inevitable staring back at him. Her death nearly assured. The cruel arrow protruding, deeply, from the middle of her chest. In her heart.

“Adora!” Fenris cried out, eyes jerking up to her face.

Her eyes are closed. Brows imperceptibly furrowed. Her breath slowing. As her precious blood seeps out across her body in rivers.

“Adora!” he cried out again. “Please...”

“Open your eyes!”

“Please!”

His cries are unanswered. And his face crumbles as tears began to fall.

“You promised...” he cried softly. “Please, Adora. Please.”

Solas’ heart shatters, at that moment. Fear overwhelming his senses, swept up in the warrior’s emotional plea, as he begins to truly believe that his beloved’s life will end. Closing his eyes as his own tears start to fall, he tries to push back the enveloping sorrow rushing around him. Trying to cloud his mind any further. For he knows this is not the end. She will live. Has lived. But the pain of the moment, the near inevitability of it all, tears at his heart with a world-shattering, devastating pull that the truth of him cannot ignore. Playing on the very fear that has cruelly stalked his every step from the moment he dared to love her. Taunting him with her death. Forcing him to face what the world could, truly, do to her. Simply because he could never be there to save her. To keep her safe.

It is cruelty. A Cruelty that no man more than him truly deserves. And, he knows it.

“F...Fen...ris...” Sarina’s voice croaked.
Snapping his eyes opening, Solas sees his beloved’s eyes open barely. Her only hand, suddenly resting on the man’s cheek, is trembling softly. As she pulls the man’s eyes to her and her breath wheezes with the pain flaring within her.

“Adora.” Fenris breathed out. A flicker of hope in his eyes. “I thought...”

“I know...” she sighed painfully.

Fenris’ face crumbled even more at the tone of her voice. The pain is palpable with every syllable she utters and he knows that she will not have long if he doesn’t do something quickly. Steeling himself for a split second, he takes a deep breath and lets it out, before reaching for the arrow buried in her chest.

“Don’t,” she demanded weakly, dropping her hand and capturing his wrist moments before his hand could make contact.

“But, Adora.” Fenris immediately pleaded. “You will die if I don’t.”

“I know.”

“Then let me help you!” he begged.

“I am...too far...gone. Little Wolf.” she suddenly whispered gently. “It’s done.”

“No, Adora!”

“It must be,” she answered. “I have nothing left to give but this.”

“Do not say such things...Please...” Fenris begged. His tone baring the weight of his sorrow. “You cannot leave us. You cannot leave me. Not like this...”

“Please, you must let me help you.”
“You cannot,” she replied, her voice weaker still. “The arrow...a final gift of Falon'Din....rang true...My...heart...is lost. Beyond healing...”

“I can feel it...My time...it is time.”

“You must...let me go,”

“Adora...please,” Fenris pleaded desperately. “You are precious to us. To me...Have been from the moment I met you. Please...Do not ask this of me. Do not ask, of me...to do nothing. To let...to let you slip away from us like this...”

“You must not give up. You must live.”

“If not for yourself, then for us...” he cried. “For me.”

With a withering sigh, Sarina pulled Fenris’ hand to her chest and held it there with a gentle and nearly comforting squeeze.

“Fear not...my dear Little Wolf...” she gently comforted. “I...am...I am ready.”

“But I am not!” he countered, his tone forceful.

“I...know...”

“But fate demanded it so.” she wheezed, knowingly. “And I...answered its call.”

“Willingly.”

“You knew?” he countered, again, panic suddenly back in his tone.

She nodded. Only to have her movements repaid with a sudden outburst of violent coughing. Blood
instantly spewing from her lips and forcefully dribbling down her chin, unrestrained.

“’Tis a sin...I accepted...knowingly.” she answered, her eyes suddenly straining against the pain and her labored breathing. Fighting to stay awake. To make her peace known before she left the world forever. “That’s...why I...pushed...”

“Why...I did not want...” she struggled, tears suddenly flowing down her face. “You...”

“To care.”

“I...my existence...has burdened too...too many already...”

“Too many...too many hearts...that only...that only wanted to protect...to love...to love me.”

“Tis my...fate. To love...those...who cannot love me.”

“And...To...to leave...those who can...”

“Do not say that,” begged Fenris, the tone of heartbreak baring his soul.

“I must...” she struggled even more. Her breath growing weaker and weaker, as her words spilled out of her mouth regretfully. “You must...must know. Must know...that I did not...did not wish to burden...to burden you like this.”

“To draw...to draw, you into...into my darkness...and make you care...”

“To...dare...dare to hope...”

“I...I pushed...pushed you...you away...”

“To...protect you...”
“Protect you...from the despair...the despair of knowing that...I cannot be saved...”

“That...I was...too far gone...long before I met you.”

“You were never a burden...” Fenris whispered. His voice suddenly laced with love as he slipped his hand from hers and cupped her face.

“And...You were never darkness...”

“You were light...mi Adora.”

“My light...” he admitted sadly.

“Getting to know you...these last few months have brought me more joy than anything in my life ever has. Seeing the part of you that so few would ever come to know. Finding...a kinship with another that I never believed I could. All because of you. You...you have shown me a piece of myself I never knew existed. The friend, the protector...the man I was meant to be.”

“You gave me...” he paused. “Hope. For the very first time in my life...I hoped for something better.”

“I will never...never be the same if you...if you leave me, now.”

“So...please...don't, Adora,” he whispered desperately. “My Adora...”

“I...I’m...sorry,” she whispered; tears streaming down her face; before her hand fell away, her eyes closed, and her body suddenly went limp in his arms.

“ADORAA!” he screamed. His eyes widening in absolute panic. “No.”

“No. No. No. No. No.” he prayed. Scrambling to check her pulse. Leaning in to feel her breath upon his skin. Any sign that she had not abandoned him as so many others had done to her. But, no flicker
of hope came. No sign that she still lingered. She was still. Silent. Lost.

“Please...Adora...don’t leave me. Please don’t leave me.” he begged more and more, falling under the crushing weight of his despair and sobbing uncontrollably as he pulled her close and wailed without restraint –devastated and inconsolable.

Lost to his own pain: mired in his own misery; Solas could do nothing but watch as Fenris mourns his beloved as a part of him, deep inside of him, died along with her. Sorrow and despair swelled. The world suddenly seemed less. Lost. And empty. Unworthy of happiness. Joy. Love. Growing so cold that the world filled with their very melancholy. Chasing away every ounce of warmth that could ever exist. Without regret.

The world dims. Growing colder and colder still. Until the very air, he breathes, lingers in his lungs with an icy chill.

The manifestation of despair. Its frozen outstretched hand reaching ever-farther. Touches the world around them with grim purpose.

The ground suddenly shifts from luscious green, under the blanket of moonlight, to a wintery, snowy, wasteland in the span of only one slow heartbeat. Blade of grass, once swaying in the gentle night breeze, still. The world grows quiet. Deathly quiet. And time stops in its icy grip.

Solas takes a breath and lets it out slowly, opening his eyes to see it manifest itself in a puff of frozen ice. Realization hits him. And, it suddenly tears at his heart. In that moment, he sees the world through the eyes of despair. A powerful, malicious, and lonesome spirit far more powerful than he’d never known. It’s devastated heartbreak, powerful beyond measure, blanketing the world without restraint. Suddenly, and voraciously, making its presence known for all to see.

And, Solas feels it deep in his soul more acutely than any pain he could have ever had.

His eyes quickly find the scene of his beloved. Her breath still. Her eyes closed. Coddle in the arms of the warrior whose heart screams the sorrow of his soul with every falling tear. The white main, long and flowing, free and falling into a waterfall of shimmering strands, atop the white wolf’s head, is peppered with snowflakes as his lashes bear their weight in mournful acceptance, as his eyes focus in the darkness of his pain still. The armor upon his back, as with the beloved woman in his arms, bare the mark of the icy grip of sorrow –shimmering in the moonlight, as frost forms upon them more and more.
Unaware that the world has fallen into the depths of his melancholy and heartbreak, the elf does not move. Does not speak. Forever lost in a wave of abandonment and loss so strong that even the threat of death is not enough to sway his sense of self-preservation. He sits quietly. In the deathly quiet of the moment. His purpose, his very soul, shattered until none but slivers remain. Forever lost at the end of all things that gave his life meaning.

As their world lingers on the precipice of finality, awaiting the inevitable fall from grace and happiness, a torrential gust of wind burst through the space stirring the snow and ice until white is all they can see. It only lasts for a moment, blowing through so quickly that it was almost like it had never come to be. And then the world goes still once more. A moment later, Solas notices something out of the corner of his eye and turns. But sees nothing but the shadows lingering under the canopy of the tree that overshadows his beloved and her distraught protector. For a moment his studies it. Uncertain whether or not what he had sensed had been nothing more than an aberration. A trick of the mind. Or something more.

Suddenly his eyes narrow, once more, as he spots the tell-tale sign of movement within the shadows. He takes a step. Intending to investigate further. But before he can gain any ground the shadows move even more. Suddenly swirling, in place, and then tearing off into different directions—as if anticipating his actions—three swaths of darkening smoke flee the shadows of the great tree and instinctively swirl around them all. Solas is immediately wary. Worried that such a manifestation could actually be the work of a demon of despair. A powerful one. That had come for its prey. To lay claim what had called it to such a place. The white wolf, who’s pain mimicked his own in every depth.

A moment of panic flickers across his heart as his fear swells and thoughts too horrific and unkind barrage his senses. The warrior’s heart is laid bare. Unguarded and undefended. And ripe for the taking. A prime target for the evil machinations of despair, and easily conquered.

He is in far more danger than he could ever realize.

The mass of swirling smoke suddenly moves faster now. Encasing them all in a swath of black for mere moments, and then suddenly coalesces into a singular form—reminiscent of a lone figure.

A voice immediately echoed.

“Such despair...”

Its sound: deeply timbered and ominous.
“Such pain...”

“A love lost long before it is realized...”

Fenris eyes immediately jump to the formless creature hovering just barely above the ground mere steps away as he unconsciously pulled Sarina closer to him protectively.

“Fear not...Little Wolf...” the voice breathed omnisciently –seemingly knowing the warrior’s visceral concerns on instinct. “I mean you no harm.”

“So all spirits say!” Fenris immediately growled. Untrusting. “I am no fool!”

“No...You are not.” the voice replied. “But foolish you may well still be.”

“I will hear none of your lies,” he replied flatly. “Begone from this place!”

“You wish for me to leave?” the voice countered, its tone deliberately mischievous. “Without even knowing why I’ve come?”

“T’would be foolish...would it not?” the voice goaded. “To dismiss so carelessly.”

Fenris flinched.

“State your purpose, then,” he demanded.

“The light in your arms is fading fast.” the creature stated plainly. “Hearing the call of the beyond her time is nearly spent. Soon to be lost to the world for all eternity.”

“But such a fate does not have to be.” the spirit added. “If that is what you truly wish.”
“I will make no bargain with the likes of you.” spat Fenris. “Nothing you could say would make me submit my will to you in hopes of saving her life.”

“I would never be able to face her if I chose such a path.”

“You mistake me for one who would demand such a sacrifice.” the spirit chuckled ominously. “I care not for a body. To claim the living. I am merely here to offer you a choice.”

“What choice!”

“You love her, do you not? The woman in your arms?” the spirit questioned. “Fear losing her, most of all?”

“But what if there was a way to save her? To heal her body and return her to the waking world once more?” it continued. “Would you willingly take the steps necessary to bring her back?”

“Free of consequence?”

“Yes!” he immediately replied.

“Are you sure? Even though she told you herself that she was ready to be free of this life? That she had accepted her fate and welcomed it willingly?” the spirit countered. “You would still go against her wishes and bring her back. You would choose to be so selfish?”

“Yes,” Fenris replied honestly, looking down at the woman in his arms sadly. “Anything for her.”

“No matter the cost?”

“No matter the cost,” Fenris repeated sternly.

“Then so be it.” the spirit replied. “If that is what you wish.”
“But such a miracle comes with a price.”

“They always do.” grumbled the warrior. “What do you demand of me?”


Fenris immediately looked up at the spirit – suspicion echoing across his face.

“It is to the Master of Crafts you must pay dearly.” the spirit informed. “Only his blessing can restore what was lost.”

“What was lost?” Fenris immediately repeated.

“The armlet can save her?”

“Yes.” the spirit seemed to nod. “But only if the price is paid. For such magic must be appeased. And a willingness must be forfeited.”

“And what is the price?”

“Half your life!” it stated with finality. “And an oath of eternal servitude for all of it that will remain.”


“That is June’s demand. A heavy price. To be sure. But, give it willingly. Without reservations. Swear fealty and remain by her side till the end of your days. And his blessing will bring her back. Restoring all that was once lost.”

As the spirit’s final words rang out, a soft golden glow suddenly appeared within the fold of Sarina’s blood-soaked robes. Peeling away the fabric near her waist, only moments passed until his eyes fell upon a small pouch dangling from her belt. Moving quickly, he immediately snatched it from where it had settled and opened it without restraint – pulling forth the glowing band from within. Fenris looked at it. Saw how it glowed softly, yet resolutely, and spied the strange markings that had never
once appeared before.

“What must I do?” he quickly questioned, looking up at the spirit once more.

“You must swear the oath. Sacrifice a part of yourself. And become her protector. Her guardian, forever.”

“Only then can she be saved.”

“I do not know the words...”

“Your mind might not know...” the spirit breathed gently. “But your heart surely does.”

“Let it guide you.”

With the golden band in his hand, Fenris turned his attention to the woman in his arms with a flicker of hope in his eyes. Looking over her delicate face, he seemed to take in her beauty one last time before leaning in close to her ear and whispering the truth of his heart for only her to hear. As the last of his promise passed through his lips, he slipped the band onto what remained of her left arm and sighed.

“This, I swear,” he added softly.

At that moment his softly spoken words suddenly echoed with a thunderous boom. And with it, the spirit vanished with an ominous chuckle so quiet that Solas feared that he had imagined it. Magic instantly flared all around them as a massive pulse of energy hit him so hard that it forced him to turn back to his beloved. Just in time to see the glow of the band expand a hundredfold and instantly consume her entire form. Fenris, fearing the machination suddenly let her go and reeled back. His eyes glued to the woman before him with panic suddenly overtaking his normally placid features. But before he could blink, the magic pulsed again. Suddenly calling forth five golden tendrils that shot out from her form and clasp themselves upon Fenris’ body. Around his eyes, around his neck, around his chest, and around his wrists they grasped and a second later the magic pulsed again. He instantly cried out. The sound, excruciating. The pain suddenly unbearable. But the magic did not relent. And pulsed again. And then again. Without hesitation. Without mercy. Without reservation. More and more. Quickly coming faster and faster. Like that of a heavy beating and desperate heart. The magic building and building. Growing and growing. Higher and higher. Building to an unknown crescendo.
In that moment the world suddenly began to dim all around them as the edge of Solas’ vision suddenly turned black and blurry. No. Not yet. He thought. Knowing full well that what time remained to witness was disappearing quickly. But no matter how much he willed the darkness to hold, to wait, it continued to encroach upon his sight. Until; just as the last of the vision came to fruition and his eyes beheld the golden magic suddenly vanish from them both and her eyes open once more; everything suddenly went black.

Instantly Solas was hit dead in the chest with a throb of pain out of nowhere –dropping him to his knees almost deliberately. The pain flared, throbbed almost violently. And he felt as if his very heart was on the verge of complete destruction. Closing his eyes, he tried to concentrate. To push back the feeling, to ease the pain but no matter how much he tried it would not relent. For what seemed like hours the pain pulsed within him and then suddenly, as if demanded on cue, it halted instantly. Taking in a deep breath, trying to steady himself from what he had just experienced, he took a moment to find his calm. Yet, no calm would come to him at that moment. For an ominous chuckle suddenly echoed.

Snapping his eyes open, Solas looked up to find the dark figure from Cole’s vision standing before him. Looming over him. With an almost perceptible smile stretching across its face, the spirit then raised his hand and with a wave the pain that Solas’ had just felt immediately crashed upon his being once more. This time, far more painful than before. Horrifically excruciating. It felt almost as if the monstrous spirit before him intended nothing more than to rip his very own heart from his very own chest. The pain pulsed violently, jerking a cry of pain from Solas’ lips. Clutching his chest desperately, as the pain continued to pulse harder and harder, tears began to fall of their own accord. Unrestrained and desperate for relief, Solas suddenly begged for it to stop. In his heart. In his head. And finally without his own voice.

“Yes.” he immediately begged.

“Another wolf that seeks to save....” the spirit chuckled cruelly. “Only to be left...begging.”

“How...fitting.”

“What do you want?!?” Solas immediately demanded, forcing through the pain.

“Nothing more...” it growled.
“She...is...quite...enough,” it added pointedly, chuckling devilishly before instantly vanishing –taking the pain with it.

Solas opened his eyes, and his sight instantly fell into two deep pools of a pair of steely blue eyes as reality immediately returned and the feel of Cole’s hand pressing on his chest lessened.

“Now...” Cole breathed out gently, his tone still cold. “Do you understand? T’was Vengeance...his words...his guidance that saved her.”

“But why?” countered Solas’.

“Without Valor, she could never be strong enough for the very purpose he holds for her,” Cole replied. “The circle needed to be complete. The Guardians made whole. Only then could her magic become what it was meant to be. What it would require to destroy everything it intends to lay waste to.”

“And such knowledge was not lost on her. T’was why she denied the little wolf from the very beginning. Why she pushed him away. Why...she did not wish to accept him. Or his offer of protection. For she knew that...someday...he would willingly take Valor’s place.”

“Vengeance manipulated them both.” Solas gasped. “The arrow...the assassin that night...it was a trap?”

“Yes. T’was a trap the wolf at her side unknowingly fell for –simply because he could not bear losing her.” Cole sighed softly with a nod. “Swearing an oath that June would never demand as payment. Fooled. Foolish in the end. As the darkness knew he would be. Unwittingly serving her up, like a lamb ready for slaughter. To be manipulated as it saw fit. Until the time came when she would finally give in. And give him what he truly wanted.”

“Her torment...” Solas answered slowly, his eyes widening in terror. “Is not to simply set himself
free...but to tie himself to her. To use her. To be a vessel for his very own spirit?”

“Yes...” breathed out Cole mournfully, finally pulling his hand away from Solas’ chest and releasing him. “He intends to break her. So that he may take her and her guardians for his very own.”

“Forever.”

“And, so, by the very own hands that refused to do what the world would one day demand of her, he will break the oath she swore to herself...to take naught another innocent life...and make her an agent of destruction from which the world will never recover.”

“Through her, his darkness will spread...until no light remains. Unrelenting and Unstoppable. Until all that stands before them is lost and the corruption of Vengeance’s outstretched touch reigns forever.”

Chapter End Notes

Last minute note update (added 1/8/2019)

***THIS IS YOUR FIRST WARNING***

After the next update (Chapter 29) Solas will be delving into the Fade to free Sarina. This will be a DEEP-DIVE into her WORST nightmares and, as such, will justify a rating/warning change to this fic. If you were squeamish/upset/angry or disturbed by the end of the abduction/torture flashbacks, you may want to skip the next few updates. I will make sure to add updated notes (at the beginning of each subsequent chapter) on when the fic will be "safe" again as they are added. So if you fear you may be "triggered" by what's coming...Watch for tag changes and continue to check in after each update to know when you can resume reading.

Please understand that this story has consumed my spirit for well over TWO YEARS and was created with a very specific chain of events in mind. I have never offered my readers a "heads up" warning before because I felt, by doing so, I would be ruining the emotional impact of what was to come. However, after revising my notes for the next few chapters I realized; considering the current social climate; that -out of courtesy to my loyal readers- such warning is necessary. I do hope that you understand, that by doing so, I have -in essence- practically spoiled parts of my own ending to some degree. And, honestly, I really hate that I have to do it. But, I appreciate my readers enough to know that sometimes it's better to err on the side of caution rather than ignoring what my fans may want. ^_^ As always, though, thanks for your support.
The White Wolf of Valor

Chapter Summary

With Valor's true identity known, Solas rushes headlong towards his beloved. Only to be stopped by the wolf at her side. A battle ensues. And Solas finds he must come to terms with both her protector's sense of justice and his desire to end the threat that has haunted Sarina's footsteps for so long.

Chapter Notes

***Secondary Warning***

As mentioned in my last update, after this chapter, Solas will venture into the Fade to try and save Sarina. While there he will come face-to-face with Sarina's WORST NIGHTMARES -which will contain GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS of situations that may disturb some of my readers. And, thus, requires this warning. If you were disturbed by Solas' reliving of the torture that Sarina suffered at the hands of the Venatori mage (e.i. the end of Ch. 11) after she was kidnapped by Red Templars, you may want to choose to skip the next few chapters. Because, to put it simply, Chapter 11 was nothing in comparison to what Sarina is now suffering because of Vengeance.

As also stated in the last update: For those that find my warning necessary, please continue to watch the updates as they come moving forward. As I will make sure to keep you abreast of the situation in each update's note section -as I have done here -and will let you know when it is "safe" to return to reading.

You have my thanks.

*bows respectfully and walks away*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Then,” Abelas answers forcefully. “There is no time to waste.”

Cole nods.

The group quickly turn their attention back to the awning where Sarina was last seen, only to notice that all who had assembled there had vanished. Jerking his eyes up towards the path, Solas sees only the visage of Sarina’s da’fenlin standing quietly upon the hill near the northern gate. It’s snow white fur glistening in the moonlight. As his eyes meet the eyes of her oldest protector, the massive wolf
disappears into the shadows with a noticeable growl. Almost, as if, daring him to follow.

And, follow they do. Traversing the sloping path, and passing the gate, on the swiftest of feet, they come to a dark path cut out of the desert sand leading to a desecrated and dark forest on the horizon. The desperation in Solas’ heart making itself known. Spurring his steps, ever on, until he is sprinting without restraint.

“You must be prepared,” Cole warns as he follows. “The wolf at her side is cunning. Far more cunning that you would deem him to be. Strong. Resilient. And forever faithful. A protector even beyond your imagining. And, she is his center. The moon to his sun. His meaning of life.”

“And, you are his enemy. The darkness to her light. The threat that must be ended.”

“He will fight to the last, without question, until the very last drop of your blood flows freely upon the ground. The light vanishes from your eyes.”

Solas nods.

“I know.”

“But,” Cole informs. “You must not kill him. His death will serve no purpose you seek. Above all else, he must endure. Or Vengeance will succeed.”

“What do you mean?” counters Abelas.

“Without the guardians, she will not have the strength to separate the darkness from love’s true purpose. And force Vengeance back to whence he came.”

“Then, at all cost, you must convince him to stand down, Falon.” Abelas breathes gently.

Coming to the edge of the forest far swifter than even Abelas had expected, they enter the tree line and continue quickly, as the path before them bends and sways between the gnarled, desolate trees singed and burned by the desert sun. Moments pass by swiftly and before they expect it they enter an enormous, charred and blackened clearing that slightly slopes upwards into a plateaued hill.
And, there she is. Suddenly before him. With only her da’fenlin and Valor’s soul brother standing between them. Urgency and desperation swim through Solas’ veins. Crying out for his beloved desperately. He cannot wait. Not now. He is so close. Taking a step, determined to get to her, he lunges forward. Only to be stopped by Cole.

“Wait. Look.”

Solas instantly takes in the scene as Cole demands.

Fenris; hood down, revealing his silver-white hair, and silhouetted by the moon’s bright glow; stands on the hill with his back to them –his sharpened broadsword sitting resolutely in his right hand. At his side, the very real wolf Sarina had claimed as a bond brother long ago, stands attentively. As they both watch his beloved with a protective countenance that justified their very purpose.

Turning his eyes to Sarina, Solas takes her in and notices that the ground in which she stands is not made of packed earth but charred and sun-bleached stone. A mosaic lies beneath her feet. Picturing a strange manifestation of an ancient black door, swirled and scrolled in blood-red ironwork, surrounded by bleak, obsidian towers peppered with the bones of souls long-since lost.

*A Void Gate.* Solas inwardly gasps.

He is immediately hit with a realization that Sarina has gone much farther than he could have ever thought she could, all for the sake of her goal. To keep Vengeance contained. In that instant, a split second before his own mind could even find a way to process such a realization further, the feel of the raw Fade invades the space with the wrath of a summer tempest wind so strong that he cannot stop himself from taking a step back. She immediately raises her hands before her; as if practically prompted; rotates her wrists gracefully, and her magic instantly shimmers across their surface. Her voice rings out, in nearly silent Elvhen, a second later.

*An incantation.*

Eyes glued to Sarina’s form, the way her body moves as she casts, Solas wracks his mind as to what she is intending. The movements are unusual, and the magic that starts to linger in the air is unfamiliar. She turns, practically pirouetting in place, before raising her hands once more, rotating her wrists three times, and raising them above her head—pressing her palms to the sky. Instantly a burst of magic pulses off her palms and shoots to the starry sky above.
A deep, guttural growl immediately rumbles. Solas turns—locking eyes with the vicious white predator staring at him with ears pinned down, head lowered, and sharpened teeth bared on instinct. Fenris; alerted by their furry companion; spins—grip tightening on the pommel of his sword, and murderously glares at their intruders.

His reaction to seeing Solas is immediate. The recognition definite, and without question.

In a flash of light, the Great White Wolf of Valor makes itself known in brilliant fashion with an unbelievably quick flare of ancient magic filling the little wolf’s eyes. In an instant, a silver-white Vallaslin; flaring out from above his heart, spreading in tandem with his lyrium brands; fans out across his skin and quickly branches out; down his arms and legs; before crawling up his neck and face—culminating in a strange brand in the middle of his forehead in the shape of a shining silver sword.

The world dims. A bitter chill draws down around them without warning before the Fade suddenly crackles and warps. And, Solas’ eyes widen in disbelief.

“The White Wolf.” he breathes as his eyes rise over Fenris’ shoulder to see the visage of the creature’s spirit looming just behind the elf, in a nearly transparent form.


As if Cole’s words were the spark to the match, Fenris immediately roars. His anger flaring exponentially. The shimmering image of the Great White Wolf vanishes. And, he charges. But, Solas does not fear. Shows no fear. And, with a flick of his wrist—calling forth his staff from his back without reaching for it—he steps forward and meets the raging protector head on.

Fenris immediately cleaves a heavy blow the second his ire is within range. But, Solas dodges. Calls forth a barrier to protect his body, and summons ice into his palm. Extending his hand, he releases the spell and a bolt of ice, long and sharp, shoots across space between them—heading for the White Wolf’s shoulder. Fenris jumps back and with a quick spin brings down his broadsword so swiftly; with the preciseness of a one-handed master swordsman; that it connects with the ice lance and shatters it before it can land. Instantly, the White Wolf counters. Extending his palm and calling forth a force blast that pulses out and hits Solas’ barrier so hard that he is sent sliding back across the ground some ten paces.

Impossible! Solas growls internally. Complete stunned by his unforeseeable ability. He is no mage.
Seemingly satisfied with the bewildered look that flashes upon the Dread Wolf’s face, Fenris smirks triumphantly and takes advantage. Charging for Solas once more. He takes another swing and Solas draws up his staff and blocks the strike aiming for his head from above, nearly a second too late. The grinding of magically imbued metals rings out and sparks fly.

“You vile monster!” Fenris growls as he pushes his blade against Solas’ defenses. “How dare you come here? How dare you show your face to her?”

Solas does not answer.

“Coward!”

“For what you have done,” he yells, pushing even harder – trying to shatter Solas’ staff with his very own will. “I will end you!”

Fenris is strong. So, very strong. Stronger than any other mortal he had come across. But, Solas is no weakling. Sliding his foot back to get just a sliver of leverage, he shifts his weight across his staff and disconnects the White Wolf’s advantage with a slip of the staff’s length and forces them apart.

In the nearly imperceptible pause that follows, Solas suddenly begins to realize that if they continue this any further, the outcome Cole; and Sarina’s situation; demands will certainly slip from his grasp. He knows that with his ancient magic, even if Valor’s truly powerful, he is no match to his own ancient knowledge. Solas has the advantage. Though, however slight. And he knows that with a simple glance he can end all of this once and for all.

Petrify, and it's done. His mind orders.

But he knows he cannot. The magic that Fenris carries is essential to save Sarina once and for all. So he must resist the urge to let his mind fall into a swirling pit of jealousy and anger – the same jealousy that had flared in his heart the moment he saw the White Wolf’s face. And, the smile she carried just for him. And, not fall to its call. He must wait for an opportunity. A way to present itself. So that he can safely disengage Fenris from Valor’s anger, without destroying both the man and the spirit in totality, and make him see reason.

But Fenris’ anger is relentless. And no reprieve comes in the pause in which Solas finds clarity.
The White Wolf counters again, suddenly breaking Solas out of his revelry. And soon the space around them erupts in a myriad of metal clashes and projectile magic.

Minutes tick by, and though neither can seem to land a debilitating or fatal blow, they do not go without injury. In time, a quick sword thrust from Fenris manages to slash a hand-length gouge across Solas upper, right arm. And an arcing; left-to-right cross-body; swing skims the Elvhen’s high cheek with near accuracy –leaving a thin cut just below his eye. While a perfectly timed ice bolt from Solas manages to pierce Fenris’ right thigh and wide swing of his staff connects with the little wolf’s temple –splitting the skin. Blood trickles down. No one is without a foreseeable scar. Yet, neither dares to relent.

Anger amplifying, and frustration growing, Fenris advances again after a split second disconnect. Lowering his center of gravity, and cleaving an upward strike that is far too close. Solas steps back, barely avoiding the strike, only to have his world completely upended as the White Wolf instantly changes the direction of his blade –arching it back down –and strategically sweeping Solas’ legs out from underneath him. The Elvhen hits the ground hard, landing flat on his back and within the span of a single heartbeat Fenris brings down his sword with massive force. Solas has only a split second to protect himself. And, in that sliver of time, he manages to summon a shield barrier just before the blade lands. Instantly Fenris looms over him. Using his immortal-like strength to press upon Solas’ barrier. Gritting his teeth coldly.

“It’s over,” Fenris growls. “Admit defeat and accept the death you know you deserve, Monster!”

“Death!” Solas counters forcefully, his hands pushing his barrier forward as best he can. “May...be my destiny. What I truly deserve. But, is that what she truly wants?”

“If you take my life. Will she forgive you for disobeying what her heart wants?”

Fenris’ strength, remains forceful. But, a flicker of doubt shimmers across his eyes for only a moment. He instantly scoffs and shakes his head dismissively.

“I will not listen to your lies!” he growls. “She will be free if I end you!”

“You would make her trade the bars she is bound by, that she knows, with those beyond her control? Simply because you wish to avenge her?”
“You created such bars!”

“Perhaps. But...There is no prison I could put her in that would ever compare to what Vengeance has in store for her.”

“You lie! Just more lies upon lies. You seek to claim me and my brothers. To bend us to your will so that you can return your people. And, nothing more. You carry no shame. No love. And, no care for her.”

“She means nothing to you. Never meant anything to you. She was just too weak to see it. Too blind to see you for what you really are!”

“She MEANS EVERYTHING TO ME!” Solas immediately yells back.

“Listen to him, Valor!” Cole suddenly implores, appealing to the spirit’s very purpose –sounding both desperate and impossibly tired for someone such as he. “He speaks the truth.”

“Compassion.” Fenris greets, yet his tone is an angered warning. “You are just as blind to all that this monster has done.”

“He is no monster!” Cole counters. “It is Vengeance that is the true villain here. His aspirations must be met with a unified force. Without the Wolf of Dread and the Wolf of Valor, the Daughter of Compassion’s greatest gift will be lost forever. Lost to the darkness for all time!”

“She will die, Fenris.” Solas breathes, a soft plea lacing his tone.

“Never!” he counters angrily, too bull-headed to listen, and bares back down on Solas’ barrier.

Suddenly a voice echoes from the farthest of reaches. It is stern. Forceful. Nearly angry. But, unbelievably childlike.

“ENOUGH OF THIS!”
Fenris is immediately hit with an invisible force that sends him stumbling back away from Solas in the blink of an eye. He looks up and sees, over Solas’ shoulder, two small glittering forms materialize from the nothing.

His recognition is instant.

“Hope?” Fenris questions, only to see the two forms fully manifest themselves at his words. Revas standing quietly beside her. Their hands linked.

“She quickens to her end, and yet you fight amongst yourselves like ignorant children!” Hope scolds firmly. “Have you no shame?!”

Valor’s magic, flowing through Fenris’ veins, instantly vanishes without cause. His eyes fall back to a soft hazel hue and he immediately kneels; bowing his head in apparent shame; as Solas scrambles to his feet.

“Forgive me, little ones.” Fenris apologizes.

“If you wish forgiveness from me, you will have none.” Hope replies. “It is to Pride you must ask, and open your heart to he who holds hers.”

“You would see me kneel to the Master of Lies?”

“I would see you be the humble man you have always been in her eyes!”

“I cannot trust him!” Fenris counters, raising to his feet defiantly. “Not after what he has done. Not after the pain he has inflicted. How she has suffered at both his hand and his very own words.”

“You must,” Hope replies. “For without him, the woman you have protected so dutifully will be lost to you both!”

“You do not understand, Hope. Because you are young.” Fenris counters once more. “He has deceived you somehow. He speaks no truth. Knows no truth. And cares for naught but for his own justification. He speaks nothing but lies.”
“Perhaps,” Solas answers, turning to face him. “But whatever lies have crossed my lips, could never destroy her any more than his!”

“That is why I am here.” Solas tries to explain. “Deceit has played a cruel trick upon us all. And she has been swept up in it. Unknowing. Unbelieving. And, without my help, the truth she is meant to know will never see the light of day.”

“I grow tired of your winded words, Wolf.” Fenris spat. “Speak plainly before I strike you down where you stand.”

Without an answer, while heaving a sigh, Solas reaches into the folds of his robes and produces an object that was, once, so very important to him and tosses it to the Wolf of Valor without hesitation. Fenris’ reaction is swift, catching the projectile without missing a beat. Pulling his hand closer to himself, he opens it. As his eyes fall upon the object within his grasp, they widen. Recognition certain.

“The Heart of Elvhenan?” he breathes, looking at the faceted, blood-red stone wreathed in gold, sitting in his palm. “Why would you...?”

“Proof of my sincerity,” Solas answers peaceably. “A sacrifice of my original purpose. Willingly done solely for her. To prove that my words hold nothing but the truth. The truth in my heart: I seek only to save her.”

Fenris grips the stone tightly in his hand once more and takes a step back shaking his head. Unwilling to believe that the monster that has haunted Sarina’s footsteps all these years could truly be before him claiming such altruistic intentions. In the years that he has been by her side, he had learned a great many things about the man who dared to love her without truly loving her—who used her. Then, abandoned her without hesitation. Shattering her confidence and self-worth. Seemingly without even the tiniest sliver of remorse.

“No.” mumbles Fenris, shaking his head. “He can’t be trusted.”

Conflicted, and confused, he is fighting the very idea that the dark wolf could ever be sincere. Could ever do anything for another without ulterior motives. Without an angle that would benefit him the most. So much has happened. So much has the world suffered from what he has done. And, so much will the world suffer from what he intends. There can be no compromise. No acceptance. No justification that could justify believing in such lies. Even with Hope and Cole’s reassurances. There
can be just no truth of it.

“No!” he instantly argues, tightening his grip on his sword before looking up at the man who was the cause of every despicable, cruel, heart-rending thing that had ever happened to her. To the woman he, himself, loves. “You lie.”

Suddenly an arctic wind called forth from someplace unknown, carrying with it the smell of lonely and bitter winters, bursts into the negative space, between them. The force, so strong. Strong enough to toss the silver-white strands atop his head. And with its manifestation, a deep, masculine voice echoes in Ancient Elvhen –its tone reticent yet accepting.

“Life Brother...” the voice echoes. “That is enough.”

“The time to yield is nigh.”

The true voice of Valor. Internally gasps Solas.

“You cannot mean that.” Fenris immediately counters, turning his eyes to the sky. “Our oath...”

“Is to protect...” the voice answers. “But many paths may the journey take to reach the same end.”

Fenris suddenly closes his eyes, and his face contorts as if he is having an inner argument with himself. As if he fighting an invisible battle with the spirit within him. A few moments pass by and then Fenris sighs reluctantly.

“If you’re certain...” he agrees.

“I am...” Valor simply answers.

The wintery chill immediately vanishes, and the strong presence of Valor’s spirit fades along with it.
“Valor...” Fenris intones, turning to face Solas once more after taking a cleansing breath. “Has yielded to your words and, despite my better judgment, so too must I.”

“But, such acceptance...such an offer of staying my hand,” he adds, lifting the Heart of Elvhenan into Solas’ view. “Comes with a price.”

“So be it.” Solas nods, knowing very well the meaning behind the warrior’s words. “Do what you will.”

Letting the stone drop back into his palm from his fingers, Fenris closes his hand around the last sliver of the First Spirit of Peace’s heart, and with a flash of Valor’s power crushes it into dust.

“She time grows short,” Cole announces. Causing all to turn to him for only a heartbeat before they all turn their eyes to focus on the true meaning of why they were all there.

“What must I do?” Solas asks as his eyes take in the form of his beloved, once more, and notices that her incantation has managed to manifest itself more and more over the time he had to deal with Valor’s anger. Above her, in the starry night sky, the shimmer of the dragon scale-like walls of her prison in the Fade has manifested itself and begun to encroach further down toward the very ground on which she stands.

“She calls forth the Fade...” Abelas breathed out in disbelief.

“You...” Fenris realizes. “Intend to follow?”

“We must,” Solas replies.

“The barrier is strong,” Fenris replies –his tone: warning. “Built with protections so as to not disrupt its casting. If you seek entry, one must step within its confines at the very last moment –else you be expelled long before you can succeed.”

“She told you?” counters Cole, seemingly surprised that her Guardian would know such a thing.

“Yes.”
“Why?” Abelas questions, clearing the distance between him and them in the interim.

“I do not know.” the warrior replies. “Nor, do I know what you will face.”

“What we will face,” Solas states firmly.

Fenris turns to Solas, surprise flickering upon his face.

“Both Pride and Valor must answer the call,” Cole explains. “It will take you both to reach the final gate.”

“Gate?” Solas counters curiously.

“Gates of Darkness,” Hope recalls mournfully. “Standing tall. Five. As the guardians are, so too, are they. Barring all who enter. From the heart within. That guards the inner sanctum. All must be passed in order to save. And end that which dares to hide in shadow.”


“Witness?” repeats Solas.

“The nightmares wrought by Vengeance’s deceit,” Cole answers.

“Her torture...” Solas breathes out in disbelief.

“Yes,” replies Cole, Hope, and Revas in tandem.

“To open the gates, to venture deep within and find where her soul remains chained, you must both share the pain she has hidden behind her waning strength and her smile cloaked in happiness.”
“Only then may you know the truth kept from you both. Know how she suffered for all our sakes.”

As if drawn to the forefront deliberately, Abelas suddenly screams out in pain and drops to his knees as Cole’s words pass his lips. Pride and Valor immediately react, turning their attention to the Sentinel to see him upon the ground and clutching his forearm with all his strength. His face harbors a difficult and straining countenance and the pain suddenly rushing through him is apparent.

Solas’ heart nearly stops at that moment. His mind instantly pulling forth the reason behind such an outburst. Kneeling, he reaches for Abelas’ arm and jerks loose the tethers of his gauntlet. Letting it fall to the ground without a care. And immediately pulls back the sleeve of his friend’s tunic.

“No.” Solas breathes out, as his fear flares. “The seal...”

It is no longer defined. Blackened fully. As is his entire arm. Yet, sparks furiously.

“It’s time, Falon.” Abelas immediately grinds out, pushing his voice through his clenched teeth. “You must go now.”

Solas looks back at his face, only to notice that Abelas is not looking at that which is quickly hastening him to his inevitable death, but to Sarina’s casting form.

“Abelas...”

“You must go,” he repeats.

“He’s right,” Fenris confirms, reaching out and grabbing Solas’ arm. “The barrier is almost done. If we don’t move quickly, our opportunity will be lost.”

“Go...” Abelas whispers. “Brother.”

“But...”

“Only your success can ensure his survival,” Hope explains, suddenly materializing at Abelas’ side
and placing her shimmering hands upon his shoulder. “I can suppress the magic for only a time. Hold back the justice that his oath now demands. But without Sarina’s freedom assured...”

“I understand.” Solas nods.

Solas and Fenris waste no more time moored in discussion and unknown possibilities and head for the barrier. But, before they can take more than three steps, Cole appears before them –his back to them both, arms stretched out wide with intent to halt.

“Cole?” Solas questions, suddenly concerned by the spirit boy’s intentions.

“Solas,” Cole breathes out; without turning his attention to him; eyes trained resolutely on Sarina’s falling barrier, watching it as is falls more and more. “A lone wolf, you once were, but no longer. A pack you have gained. Friends. Family. Brothers in arms. And, a mate –chosen for life. To see the end you wish. Protect all that you have gained. And trust in the bonds you must now covet. Only then can the love you wish to save, endure.”

“Fear not the fears she fears. But take heart in her pain. Be the Pride you are so named for. And do not falter in the eyes of the nightmares that seek to separate you both. Be strong. Be resolute. And do not hesitate. Only then will you succeed. Only then will the shadows that fill her heart be washed away. Only then will she see the truest piece of you.”

“I understand.” Solas nods.

“Fenris,” Cole adds softly. “The years have not been kind. And your bitterness has grown. The truth you know to be certain. Is now false. Yet, your promise endures. To aid the love that you would willingly sacrifice for, you must follow the monster that has haunted her heart from the very beginning. A seek to find a solution that will set her free. Take heed of your new brother. The dark wolf at your side. And, honor the bonds of the pack to which you now belong. For only with trust and understanding will you set the beloved you both share free.”

“When that time comes, it is to the both of you she will turn. The wolves of her heart. One for truth. One for strength. And you both must answer. Only then can the brothers left in the bitterness of the unknown find their way to her side. And the power of the bond shared between all be called forth to do battle.”

“Do this, all of this, and the darkness will find its end. Do this, all of this, and she will finally be
“I understand,” Fenris replies, looking to Solas who nodded in agreement.

“Then go!” Cole shouts, dropping his barring arms. “Now!”

Without hesitation, the Wolf of Dread and the Wolf of Valor set off in a mad sprint towards Sarina’s barrier, clearing the distance in seconds, and disappear into the unknown just as the barrier crashes upon the ground.

Chapter End Notes

I am aware that there is a grammatical shift in tone here. It is deliberate, as I have come to decide a formatting change will need to be implemented to make the story sound better. And, thus, some backward editing will need to be done in previous chapters to make the tonal theme the same throughout. This, however, will not change the story in any way. So you will not need to re-read anything you have previously read.
The First Gate

Chapter Summary

Solas and Fenris open their eyes to the Fade and find a place of corruption and agony. Fighting the fears that immediately try to overtake them, they set off in search of their beloved and to face the first nightmare waiting for them.

Chapter Notes

The next few chapters, counting this one: a total of five, will get more and more graphic, violent, and heartbreaking as they go. SO be warned.

Dank, desecrated, and putrid, the smell of the corrupted Fade invades their senses the very moment her barrier falls. Casting them into utter and unknowing darkness. The tainted magic of the very Fade itself instantly creeps across their skin like thousands of tiny insects hell-bent on burrowing within. And their world is eerily silent. A silence, so poignant, that to even breathe seems almost a sin. Gone are the memories of happier days. Of days spent in comfortable camaraderie amongst friends. And gone are the very days where Solas could find peace in the realm so known to him.

It is a foreign feeling. Unlike anything, he could possibly imagine. A place of pain, of death and misery, too horrible to speak of. Yet, endure. The cursing weight of despair pursued relentlessly by deceit and abhorrent destruction contained by a sheer force of will. An abomination of the Fade’s true purpose. And, hers.

For a moment, Solas can barely breathe. Let, alone, contrive a coherent thought. Consumed by the aberration that was once the only place that he had ever thought of as home. His sanctuary. In the crystal clear silence, there is nothing. An emptiness suffocated beyond all measure. Wherein even their own existence feels muted. It is a nightmare. A devilish nightmare beyond all doubt. And a place his heart cannot withstand for very long.

His chest heaves with heavy breaths as he tries to make himself focus on the task at hand. He knows he must not allow Vengeance’s corruption of the Fade to conquer him so. Yet the incessant feeling of acceptance and concession is forever present in the back of his mind. Lingering there, like an impoverished specter, determined to claim another victim.
The feeling of Fenris’ hand falling upon his shoulder a moment later is abrupt. And, unexpected. Breaking his cyclical and ever-spiraling thoughts of acceptance. He turns, and though he cannot see the Guardian standing at his side, a part of him finds relief in such a presence. He turns back to the darkness, determined to resettle his mind on his goal once more. In hopes to find a way to progress. But moments tick by and he finds nothing. It is only when he vocalizes a quiet, disgruntled and frustrated sigh that his questions seem to find an answer.

Far off in the distance, just behind the horizon he does not know, appears an unforeseeable light – glowing a sickly, fiery green and mimicking the sunrise of unnatural dawn. The light, muted at first, and long-past even his sight, immediately begins to slowly grow in intensity with each passing heartbeat. Pulsing into a brighter more illuminating visage, in time with each beat. As if called, into existence, simply because of it. Of them. Crafted and created by his very own desperation.

The world created by Vengeance, within the walls of her prison, slowly begins to reveal itself in each passing moment as the eerie light reveals all before them. A scrawling ancient forest; with enormous, monolithic trees; appears silently in the din of unnaturalness. Nearly glowing with sinister purpose as the light reveals them one at a time. Only to dwarf their existence with more and more intensity. Until, in between the silence of two heartbeats, the brilliant horror that is the source of such encroaching light crests the horizon in all its glorious and twisted splendor. Mocking the dawn of the waking world yet mired in Vengeance’s true corruption ever still. The bringer of the dawn is a shade of fiery jade, blotched wholly and horribly by thick, abyssal swaths of primordial darkness that move across its surface as if possessing a life of their very own.

Solas’ stomach twists at such a malicious perversion of something so pure. It sickens him. Churning within himself an unnatural and unrestrained desire to wipe such an atrocity from the eyes of their world. To wish it isn’t so.

Horrific and heinous, it is not deterred by such thoughts as its light continues to make its unstoppable march across the very lands that had unknowingly stretched out before them both – all this time. Moments pass quickly, and soon the great forest, lingering on the horizon, suddenly gives way to an unnatural creation of ancient stone. A wall, dark as obsidian, swathed with the seemingly demure tones of grey and splattered with the audaciousness of crimson blood, stands tall. Solas takes the construct in, allowing his eyes to follow the way it has cut a path through the forest, arching wide; mimicking the bend of a circular world; before vanishing just beyond the edge of the light. His fearful curiosity flares, driving him to take the scene in further, and he returns his eyes to the focal point previously abandoned just in time to see the dawn reveal something dark and powerful, emanating with corrupted energy, rise up at the height of the center arc’s bend.

“A Void Gate...” Solas gasps in surprise, as the very construct he had seen emblazoned on Sarina’s stone sigil manifest itself right before his very eyes in the farthest distance.
“It is not the first,” Fenris replies a moment later, as his eyes record the further encroachment of the dawn, and takes note of a second circular wall appearing closer in—and the dark gate that came with it. “But the last.”

Solas’ mind takes in the Guardian’s observation with much more clarity than he is sure he does not possess. Prompting him to immediately turn to the White Wolf at his side. What he sees there is not the same Fenris that followed him into the Fade, but a strange amalgamation of both his true self and Valor. The glow from his vallaslin, the only proof he needs to confirm such suspicions. That Valor is stronger here. But whether not it is truly Fenris standing beside him, and not the ancient spirit he has bonded with, still remains to be seen.

“Pride,” Fenris intones slowly, his voice thankfully still his own. “Will go, before the fall, yes?”

“I have given my word, have I not?” he confirms. Turning to take in the landscape appearing more and more before them.

“Good,” Fenris replies, though his voice seems to reverberate a little. “For this is no place for the faint of heart.”

“Or those without the utmost courage.” Valor’s voice suddenly echoes from Fenris’ lips in warning.

“I understand.”

Time passes slowly, and with each passing moment more and more of the landscape reveals itself under the corrupted sun of Vengeance’s making. Revealing even more of the dark forest before them, along with more concentric walls adorned with dark gates. When the light reaches the height of the sky, and all is revealed, Solas and Fenris find themselves overseeing a grand design. A place mimicking a swirling vortex of dark, ancient trees, outlined succinctly with each obstacle, clearly in sight. It is then that Solas notices the unforeseeable beauty in such a construct. How proportionately each ring of the massive space holds no variation. How each gate; a total of five; perfectly aligns with the one before it and, more importantly, how they all seemed to be waiting for something. For them.

The tree line directly in front of them, comprised of massively tall ancient trees, is as thick as muddied water. No light can pierce their heavy foliage for very long. And there is not a sound from within. No movement of animals. No wind blowing through the leaves. Not even a breath or note of a hidden songbird. The only sign of hope: a twisting path leading into the darkness within. Confirming what Hope, herself, had feared. A long journey. Set to take them into the darkness long-since kept from their sight.
Solas immediately wishes to follow. To take the path and begin the journey that will ultimately lead to her. But, before he can even move a thought suddenly flashes across the forefront of his mind and gives him pause. He is surprised by it. By both its suddenness and its nearly simplistic clarity that he had not realized. Forcing him to ask questions he had never thought to ask. Looking for answers, he had yet to receive.

“Valor?” he questions, seeking wisdom from the Guardian and not the man he calls life brother.

“Yes, Pride.” Valor answers coldly.

“Your brothers...” Solas questions. “Can you reach out to them here? Can they hear your thoughts? Feel your feelings? Heed your call and know that you have returned to this place?”

“No,” Valor replies. “The bond is broken.”

“And, why was the bond broken?”

“The White Wolf’s oath is eternal. And cannot be undone. No matter the order, I must obey.”

“It is by her word, her order, that you severed the bond with your brothers?” Solas questions, turning to look at the Guardian at his side. “Because...because she did not wish for them to know her fate. To save her?”

“Yes,”

“And can the bond be mended?”

“Only by her order. If given willingly. And, without hesitation.”

“That is your purpose here.” Valor replies, his voice nearly overtaking Fenris’ own to make his point known. “Only you can bring her back from the brink of her own destruction. Only you can make her see the truth her heart has failed to see.”
“And...Only you can set her free from Vengeance’s corruption and make her honor her promise to those who serve her.”

“And what promise was that, may I ask?” questions Solas, immediately noticing that the glow of his vallaslin had begun to fade ever so slightly.

“To be the woman she was always meant to be...” Fenris answers calmly. The sound of Valor’s influence waning from his words. “And, to live...for no one’s sake but her own.”

“Is that what you wish for her Fenris? Or is that what Valor’s true nature demands?”

“It is the truest wish of her heart,” Fenris replies, in all honesty. “No matter the fate of the world, no matter what cruelties have been forced upon her, or what society demands, that has always been her dream. To live a normal life. And, to love and be loved without fear. Without hesitation or regret.”

“To be loved, simply, for the sake of being loved.”

“Ah, yes.” Solas nods in understanding. “She spoke of it often. Her dream to live a life as others do. A life of peace and quiet. Filled with love and laughter. Surrounded by cherished friends and loving family. A long life lived with no regrets. Where she could just breathe and never know fear again.”

“A dream...” Solas admits truthfully, his voice softened by regret. “For a time...I truly wanted to give her. With all my heart. But...”

“And... a dream,” Fenris interrupts, his voice cold as ice, as he jerks his attention away from the Elven at his side and settles his focus on the path before them. “She has nearly destroyed. And, all, because of you.”

“Nearly, yes.” Solas counters firmly, yet with guilt truly lacing his tone. “But not yet.”

“Not completely. Not yet.”
“We shall see...” breathes out Fenris sadly. “Wolf, we shall see.”

With such declaration of disbelief, the pair begin their journey deeper in the fade without another word shared between them deliberately. They follow the path in silence. Taking in every bit of the ancient forest that is suddenly all around them as they advance. Hoping for any sign of Sarina. Of Vengeance. Or, even of the torments, they are were meant to be made witness to. In hopes of setting her free. But for a time, for how long is unknown to them, they see nothing. And hear nothing, but their own guarded footsteps echoing in the dark undercurrent of the forest’s canopy.

It isn’t long, however, before Solas begins to get the feeling that they are being watched. As if in the very darkness itself, thousands upon thousands of eyes are watching their every move. Recording every thought and gesture. Stalking their very hearts. Like a predator tracking its helpless prey. Preparing to attack at the most opportune moment. The feeling is unnerving. And, unsettling. And, Solas cannot seem to shake the dread that begins to pool in the bottom of his heart with each passing moment the feeling lingers.

Fear, for the first time in a very long time, has found him in the Fade. And, he hates it.

Hesitation in Fenris’ gate suddenly gives him pause a few moments later. Setting off alarm bells in his head. Until that very moment, the elf’s movements had been steady. Sure. And, unwavering. But, suddenly there was a second of hesitation that he had not expected. Fenris is immediately on guard. And that realization is telling.

“What is it?” Solas questions quietly.

“Movement, up ahead.”

“We must be careful,” Fenris adds softly. “And be prepared for anything.”

Solas had no need to answer the warrior’s warning with any other confirmation other than a gentle nod, before resuming his steps. Yet, he does not discount the man’s concerns. The Fade can be a terrible place, even on its best days, for ones not as skilled as he. But in a place like this, corrupted as viciously as it is, anything is possible. And, nothing is for certain.

But Solas is determined to see this through to the end. And, with his purpose sequestered firmly in his mind, he will not hesitate.
The farther they encroach into the forest, the more they begin to sense movement in the darkness. They come swiftly. Apparitions comprised of darkness and mist. Flashing into being and appearing just out of sight. Flickering into existence in the corners of their eyes before vanishing from their sight long before they can focus. Toying with their senses, almost like a mischievous child. Tormenting their sanity and making them question their very own minds. Almost, as if, it was a game.

In time, the movement becomes more frequent. Yet, always the same. Never able to get a good look at them. Nor knowing their true form. But Fenris and Solas are not deterred. Nor are they afraid. Their purpose, an armor against anything. Their belief in their goal the only certainty.

That is until the trees slowly begin to thin.

And the horror of Vengeance’s true nature finally begins to reveal itself.

When the forest abruptly thins into a barren wasteland before their very eyes, Solas and Fenris find themselves seemingly petrified with fear as shock washes over them without restraint. Before them, stretching for as far as their eyes can see, is a battlefield unlike any they have ever seen. Confined in, what Solas can only describe as, a desecrated field that seems endless, the lushness of the forest has been burned away. And in its place, nothing but decay and death remain. The ground is littered with bodies, hundreds of them, in every shape and size. Limbs twisted, intertwined, and wrenched in all different directions. Mutilated beyond all measure...with faces frozen in absolute terror.

Elven faces.

Dalish faces.

*Her people.*

A scream suddenly echoes across the corpses of the dead and neither Solas nor Fenris can stop the involuntary flinch that takes hold of them for a split second. The eyes are immediately and instinctually drawn to the sound. And, it is there that they see signs of life.

But not many.
The battlefield slopes downward, as does the path, leading to the middle of what seems like a centralized space. As they traverse the distance between them and the strange figures, with hurried steps, they cannot ignore the grotesque bodies left rotting in the proverbial sun. The smell is horrendous. Drying blood and festering bodily fluids mix with the putrid smell of severed and rotting flesh. But, even the smell; their mangled natures and the signs of their horrible and horrendous deaths; cannot dissuade Solas from his goal. He is disturbed. Truly. Far more than he really should be, considering the life he’d once lived. But it is not the guilt he feels for his past wrongdoings, or the fates of these people unknown to him, that tears at his very soul.

It’s the fact, that no matter where he looks, no matter how much farther he ventures into the nightmare, all he can see are the bodies of the lost. Of the slaughtered and fallen. Of Elvhen lost before their time.

As they reach the bottom of the path’s sloping decent, they are met with a concerning and fearful scene. A solitary, singed and heavily damaged, aravel sits quietly upon a flattened patch of scorched earth. And, before it, stands a crowd of some six Dalish women huddled together in terror. Battered and beaten, covered in sweat, soot, and the blood of the fallen, and breathing with heavy panic, they hold each other desperately. Standing so close to one another that not even a single slip of grass could fall between. With fear and horror clearly plastered upon their faces.

The question comes to him once more. A fearful wondering of what has happened here. What is happening here? And what have they –and by extension Sarina– has suffered. That thought makes his mind snap to the question of his beloved. The nightmares within this dreamscape of terror were said to exist solely to torment her. Yet, she is seemingly nowhere to be found. Or rather, has yet to be revealed.

Solas’ concern for the whereabouts of his beloved, however, are answered a mere second after that thought echoes across his mind. In that impeccably short span of silence, he suddenly hears a voice that he would recognize no matter the circumstance. But it is not true words that he hears. Not a single syllable of coherent vocalization. Instead, it is a nearly silent and strangled sob. His attention immediately jerks to the source of the despair and it is there, just at the western edge of the clearing, that he spots such cruelty that his heart cannot help but rage.

A twisted construct, of scorched wood and rusted iron metal, stands unapologetically for all the world to see. And within its clutches, his beloved is entrenched. The cage is small. So tightly built that none but a woman of her compact size could fit. Made perfectly just for her. Confined tightly by its iron bars, there is no space to move. To even breathe. Yet it is made small still, by the very fact that she cannot stand. Forced to her knees by its very confines.

In that very moment, he takes her in as panic swells in his heart.
A very mirror of the women huddled before the aravel, she is dressed in threadbare Dalish clothing and caked in filth. Her beautiful hair, once lively and lovely, is now dull and lifeless. Full of sweat, dried blood, and the unmistakable touch of Vengeance’s vitriolic ichor. Her face mirrors the very definition of both injury and terror. As tears crest the confines of her eyes and roll down her cheeks without restraint. And her hands; both bloodied, battered, and broken; clutch at the bars before her with the white-knuckled urgency of a fearful heart as she stares intently at the innocents beneath her.

She is afraid.

But not for herself.

Solas’ feet are immediately compelled to move by his own fearful heart but before he can take more than two steps he feels Fenris’ hand fall upon his shoulder.

“We mustn’t interfere,” the Guardian warns tightly, though no amount of his self-control can hide the very fear lacing his own voice. “Remember.”

Fenris’ warning, those despised by his very own heart, is not one he can ignore. He is very well aware of what their true purpose demands but seeing her like this; so distraught and mired in so much pain and fear; is hard to ignore as well. He wants to end this. End it all, right here and now, but there is no way around it. No matter how much he wants to banish every bit of the coercive cruelty inflicted upon her at this moment, in the end, he knows he must allow it to be as it has been. For now.

In the interim of his embroiled thoughts on such a situation, Solas does not notice the flicker of movement that suddenly shudders in the darkness just beyond the clearing’s edge. But, he does notice Sarina flinch. He quickly settles his eyes on his beloved once more and immediately realizes that her eyes are no longer staring desperately at the women practically cornered against the aravel. They are moving. And quickly. Scanning the darkness for any sign of something that she seemingly knows is there. Her head turns sporadically, jerking here and there, all in hopes of spotting whatever threat she is expecting. And, it is that very panicked movement that forces Solas to do the same. As he tears his eyes from his beloved once more to search as she, he instantly hears one of the women scream in terror and looks to find that where there were, once, six women there are now only five.

A sudden, heavy thud ricochets off the side of the aravel as second later. Pulling both Solas and Fenris’ attention to the east. Behind them. They turn and are immediately punished for the movement with the sight of the missing young girl’s limp body lying breathlessly upon the ground. Dead. It takes only two heartbeats for Solas to realize that she is no longer alive and the cause of her premature death. As the moon-shaped gash across her throat runs red with blood from ear to ear.
“Assasin,” Fenris breathes cautiously in warning. Seconds before another scream echoes.

Turning back to look upon the women once more, Solas and Fenris immediately catch the very moment another of the women is suddenly snatched from the group and pulled into a puff of darkness. Vanishing without a trace. No more than two heartbeats pass this time, and the inevitable thud resounds again. From the south, from whence they’d come. Solas doesn’t even bother to spare a glance this time. Coming quickly to the conclusion that something is picking off the Dalish here one by one. Deliberately. And with cruel reason.

To make Sarina watch.

And with that realization, the reason behind all of this suddenly becomes all too clear. As does the identity of the Dalish slaughtered here.

Her clan.

Vengeance is trying to break her by tormenting her with the death of her clan.

And it is working. For her cries have not ceased. Nor has the pleas of her heart. Only growing louder. So loud that they now come to his ear unbidden. Unmuted as they were before. And growing ever still. Begging. Begging for those that remain to flee, to run. It is not safe here! Run! You must not linger. You must go, now! she begs of them. Screaming between the horrified and panic sobs that wrack her body. Yet, none do as she bids. None heed her words. And, only another moment passes before another scream bounces off the side of the aravel and the knowing thud of a lifeless body falling to the ground is heard once more.

“We have to stop this,” Solas intones forcefully. The pain in Sarina’s desperate pleas tormenting his very soul as if her pain was exactly his. “We have to...”

“We cannot,” Fenris replies softly. “Though it pains me to say it, we must allow...”

Solas wants to argue, again, but he knows there is simply nothing that can be done. Fenris is right. As is the little echo of Valor’s voice, that laces the man’s words, that reiterates that fact. But he still hates the truth of it.

“No matter what we both may wish,” Fenris adds, his tone more agreeable than the circumstances
would dictate. He hates this just as much as Solas does, and that is obvious. “We can only witness.”

It isn’t long before two more of the women are picked off and immediately disposed of in a similar fashion. Leaving only one remaining. Solas immediately looks up at the woman, standing there all alone. And, at that moment, a strange recognition flashes across his mind.

She is older than those that once stood at her side. Her face is marred with subtle creases around her eyes and lips. And, her hair reflects a silver hue nearly snuffed out by the darkness of her natural color. Speaking of her long years. She is taller than most. With dark green eyes that speak of a life carefully curated with the wealth of knowledge and understanding gained by years and years of dutiful study. Her clothes; though torn and threadbare, and stained with blood; are ones that seem to offer a distinction of position and prosperity. As does the strange amulet dangling around her neck – marked with an unusual glyph mimicking a vaguely familiar amalgamation of both the symbol of Andraste and of the All-Mother, Mythal.

It is that very necklace that instantly gives away the woman’s identity. And, it is then, that Solas’ heart truly dies a little.

*Her Keeper. The only woman she ever truly thought of as a mother.*

A deafening silence immediately falls at his realization. And it is neither a trick of the mind or an aberration of his fear. For the world around them truly grows silent. No more sobs echo from the cage dangling high above. No more prayers of escape are begged for. And, with its loss, despair quickly invades in its wake.

Turning his eyes from the visage of Sarina’s Keeper, he turns to his beloved to see that she has suddenly allowed her head to drop, seemingly in defeat. Though her hands, still bleeding and white-knuckled, grasp the bars confining her with certainty she looks almost as if all the fight that she has ever possessed has finally left her. Beaten and battered, both emotionally and physically, nothing but acceptance seems to remain. And, yet, though her chest heaves with heavy breaths, he knows that she hasn’t truly given up. Not yet. Simply because that is not who Sarina Lavellan is.

She would never give up. Never. No matter the circumstance. And, definitely not when someone she cared for was in danger.

An ominous chuckle immediately resounds across the battlefield. Rich, warm, and full of dangerous mirth, it flows across the planes of the Fade like a current of warm water washing away the dust of the day, in hopes to leave refreshment behind. But, such a luxury, it is not. For as lush as the deep, masculine voice sounds, in its revelry, its true purpose is abundantly made clear in its omniscient and
“Do not mock me.” Sarina’s voice suddenly echoes softly. It is cracked. And broken. And laced with a deep, deep pain so visceral that every syllable uttered feels like a slicing blade carving upon Solas’ very own heart. “You monster.”

“Oh, my dear little one…” the voice immediately responds. It’s tone dismissive as if talking to a small child. And sounding all too familiar. “Such cruel words do you sling with such a fearful and unseeing heart.”

“Tis a sin. To see me as such. To speak of your Vhenan in such a way…”

Solas instantly grits his teeth. As the voice chooses that very phrase to mimic his very own. And, use that word to address his beloved so.

“You ARE NOT HIM!” Sarina instantly screams. Her face shooting towards the sky in defiance as her hands grip the iron bars of her cage with all her strength and they groan in protest. “Nor will you be, EVER!”

“I know what you are…” she added forcefully. “And, no matter what you do…No matter how much of me you try to strip away…I WILL NOT give you what you want.”

“I WILL NOT GIVE IN TO A MONSTER LIKE YOU!”

“EVER!”

“A monster like me…?” the voice of Vengeance questions, before chuckling sinisterly. “Is that what you really believe, or its simply what you wish were true?”

“For you know as well as I; there is only one here that is truly guilty.”

“You believe me to be a monster yet there is no proof of such deeds that would make it so. For it is not I whose hands are stained with the blood of the innocent. The blood of the people you so daringly believed you could save.”
“It was not my hands that bore witness to the lives left unfinished. The loves left unfulfilled. To the futures left unrealized.”

“At Vengeance’s accusation, so cruelly given, a sudden whoosh of sound echoes and with it another scream of terror. All eyes immediately downcast themselves just in time to see a shadowy figure standing behind the lone Dalish that remains. Its form; ever flowing, lithe, and shrouded in darkness; holds-fast to the defiant, writhing woman in its arms as its once-hidden blade poises dangerously at her throat.

“DESHANNA!” Sarina immediately screams.

Her desperate plea for her dearest Keeper ultimately holds no bearing against the creature’s true intentions. Nor is it even swayed. Cruelty compounded. It allows no hesitation. Maliciously dragging the blade across the woman’s throat slowly and savoring the sheer terror and despair upon Sarina’s face. Deshanna’s blood flows freely, streaming down her chest like a river as the life in her eyes vanishes into a pool of nothingness in the blink an eye. Before her lifeless body is suddenly cast to the ground without remorse. Landing with a resounding thud so loud that it mimics the very boisterous boom of a poignant thunderclap –punctuating the finality of it all.

And, punctuating a truth that cannot be undone.

Solas’ heart plummets into a pit of despair and sorrow at that moment. The horror on Sarina’s face is far too cruel for even him to endure. Let alone relive. For he knows the purpose of this torment truly. For it is not mired in fantasy, but fact. The death of her clan had always tormented her.

He still remembers the very day, the very hour and moment, when she’d received the news. And how devastated she had been. Her choices, at the time, had made sense to her. The urgency in which she so eagerly defended her clan, her people, was unmistakable. But, in the end, nothing she had tried to do to keep them safe had made a difference. And, because of that failure, she truly despised her own heart. Culminating into a very palpable feeling of self-loathing that she’d carry within her for all the rest of her days.

Sarina’s tears instantly flow freely, her sobs wracking her body in uncontrollable waves of distress, despair, and utter dissolution of any composure. She is beside herself. So lost in the pain she now feels that the world seems to dim all around them. As if her very sorrow has tainted every bit of the
world she has known or will know. And there is no reprieve. No way in which to take back the cruelty pressed upon her by Vengeance’s hand. And, no way to make any of this right.

Vengeance’s voice makes that very moment the moment in which to compound her pain even further by adding a nearly victorious and maliciously aligned chuckle full of ominous intent. Seemingly reveling in her own despair. His tone is utterly vicious and cruel. Twisting the knife of what she has had to endure with deliberate purpose. And, calling forth a joy that should never be.

“Oh, how, does the little heart suffer...” his voice prods maliciously. “When good intentions fall to bitter failure.”

“When those who meant so much, disappear from the world simply because of you!”

With those words the Fade instantly shutters, calling out to all that are bearing witness to such an atrocious and evil torment. Sarina, Fenris, and Solas turn their eyes back to where Deshanna’s lifeless body remains and where the shadowy assassin waits. It is then that the darkness surrounding the figure suddenly fades, revealing the visage of the one behind it all.

The mirrored image of Sarina, herself.

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