Fen'Harel Isala Enaste

by Mythalenaste

Summary

Pre Inquisition Felavellan. Just a smattering of one shot like things...reposted from tumblr.

Notes

More Felavellan. It isn’t anything of substance/very shippy yet but my creativity is still hiding from me sooo I figured I’d just post it for the confidence boost/to see if anyone was interested in my ridiculous crack ship.

Mostly for calyah, who is amazing and a lovely writer and just…go check out her fics because you’ll love them! :D
Chapter 1

He had to be here... she felt a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. Felassan. The Slow Arrow. Had anyone seen him? She finally started asking the other hunter's she came across, the clan’s who knew of him shaking their heads and making warding signs to their respective Creator of choice as their lips curled. We haven’t seen him, Nothing Child. What do you care? Lycanae tried not to let the sour panic overwhelm her as she searched for hours, both cursing and lamenting the numbers present at the gathering. Too few to constitute a nation and continually dwindling, but not few enough that trying to find a single elf among them was easy or even possible.

Lycanae passed by a shooting range and pretended not to hear the shouts for her to join an archery contest, passing a story circle for the da’len being presided over by an aging woman with a wooden headpiece that was carved and painted to look like halla horns. Stories... Felassan told stories of the Dread Wolf that made all the parents steer their children away, for who could trust stories of the Dread Wolf’s cleverness? It didn’t do to teach children that the Dread Wolf was clever when you wanted them to behave, to mind their Keepers and do as they were told. Doing as you were told, Felassan said, was vastly overrated. Her heart beat a double thump stutter in her chest and she felt her breath catch. What had happened to him? Where was he?

“Da’rellani. How many times have I told you not to panic in the Fade? Also, falling asleep when you were supposed to be waiting to meet me is bad form.” The Fade?! She didn’t care, she didn’t care that she’d been nervous, either. The surge of relief was too great as she turned to face him, laughter already bubbling up inside her as she struggled to squash it as she met Felassan’s wicked smirk.

“I wasn’t panicking,” She replied evenly, glancing around with an air of nonchalance. It was the Fade, but not as she usually saw it. Felassan’s very presence had been enough to keep whatever nightmares and demons that usually plagued her at bay. Felassan raised an eyebrow and his smile widened, relaxing into a cocky stance as he leaned on his staff and surveyed her with an appraising, violet gaze. “What? Do I look like I’m panicking right now? I knew you were fine. Just late.”

“It’s hard to bluff the Fade, Da’rellani. But points for the attempt.” Felassan snorted and his expression softened slightly, something steady and warm in his eyes before he looked away. The Fade had shifted and was now a mimic of the road he was probably traveling on in the waking world, the path strewn with leaves under his bare feet. She matched his stride, falling into a companionable step with him, close enough that their wrists and the back of their hands brushed together briefly.

“So where are you, Felassan?” Fine, she’d change the subject if he was so dead set on making fun of her for worrying. She didn’t worry, anyway. It’d been a momentary lapse. She, more than anyone, knew that her mentor(if he could truly be called that, at this point. Hahren? Friend? Partner in crime?) was more than capable of taking care of himself. Whatever they were to one another, he took the subject change with grace as they walked through the Fade together. He cocked his head to the side like a bird as he puzzled out his location for her.

“An hour out. Stopping for a rest. Should be there soon, though. Has there been any rioting yet?”

“That Falon’din clan ended up camped next to Clan Ghilain and their Keeper’s are snapping at each other like a pair of rabid dogs. Someone will have to move or else get used to the arrangement. As it is, they seem somewhat camped in.” Informing him on the banal ups and downs of politicking between various clans was soothing in its familiarity for her. She was his eyes and ears, an insider for a fellow elf who held no affiliation to any one specific clan but was known to most.
Felassan made a soft tutting sound at the news, shooting her a sidelong look.

“Well, there’s a happy accident.”

“Or someone is plotting something.” She had her theories about the two rivals and as soon as Felassan finally arrived, they would discuss them at length. For now, she was merely smugly pleased with her knowledge of any perceived subterfuges.

“Well spotted, Da’rellani. We’ll talk more about it when I get in. For now, you should—” wake up. Felassan’s voice was an echo in her ears as she opened her eyes to the early evening sunlight. She was neatly wrapped in her hammock, suspended some twenty feet off the ground in the sturdier boughs of a willow. It was just outside the perimeter set up and maintained by a collective group of hunters, clans working together to have their segment of the border patrolled. She was comfortably close enough that such a patrol would still offer her it’s relative safety but far enough away that no one would disturb her or question her privately meeting with the Slow Arrow.

He was known to the Dalish in a similar way to Asha’Bellanar, a strange and infrequent player who usually kept to the fringes of Dalish society. He was tangentially involved in the occasional dispute or meeting, cleaving mostly to Lycanae’s birth clan, Virmehn. Felassan remained a liminal element, however. Keeper Thelhen seemed to merely tolerate his scant and usually fleeting presence with grudging humour. It was certainly not the reverent way in which Keeper Marethari tended to refer to the The Woman of Many Years with. That difference had always made Lycanae prickle with well-hidden but fierce resentment. That a shemlen, even such a notable and powerful friend of the people as Asha Bellanar, would be treated better than one of their own? It did not seem just.

Lycanae freed herself from the hammock and swung up to straddle the branch, unfastening the makeshift bed and rolling the fabric before tying it with twine. She leaned over to retrieve her bow and quiver from a neighbouring branch, slinging both over her shoulder and securing them. Standing with an easy grace, she walked along the massive bough until she reached the junction where it split from the trees trunk. She leapt, caught a slenderer branch and swung to the next bough over. Her descent was swift, careful to make not a sound as her bare feet touched down on the carpet of dead leaves and sparse grass beneath the willow’s canopy. She smiled and let out a sigh of contentment, inhaling the sweet smell of a forest anticipating the coming rain as she set off through the undergrowth.

It was her second Arlathvhen, the summer of her twenty fifth year. Life was blissful in these stolen moments away from the clan, free from the stress of the constant need to impress Deshanna, to prove to the clan she deserved to be there. They hardly ever called her banal’len anymore, which was nice. Still, seeing Felassan again was always a welcome reprieve.
“Of course you chose Andruil.” His scoff hurt her more sharply than she was expecting and she frowned, reaching up to touch the markings and trying to hide her uncertainty from him.

“Is there something wrong with Andruil?”

“No. Not unless you count all those times she went Void stepping and used to hunt everything and anything that moved just for the sport of it. Barring that, Andruil was almost sane. Her followers tend to live short, violent lives… I just expected more sense from you, Da’rellani.” At the harsh words, Lycanae felt a flare of hot temper sear through her like an arrow loosed from a bow. She had always been sensible… quick to act, impulsive at times but always sensible. She was hurt that Felassan would react this way when the only emotion she’d been expecting was pride…

“I suppose I could have picked Sylaise. Been ready with some incense and a pleasing smile.” Her voice held none of the collected poise and disinterested calculation she had wanted it too and she winced internally at the lapse. From across the blackened campfire, Felassan let out a bark of laughter and shook his head.

“Of all the legends to mangle… If you had Sylaise’s vallas’lin, you’d have lit the camp on fire. It doesn’t suit you, Da’rellani.”

“Well, I was holding out for the infinitely more appropriate Fen’Harel vallas’lin but sadly he didn’t seem to believe in them.” If he wished to poke fun at her, to tear her down for her attempted worship of elven gods then he could suffer through her mocking Fen’Harel. Why hold anything sacred if he refused to do so? And maybe her words would force him to stop dancing and tell her what was troubling him.

“‘Sadly’.” Felassan snorted and shook his head, rolling his eyes. This was not the reaction she’d been expecting and it drove a shard of anxiety and upset deep into her heart.

“You’re in a bad mood,”

“No. I wasn’t in a bad mood. I’m not in a bad mood.” She glared at him and he sighed deeply, pinching the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger and dropping his gaze.” It’s not you, Da’rellani. You’re just… you’re just doing what you have to do.”

“I do not have to do anything. I chose these markings of my own free will. To represent my goddess. Blood and force, the hunt. To represent sacrifice.” At the word ‘sacrifice’ a fierce light seemed to come to Felassan’s eyes and the smile that spread across his face was almost feral.

“Oh? Now, blood and sacrifice is more like Andruil. And you have sacrificed to help the Dalish, to try and show them truths that perhaps they will never see. You hunt for ways to make their lives better and to improve their lots. When the time finally comes to cry havoc in the moonlight, I have no doubt that you will bring the Dalish into their new era. And knowing your fondness for the
shemlen, ‘blood and force’ is not an unexpected consequence of your eventual leadership.” The ferocity left him suddenly and he looked away as the smile faded, something pained taking it’s place. “… and because it is something done in the name of Andruil, it will be bloody and merciless. It will be fierce and fast and brutally efficient. If you are not wary, Da’rellani, it will be your end.”

Lycanae said nothing for a moment, at a loss for words. Felassan was not usually so manic and driven to melancholy. He had always listened to her plans and encouraged her without reservation, save to counsel her to use wit and charm instead of force. Maybe that had been what upset him so? That she had chosen such an unrelenting patron?

“You could have had a life in Halamshiral, you know. It would have been boring, it wouldn’t have suited you… but you could have had a life there.”

“Bowing to the shemlen and scraping by? What is a life lived in boredom? It is not a life. I do not miss being a city elf, Felassan. It is… things are better here. I belong here.”

“A slave to the wills and whims of the People who do not respect you. No matter how many times they call you banal’len, express surprise when you’re capable of simple skills, tell you you aren’t worthy of them… you endure it all and you never complain.” There was wonder and sorrow in his voice, violet eyes looking everywhere but at her face. He was almost guilty as he sat there beside her and had she not been so consumed with the shame of hearing him speak the name banal’len, she might have noticed.

How did he know what they called her? The Child of Nothing. It had hurt so much the first time she heard it, cutting like a knife to the heart of her being. Just words… but one should never underestimate the power of words, of a name given in malice and distrust. She’d chosen to ignore it and let her actions speak for her, thought of how proud her father would be that she had found his people after all. She would endure this and she would be better for it. She knew who she was. Let them call her Banal’len and she would prove how important she was, that her loyalties were unequivocally Dalish.

It had worked, for the most part. She had heard it less and less in recent years. Now, it’s use merely wakened a dull ache inside her that she never let show on her face. But to hear Felassan say it reopened the wound as though it were freshly inflicted, to hear that he had known all along and her attempts to keep it from him had been for naught. Every smile when asked how she was, every lie she had told to reassure him had all been useless. Failed.

“I am not a ‘slave’ to my own People. I am devoted to them, to their betterment. I am the daughter of Enasallas, former first of Clan Virnehn. I am of Clan Lavellan. I earned my vallas’lin and I am worthy of Andruil regardless of my… past.” Felassan watched her with a calm, quiet intensity. He threaded a bit of grass through his figures, winding it around them contemplatively, his gaze softening as his expression became unreadable.

“You deserve better, Da’rellani…” You deserve better. What could be ‘better’ than being Dalish? This was her life, the life she’d chosen. These were her People, even if sometimes their ideas were backwards. Gradually, she would make them see. That the city elves were not different from the Dalish, that it was simply a result of upbringing and not that a ‘flat ear’ was lesser in skill or intelligence. One day, they would all simply be elvehnan with no distinctions. With Felassan’s guidance, she would unite the disparate groups and the Dalish and the city elves would be stronger for it. Maybe one day, the would be strong enough to take back the nation that was theirs… what could possibly be better than being a part in that?

“Oh, I don’t know, Hahren. I am the Little Trickster. I certainly deserve what I get. But the fact that you worry over me is charming nonetheless…” She smiled to soften the ‘hahren’ and
Felassan’s far away expression dissolved and he made a face. His lips quirked into something like a long-suffering smile.

“Ugh, don’t call me hahren. You make me feel old.” Felassan glanced away from her and rubbed the back of his neck in a distracted fashion, the diffuse twilight casting his profile in vibrant hints of orange. He reached up to trace her markings once more, with careful, gentle attention this time. There was something hoarse and serious about his voice and his next words were soft.

“Someone has to worry about you, Da’rellani….Dread Wolf knows, you don’t worry for yourself.”

“Oh? I thought you told me that was a good thing. Why should I be concerned with-” The touch that had been lightly and reverently brushing over the freshly healed marks on her face slid to her chin and became a grip. There was a moment of confusion as she tried to reconcile the sudden tightness of his fingers with the shift in mood. There was resolve behind the softness of Felassan’s gaze, that persistent and unfathomable sadness that always hid behind his smiles becoming a steely sharp intensity.

His lips caught hers and her breath escaped in a huff past the kiss, his fingers sliding down her jaw to lightly cradle the back of her head, keeping her in place. Her surprised gasp leant itself to the rhythm of the kiss, his greedy inhalation breathing the air that escaped her lungs into his own. She could feel his teeth clenched tight behind his lips as she returned the kiss in a way that was as natural for her as breathing. She had kissed and been kissed before in Halamshiral. But those kisses had held all the awkwardness of youth, the fumbling attempts and the bumping noses. This was different. This felt… true. It was easy, as though they had been kissing their whole lives like this. Lathbora viran. Her lips moved over his, teeth grazing his bottom lip and surprising a groan out of him. It was part pleasure, part frustration as it changed into muttered epithets against her lips. She pulled back to glance at him in concern.

“Felassan? Are you alright-”

“No.” He shook his head, pressing forward again. His fingers tangled in the hair at the back of her neck as he kissed and spoke at almost the same time, the scent of mint on his breath: “I’m not alright.”

“Felassan…” He held her face gently between hands callused from wielding a staff, held her like she was something precious and fragile. After so much of the Clan telling her she didn’t deserve to be one of them, after all the ‘tough love’ Felassan had practiced while preparing her to rejoin the clans… his care for her was unexpected and strangely telling.

“Ma bora’vhenan, ma bora’taren. Ar dirthara banal. Hamin atishan enaste ar enansal-” His voice was husky and rough as his teeth closed gently on her bottom lip, the sharpness of an incisor clipping her with the barest extra force in his fevered whisper. She nipped his bottom lip decisively-hard enough to bruise and cause him to pause with a small, affronted noise and jump to his feet, pacing away from her in his distress and glaring at her fiercely. “-ah! Fenhedis! Emma tel’glandival fen’len-”

“Felassan.” She tried not to let the surge of lust and wanting in her lower belly distract her from her purpose. She had to be cool, calm, collected. Even if she wanted to be everything but, even if her heart was hammering in her chest and she was warring with herself and her decision to stop him and demand answers. “Why are you swearing?”

“I’m not!” He threw up his hands, every movement curt and stilted with his frustration. She followed him across the clearing, allowing him enough space to pace back and forth but refusing to allow him to truly flee. “I’m cursing, Da’rellani. There’s a huge distinction-”
“You only curse in dirth elvhenan when you are nervous or furious. Which is it and how can I-”

He crashed into her and sent her off balance. She would have fallen had she not reflexively clung to him and he not wrapped his arms around her waist and kept her on her feet. His previous kiss had been gentle, full of a contained wanting. This one was not; he stole her breath, grip firm and tight on her jaw as fitted his mouth over her’s in a hot press of lips and teeth that was there and gone in almost the same breathless instant. His absence was sudden, fleeing to the other side of the campsite and clutching his temples, cursing vociferously.

“Fen’Harel isala enaste! Tel’na halani’din! Ma Da’rellani…you can’t help, da’fen vhenan.” Three words of common in a deluge of elven was not enough of a breakthrough for her…perhaps speaking what little elven she knew could reach him in ways arguing in the common tongue could not.

“Ne tu’him abelas, Felassan?”

Are you sorry, Slow Arrow? If he said yes, if he calmed and apologised then it could all be forgotten and put behind them. Her chest tightened at the thought that he could take it back, that she would let him take it back out of courtesy and respect. She did not want to and her heart pounded as she watched him, violet gaze dark and intense from the shadow of his hood. His aristocratic features twisted with an expression of frustration and desire in equal measure, tension in the sharp line of his jaw.

“Tel’abelas.” Her nerves seized with exhilaration and comprehension as she crossed the space between them, taking his face in her hands and drawing his mouth down to her’s. His his hands slid down the narrowed taper of her waist to rest on the flare of her hips and draw her against him, fitting his mouth hungrily over her own. Boldly, she brushed her fingers in feather light touch over the sensitive tips of his ears. His sharp intake of breath and the way his grip tightened with almost bruising strength had her smiling into his kiss.

“Ar tu’sulevin bora’him in ma. I have surely become lost in you-” He clung to her like a drowning man clinging to driftwood in a storm, the sadness sharp and bright in his fevered gaze, pressing his forehead to her’s and forestalling her attempts to draw him back down for the kisses she suddenly could not seem to get enough of.

His sorrow… that rootless desperation she did not understand frightened her too much for her to keep examining it for motive and purpose and cause. Too long had she lived while dissecting every minute detail of an expression when turned on her, every quaver in a voice that spoke to her. His words seemed true, his desperation and fondness for her genuine. But what if… Not here, not now, not with the taste of Felassan on her lips and the deliciously wholesome scent of herbs that clung to his skin and clothes intoxicatingly thick in her nose.

“Dirth hamin. Tel’mana.” She tried to sound commanding, but the words came out a breathless gasp. His gaze searched her’s for a moment, hesitating as he touched the fine tracery of the vallas’lin across her cheekbones once more. Her breathing hitched as the pads of his fingers brushed over her lips. “Felassan-”

“‘Don’t stop’ she says, then my name in a very misleading fashion-” Something of his normal confidence and smug self assurance had leaked back into his tone and she felt her heart flutter with nervous eagerness. “-that sounds almost as if she wants me to stop-”

“Felassan.” She spoke again, firmly this time; running her hands up under the half cloak over his shoulders, the feeling of his lean musculature and the warmth of his skin enthralling even through the thin fabric. Their eyes met and the sadness in the deep, intense violet of his regard had softened to a fond warmth. “Please… don’t stop.”

“Ma nuvenin, Da’rellani.”
As you wish, Little Trickster.
This was actually…heart-breakingly cute for me to write? Probably reads like rubbish but this ship is breaking my heart :_; Ly’s so happy…)

“Lovers alone wear sunlight.”
— E.E. Cummings

“‘Oh no, it’s fine! Felassan you worry too much.’ She says. ‘Felassan, you fuss like some old hahren-’” He grumbled, taking a wet cloth and gently cleaning the deep claw marks on her shoulder blades.

“You are fussing—” Lycanae let out a gasp as the suture pulled tight and she flinched at the dragging pain. One hand on her spine steadied her and she bit her lip against the stinging. For all her bravery, the deep furrows the giant spider had dug into her flesh still hurt, even after the healing magic he’d used to partially close them. Her toes curled in the bloodied leaves and she clenched her teeth against a cry of pain.

“Hush, Da’rellani. Drink your tea to counteract some of this venom and stay still.” She shifted slightly and the hand that had been braced against her back, moved to her shoulder to steady her. “Atisha, Lycanae. I know your natural inclination is to do stupid things quickly and you’re eager to get back to it, but let me stitch you up, first.”

Even through the pain, she felt herself smiling a little at the concern. It had been an awfully long time since anyone cared what happened to her enough to be even mildly concerned…she’d forgotten how welcome that was. She brought her knees up to her chest and wrapping her arms around them, pressing the bare soles of her feet against the cold stone ledge on which she was sitting.

“Felassan, you haven’t even cleaned the blood off of yourself yet—”

“It’s mostly your blood. I had a barrier and if you could have just stayed still—” The feeling of needle and thread pulling her flesh together itched and burned in equal measure, his voice helping distract from the unpleasantness of the sensation. “—we could have both had a barrier.”

He dropped the needle and it dangled from it’s string against her back as he turned his attention to dampening the cloth again with a solution of water and boiled elfroot. Before he could object, she turned to face him. The afternoon sunlight cast dappled shadows on them both from where it filtered through the leaves as she grinned at his scowling face. Even glowering at her as he was, she felt her heart ache with fondness for him and she reached up and tapped the bridge of his nose with a forefinger, ignoring the affronted sound he made.

“Give me the cloth, Felassan. You’ve got blood on your forehead and neck.”

“If I do this, I want you to swear on Fen’Harel’s pointy eyeteeth that you’ll let me finish those stitches before gangrene sets in. And that you’ll drink the tea—” She opened her mouth to object and he raised his voice slightly. “—the tea is non-negotiable.”

“It’s not much of a deal then, is it?” She fought to keep the laughter from her voice as he ceded the
cloth to her and allowed her to gently set about cleaning away the dried blood. The movements pulled at her wounds but she ignored the slight discomfort and focused on enjoying Felassan’s closeness, even in situations like this.

“Making a deal with you, Da’rellani, is like making a deal with Anaris. I was saying ‘deal’ to be politely diplomatic.” She hummed affirmatively and rubbed the warm, damp cloth in small circles over his cheek, turning the formally greenish cloth to russet. She worked her way down the column of his throat and to the edge of his collar bone, bringing her fingers to his chin to gently tip his head from side to side to see if she’d missed any obvious patches. “I think you managed to get blood behind my ears—”

In a deft movement he was too busy grumbling to see coming, she pressed her lips quickly to his and silenced him. Felassan made a soft, defeated kind of groaning noise and brought a hand up to cradle the back of her neck, returning the kiss briefly and blissfully before breaking away. His thumb stroked across her cheek, brushing gently over a shallow scratch and meeting her steady gaze.

“This doesn’t change anything, Da’rellani. You’re still drinking that tea.”

“Of course… hahren.”

“UGH.”
Virnehn

Alright, at long last, Lycanae meets Felassan for the first time. Part I. Also, derps through the winter in Orlais. For calyah, who inspired me to write it and months ago prompted it! Sorry it’s taken me this long! Also to saarebitch, as it mentions Enansalas and thus, her scion concepts :D!

Huge thanks go to fauxfelix for tirelessly listening to me fling ideas at her and going over this with me. Also to Donuts for some edits :D

“I would enter your sleep if I could, and guard you there, and slay the thing that hounds you, as I would if it had the courage to face me in fair daylight. But I cannot come in unless you dream of me.”

— Peter S. Beagle, The Last Unicorn

“No…”

The camp was long abandoned. Desolate. She’d felt such hope when she saw the wolf statue, the memories from her childhood rushing back. Listening to her father tell her all the landmarks, things that were unlikely to change even in the ten year absence they had endured from the clan. Virnehn, The Path to Joy. A true Dalish elf can always find her way home again, da’len, if only she remembers the Joyful Path…Every lesson, every word her father had taught her and every trick of tracking had come to naught. The clan wasn’t here, had not been here for many months. That itself didn’t make sense….the wolf statue had always been the centre of their camp.

She drew back her fist and slammed it into the soft earth beside the statue, hunger gnawing at her belly and tears welling in her eyes. She didn’t want this to be it, the thieves guild to be right…her whole silly adventure into the unknown to search for her father’s People-for her People-to have been a failure. There was nothing left for her if this didn’t work…how could she show her face back in Halamshiral? How could she go back to the place where her father had died and her mother had left and Syth had disappeared? After all that talk about the Dalish, after all of her infamy and her skill amongst the city elves she’d more or less grown up with…after Lemet holding her hands in his, pressing the last of his earnings from the past three months into her palms. Please, take this…get away, lethallan. Find your People.

Deep down, she’d known what he was really asking her: live. A thief, a risk taker whose pride had not yet been humbled by the hard life city elves had to live. She would surely not have been long for that world…even had she stayed.

“Ahh..” She let out a soft cry and clenched her teeth against another sob, tearing up fistfulls of drying grass and letting out a ragged breath. The air was frigid against her skin….stupid to think the clan would not head for warmer climes during the cooler months. She shuddered, clutched at the lump of agony in her stomach and tried to hold back her tears. She couldn’t afford to waste the water, anyway…

“Please,” Her voice croaked from her lips as she pushed herself back to her knees and looked up at the wolf statue with tears blurring her sight. “Please.”
She had never done this before, prayed aloud like this. Save for a few breathily muttered words in passing to one Creator or the next, she had never truly prayed. Enansalas had always discouraged it, destroyed the altars she had built to Andruil and Dirthamen, the patron of Clan Virehn and the very god to whom he was beholden. *The Gods do not care for anyone but themselves. That is why they are gods. It is mortal arrogance to believe they guide us to anything other than their own ends.* Her father had been a scion of the People, a spiritual leader and guide...he had fallen far and abandoned both his people and his birthright out of fear of the very religion he was supposed to champion. Her mother, a city elven hero before she fell to her own ambitions and vanity. Felicienne Vidette, before she would sit silent in their cramped home with the door barred on the night’s the Chevaliers came into the alienage, seeking to slaughter elven citizens in order to whet their initiate’s appetite for violence. Parents fallen from crumbling pedestals and all faith in even mundane authority had fled Lycanae’s heart.

She looked up at the guardian wolf statue, the familiar comfort of its presence that she’d always felt as a young child was gone. It was stone...cold and unforgiving and wearing away inexorably with the passage of the years. It was dead and there was no magic in it, no magic in anything. She shivered violently against the chill and let out a white plume of breath. She did not feel like herself: curled into a pathetic ball, tears freezing on her cheeks. *Clever as Fen’Harel and thrice as pretty.* Threnn had said that about her once, surprised when she had resented the comparison. To city elves, Fen’Harel was not *The Bringer of Nightmares, He Who Hunts Alone.* He was a figure of mystery that represented agency to them, cleverness and a disregard for any authority. Fen’Harel was the god of trickery, of misplaced faith. Of loopholes and lies who bore no one allegiance. It had scared her a little to hear Threnn say it and when it had caught on it had troubled her and she had not let them see. She feared such a phrase might call him, such temerity to mock the Dread Wolf. And what had her life come to? Slumped against a stone statue, lost and alone with her death so close she could taste blood on her tongue. Surely, the Dread Wolf had caught her scent.

“Ar isala Fen’Harel enaste. Ir abelas. I ask for mercy, Dread Wolf. I am lost, I who belong to no one and cleave to nothing. I have tricked and thieved and snuck my way across Orlais in search of my People. I am alone, failed in all I have set out to attempt. Dread Wolf, forgive me. Dread Wolf...do something.” It had started to snow as she spoke, heavy, lumpy flakes kissing her cheeks like ice cold feathers. An early snow. She felt a hysterical laugh burble up in her parched throat and struggled to keep it from breaking free. An early snow! One that would surely kill her, bring the cold and bury her with it. That was all Fen’Harel would give her: Death and ruin. She felt a surge of rage blossom in her chest, burn with a fierce and violent flame. How dare it end like this...

She struggled to her feet, her joints refusing to obey her as she used the statue to support her weight. She was so tired, her feet ached and the cold merely felt like pain. Where could she go? The Clan’s tracks had gone cold and she had no food...she’d die out here unless she could find something to eat, some way to get warm.

“I curse you, Fen’Harel! You wish to remain silent? Then let Silence be all you can utter! I call upon Dirthamen, He Who Casts the Long Shadow, Threadspinner and Whisperer in the Womb-” She didn’t even know what she was saying anymore, save that it was desperate. That she was screaming pleas and curses to ancient gods who didn’t listen at a grey sky as the snow fell upon her tongue. Her body was greedy for the moisture, greedy for any last feeling of life. She didn’t want to starve, she didn’t want to die, she didn’t want to fail...and more than anything, she didn’t want to be alone. “I vow to every Creator that I will hunt you, Fen’Harel. Through the Beyond when I am dead. I will hunt you and I will stand before you and spit in your face...you who took everything from the elvhen, from the People. You who have given nothing back. You who have driven me to this, to death-”
“That’s quite a plan, Da’rellani.” Her tired body found the strength to lunge away from the statue and the voice in one frantic scramble. She knocked an arrow in one smooth motion and rounded on the statue, aiming at a hooded figure perched on it’s head. In her ranting, she had not been paying attention to her surroundings. Whoever the speaker was could have killed her as easily as breathing and she would never have even seen the blow.

“Or rather it isn’t a plan, not really. I get the sense that you’re not really a planner. A plotter, maybe, but plans take so much of the fun and danger out of things, don’t they?” Her mind raced and her fingers tightened on the arrow as the figure stood in one languid motion.

Felicienne’s training and her own experience as a lookout for Halamshiral’s thieve’s guild kicked in as she took the measure of the stranger: male by his stance and height, clearly at home here. He appeared unarmed, but that meant little. Something about the casual grace with which he carried himself told her the interloper was an elf, the glint of eyeshine from beneath the hood confirming her suspicion. He was wholly unconcerned by her drawn weapon, which meant he was either confident in his ability to overcome her or doubted she would truly fire at him. She lowered the arrowhead a fraction but kept her tense posture.

“You’re awfully quiet all of a sudden. I didn’t mean to interrupt your cleansing shouting match at Fen’Harel..” The elf leapt down from the statue and landed silently in the fine dusting of snow, keeping his gaze trained on her. Her hands shook and the arrow in her bow trembled slightly as she stood her ground. Dalish, or else very used to the woodlands…but alone? She glanced around but saw nothing that indicated she was surrounded and even were she, this is what she came here for. To find the Dalish, find her former Clan. She lowered her bow and cleared her throat.

“Aneth ara, lethallin.” It had been a long time since she’d spoken to anyone and her voice cracked as she made an effort to sound self possessed after her desperate outburst. “Are you of Clan Virnehn?”

“Are you? Where are your vallaslin, Da’rellani?” He sounded…amused. That word was not one she was familiar with from her father’s understanding of broken elven. Was this man mocking her? She cocked her head to the side, mimicking his body language and replacing the arrow in her quiver with a movement she hoped looked sufficiently skilled.

“Is the Clan still here?” She tried again, refusing to be baited or back down. She held herself with pride, she would not be intimidated by him even as he advanced. Lycanae moved to keep a distance between them that she was comfortable with, too far for him to lunge as she circled, never truly retreating but refusing to let him gain any ground or tactical advantage. Now that adrenalin was no longer coursing through her veins she felt her body protest this extra strain and she struggled to hide it as a knowing smile played at the corners of the elf’s lips. He stopped tracking her steps as she circled and she hesitated fractionally.

“I know Orlesians enjoy dancing, but let’s introduce each other first. My name is Felassan. Your turn, Da’rellani.” There was that word again, she felt a flicker of irritation that she didn’t know what it meant and she sighed. But ‘assan’ she knew to be ‘arrow’. And ‘fel’ was slow. The Slow Arrow…something about that was familiar to her but she could not think where she’d heard it before. Either way, the name was strange. It felt like more of a nickname than a name, a sobriquet like her mother had once used.

“Lycanae. Lycanae Vid-Virnehn.” She’d almost said ‘Vidette’ instead and she felt her eartips heat with shame. The elf before her pushed back his hood and faced her, eyes a brilliant shade of violet framed by Dirthamen’s vallaslin.

“Aneth ara, Da’rellani.” She sighed as she watched a crooked, rueful smile grace his lips. She would never get a proper answer out of-a cramp of agony shot through her belly and she bent
double with the pain of it. She tried to step over a root at the same time and stumbled, striking out a hand to steady herself and finding nothing but air. Strong hands caught her under the elbows before she could fall completely and she clung to his arms, struggling to get her feet underneath her like a newborn halla. She was so tired, and the pain twisting in her gut was too much for her.

“Atisha…don’t try and stand-” Everything seemed like it was spinning to her, the dizziness sudden and inescapable. She’d suddenly gotten so much colder….why was she so cold?! “Don’t wake-!”

Lycanae bolted upright with a gasp, snow sliding off her shoulders and down her tunic in icy rivulets. Her threadbare cloak had done little to keep her dry and she shook violently. She’d fallen asleep at the base of the wolf statue and dreamt her entire encounter with…Felassan? The Slow Arrow…probably a demon. She struggled to her feet, the pains searing her belly as she shouldered her empty, useless pack. Her trembling fingers counted her arrows, rattling them in the quiver as she glanced around at the dead trees, their branches heavy with snow and the bleak gray sky darkening with evenings onset. *Five, six, seven…only seven?* Only seven arrows. She’d have to make them count.

Lycanae cast one last glance up at the wolf statue, despair sinking deep into her mind with icy fingers. It was just stone, one of it’s ears chipped and crumbling now in it’s age. It could offer her no protection, no help. The gods could not hear her here, if they ever could. She’d fallen asleep and dreamt of the impossible; that there were still Dalish here to save her, that anyone could save her but herself. Or maybe it had been a demon? It hadn’t felt like Doubt, her constant companion in the Fade. She reached up with aching muscles and patted the stone wolf on the cheek, just as she had when she was a little girl.

“Goodbye, ma fen.”

The snow got worse and with it, the cold. It was woodlands with no caves, no shelter and endless white. Lycanae had never seen this much white as she slogged, mindless and shuddering, through the snow. She walked through the night, the distant howling of wolves and the soft sound of her footsteps piercing the oppressive silence. Dead black trees clawing towards the grey sky impeded her as she trudged through the woods. She no longer truly felt the cold but the hunger gnawed at her like a living thing. She’d make it out…she just had to keep moving towards something and she’d make it.

The morning sky was still a blank whiteness above her, the snow at her waist now. She thought she heard crows cawing in the stillness but she couldn’t be sure. She could hardly feel her fingers, let alone fire her bow even if she saw prey she thought she could catch. Her eyelids were heavy but there was no place to rest, everything was blanketed in snow and there was nothing to eat. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

She stopped counting how many times she fell and dragged herself up again. She slid and slipped and stumbled down a hill, the trees at it’s base thinning. Maybe it was a field? A plain? Anything but the endless trees that- her foot caught on something beneath the snow and she let out a cry, unable to catch herself as she fell the rest of the way down the incline. Arrows scattered as she landed hard, her father’s bow spinning away from her across the ice. It was ice? Of course it was ice…

She forced her trembling body to crawl through the snow toward her bow, thoughts spinning through her mind like leaves in a gale. Snow on ice, ice beneath snow, it was so cold it had to be safe to stand on, to walk on. She wasn’t going anywhere without that bow…it was all she had left of her father, all she had left of her Dalish heritage. *Mythal enaste, Andruil enaste, Elgar’nan enaste…please, please help me…*her breath escaped her lips in a white plume as she inched closer,
raising herself up off the ice just a fraction. Lycanae stretched out her hand, fingertips reaching for the smooth, polished wood-

There was a snapping sound and a deafening crack as the ice beneath her gave way and she plunged into water so bone chillingly cold it froze the scream in her throat and stole the breath from her lungs. There was a glimpse of a blank expanse of white ice above her head, a flash of a submerged tree beneath her and it’s branches scraping painfully across the back of her knees as she struggled to orient herself and hold her breath against the urge to gasp in a lungful of ice cold water. Her heavy clothes and pack dragged her down, her water filled quiver unbalancing her as she sank. Her fingers blindly clawed at the ice above her head, kicking her legs and trying to flounder to the surface. It was no use. She had to get rid of the cloak… but her mind was so scattered and her body so incredibly cold. She flailed and caught hold of something, fumbling for the toggle at her throat with her other hand. it came free and she kicked out hard against the oppressive weight of the water.

Her head burst through the surface and she sucked in a desperate gasp of air and then another, struggling to stay afloat and kicking out at the tree branches beneath her. Their skeletal fingers cracked and snapped under her feet as she tried to grip the ice that crumbled around her. Her ragged breaths quickened, fingers quivering and bright red as she tried to pull herself up only to break more ice. Where was Enansalas’ bow? Had it sunk with her? She let out a shriek of agony and desperation, clawing at the chunks of ice, breaths coming fast and her heart pounding so hard against her ribcage it hurt.

Sink, something told her. Just let yourself sink. Die here, die now. This is meant to end. Let go. Learn the secrets of the abyss, of the depths. Surrender to this Silence, da’len. She screamed again, even though the effort left her breathless as she finally found purchase on the ice. Lycanae struggled to pull herself up, squirming on her belly and running her hands through the churned up snow as she dragged herself away from the edge. She was further out on the ice than she wanted to be but finally, finally out of the water. She was too cold to do anything but shiver, shiver and try to block out the voice telling her to die, to sleep. She drew her gloved hands in close to her body, shoved them into her armpits and curled up on her side in the snow.

Get up. Please, just get up. She just had to keep moving, to find shelter now, to rest because she was too tired, she was so tired. The ice could melt, she could fall through again and she just didn’t care. She couldn’t care. She’d never, ever be warm again. Sleep beckoned her, promising a freedom from pain and panic. Lycanae braced her hand beneath her, forced her muscles to strain against all the cold and pain and exhaustion to try and push herself to her knees. With a cry, her strength gave out and she collapsed. She rolled on her back and cast her gaze to the mottled grey and white sky, snowflakes falling on her cheeks and her tongue as she panted for air.

She closed her eyes…she’d just rest for a moment…regain her strength…
Virnehn Part II

Chapter Notes

I am officially sick of looking at this. I think, however, that it came out okay? I hope. Part II of Virnehn. Ly and the tail end of meeting Felassan. Credits at the end because they’re a bit long and tumblr is grumpy with me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“We are not always what we seem, and hardly ever what we dream.”
— Peter S. Beagle (The Last Unicorn)

The world was an ocean without shore, a vast and unknowable depth into which she sank. The sinking was slow, an inexorable force that drew her down and further and further. She wanted to panic, to seize control and kick herself towards a surface she knew she could never reach. The urge warred with the oppressive calm of the water, it’s heaviness comforting. She found she could breathe, that the water was around her and within her, above and below. It was time before there was anything of significance at all, the unfathomable depth was featureless. Shafts of silver light pierced the Surface at it’s unimaginable height far above as she finally, finally drifted to the rippling sand of the seabed.

Lycanae stood, her every movement a struggle against the weight of the water. The sand beneath her feet was grey as ash, rising in swirling motes of silver with each footfall as she set out through the nothingness. Far into the distant murk of the grey green water there seemed to be four pillars, thick at their base and tapered and bowed as they came up to some eventual point far beyond the surface. When she walked, her every movement felt heavy and difficult. It was incredibly cold here, a burning kind of cold and in it, there was a memory. A distant dream of her body lying somewhere in the snow…it did not matter. Nothing mattered but the direction in which she trudged through the depth, nothing mattered but the patterns in the sand that began to evolve the further she went. Their shapes were strange, twisting in on one another in spirals within spirals, the convex curves looping in an unnatural and maddening progression. She followed them downward to where the cold grew more insistent and the water heavier in her mind. She followed a current, an implacable will that guided her own feet until the steps she took did not feel as though they were truly her own.

She broke through the seabed and fell, clutching the wet sand from where she’d emerged, the thin sheen of water reflecting the waves above her in a shifting swell that sickened her in it’s churning. A ringing, persistent sound sent pain lancing through her eardrums to pierce her mind like a thousand arrows striking home.

Her scream of agony was soundless, the water pressing into her throat and stealing her voice. There was a hum that filled her ribcage, thrumming in tune with the tone that caused her such
pain as she stood up amongst the submerged ruins of what might once have been a city. It had an elven feel to it, save that the buildings were impossibly large, their broken hulks twisted and curved and misshapen. The angles hurt to look at, grotesque in a way that sharpened the ringing in her ears and the numbing effect of the cold. Still, she moved onward with the current that drew her through the labyrinthian alleys and roads of the decaying metropolis. More than anything, Lycanae knew she needed to leave...there was an innate sense of wrongness to this place that was worse than any of the nightmares she could remember having. She would do anything to avoid the painful sound, to lessen it's effect, to be able to think past it.

In a way, she could. The ringing was imbued with knowledge that was all but comforting: This place did not belong to her, did not belong to the normal walks of the Fade. It was somewhere else entirely and this was only it’s border. Perhaps more horrifying was the thought that it knew of her as she knew of it, the towers and monoliths with their unnatural curvatures knew her intimately and each step she took was one that furthered her enmeshment within the Depth. Lycanae knew she couldn’t gaze at the buildings too long, she dare not look too closely at the interior of the kelp covered, crumbling temples where the shafts of silver light could not reach. She could not let her eyes rest on any of the runes that twisted intricate patterns upon the stone work for if she did her mind would break; the ringing would worsen and a madness would take her so deeply that she would wake undone, unable to scream or speak or ever articulate what she knew again. She would be rendered deaf and blind and mute by the warped and broken continuity of The Place of Secrets.

She came upon a massive set of stairs, their immense blocks twice her height as she passed by them, the current drawing her up the steps even as the ringing increased to an unbearable pitch. She did not like this, anything was better than this horrible sound, this dreadful feeling of weight and vibration that shook her every fiber. Worse was the sense that her will to resist had not been stolen from her, but that it was intact and no longer under her command. Her willpower had never mattered. Thinking she could direct the current, that she could have avoided the sound that had now reached a near mind-shattering intensity?

That thought had been a myth, a fancy that had nothing to do with the stark reality that she had been doing precisely what was expected of her. She had followed the path that had been made for her, the illusion of self will was laughable. The world was laughable and her mind felt like it was melting to a silver grey sand held tight behind her lips, that would pour from her ears and swallow her sight. Her will was malleable, she existed for the purpose of something greater and truer and wiser than anything known. Whether she was grateful or frightened, regardless of personal feelings she was beholden to this place and to its ruler.

As she rose, she realised to her horror that the ruins many paths had not been so random as she first supposed. It was not a spiral curving in on itself nor the spokes of some turning wheel but a web. An immense, complex web the design of which made sense only to its ultimate arbiter. Her head broke the surface and she stepped into a grove.

It was only a grove in it’s loosest sense, for the dead trees rose from silver kelp grass in great, petrified hulks of their former glory, immense oaks twisted in on themselves in an agonised contortion. Large,black ravens glided between the ossified trunks, their every move in tune with the infernal resonance that drew her onwards. There was a weight on her shoulders now just as there had always been, but when she looked down two huge, white birdlike claws clutched her collarbone with enough force for blood to well around the piercing talons, spiraling away through the water like plumes of scarlet ink. A shadow fell across her and she looked ahead to where the path before her wound to...to...

The ringing ceased suddenly and she stared up at the immense figure that stood before her. It shifted before her eyes, at times an elven semblance and at others a confusing jumble of flesh and
bone like a melting wax work. She looked at His face and struggled to make sense of what she was seeing: Large, elven eyes with luminous irises the colour of polished hematite stared down at her with a dispassionate intensity. His lips were thin, belied no expression as the raven that had been perched on her shoulders took off with enough force to send her to her knees. The white feathers of Deceit shone in the gloom of the Depths as it alighted on His mighty shoulder, it’s blue eyes boring into her’s. This was Dirthamen, Thread spinner and Lord of the Dark House, powerful and terrible and impossible.

He raised one long fingered hand, the nails curved and hooked like a raven’s claws as he extended it toward her. He touched the needle tip to the center of her forehead as she knelt transfixed; something more flooring than pain searing her mind like it had been bathed in venom.

Everything that had ever been, every moment and every breath since her first breath, it was known to the Keeper of Secrets. Her name, her essence and her will. This was what her father had feared, this was the well from which all knowledge sprang of past and present and the multitude of futures. There were many, so many, too many for one mind to hold so they appeared and slipped from her mind’s eye in a rapid deluge, leaving powerful impressions like scars on her subconscious. It was her life played out in every frame and every shifting vision and it was as vivid against the greyness, against the weight of the Depths, as fresh blood on snow and as cold steel driven into flesh. It was pain and it was conflict and it was the suffering of a long, long life in which so many things were beyond her control.

It is as it should be. It is inevitable. It is everything and nothing and you are but a single piece.

The touch communicated all of this in a bare instant, withdrawing smoothly and leaving her curled in on herself in agony. Somewhere, she was cold and shivering in the snow. She was freezing to death and there was no way out for her. She looked up and found the image of Dirthamen to be blurring in her sight, unfocused as if seen from very far away. From his shadow a form was becoming clearer, a sense of dread and relief in equal measure welled within her. There were words she could not hear, spoken in a bare murmur that even though she could not make out their meaning the sentiment was oppressively felt: If she wanted, she would never feel the cold again. If she wanted, she could leave the world and all its sorrow behind her. She could move on from the struggle that was to be her whole life, she could rest. It would be easy and even if she didn’t choose this now…it would come to her eventually. She strained to hear, to understand.

As Dirthamen blurred in her sight, another image, another figure sharpened. She could almost see-

“WAKE UP! GARAS’AN!” The words, not from any supernatural source but a very real one, felt like being clouted in the chest with a hammer. They were loud and they pulled at her, dragging her mind from the spirals and the web, from the sticky wrench of the Fade’s deepest and most hallowed reaches-

“Come back! Come back-” She gasped for breath and lunged up, clawing at the wrists and forearms of the person who held her. Where was she!? She’d fallen asleep in the snow and then she- she panted for breath and stared into the face of the elven man currently still clutching her shoulders.

“F-F-Felassan?” That was impossible he wasn’t real she must still be-!

“Ah ah! Dareth atishan! You’re safe! Safe. See? You’re awake now. After a wander through the darkest part of the Fade, no less.” She tried to scramble back slightly but she was still weak and
running on adrenalin and his grip was firm.

“You…are you a demon?” She managed to choke out, trying unsuccessfully to hide her fear. After the nightmares, she didn’t know how much more of this she could take.

“Well, that’s gratitude,” He grumbled, shaking his head and sighing. “No, Da’rellani. I’m not a demon. I’m a dreamer.”

A dreamer? Somniari? That explained much and she felt herself relax fractionally. She was fairly certain she was free, now. No longer trapped in the frightening paths of the Fade that now seemed to be a memory that was fast fading. She remembered…greyness. A lingering sense of sadness, too. She felt so weak she could barely hold herself up, allowing her body to slump wearily in his grip.

“Atisha, da’assan, atisha.” He murmured, slowly lowering her back to the mountain of furs. *Peace, little arrow, peace.* Lycanae breathed deeply and tried to orient herself, clenching and unclenching her fingers. She was amazed she could still feel them, still feel her toes…that she wasn’t frozen in the snow.

Her eyes darted from his face to her surroundings…some kind of cave? What little she could see of the walls looked far too regular to be a cavern but it was stone. She was lying in a heap of fur, the smell of snowmelt and the gaminess of leather and tanned hide thick in her nose and intermingled with the heavy scent of an incense she was unfamiliar with. The warmth of a fire—even though it was *green*- was such a blessing she felt as though she might weep with relief.

“W-w-what happened?”

“You went swimming in the off season.” He muttered, punctuating the offhand words with a dismissive snort but softening their blow with a smile. The humour was strangely soothing and she took a breath and drew her knees up to her chest, hiding her face and trembling. *Get a hold of yourself and try not to be such a failure…*

“And a few hours of healing magic and some warm, dry clothes. You still might have nerve damage in your fingertips. I misjudged how far you would get in the snow…ir abelas.”

“You…you knew I was out here? Alone?”

“No, not still, anyway. Not until the night before last, actually. I thought you’d have given up after the near miss with those bandits—” There had been no ‘near miss’ with any bandits. She’d marched through their camp, stolen sparse supplies from a bunch of fat, lazy shems who had been taking easy pickings from the Imperial Highway. When that hadn’t been enough, she’d warned the elven servants—at the exclusion of their noble employers—about the bandits ahead and then filched everything that the bandits would never miss from the resulting havoc. Had the noble shems been worth saving, their own servants surely would have warned them instead of heading for the hills with all they could carry. End of not so impressive story. She hadn’t necessarily expected the Dalish to ride in and save her, but she also hadn’t expected this much judgement. “-I just thought you might have guided those servants to a town somewhere since you decided to give them the bulk of your stolen supplies—”

“Giving up finding Vimnehn just to act as a tour guide was not part of my agenda.” She interrupted, wrapping her arms around herself and realising she was wearing unfamiliar clothes as she did so. A kind of beige tunic and leggings that were just a tad too large for her hung off her frame and cinched around her slim waist with a belt of halla leather. She was too tired to feel self-conscious and modesty was something only those who hadn’t fallen into frozen lakes could afford. She was just glad the garments were dry and reasonably warm. She glanced up and found
that Felassan’s attention had turned to stoking the campfire, his expression unconcerned.

“Agreed. Tour guides are generally expected to know where they’re going, Da’rellani.” His tone was light and playful, teasing her at a time she hardly felt like being teased. She had nearly died to get here, to where the Clan would have been. His mockery was cutting. *Mind yourself, Lycanae. With other elves, you are so comfortable that sometimes you forget how the Game is played.* Her mother’s words echoed from years ago, her childish reply a memory nearly as potent. *Not everything is the Game.* Felicienne’s light snort and her eye roll had indicated otherwise, had mocked. *Life is the Game, ma petite oiseau. If you realise that now, then perhaps it will spare you some sorrow in the future.* She inclined her head in acquiescence, meeting Felassan’s eyes as she did so.

“You…Ma serannas, Felassan. I would be dead without your timely intervention.”

“Oh, you wounded me, Da’rellani. I really didn’t think you’d still be out in a snowstorm. But then, I don’t suppose your Dalish parent felt like recognizing weather changes was as important as the skills you’d need in whatever city you’re from.” Assuming she had city skills at the exclusion of knowing any Dalish skills? She had expected that. She’d expected the Dalish would scorn anything not of their own unique experience but the reality stung more than it should have. He’d known right where to strike to get her down again. She was tired and life may have been the Game but for now, she wasn’t interested in playing.

“No,” She sighed and shook her head. “I knew the weather was changing. I just…”

“You thought you could make it? You gambled?”

“Yes.”

“Well, if you hadn’t gambled and you hadn’t been treading that particular stretch of bandit inundated road, those servants would be dead. You saved them. The elves, anyway.” His voice was soft with a slight hint of a Dalish accent and his smile was kinder than she felt she deserved.

“You…you care about city elves?” It was hard to say it, to say ‘city elves’ like they were different from Dalish elves. Like they were other. Harder still to ask for the axe to fall, to await laughter or scorn or just mere neutrality. Instead, she felt like she glimpsed a spark of challenge in his gaze, a tightening of his smile.

“Don’t you?” She watched him warily and said nothing. Was this a test? Felassan sighed and held out a small wooden bowl to her. She took it, sniffing tentatively at the air. The cold and the overwhelming scent of wet stone and snowmelt had dulled her sense of smell until it was almost nonexistent. She’d been so exhausted and so starving for so long that food had been something she’d forced to the back of her mind. The aroma of venison stew was so beautiful to her in that moment that she let out a soft, joyful gasp of surprise and delight.

“Elves are elves, Da’rellani. All have pointed ears, all persecuted, all suffering. Regardless of whether we live in wagons pulled by deer or in city streets full of garbage.” She nodded and reached for the bowl tentatively. “It’s alright, I’m not going to bite. Here.”

“Thank you.” She took the bowl and slowly brought it into her lap, almost reverent.

“Mythal’s heaving bosom, Da’rellani. It’s bad stew and stale bread, not gold.”

“I haven’t eaten anything in over a week.” She muttered, slowly dipping the bread in the stew and soaking it. “Da’rellani…What does that mean? You’re the Slow Arrow but what do you keep calling me?”
“Da’rellani is ‘Little Trickster’. It seemed to fit. Do you have a real name or shall I keep calling you that?” She’d earnestly thought she would die and never see food again. Beyond all other things, food had become this all important aspect of living that she’d been forcing herself to neglect for so long. It took her a moment to process what Felassan had said. Little Trickster. It was at once flattering and apt, a name that suited her. Da’rellani. It made her feel more elven, more a part of something.

“You can keep calling me that, it’s better than my real name. ‘Lycanae’ is a mouthful.” She murmured, taking a small bite of the broth soaked bread. Felassan watched her and cocked his head to the side, frowning.

“You’re named…that name is Tevene.”

“You know Tevene?” Ly kept her wince internal and continued eating as slowly as she could stand. “How does a Dalish elf know Tevene?”

“I only know a little. But that’s just…” He grinned at her broadly and she stopped eating long enough to glare.

“Don’t. My mother gave me that name and I’ve never liked it. She was…her parents came from the Imperium. Call me ‘Ly’ if you must.”

“Ly? Like liar? No, I think ‘Da’rellani’ works.” She nodded noncommittally and finished the bread, her entire brain screaming at her to suck down as much of the broth as she could. She wanted to eat everything now that she had begun. Instead, she set the bowl aside and brought her knees up to her chest, watching him.

“You’re from Clan Virnehn?” No, he isn’t. He would not have stayed behind.

“No. My Clan isn’t Virnehn. I am Dirth’vhen Hanin-”

“No Clan, just a respected elder.” Felassan looked slightly taken aback by this and squinted at her.

“Who are you, Da’rellani?”

“Enansalas, Former First to Keeper Thelhen and the Black Tongue of Clan Virnehn, was my father.” She let the pride fill her voice, not caring if all those titles had been lost since her father’s self exile.

“Oh! Oho! You might have a shadow of a chance, Da’rellani. Even with a cute Tevene name and a bardic mother-”

“My mother was…how did you know who Felicienne was?” She asked him incredulously, her ears flicking forward and then back and flattening against her head. What Dalish elf was interested in these things, asked questions yet with the ease of someone who already seemed to know what the answers would be? Felassan laughed and she liked the sound despite her doubts.

“I’m Dirth’vhen Hanin, you don’t get that title by being the smartest halla herder in the Dales. Also, your mother and your father’s scandal was the talk of the Clans for years. Felicity? Penelope? Whatever you said her name was, she should be proud. She certainly left an impression. A city elf shaped dent, rather.” She frowned and held the bowl of stew tighter, taking a sip that scalded her mouth. That did not bode well for them letting her into the Clan…but she couldn’t stop now. Felassan seemed to read her mind, his wry smile softening slightly around the edges. “What happened to your parents, da’len?”

“I’m hardly a child,” She corrected before she could stop herself and then bit her lip hard to stem
any more idiotic defenses. For the first time, Felassan seemed not to have a witty riposte. Instead, his violet gaze had mellowed with a kind of distant melancholy.

“Forgive me, Da’rellani. I don’t suppose you are.” She watched him for a moment before she spoke, choosing her words carefully and trying to keep the bitterness and sorrow from them as she spoke.

“We left the clan after my brother was born—”

“The blind somniari. Thelhen insisted that his First had stolen something that rightfully belonged to the clan but refused to speak of it. Go on, Da’rellani.”

“We went to Halamshiral but it was supposed to be…temporary. My father was paranoid he thought that if we returned to the Dalish something would—” She felt the crushing weight of water fill her lungs and the inexorable pull of something deep within her mind and heart lurch sickeningly. White raven, blue eyes. What was—as quickly as the feeling had come, it left her. She glanced up and took a breath, feeling the boiling heat of a bit of broth from the bowl trickle down her knuckles without registering the pain. Felassan’s eyes narrowed slightly, but he stayed silent and she soldiered on. “-he wouldn’t let us come back. My mother stayed with us but she left several years ago with no note and no explanation. My father sickened…his breathing went bad and he…he’s dead. There were no healers who could help him—” None that I could afford or find who would come into the Elven quarter. The grief weighed heavily on her and she felt lingering guilt twist her belly into knots. I couldn’t even give him a proper Dalish burial. “-my brother simply left a few days before he died. I looked everywhere for him, but I couldn’t leave…I couldn’t look for very long. So, I left. I wanted to find Virnehn.”

“You thought perhaps your former clan might know of his whereabouts?” Lycanae stalled an answer by taking another large swallow of the cooling stew. No. Sythaeryn would not have gone looking for Virnehn. He was blind, but it had never seemed to affect him too much. He hadn’t even told her he was leaving, anything could have happened to him and she’d been too torn to search properly. But Halamshiral was huge…what could I have done? She took another sip of stew and focused on the muscle exercises Felicienne had taught her to hide expressions. More. You could have done more. Did you even look? How hard would two more months of trying have been? Didn’t you care? It was important she not appear guilty. If Felassan was lying to her, if his true interest was in Sythaeryn and he suspected her of duplicity…

“Yes.” Keep the lie simple for now, you can complicate it later if need be. Felassan sighed and shook his head, leaning back slightly before meeting her eyes.

“Well, allow me to save you time: Virnehn hasn’t seen your brother. If they had, Thelhen would have been a good deal less irritable then he was when I saw him last. He’s desperate for mages…but he’s got an overabundance of hunters. I doubt he’ll take you.”

“But he has to take me! I’m his…” His granddaughter. He might never fully legitimize me, he never properly acknowledged my father as his son, the politics were too delicate at the time. Lycanae felt despair and panic seize her. No, I will not go back to the city. I cant go back. I should be here, with the People. Felassan held up a hand to forestall her protests, the green light of fade fire lending his face a ghostly pallor.

“Atisha, Da’rellani. I want to help you, I do. You suffered to get here and I’m not trying to send you back the way you came…even if that would be easier. Dalish among city elves? Oh, they’ll get used to you after a while. City elf amongst the Dalish? There’s always going to be some who will shun you like a bad smell. You’ll have to work twice as hard to be thought of as half as good. Can you endure that, Da’rellani?”
“I nearly froze to death in the snow to get here, Slow Arrow. I don’t care what they call me or how they treat me.” She held her head high and the words left her in clipped, painful tones. *You expected this, you haven’t even met them yet you can’t falter now.* “Please, hahren, lasa ghilan.”

“Ah, right.” Felassan winced like he’d kicked her in the stomach with something she’d said. “I’ll help, Da’rellani. But first, don’t call me hahren.” He shuddered and shook himself slightly before his look turned steely and he locked gazes with her. “Secondly, I am not going to devote my time to helping you for free. I want you to tell me something, Da’rellani, and I need you to answer me as truthfully as you can.”

Lycanae, sensing the gravity of the upcoming question, stayed silent and nodded.

“Who are your people?”

“The elves.” She almost laughed at the simplicity of it. She had been expecting a true price, not a riddle. But her smile was met with nothing but Felassan’s glare.

“Which elves?” He asked again, his voice stern enough to send resentment flaring through her. This was obvious.

“All elves. City elves and Dalish elves. If you are elvhen, you are my people. Is that concept so difficult to grasp?” She thought she saw something flicker in his expression when she said it.

“What would you do to help your People, Da’rellani?” She glared at him with the same intensity he afforded her, her back straight and her head held high despite the exhaustion that was starting to chip at her senses. How many times had she pondered that question while she stalked the streets of Halamshiral and saw what had become of the elves there? How many stories had Enansalas told her of Arlathan’s lost glory? Her heart felt like it was about to beat out of her chest with determination. There was only one right answer to this and she felt it with her every fiber.

“Anything.” The word once uttered felt insufficient and she continued. “Everything.”

Felassan watched her closely and for a moment, she feared he would deny her his help. Without him…she’d still try. But her chances of success would be abysmally low. For the first time, though, she did not care if her answer had been right or wrong. It had been the truth, it was what she felt and what she knew. That alone made it worth something, to finally be able to say it. Suddenly, a wide and wicked smile spread across Felassan’s face.

“Good. All in, even if the bet is bad and the odds are atrocious. Because that’s what this will take.” Her relief was immense but she expected…this seemed too easy, in truth.

“For you to help me? Will I be that much trouble?” She joked, smiling back at him.

“You? No. Not that I don’t think you’ll be trouble. Falon’Din’s pointy chin, if you weren’t going to give me no end of trouble you’d be too boring to bother with.” He made an absent waving motion and snorted. “But convincing the elves—all the elves—to do what’s best for them? To accept each other and form a united front? To become a People once more? That’s at least two person job. What do you say, Da’rellani?”

It sounded romantic, a pipe dream that seemed suddenly within reach. *Those are dangerous, though, you know they’re dangerous.* But she didn’t care how idealistic it was, or how high the cost. Everything inside her wanted it more than anything else.

“Its the excited trembling a yes or are you about to fall unconscious again? I have a limit of seven resuscitations post near death experience before I start getting bored with your determined attempts to shuffle off your mortal coil—” She bit back and groan at the wisecrack but could not contain her
eye roll.

“It’s a yes, Felassan.” He chuckled and Lycanae clenched her teeth slightly and set aside the empty bowl of stew, trying to hide her delight. Going from despairing and dying in the snow and ice to making friends and allies with a Dirth’vhen Hanin who believed in the cause of the elves? Her luck had, as it so often did, changed very suddenly.

“Sleep, da’assan. Tomorrow you can show me if you’re any good with that bow of yours.”

Quick translations:

**Dirth’vhen Hanin:** Roughly to Those Who Speak/Know of Glory, a title for liminal elements within the Dalish society that I made up. Asha Bellanar is one and the Keeper of the Brecilian Clan in Origins was about to become one (due to his age and perceived reclamation of immortality) before his death.

**Da’assan:** Little arrow

**Da’rellani:** Little Trickster. Felassan’s nickname for Ly.

**Lasa ghilan:** give guidance

Chapter End Notes

**CREDITS:**

Huge thanks and an enormous amount of credit goes to @saarebitch for helping me with editing and brainstorming and again, allowing me to borrow her scion concepts from her extended Dalish canon :D. All the Dirthamen stuff is largely influenced by her writing and the concept of creators as spooky beings of lovecraftian power. If you haven’t already, I highly suggest you go read her fic Birthright !! Also, thank you to both @foefelix and @krementines for both support and editing.
“Selfish—a judgment readily passed by those who have never tested their own power of sacrifice.”
— George Eliot

Wake up and come meet me, Da’rellani.

Felassan’s words lingered in her mind as she opened her eyes, arching her back and stretching. The campfire’s orange light cast a dim afterimage of his face from her dream and she sat up on the woven rug, yawning. Beside her, Athim looked over from the robes he was patching and smiled.

“Sleep well?” His voice was kind, almost solicitously so. She spared him a quick, brilliant smile out of habit.

“Well enough. I’ll be back in a bit.”

“You’re going?” Athim’s every emotion was always plain on his face, always immediately apparent to her. She felt a ripple of guilt at the blatant concern.

“I’ll be back before you can miss me, Athim.” She leaned over and placed a quick, platonic kiss on his cheek. She avoided his gaze as she pulled away, picking up her bow and quiver and slinging it over her shoulder. Past the gleam of the campfires light, she thought she glimpsed the coppery refraction of watching eyes.

“I doubt that, lethallan.” Athim murmured very softly from behind her, almost too quietly for her to hear. Lycanae took a deep breath and forced herself away before she could dwell. They were friends and that should be enough. Please, let that be enough.

She passed Elnehn, one of the other hunters, on her way into the woods. He reached for her arm and she stepped around him and expertly avoided the grip, walking backwards to keep him in her sights. He turned and his eyes narrowed as he glared at her.

“Where are you going in such a hurry, Lycanae?”

“Ask the trees, Elnehn. If I’m in a hurry, why would you assume I had time to tell you—of all people—what I was doing?” She replied, her tone dulcet and silky with mockery. He resented her and she could not truly blame him but that didn’t mean she had to take his bullying lying down.

“Your quick tongue is not nearly as endearing to me as it is to Athim, Seth’lin.” He snapped darkly, hands fisting at his sides as she continued to walk away from him.

“A good thing, too. I don’t think I could bear to speak to you for a moment longer than necessary, Elnehn. Until next time, lethallin.” She turned on her heel and slipped into the woods, walking with calm but swift steps. She walked through the relative quiet of the grove, the slight chill of night air making her shiver slightly in the gloom. She passed two scouts who nodded to her, cresting a small hill with the scent of pine needles crushed underfoot thick in her nose.

Felassan was there and she felt relieved to see him again. It had been a month but it had felt longer to her, as it always did. He had his gaze fixed on the camp behind her as she approached, eager to fill him in on all that had happened in the clan and all she’d heard of the other clans in his absence.
She opened her mouth and spoke, trying to curb her enthusiasm and failing.

“Felassan. It’s good to see you. I should really thank you because that was getting to be a bit much for me-”

“He loves you.” He interrupted, looking her up and down and nodding his head in the direction of the camp.

“What?” Lycanae quieted, meeting Felassan’s distant expression.

“Humility. Deshanna’s son. For someone who prides herself on seeing all, Da’rellani, you are incredibly oblivious.” Felassan remarked, leaning against a large oak with his arms crossed and all the cocky self assurance of a much younger elf in the lean, long lines of his body. He watched her with a calculated coldness that she returned without question. This was to be a game, or a fight, and she wasn’t going to lose just because she’d been unprepared for his mood to take this turn.

“I’m not oblivious.”

“Oh? So you’ve seen the way he looks at you?” The question made her uncomfortable and she glanced back down the hill at the campfire she’d left, the sounds of merriment drifting to her on the breeze. She had seen the way Athim looked at her…she’d been still looking at her…a solitary figure casting a soft shadow on the tent behind him. She stepped further into the gloom of the trees beyond the friendly orange light, closer to where Felassan stood in the darkness. The gesture was an empty one: there was no way Athim could see her against the glare of the campfire, but slipping further into the trees made her feel safer. She stepped past Felassan and lead the way further into the copse of trees, refusing to meet his violet eyes and trying to quash her guilt.

“There are women more…he’ll be fine.” Athim was as gentle as she was discerning, as calm as she was driven, as self assured as she always pretended to be. He deserved much better than her, the banal’len who no one trusted. She wouldn’t use him just to get more acclaim in the clans…not unless Felassan pushed for it. Not unless there was no other way.

“He’d be a good mate for you, Da’rellani. It’d be a good life for you…” A good mate…a good life. What did he mean? She met Felassan’s eyes, the coppery green reflection of the light they caught gleaming from the shadow. He was in a maudlin mood and she refused to entertain it.

“Not everyone is born for a ‘good life’. Some of us must do what we have to so that other’s can have the luxury of a good life. Do not forget who it is that taught me that.” Felassan’s expression went from wistful to a dark look in the space of a second.

“Oh? And just how is you being here with me helping the elves? Pride unbowed helps no one, Da’rellani. At this point, bonding to the First is your best chance of convincing the Dalish to accept your flat ears and vice versa…not philandering about like some da’len with an old elf in the woods.” The words were bitter, the confession of the pain within them as sharp as a knife that cut the one wielding it deeper than the opponent for whom it had been intended.

“Don’t call them ‘my’. Or Flat Ears.” She replied, stalking a step closer as he stood his ground with a tense glower.

“Why? That’s what the Dalish call them, that’s what they are. So domesticated they’ve forgotten what freedom is-”

“Freedom! Don’t speak to me of freedom! Freedom is purchased at a high price of what we are prepared to sacrifice for it.” Why was he lecturing her? Had she done something wrong?
“What are you giving up? You ran off into the woods! You left them! You’re going to abandon them to that for the sake of a tryst. I thought you were better than that. But maybe all you’ll ever be on the inside is a little city elf saving your own skin…someone who forgets her own People.” The way he glared at her made dread settle in her like an anvil and her heart slam against her ribcage in terror. It was a nightmare she couldn’t wake from, a lie discovered. Don’t. He doesn’t mean it and you know it. Let this be a test, let me pass it.

“I’m not fighting with you, Felassan. You’re attempting to bait me and it’s tragically transparent.” She hissed back at him, her fists balling at her sides. The action would look aggressive to an opponent but in truth, her nails were digging so hard into her palm blood was surely welling around their edges, the pain keeping her focused.

“The only thing that’s tragically transparent is that you can’t defend yourself, Da’rellani-

“Neither can you!” She snarled suddenly, close enough to him to see the frustration and anger warring in his gaze. “What about your People? Your Clan? If you even have a clan-”

“They’re dead! The elves are dead and now their descendants pick over their bones and playact at what once might have been-”

“How can you say that?! I thought you cared about our culture, about what we were-”

“What were they? What are we? This is banal’era, it’s an empty dream! It will destroy you! Fenhedis, Da’rellani. Why can’t you just go bond with the idiot boy and be happy and have a whole host of tiny Dalish babies why does any of this matter-”

“I can’t! No one can! You want me to have children!? CHILDREN. In a world that looks like this one? Where humans burn our homes and slaughter us by the hundreds and armies march on the heathen elves and no one bats an eye because ‘the Maker’ told them to? A world where Chevaliers are lauded for their nobility, the same men and women who murder and rape their way through the streets of elven districts? For a pat on the back, for a medal, for a commission-”

“I didn’t say drag them back to the city-” He tried half heartedly to defend himself, backing away as she advanced.

“Oh? OH?! And the world of constantly running and moving from place to place is better than that? Still battling shemlen at every turn, the stink of halla shit and the bite of cold winters? Never having a home, never having roots, never knowing what home is! Surviving isn’t living.”

“I know,” He murmured softly, his gaze downcast and unable to meet hers. “I know-”

“Ar tel’halam!” She snapped and he quieted. “How dare you presume to know what’s best for me, how dare you try to take my choices and make them yours. How dare you lecture me. As for children…the children are precisely why all of this matters.”

The silence between them stretched, the only sound her rapid breathing and the soft night sounds of the forest surrounding them. She had surprised herself with how passionately she’d fought him on this. Even more surprised that she’d won the argument, if the airing of bleak facts of life could be called ‘winning’. Felassan leaned against the gnarled trunk of an oak tree, his head in his hands. She felt a slight stab of guilt and relaxed her hands, stretching her fingers where they’d started to cramp from being held in such a tight fist for so long. Her fingernails were painted black with her own blood in the dim light.

“Garas’an, Da’rellani?” His voice was a gentle, husky whisper, tinged with desperation. Come here? She felt relief flood her even as tears of anger and pain pricked her eyes. “…please.”
She took several swift steps towards him and let him pull her into his embrace, holding her gently but fiercely in the quiet. She pressed her face into the hollow between his neck and shoulder, breathing deep his comforting scent of herbs and woodsmoke and trying to still her own trembling. He stroked her hair soothingly and she felt him shift to press his lips to her forehead gently.

“Ir abelas. I’m an idiot.”

“You are.” She murmured, barely keeping her voice from breaking. She felt the moment Felassan’s mood changed, the moment the vulnerability left him as his arms slipped lower around her waist. He laughed and moved his lips to her ear and nipped at it apologetically.

“I’m a very sorry idiot-” She stomped hard on his foot and tried to keep herself from smiling and failed.

“I’m still angry.” She muttered, putting as much disapproval behind the words as she could muster.

“Good. You’re magnificent when you’re angry. The way you say ‘how dare you’ gives me shivers-”

“Felassan, if you’re mocking me-”

“Ow! Ah, no, ma lath. I’m not mocking you-” His voice hitched as her teeth grazed across his throat. “You have the commanding presence of Mythal-”

“Did you just call me ‘motherly’?!” She leaned back to glare at him and he grinned and gave her hips a gentle squeeze.

“Now who’s trying to pick fights-AH! OW! Ir abelas, ir abelas! Right now, you have the bedroom etiquette of Andruil-” She let up the pressure slightly on his ear and made a small affirmative sound of approval. “Ah, Sylaise’s supple thighs, that’s the phrase that gets you going? The insult?”

“I’m not going. I am so far from going I’ve barely made it out of ‘wordlessly enraged’. Try again, Felassan.” Her retort was playful despite the truth of it and she tugged slightly on the long braid, pressing her lips to his for a quick kiss.

“You and I both know that you’re impossible to satisfy…” He rolled his eyes but his smile was a warm one and he cupped her jaw in one hand, running his thumb over her lips. “but I’ll gladly try. Ar lath ma ghilas halam.”

“You only love me until the end?”

“Telanadas, Da’rellani. Not even the People.” She placed a slender finger to his lips and frowned. Why does he always make things sad these days? What’s really wrong? Let me help you, ma sa’lath.

“Don’t say that.”

“Ma nuvenin, ma lath.” His mouth on hers was a blissful state of existence and she let herself get lost in the kiss. Banal telanadas. This mattered, this was real, this was important. And maybe, selfishly, this was all she really wanted.
Era'Hanin

Chapter Summary

Dreams of Glory, a fable about a Dreamer and the Dread Wolf and some Felassan/Lycanae shipping. Author’s note at the end.

“Real magic can never be made by offering someone else’s liver. You must tear out your own, and not expect to get it back.”

— Peter S. Beagle, The Last Unicorn

“Once, there was an elf with dreams of greatness. He dreamt of things both magnificent and terrible, of things that could not be. So vivid were these dreams and so grand in their scope and poisonous in their vision that they frightened him. His fear was such that in his desperation he sought the Bringer of Nightmares to beg him for mercy.

‘Mighty Fen’Harel,’ said the elf. ‘I implore you to take these horrors from my sight.’

But the elf did not truly believe that the Trickster would do this without cost and knew what he was prepared to pay to rid himself of his dreams. Yet, Fen’harel bowed his head and bade the elf tell him of his dreams without naming a price.

‘But what of the cost, Dread Wolf?’

‘I ask no boon of you, save that you tell me of these dreams so that I may lift them from your weary shoulders.’ The man was so happy to hear this that his relief blinded him to all else and he agreed, telling the Dread Wolf of his nightmares:

‘I dream that all the lakes and rivers have all dried up to nothingness, I dream of the hum of tens of thousands of terrible wings in a cloud that blots out the sun. I dream of a Desert Without End, of dust and sand stained red with the blood of the vanquished. I dream of a Crooked Staff and paths at the edge of the Void.’

‘Is that all you dream of?’

‘I dream of oceans without shore, a depth of many fathoms. I dream of a Dark House, a temple in which all the acolytes are Silent. I dream of secrets with no voice, runes with no name, an eye that sees all that is and all that shall be and all that ever was. I dream of two wicked ravens, who speak with the frightful, deceitful Voices of the Dead.’

‘I thank you for this,’ The Dread Wolf smiled. ‘and I promise you shall no longer dream of Inexorable Death or of Knowledge Unfathomable.’

And in so saying, the Dread Wolf devoured the elf’s dreams and he slept soundly once more. But the peace did not last, for new dreams plagued the man and in a short time, he found himself before the Dread Wolf once again.
'Dread Wolf! The dreams have returned!'

'Speak, then. Tell me of your dreams.'

'I dream of cracked earth and scorching light, of thorns that pierce the flesh of those ensnared. I dream a choking vine wrapped around a leafless tree. I dream of weapons of will and wrath wielded by Hands that know no mercy. I dream of a mighty force that comes to conquer, the tramp of their feet drowning out the screams of those who would oppose them.'

The Dread Wolf licked at his slavering jaws and paced before the elf.

'Of what else do you dream?'

'I dream of a pounding heart and catching breath, of a forest black as dried blood and dragon bone. I dream of the taste of copper and fleeing hares, the gleam of golden light through the feathers of the hunting hawk’s wings. I dream a silver moon, full bellied and gleaming with the desire of the Hunted and the Huntress. I dream of a quiver of arrows and a Spear born of the Sun’s Fire.’

“I shall take these dreams from you, da’len. No more shall the fear of Dominion nor Ravenous Death haunt your slumber.” And in so saying, the Fen’Harel devoured these nightmares as well. The elf left, no longer troubled by his visions. He did not return and the Dread Wolf grew restless. He gnashed his mighty teeth and howled at the sky. For he had feasted well on dreams of a terror that was rich and now he went hungry. He desired more, and though dreams of fright were the most delicious, he would have settled for any dreams with which to slake his unbearable thirst.

The Dread Wolf sought the elf this time, hunting his scent through the Fade until he found him. Fen’Harel set upon the elf with teeth bared and tail lashing back and forth, his snarls echoing across the land of Dreams.

‘You! Do your dreams no longer haunt you? Why have you not sought me out!?'

‘There has been no need, Dread Wolf. I am at peace with my dreams.”

‘That cannot be…there must be something about your dreams that you fear,’ Fen’Harel rasped, His Voice a powerful thing within his realm. ‘I implore you to think: Is there not in all your mind that terrifies you?’

The elf knew what terrified him then, but he could not speak it. Who was he to deny He Who Hunts Alone? For that is what the People call the Wolf, not because he is lonely in the way of those who have no pack, but because any who dared to hunt beside him will soon enough find themselves consumed when there is naught else to eat. And so the elf spoke:

‘I dream of beasts so numerous and wild that they cannot be tamed, a hundred thousand eyes that gleam from the darkness. There is a Creatrix and The Huntress, the Beginning and the End. I dream of Perfection in natural form. I dream of Paths that cannot be traced, of meadows silvered with dew. I dream of oceans cold enough to still the heart where dwell creatures whose glory could shake the heavens.’

‘That is interesting. What else?’ Fen’harel snapped for he was greedy, and a Dream of Perfect Creation was not enough.

‘I dream of will given unto the Bones of the Earth, a thousand hammers rise and fall in tune with the hearts which beat in one rhythm. I dream of blades that cannot fail, of clever mechanisms woven with the magic of the People’s Blood. I dream of all the paths in a place that is not a place, where the only map is will and the only compass desire.’
'More.' The Dread Wolf snarled, and where he tread in the Land of Dreams the ground blackened. Even the dream of The Will that Creates was not sufficient to slake his thirst. His eyes burned with the cold fire of a dying star, his voice made the very world warp to his will. Yet the elf did not show his fear but spoke in a calm voice. He was reluctant to give this dream to the Wolf Who Waits, but he judged that his life was worth more than the dream:

‘Dread Wolf, I dream of Fire Eternal, of that which destroys to renew. I dream of a lover’s sighs, of a touch that burns and leaves Passioned Breath in it’s wake. I dream of a caress as fine as the ashen powder on a Moth’s wings and as soft and yielding as trembling thighs. I dream of ecstasy in another’s arms and of Mouths Open in Exultation. I dream a dance to which all know the steps, of fervent life and of a heat that once stoked makes hearts pound. I dreamt that I had tasted Creation in the salt of sweat and divinity’s sweetness in a kiss.’ Fen’Harel had ceased his pacing and watched the elf with a dark gaze. ‘Does that satisfy you, Dread Wolf?’

‘For now.’ So saying, the Bringer of Nightmares took the elf’s dream of Impassioned Creation and swallowed it whole. He left the elf in darkness and the dreamer wept for his dreams of greatness had been stolen from him. He had shown the Dread Wolf the dreams which he feared and in recompence, the Dread Wolf had torn from him even the one’s he once found joy in. Should Fen’Harel seek him out once more, he would have nothing left to give and surely the Wolf would swallow him whole. It was in his moment of despair that the dreamer sought out the All Mother, Mythal, and fell to his knees before her.

‘Mythal, All Mother, I beseech you, aid me. I am hunted by Fen’harel for my dreams and now I have naught to give him but myself. Free me, Mythal, from my service unto him.”

“You wish to be free of the Dread Wolf? That is impossible. What is done cannot be undone, prey once seized in His Jaws can never again walk free. He will Hunt you until the world is ash and dust, he will hunt you through the Void and on until Banalhan. I am sorry for you with all my heart, but I cannot save you.”

‘Please, All Mother. Your help is worth any price.”

“Even if you had something I wanted, I cannot be bought, Da’len. Surely you are clever enough to know this.” Mythal turned her back upon the dreamer, but his final cries reached her heart:

“Forgive me, Mythal, Mother of the People and She Who Protects, for I have traded all my dreams to the Dread Wolf and it is true, I have nothing to offer you but penitent prayers and my sorrow. Please.” Mythal held up one graceful hand to still the Dreamers’ pleading, as patient and benevolent as the mightiest of the trees in Arlathan. She did not want his prayers…but the cries of sorrow from lost things have always touched her heart.

“I know of only one thing that could turn the Dread Wolf’s gaze but you must know, the cost is high.” So spoke the All Mother, Benevolent Protectress and Bringer of Fierce Justice.

“The cost has already been high, All Mother.”

“The price is not always ours to pay.”

“So…what happens?” Felassan glanced up at her and continued to spin the twig he was holding between nimble fingers, issuing a soft snort at her impatience. His face was cast in the dim shadows of the campfire light, his expression unreadable.

“Well, the dreamer lived.” He turned the twig over in his hands with the air of someone avoiding
the question until, hopefully, the asker felt dissuaded from asking. *Please, Little Trickster. Guess, I want you to guess. Learn from this.* At the same time, he was dancing along the edge of a knife between telling her and not telling her. *Tell her and she dies. But not telling her was becoming just as perilous and his chest felt tight, words thick as they stuck in his throat. That’s rare for you, Slow Arrow, to be caught with nothing to say.*

“Yes, but *how*? Don’t say that’s the end, I know it isn’t.” Lycanae persisted, fixing him with an insistent look. He reached up and ran his fingers over her cheekbone, tracing the lines of her vallaslin absenty.

She was no less beautiful to him like this, with marks on her face. *They don’t mean the same thing they used to, they changed them. An expression of faith, of trust in something…even if it’s wholly undeserved.* He wanted to kiss her, to bring her lips to his and forget, forget, forget the pain of holding back and keeping secrets. To lose himself, even if momentarily…even if the Dread Wolf still waited in the shadows to swallow him whole. Resisting the urge, he let his hand fall to the ground and dropped his gaze, resting back on his elbows.

“Can’t we just let the story end happily? Why do you have to pester me for the truth all the time?” Felassan shut his eyes and sighed deeply, flopping down on his back. Lycanae scooted closer, leaning over him and gently pushing at his shoulder.

“Felassan…please tell me.”

“You tell me, first. Why is it that the world’s best liar always has to know the truth?” *Because you wouldn’t be you if you didn’t persist, if you didn’t strive. If you didn’t always, always have to know.* So what was better, knowing or not knowing? Enduring the pain of frightening dreams and dark secrets so one could enjoy the pleasure of those that came so close to perfection? Felassan had lived through all of it and he still didn’t know the answer.

“So she can tell better lies.” Ly beamed at him and reached out to take the twig from his hands. He withheld it and in a lightning quick movement she had it from him anyway, spinning it between her fingers and grinning at him challengingly.

“Presumptuous of you, Da’rellani. I was talking about myself.” *I was talking about us both.*

“When are you not?” She almost had a smile out of him then, she surely would have if he wasn’t so afraid. Afraid she’d never guess that this wasn’t a game, this wasn’t *just* a fable until much, much too late.

“Rapier wit.” *She’d feed the Dread Wolf his own tail, laughing all the while.* Felassan sighed deeply and lay his head back on his arm, violet gaze boring into her’s as he spoke: “Fine. If you want to know so badly, guess.”

“The dreamer dies.” Felassan looked at her aghast and tried to recover before he could shout at her, grab her by the shoulders and shake her. *Take this seriously! Take this seriously because I didn’t, because I never did! Because the whole story is about what comes of ignoring the cost!*

“Felassan,” She laughed-laughed!- and nudged him gently with her elbow. “Go on. Tell the rest.”

“What is the cost?” *The Dreamer asked the Mother of All, knowing in his heart that even in the asking, a price cannot be truly felt until it is paid, until it is far too late to take back. The Goddess looked upon him and she smiled sadly, kissing her supplicant on his brow.*

“You already know, da’len.”
The Dreamer went to sleep in the safety of the realm of the All Mother, temporary though it might be. In his sleep, he reached out to touch the minds of all who slept. He dreamt as he had never dreamt before, walking not in the shadow of the Creators but in the footsteps of the People. He dreamt of all elvhenan, all that they saw and all that they were. Their will, their sorrow, their desire. These dreams were not as glorious as his dreams of the Gods, but they were numerous and true and powerfully felt.

Thus Fen’Harel came a final time to the Dreamer, surprised that his prey had not run. The wolf smiled and showed his teeth, gnashing his mighty jaws as he circled the man who looked on him without fear.

“You are a greater fool than I thought. Are you not afraid? I am starving, yet I see nothing that will sate my hunger, nothing that will slake my thirst. You disappoint me.” The Dread Wolf gathered himself to swallow the Dreamer whole and yet, something stopped him. “You will let me devour you, you will offer nothing in your defense?”

“Dread Wolf, I have dreams still. I have dreams for you, dreams beyond counting if you will but spare me.” The Bringer of Nightmares stalked closer to the Dreamer, stared deep into his eyes.

“You dare lie to me?”

“It is not a lie. I have walked through the minds of the People while I slept. I can show you the dreams of all elvhenan if you will but allow me to live, Dread Wolf.” Fen’Harel laughed and it was a terrifying sound, his fiendish delight warped all that it touched and all who heard it. For the Dreamer had done exactly what the Wolf expected, he had traded the dreams of the People for his own freedom.

“No,” said the Dread Wolf. “I have a better idea, Dreamer. For your pride, you will still suffer. I will take those dreams and you shall take this.”

The Dread Wolf gave unto the Dreamer a longbow of beautiful make, a weapon to make all gods jealous; crafted by his own hands. Secrets were woven into the string and yet it’s draw was as Silent as the final breaths of the Dead. It was heavy in the Dreamer’s hands and once he reached out and wrapped his fingers around it’s grip, he found he could not let it go.

“It is not a gift, it is a tool. You and I shall hunt together, Dreamer, for you go unnoticed among both the People and the Gods. For as long as you hold this bow and hunt with Fen’Harel, you need never fear death at my hand.”

Felassan finished his story and looked up at the sky, staring at the infinite canopy of stars in the heavens. He rested his head on his folded arms and did not look at Lycanae, did not meet her pensive gaze. Between her fingers, she twirled the twig back and forth, it’s bark peeling under her touch now. Usually, it was easy to wait for her to riddle out his allegorical tales. It didn’t ever take her very long, most of the time she’d already figured it out halfway through his telling and was patient enough to let him ramble through the rest. But this story…his heart pounded uncomfortably hard in his chest while he waited.

“He lost.” She murmured quietly, the sharp sound of the twig snapping in her grip making Felassan wince.

“Most people do when betting against the gods, Da’rellani.” His voice was equally as soft as her’s and his chest ached. I wish it ended more happily, ma lath vhenan. But if it did, it wouldn’t be true, it wouldn’t have taught anyone anything. It still might not. “Sometimes, the wolf gets the halla and there is no force in all the world that could have prevented it.”
“Dying would have been nobler, being consumed. He just distracted the Dread Wolf…it was temporary, the People only have so many dreams. That story isn’t over.” Felassan let out a sigh at the accusation and sat up, arm and shoulder against her back. She flicked the broken pieces of the twig into the emerald fire at the center of their small camp, frowning into the flames.

“The Dreamer was a coward and death is not a choice.” Felassan muttered, winding a lock of her pale blonde hair around his fingers and sighing. Lycanae pinned her ears back and glowered at the campfire.

“Death is always a choice.” He turned her to face him suddenly, glaring at her. He could see himself reflected in the brilliant greenish blue of her gaze. She was keeping her expression carefully blank now, the courtly distance that always pre-empted a fierce argument from her. Damn you, listen.

“It is not. What is to say the Dreamer could not do more damage standing by the Dread Wolf’s side? Why must you always think first of death and second of common sense? You miss the point of the lesson.” Now she was just being obstinate.

“You cannot fire a shot with a bow by someone’s side. You can stand at their back with a dagger, but it is not the same. The Dreamer did not do that, it did not occur to him. The Dreamer was a fool, not a coward.” Well, she was getting closer now.

“Ma serannas,” He grumbled, catching her sudden attention and rushing to speak up. “Yes, you’re getting closer to the point, Da’rellani. But do you truly think the Dread Wolf could be felled so easily?”

“By a weapon of his own make? Yes, the Dread Wolf is prideful. For a moment, he truly believed the Dreamer could not have escaped, could not have out-thought him.”

“You presume the Dreamer bringing him the dreams of all elvhenan was not Fen’Harel’s plan all along.” She shook her head and Felassan pressed his lips together in irritation. He wanted to shout down all the things wrong with her plan, with this disaster she was plotting out in her head with such logical certainty.

“You argue to argue. I say Fen’Harel’s flaw is his pride and every story you have told me supports it. I still say the Dread Wolf could be felled by a weapon of his own making. A prideful being would craft the best weapon, a weapon capable of felling gods.” A mad plan, a bad plan. Felassan was torn between taking her and shaking sense into her and laughing, just laughing and laughing. Was this what came of having all the cleverness in the world? Cleverness but not a lick of self preservation.

“What if you’re wrong, Lycanae? What then? When the Dread Wolf turns and rips out your throat—” Don’t make me watch that, don’t make me do this. Give you all the tools and watch you destroy yourself.

“I will have tried. And I will have given the Dread Wolf nothing more than what I already lost.” No, no. Death is not supposed to be the answer. She was supposed to have a better idea than the only possible option left to me. She was looking at him now, truly looking. Her brow furrowed, eyes searching his face. He’d done as much as he could, said as much as he could safely say. She brought her hands to his face, held him still. “Felassan, what is it? What’s wrong? Please, ma sa lath-”

He kissed her, swallowed the rest of her words and the rest of his. He would hold her close for as long as he could, there would be one dream…one final dream the Dread Wolf could not take from him. One last dream he would fight for.
Author’s Note: Wow okay so I have had this languishing for MONTHS. I am really pleased I finally finished it. I have everyone who has babied me through it to thank…so everyone in Huggin chat( thank you guys, I whine so much). But I really want to thank @Calyah and @saarebitch the most for being such huge inspirations to me and so incredibly supportive. Without them, I certainly would not have been able to come up with something this cool I’m sure. The dreams of Andruil and Sylaise respectively are a shoutout to you guys and the dreams in this style are meant to cater to a creator canon present in Birthright_ READ IT AND LOVE IT. Also, huge thanks to @foefelix who always let’s me bounce ideas off her and has known about this project for the longest.

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