Chasing Night's Shadows
by Talonticus

Summary

Since the moment she awoke, Veilidh has understood that her life will not be an easy one to live. The sylvari are new to this world, with much of its dangers and truths having yet to be revealed. Despite the uncertainty ahead, she understands that to find her place in it, she must explore and learn. However, even as she is drawn to other parts of Tyria, her heart lingers in one location, constantly torn with what it wants and what it can have. One touch can put everything right or shatter her completely.

Notes

Main characters: Veilidh (Female Sylvari Pact Commander), Caithe, Magister Sieran
Secondary characters: The Pale Tree, Trahearn, Faolain, Daeynwe (Female Sylvari Thief OC)
Minor characters: Peacemaker Siinga (Female Asura Engineer OC), Professor Zebb (Male Asura Elementalist OC), Wynnet Fairhaired, Canach, Steward Gixx

Hello, I'm Claire Talon, or Talonticus, and I'm shit at summaries. If you read a fic I started last year called "Blood bond", you may recognize the name of the protagonist for this story, from chapter 25 in that fic. Veilidh is the character who will later become the Pact Commander and this is how her tale began. It does occur in the same "reality" as Blood bond too. Compared to canon, however, this story begins two decades sooner, and goes through a
lot of different twists and turns than what we actually experience in-game.

You may have noticed that I've tagged the story with "complicated romance" and that's not because I believe that my writing will make it difficult to understand, but rather that the future relationship status between Veilidh and Caithe is complicated, due to the different natures of their personalities. You'll hopefully understand more later.

If you want to see an actual image of Veilidh, I have her profile at the bottom of this blog page.
And the skies erupted

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1305 AE – The Dream

Forging serenity within the heart is more difficult than any physical battle.

The words of the transparent being, a ghost in the hazy mist of the lush and green surroundings, are but one of many visions, as wells of wisdom. This creature, this…centaur, as they simply know to call him for some reason, is definitely the one which attracts the most attention, but is far from the only one.

I did not know that such a small seed could begin such a very large journey…

The most populous of creatures in the fertile soil of the forest floor are the living and moving vegetation, like plants and yet not. The sylvari here are young and curious, ignorant of anything else outside of this little playground. There are many things which want to steal their attention, and while many flock to similar activities, each individual is different.

Life can be painful, but do not fear the trials you will face. Hard ground makes strong roots.

These young beings, doing their best to stretch their legs and learn about their sense of self, are mostly pulled into four various groups.

Some wander across the area and talk to one another, trying out each word, testing how far they can push them, while wanting to know as many of the other sylvari as possible. Others are focused on sitting down and listening to the visions, absorbing knowledge of distant places, concepts they have yet to fully comprehend or items which seem out of this world.

A third group are eager to test themselves, throwing each other around, engaging in physical competitions or doing their very best to see every piece of the thick forest, constantly wanting something new.

And then, at last, there are the loners, the ones who linger in the shadows, hiding in the dark. They keep to themselves, not out of distrust, but a sense of introspection which separates them from the rest.

Live well and fully, and waste nothing. Each day is a gift.

Out of all the young sylvari, one specific sapling sits among those who absorb the wisdom of the distant visions, but at the same time, is able to get a view out of all those around her. She sees the divides, the various activities and how each one tries to locate their identity, what makes their sentience be unique in their own way. It makes her smile.

You cannot expect the world to give you peace. You must find it…within yourself.

The sapling with an overview of the situation is quite like the others in terms of blending in with the flora. The dark green complexion of her skin is reminiscent of the leaves of some of the trees, but the difference exists in the white and teal highlighted markings across her arms, chest, legs and face, which creates all sorts of imaginative shapes. Those over her face especially, form sharp lines by her cheeks and forehead, while small spots, like freckles, dot the area just above her nose.

Over her head, hiding half of her face, are thick dark blue petals, like a flower, imitating the hair of certain humanoids, but in a vegetative way. The black of her iris is dipped into a tiny white sea of the rest of her eye.
Never leave a wrong to ripen into evil or sorrow.

The little world she exists in with her fellow sylvari is a curious and unexplainable place, at least to these prospective newborns. For her inquisitive mind, it raises many questions, ones she does not yet know how to answer, but that she keeps asking herself.

Who are they? What are they doing here? Why are these visions transparent? Where do they come from? Who put these people in this forest to flourish and how far does its branches reach?

And what is that slight vibration in the ground, that prickling sensation in her fingers?

*Act with wisdom, but act.*

As it happens yet again, the sapling raises her hand, looking at her long thin fingers, trying to discern where the short and quick pain came from, searching for a thorn or something else, but there is nothing. For now, she simply accepts it, assuming that it’s another part of this experience, this curious existence, that they cannot quite describe. At some point, someone will come and provide them with truth. They have to do that, don’t they? If they don’t, she will simply have to get up and look for answers on her own.

“Saplings, please, you must listen! Hear my voice and come to me.”

Another voice separates itself from the rest. The young sylvari looks up, sweeping the area with her gaze, but she sees nothing different. She assumed it might be some new curious aspect which she will be able to deconstruct and gain new knowledge from, just like the visions, but all around her are only the other sylvari, playing, learning and being happily ignorant of any other aspect of this world.

She shrugs, thinking she must have misheard and pulls up her knees again to wrap her arms around them, while she continues to listen to the centaur.

“You cannot remain here. Please, listen! The Pale Tree calls to you, as does the Dream. Do not let the shadows prevail!”

This time, she’s certain she heard a voice, one different and louder from the rest. She scowls in thought and looks around, trying to see where the wind might’ve blown it from. Still nothing other than the light mist, the sylvari and the pleasant plant life.

With her curiosity being too great at this point, she realizes that the centaur will not be able to hold her attention for long and therefore stands up.

“Yes! You there, young sylvari with the blue petals! Can you hear my voice? Come to me, please!”

The young one focuses her mind and heart upon the voice, hearing a certain urgency within it. What could it be? Why would anyone be so panicked in this tranquil paradise? It fills her with concern and anxiety, but also a sense of purpose.

It is not until she gets to the outskirts of the glade that the shadows are split and another being appears in front of her. To her surprise, it is another sylvari, with much lighter green hide, but surrounded by dark green, like very large leaves or grass. The petals upon her head, emulating hair, are so faded that they might as well be white, while her eyes are pale blue.

The main difference, is, of course, that she is transparent, like the visions.

The younger sylvari blinks her eyes in surprise and tilts her head curiously.

“Who are you? And...why can I see through you? Are you truly here?”

She reaches out to touch the speaker, but her hand passes through it. The transparent one smiles gently and shakes her head.

“No, I am not. Not really, anyway. My mind is with you, but my body is elsewhere.”
“What? How is that possible?”

“I’m sorry, but it would take a long time for me to explain, and we don’t have such a time. You are the first to be able to listen to me, and you must take heed. Something is wrong in the Dream.”

The sapling looks confused again, folding her arms and absorbing each word. They’re very intriguing.

“The Dream? Where is that? And why aren’t you here?”

“You are a sapling, a young sylvari and the Dream is where the Pale Tree, our mother, nurtures us and lets us understand the world, before we are born. However, something is wrong. It’s poisoning the Dream right now, leaving saplings that have yet to be born to suffer.”

The sapling is taken aback by it, and immediately shifts her attention back to the other sylvari. Unlike what she was told just now, most of them seem happy and content, able to play around as always.

“Are you sure? Everything seems fine to me. All sylvari here don’t look much like they’re suffering, as we have what we need.”

“It is a ruse, Dreamer, an illusion. Have you not felt something odd as of late? Is there not anything amiss at all? An ill breeze, a sudden cough, a prickling sensation in the back of your mind?”

Lifting her hand and looking down on it, the sapling remembers what she felt earlier, immediately being drawn to that memory.

“Wait, yes, there was. It…it felt like a thorn piercing my finger. I tried to find it, but saw nothing.”

The visitor nods eagerly.

“That’s it! This is what the poison is. It hides among you, deceiving your eyes and drains you slowly. Focus on it, little sapling, draw it out. See the truth around you.”

The sapling feels fear welling up in her chest, but she can’t really say why. She does as she’s told, closing her eyes and tries to focus on the small bit of pain she felt earlier, not letting it escape. It’s difficult at first, for how can you find something that you didn’t know existed to begin with? However, it is as if the revelation, the very idea that she realizes how something is wrong, is enough for the illusion to break and she believes she can hear a shattering noise, like glass, occurring around her.

When next she opens her eyes, horror is unveiled before her. It is as if a shadow has descended upon her out of nowhere, and the peaceful vision of the Dream was a lie. Thorny veins reach up from the ground to capture other young sylvari, menacing plant-like animals hunt some of them and pools of black sludge seep out from the ground, drowning the unfortunate. The sapling watches how her fellow sylvari are being torn apart, suffering from the attacks of the malevolent forest and cannot escape. Many have passed out, while others still flee frantically. It fills her with fear as she backs off, wanting to have it as far away from her as possible.

However, she stops when she feels a hand on her shoulder and looks towards the visitor, who is meeting her gaze directly.

“You see it now, don’t you, Dreamer? Don’t be afraid, as this is a good thing. Now, you can fight back.”

The young one breathes a bit heavier, feeling how her body shivers and the panic gives her only one thought – she must run.
“Fight? Against…this? How? I…I can’t.”

The visitor nods, running her hand down along the saplings arm very softly. She doesn’t know why, but the touch and motion are very soothing somehow.

“You can, trust me. You are not alone, as I will help you fight.”

Their hands are soon at an even level and the visitor wraps her fingers around the younger sapling, who returns the gesture.

“What is your name?”

The sapling looks at her searchingly, eyes shifting back and forth.

“Name? Wha… I…”

Suddenly, something is drawn to the surface of her thoughts, as if erupting from her heart.

“Veilidh.”

She says it without thinking, without having to consider it whatsoever.

The visitor smiles warmly.

“Veilidh. A beautiful name.”

“How…how did I know that?”

“Because it is who you are, who you will become when you awaken. You have always known.”

She returns to a more solemn expression.

“Now, we must focus, Veilidh. Are you ready to fight back against the corruption?”

Veil bites at her lower lip, hesitating.

“M-maybe, if I had some way to do it.”

“You do. Close your eyes and clear your mind. The Pale Tree has allowed me to grant you a blessing.”

Doing as she’s told, Veil shuts her eyes and tries her best to wipe all thoughts from her mind. It’s not easy, as the noises around her constantly makes her want to give into the fear, no matter how foolish it might be. However, she stays strong, letting the visitor’s confidence infect her.

A soft, tingling sensation can be felt in her hand and when she opens her eyes, the transparent sylvari draws hers away, revealing something in her grasp.

“A pistol? Fascinating”, the visitor comments.

Veil turns and twists the weapon around in her hand. It’s not huge, not a sword or a long spear to push away enemies with, but it still has a certain appeal. Similar to the sylvari and everything else here, it appears to have been made by the very nature around them.

“What does it do?”

“Point it at your foe, aim, pull the little handle close to your fingers, and it will unleash fire upon them. It is useful and most of all, you now have a way to fight back. It means you must act.”

Yet again, as if just knowing, Veil feels a sudden bond to this weapon, as if it was meant for her. She holds it tightly and turns her gaze towards the transparent one.

“Alright, I’ll do my best. But how do I stop these horrors? How do I save the Dream?”

The visitor nudges her head to the side.

“Follow me. We must find the source. I can locate it for you.”

Veil hurries, following this guide, who seems to understand so much more than her, giving Veil confidence just by being in her presence.

They pass through the poisoned dream, getting away from any monsters and dangers that harass
the other Dreamers.
As they move to the outskirts of it, Veil constantly senses a rising feeling of sympathy, of compassion. These are her people, other sylvari. Can she just leave them be and let them suffer?

As they walk past another small glade, they see two other young ones, a male and female, being cornered by at least five menacing fern hounds, growling and snapping their jaws at them. Veil is about to run past them, as they’re several meters away, but suddenly stops.
“Wait!”

The visitor immediately halts and looks back at her.
“What is it?”

“I…I can’t just ignore this. I must help them.”

“What?”
She glances towards the cornered sylvari, pity filling her eyes, but she tries to remain firm.
“You can’t get distracted. There’s something far greater at stake here. We must continue if we-“
However, the young one has already moved away.
“Veilidh!”

She has to pursue her, as Veil runs straight for the hounds and just as one of them is about to lunge at the pair, a sharp sound is heard from Veil’s gun as she fires it at the hound. It growls in pain, whimpers as it falls to the ground.
“Leave them alone!”, she calls out to the rest. All of them suddenly turn and immediately shift their growls to her instead. She widens her eyes in surprise.
“Uh-oh. This…wasn’t quite what I had in mind.”

The fern hounds start to circle around her, and one of them charges at her, trying to bite her. She jumps to the side, just barely evading it and then fires a shot towards its side. She seems to have quite good aim, as it pierces the animal’s hide, but she’s still surrounded and isn’t ready for when the next one bites into her leg.
The visitor watches all of this and breathes out in frustration.
“Dammit. Mother Tree, please, grant me another blessing! I must help her!”

Suddenly, from the soil beneath the hounds, several more vines appear, but these ones are not as thorny, nor as corrupted. They wrap themselves around the hounds and drags them off, saving Veil. She smiles and gets back up.
“Wow, that was pretty amazing!”

Her guide rushes up to her and puts a hand on her shoulder, expression filled with concern and irritation.
“You shouldn’t run off like that! What if you had gotten seriously hurt? I can’t help you at all times, Veilidh. My power here is very weak.”

Veil is unsure and glances downwards, a sense of guilt coming over her, but she holds onto a certain underlying defiance.
“I…I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to, but I couldn’t just let them suffer. They’re sylvari, like us.”

The visitor takes a deep breath, trying to steady her swirling emotions, while glancing towards the pair who seems to be doing much better now.
“Are you alright?”

They both nod.
“We are”, the man answers, before addressing Veil.
“You saved us.”
Veil offers a smile to them. 
“I couldn’t let you get eaten. My guilt would’ve swallowed me.”

The woman steps forth, still half-filled with fear, but gets drawn to Veil’s assurance. 
“Can…can we come with you? You are strong and you can fight. We would rather be at your side.”

Immediately, she wants to approve of this notion, but she realizes that she has already taken quite a hasty decision and instead directs her eyes towards the transparent one, hoping that she will agree.
The visitor meets Veil’s gaze and sighs.
“Fine, you may. Just stay close and try not to slow us down. We’re on an important mission.”

Soon after, they return to the road and continue towards the source. What the visitor does not realize, however, is that several more sylvari along the way are in need of help and each one is aided by Veilidh. Eventually, she simply can’t resist the young fighter’s urges, as she won’t listen to the guidance anyhow. In a way, this is quite positive, as Veil is building up some sort of fighting force. They’re not armed with anything particularly dangerous, nor are they especially experienced, but their numbers are growing and that might be enough to destroy the corruption’s heart.

Finally, after having ran through the thick and dimly lit vegetation around them, they arrive in a clearing, where the visitor can sense the corruption originating from. To the dismay of her, Veil and most of her followers, the source is not quite what they had expected.
A gigantic creature, put together by huge tree trunks, vines, branches and bushes stands before them. The color of its eyes burns like flames, and spreads out over the rest of the body, as if its veins are on fire.
Its claws are dug deep into the earth and every few seconds, it pulsates, as it drains the soil it connects to.

The transparent one looks in shock at the creature, before she clenches her fists.
“A dragon? But…this can’t be. It’s too soon…”

Veil is confused by it all, but seeing how huge and threatening it is, she doubts this means anything good.
“What’s a dragon?”

“Dangerous creatures, ones that wish to devour the world. It’s tearing up the Dream, Veilidh, and we must stop it!”

Veil shifts her gaze towards the plant dragon again. Each time it pulsates, they feel it through the ground, through their bodies. It is hurting their lives and who they are, trying to consume everything. How will she even be able to fight this thing with her little gun? Is there any point to it?
Then again, that doesn’t matter. With enough will, anything is possible, or at least that’s what she tells herself.
“Right. Well, I’m with you. How do we do this?”

The visitor closes her eyes, tilting her head down and puts a hand to her chest. Veil and the rest of the Dreamers see how a light appears around her and the transparent shape of her now becomes far more solid, as if she truly enters the Dream. When next she opens them, she turns to look at Veil again.
“The Pale Tree has given me power enough to aid you. As I said, you won’t be alone.”

More lights burst into existence, within the hands of the Dreamers, as they are given true weapons.
Swords, hammers, burning torches and rifles are sent into the area and directly placed within their grips. It appears this Pale Tree is ready to do everything to save them.

Veil smiles and nods sharply.

"Dreamers, listen to me! This beast is trying to destroy our home, our very lives, by draining them directly from the ground. We must stand together to fight and send it back wherever it came from! Follow me, and we’ll end this threat, once and for all!"

There isn’t much else that needs to be said and the visitor can only watch the sapling she just introduced to a new life somewhat wistfully, perhaps even with pride.

As cheers erupt among the Dreamers, they turn and launch themselves at their enemy, fighting together in a huge group, hoping that it will be enough.

The dragon doesn’t go down lightly, as it mixes attacks of terribly corrupted breaths with thorny vines from the ground. To it, they are nothing more than small nuisances, insects thinking they can do anything to a superior creature.

However, even bug bites will eventually become unmanageable, if occurring in large numbers.

While the visitor - their guide through the darkness - does her best to stab into the dragon with a frightening accuracy, Veil provides several valiant attacks as well, aiming for the many eyes along the dragon’s huge head. That blinds it momentarily, making it more difficult to tear apart the other Dreamers.

It is through this sheer persistence, this wave of foes, that the dragon needs to bend and admit its folly, as it eventually falls to the earth. As it is vanquished, the poison slips away and joins it in death.

As the haze of the nightmare grows weaker, the guide is surrounded by light once more, her image fading away. Before she goes, she turns her attention to Veil, smiling gently at her.

"Well done, brave Dreamer. You have my thanks, for staying true to your beliefs and doing what needed to be done. Your courage and leadership was something I hadn’t expected, but I suppose that it was for the best. I sense that it will do great things for your future. We shall meet again, beneath the skies of Tyria."

The very first noise she emits is a groan, one infused with both pain and exhaustion. Her body feels heavy, sore, and every muscle aches with overuse. This is obviously strange, as it has never really been used, but one can blame that on the drain of the corruption, which tried to destroy them from within.

The golden birthing pod is only one among many which has appeared as of late, due to this wave of sylvari being larger and more frequent than usual.

As many of the young sylvari get ready to take their first breaths, touch the ground for the first time or absorb their first bit of water, there are other, older ones, standing ready to aid them, not letting them be alone.

Veil’s eyes flicker, as she attempts to blink the blurriness of them away. It is weird to her somehow, as if the mist from the nightmare she just had still lingers, even though all it truly means is that she’s unaware of what it’s like to be born. If she peers up at the sky, she would see the beautiful colors above; shades of dark blue intermingled with a fire red, as if the very sky is burning, but in a peaceful manner. Unbeknownst to her, dusk has arrived.

Grabbing the edge of the pod, she tries to heave herself up and over the edge, but due to being so weak, she stumbles and falls. Normally, she would plummet to the ground without being able to do anything about it, but instead of suffering this unfortunate fate, she falls right into a somewhat softer chest, letting a pair of gentle arms embrace her.

Tired and confused, she looks up and sees a pair of familiar pale blue eyes and a friendly smile.
aimed at her. It fills her with a welcoming warmth.

“Good to see you finally awake and well, dear Veilidh. My name is Caithe.”

Chapter End Notes

If you're wondering, no, I won't be tagging every chapter with the year, like I did in "Blood Bond". It's just for when I jump forward in the story, every now and then.
Third. That’s what they had been told that they were. The third batch of sylvari to leave the safety of the Dream and step out of the golden birthing pods attached to the Pale Tree. Interestingly enough, it has also nearly been three years since the Firstborn emerged into the world, marking a special occasion. However, it appears that this third batch is much larger than the previous two and there’s already more sylvari awakening while these ones await guidance. Their numbers are increasing at a rate that very few could’ve anticipated and while some may find that alarming, for the most part, it is a wonderful aspect to most of their own people.

Once they were led out of the pods, the newly awakened had been asked to follow their guides and have now temporarily been placed in a very large house, made of branches and sturdy leaves. As the day kept going, more and more joined in. It is here that Veilidh is currently sitting, with the rest of her brethren.

Being out in the ‘real world’ as some of the older ones had said, is both pleasant and strange, as being awake is so very different from the Dream. There are so many new concepts to absorb – smells, sights, sounds, tastes – and all those around her seem to agree. Even more fascinating, most already appear to act in the same manner that Veil had seen them previously - some interact, others wander around seeking knowledge, some wish to leave and explore immediately, and a few sits in a corner contemplating reality alone.

Despite sort of wanting to join, Veil has to admit that she feels a little bit lost, almost shy. She’s not sure who exactly to approach or what to say. In the Dream, she didn’t have the same problem for some reason, as if her curiosity was simply the most important aspect of her; but now, she’s growing more conscious of her surroundings. She would want to leave and see what else she can find, but she and the others had been dropped off here inside this chamber and told to stay. Who is she to argue with a Firstborn?

Veil doesn’t look to be in as much of a hurry as some of the rest and can easily just stand around waiting, while those wiser than them handle the situation. However, after she has switched location and leans against one of the walls with her arms folded, she becomes lost in her own thoughts and is rather distant for a short time. This is why she doesn’t notice how someone else walks right up to her.

“Hi!”

She twitches in surprise at the sudden and fairly loud voice, spoken so close to her location. Immediately, she turns around and sees another sylvari. Just like Veil and all of the other sylvari here, she’s wearing very little – only a few leaves that they have been handed to cover themselves with – and therefore most of her features are visible. Compared to Veil, she has a yellow hide or skin, with thin dark red leaves as hair. Across her face, arms, chest and legs, Veil notices lined patterns in mixed colors of green and pink. Her eyes are a pleasant sky blue as well. The most distinguishable feature on her, however, is the large smile she displays.

Veil tries to collect herself and clears her throat. “Uh, hello there.”

She hadn’t noticed this one when she awoke, meaning the newcomer must’ve come later. Perhaps she was one of those who awoke in the morning the next day or at noon?
The newcomer glances up at the roof and her gaze seems to sweep across the room.
“This is pretty exciting, isn’t it?”

Veil tries to follow where she’s looking, but can’t really see anything specific.
“What is?”

“Everything! There’s an entire world around us, the waking world! So far, we have only dreamed of it, but now we’re really here!”
Her smile seems to widen, almost becoming dreamy.
“There’s so many things to experience, to see, to hear of, and I want to go through them all. Oh, I can’t wait to see everything!”
She suddenly turns back around to Veil.
“Don’t you feel the same?”

This is the first of the other sylvari to actually approach her after she awoke, except for some of the older ones who helped her. Veil hadn’t expected such an excitable person, although she seems rather nice.
“I suppose I do, yes, but I also wish I had something more…solid to put my hands on. It would be nice to study things in a more practical sense.”

“Oh, I know what you mean! I would certainly like that as well.”
She takes a step forward and offers her hand.
“I’m Sieran! What’s your name?”

Even as she offers it, it’s more like she’s about to seize Veil’s hand before the latter can return the gesture. Veil only has to move her hand a small bit and Sieran captures it. Her handshake isn’t too harsh, however, just eager.
“Erm, Veilidh.”

Sieran’s eyes widens with excitement and curiosity.
“Ooh, I’ve heard of you! Weren’t you the one who slew that big monster? Some of the others talked about you.”

Veil glances at the rest of the group, but currently, she can’t see anyone looking directly at them.
“Oh, really? You spoke to them?”

“I did! Some people said I was a bit too talkative, though, so I left them alone.”

“Mm, well, I was there and fought the dragon, yes, but Caithe did most of the work. She only let me be a sort of vessel for acting within the Dream, as she needed help.”

Sieran nods curtly.
“Ah, I see! Makes sense, I suppose. I tried to help out as well, but I got a bit lost in the forest. And then, some vines chased after me and I had to lure them all around to get away. I did eventually manage to trick them into a trap, which was fascinating! I didn’t think it would work.”

Veil watches her with a smile and tilts her head.
“You did? That’s quite a clever move.”

The little praise only seems to make Sieran even happier and she moves both hands to hold one of Veil’s.
“You think so?”

“Of course. I saw a lot of people suffering unfortunate fates and very few managed to fight back.
You should be proud that you could.”

She sees how a small grin forms on Sieran’s face, one that displays a similar emotion to what Veil suggested.
“Well, I have to admit that it was very fun and interesting to try it out. Those vines thought they could capture me so easily, but they underestimated a properly cunning sylvari! Pretty stupid plants, really.”

As she starts to think about it, Veil lowers her gaze and lifts a hand up to her chin, stroking it in thought.
“I wonder if they exist in this world, or if they belong to the Dream. It would be very fascinating to examine one of those creatures.”

However, as she considers this, Sieran’s attention is drawn elsewhere.
“Ooh, have you seen this over here?”, she says, while pointing at a table in one of the corners.

Veil blinks and then shifts her gaze over to where Sieran is indicating, noticing the metal box placed on top.
“No, I hadn’t seen it before. Must be some of the stuff that the Firstborn left.”

“It looks interesting!”
She turns to lock her eyes with Veil’s.
“We should investigate.”

Not what she had expected to hear, especially as they had been told to simply sit still and wait until someone could attend to them.
“Eh, I don’t know. It’s probably best if we don’t.”

Sieran tilts her head curiously, her smile momentarily dispersing.
“You don’t find it intriguing?”

“No no, I do, but they’ve sort of told us not to touch anything, and well…this thing isn’t ours. We should leave it be.”

Sieran chuckles and then grabs her hand.
“Come now, if it was that important, they wouldn’t just leave it in here!”

The only one who has touched her up to this point is Caithe, and while that was pleasant, Sieran has now gotten physical thrice, and she doesn’t seem shy about it. Veil notes how soft she is.
“But…what if they get mad at us?”

“Don’t be like that! Come, it’ll be cherry!”

“…what? Cher-“

She doesn’t wait for Veil to finish the response or allow her to protest any further, and starts dragging the other sylvari with her, towards the box. Veil is too surprised to struggle and simply allows it to happen. She has a feeling they might get into trouble, but it’s too late now.
Eventually, they arrive right in front of the item and the duo are both drawn to it. It’s a fascinating little thing, completely square in its shape, silver colored and with a few flowery patterns made in red. However, some of the color has faded in certain places and there are signs of it being worn by scratch marks.

As the table is fairly short, Sieran has to kneel down, and Veil joins her. It’s the former who gets her hands on it first, running her fingers over its surface, wanting to touch everything.
“Oh, it’s fairly cold to the touch and much sturdier than the bark and leaves of the Grove. I
wonder what it is. Do you think there’s something inside? Maybe we can get it open? We could get some tools, I suppose."

She stops asking questions and looks up when Veil gently takes her hands and sighs. "Be careful. We don’t know what might happen.”

Sieran smiles at her. "Isn’t that why we’re investigating?”

Veil rolls her eyes. "Yes, of course, but we can’t just push everything and hope it will work. Will you allow me to examine it quickly?”

“Oh, sure! Go ahead.”
She puts a hand to the side of the box and slides it towards Veil. "Hmm, it’s not as heavy as I thought it would be.”

Finally having it in her own grasp, Veil doesn’t choose to find out more with her hands, but instead examines most of it with her eyes. She tries to sniff it as well, but it doesn’t have much of a scent.
Eventually, she locates something interesting in the lower end of the back, which looks like a small red outcropping. "Hmm, what’s this?”

She pushes it and once she does, both of the girls gasp as the lid of the box suddenly pulls itself back automatically, revealing the interior. What they see isn’t what either had anticipated.
At the center, there’s a very small figure, like a miniature sylvari, but not. It doesn’t seem to be made of the same plant-like material as them, being much smoother. Its skin also appears to be light brown and the long curly hair is black, not at all like their petals.
As it moves, they see some kind of rudimentary surroundings, like a stage, and the figure spins around upon it. At the same time, a slow and simple tune plays for them.

For about a minute, the two of them just sit there and stare at it, listening to the tune, taking in as much of its appearance as possible. That’s when the tune seems to loop.
Sieran smiles once more, while putting her hands together. "Ah, it’s so beautiful. The music and the little figure…it looks like it’s been made to dance, right?”

At the same time, Veil is tilting most of her upper body to the side, trying to view it from various angles. "I wonder how it works. How does it spin like that? Is there someone inside doing it or something?”

"Like a little person, you mean? Ooh, that would be exciting to find out!”

Part of Veil actually wants to open it up and take it apart, seeing the interior of the design. She hadn’t thought that this was the type of thing she’d see on her first day, but it’s clear her thirst for knowledge is immediately guiding her.
Before she can consider this much further, though, a set of hands are placed on top of their shoulders and a voice is heard from behind. "Can’t keep yourselves out of trouble, can you?”

Both of them twitch in surprise and looks up, coming face to face with a familiar sylvari. Caithe sighs and stands up straighter, folding her arms. "Oh uh, hello Caithe”, Veil says while trying to close the box. "W-we erm…we just wanted to uh, have a little look around.”
Sieran nods eagerly.
“Yes! We were so curious about everything and this box was so different.”

Veil turns her eyes downwards, quite embarrassed.
“…we didn’t mean to cause any trouble.”

Caithe shakes her head.
“And yet you immediately went to touch and open the first foreign object you could find? Some of the others might not be so happy about that.”

They both are a little bit unsure how to proceed, but Veil glances slightly at Sieran, before addressing Caithe.
“Please, don’t punish her. It was all my idea. She…told me that we shouldn’t do it, but I really wanted to have a look.”

Caithe arches a skeptical brow.
“Really? That’s truly what happened?”

“Yes, it is! I promise.”

She might take her word for it, but gazes momentarily at Sieran. Unfortunately for them both, Sieran’s astonishment over Veil’s choice to lie for her, lingers on her expression for a few moments.
Caithe exhales slowly.
“There’s no need to take the blame, Veilidh. You lured her into it, didn’t you, Sieran?”

Feeling how she’s being caught red-handed, Sieran clears her throat and grins sheepishly.
“We didn’t damage it in any way, I swear! It’s still as good as new! Well, if it is new. It did look a bit worn.
…anyway, everything is so new to us that I couldn’t stop myself!”

Caithe sighs, but she has to smile too, as she remembers how it was for her to awaken for the first time.
“Somehow, I get the sense that you’ll both be trouble for a while. Ah well.”
She then offers a hand to Veil.
“Veilidh, I need you to come with me.”

Veil is hesitant, but she raises her own to places it on top of Caithe’s.
“Oh? Why?”

“The Mother Tree wishes to have a word with us both.”

---

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I know that Sieran is supposed to be a bit younger, according to her own dialogue anyway, but I liked the idea of these two being born around the same time and experiencing the same things together.
As you can hopefully see, I’m still aiming to make her the same kind of character, and will definitely get Veilidh into a lot of trouble.
Walking with Caithe through the Grove in such a public fashion is something that Veilidh can immediately admit that she’s enjoying. Not only does she get to see a lot of the incredible sights of this large home of theirs, but people get to witness her accompanying one of the Firstborn in a fairly intimate manner, seeing as how they hold hands the whole way. She’s not quite sure why Caithe insists on holding onto her, whether it’s due to being protective or perhaps not wanting Veil to stray too far, but she doesn’t really mind either way. It’s a pleasant experience.

As they utilize some kind of planet-based elevator, ascending through the tree, they eventually arrive at the very top, something Caithe called the ‘Omphalos Chamber’. When they step out, Veil looks around to see that there’s a whole bunch of other sylvari already gathered here. Most of them sit and discuss a variety of topics in a corner or get instructed by their elders. She’s not sure if they are with her ‘generation’ or if it’s perhaps some of the Secondborn. Either way, Caithe redirects her attention to another area, as Veil continues to be guided forward.

Underneath an arch of flowers and vines stands a gleaming figure, radiating of warmth and compassion. By her side, they can both see another sylvari, a male with dark green complexion, wrapped inside a plant-based armor of brown and grey colors. At this time, the duo appears to be having a serious conversation.

“This vision is definitely curious”, the man says, “and it makes me wonder where it came from. What could’ve brought it to affect the Dream in such an adverse way?”

The glowing figure shakes her head slightly.
“I’m sorry, my dear, I am not quite sure. But you are right, of course, this needs to be investigated. I trust that you and the others will be able to find the truth, as you always do.”

“I shall do my best, mother.”

Before they get much further, the obvious leader of the two shifts her attention towards the approaching duo and her face immediately shines up into a wide smile. Instead of waiting, she meets them halfway and begins by putting a hand on Caithe’s shoulder and then kissing her cheek gently.

“Ah, there you are, my sweet night child. I hope you are feeling well today.”

Caithe offers a small smile of her own and nods.
“Always, mother. However, I did have to make sure that this one didn’t get into trouble.”

The figure turns towards Veilidh then, shortening the distance to her and when they are standing in such close proximity, it’s clear that Veil is the smaller one.
She raises a hand to the young sylvari’s cheek, caressing it tenderly.
“And you must be Veilidh, my dear. Of course you are. Such a magnificent and wondrous child you have become.”

Being in her vicinity and looking upon her, Veil is quite taken by the beautiful sight of this creature. She inclines her head briefly, but keeps their eyes locked.
“Yes, that’s my name. You…you are the Mother Tree, aren’t you?”

The avatar of the Pale Tree seems to turn even brighter at this acknowledgement, as her eyes begin to search more of Veil’s appearance, wanting to examine her thoroughly.
“Of course I am, my sapling. I have heard and seen what you did in the Dream. I am so very
proud of your courage, prowess and leadership. You did very well.”

Tilting herself forward, she puts a gentle kiss on Veil’s forehead. The sylvari feels a flourishing warmth and joy at being able to please her mother like this, something she didn’t know she wanted until now.

“Thank you, mother.”

Taking a step back, the Pale Tree turns around slightly and gestures with her hand towards the man who spoke to her previously.

“Let me introduce you to another. This is Trahearne, one of my first sons. He has grown to be a very capable magic user and scholar.”

Trahearne puts a hand to his chest, bowing his head politely.

“It is an honor to meet you, Veilidh. I am sure you will become someone important to us as well, from what mother witnessed in the Dream.”

Veil looks at him curiously.

“One of the first? Did you awaken around the same time as Caithe, then?”

He nods briefly.

“Yes, we are both Firstborn, even if we do not belong to the same Cycle.”

Caithe smirks slightly as she returns the gaze she receives from him.

“We may be siblings, but he can be quite a handful at times, I will admit.”

Trahearne doesn’t say anything in return, merely chuckles. Soon after, his attention shifts back towards Veil.

“Tell me, is it true that you saw and fought a vision of a dragon within the Dream?”

“I did”, Veil tells him, “or at least from all the descriptions I’ve received so far, it did look like one. It was massive, powerful and frightening. It required a lot of us to take it down together, even Caithe.”

She feels how Caithe’s hand caresses her, before the older sylvari speaks.

“She performed very well during such circumstances, despite only being a sapling. She was very brave and did much better than I anticipated.”

Being unable to stop it, Veil senses almost electrifying sensation, a new experience for her. The others see how she begins to glow somewhat shyly, a sign of a sylvari blushing. On top of this, Veil feels very excited to hear that Caithe would praise her so.

“I’m…glad you approve.”

Caithe doesn’t say anything, merely winking at Veil. At the same time, Trahearne raises a hand up to his chin in concern.

“I was worried something like this would occur within our place of birth eventually. And already as a result, all sorts of rumors are spreading.”

“Rumors?” Veil asks.

“Yes, about the underlying cause of the dragon’s intrusion. Some believe it must be the Nightmare, the darkness infecting the Dream in certain places. It would be the most obvious explanation, but I am not so sure. Why would it take such a distinct shape and why would it attempt to drain rather than transform the Dream? It’s all very curious.”

His questions and ponderings are obviously intriguing to the rest, but the Pale Tree wants them to focus on the matter at hand, which is why she now turns back to Veil.
“This is why I decided to call you here now, my dear. The incident needs to be discussed and explained.”

Veil is about to say something, but feels a little bit disappointed by the loss of Caithe’s hand, as the other sylvari decides to leave her there and stroll up to the Pale Tree’s avatar, taking a position next to her, opposite of where Trahearne is standing.
Having nothing to hold, Veil begins to fidget with her own hands instead.
“Well, I’m not sure what you expect me to say, mother. I don’t really know much of dragons yet, and while I would love to study them further, it’s impossible for me to claim much else.”

The Pale Tree laughs gently, quite a melodic sound.
“Oh, my dear child, I did not call you here to extract any knowledge. I asked you to come so that I may give you news regarding your future fate.”

“My fate?”

She nods slowly.
“Indeed, for you see, I believe that what you experienced prior to your awakening is what may be your ‘Wyld Hunt’.”

Veil arches a brow confusedly, getting more terms she has never heard before.
“My what?”

Caithe is allowed to take over for a short time.
“It is a special type of event which only befalls a few of us sylvari thus far; an important quest, a calling or almost a destiny.”

Trahearne folds his arms and explains further.
“We have chosen to call those people ‘Wyld Hunt Valiants’, and their purposes range from all types of things; small to big, simple to complex.”

Definitely an interesting matter to consider, but also somewhat frightening. That huge monster is part of her destiny? Not something she’d actually enjoy, but perhaps she’ll become braver when she understands more of this quest.
“How many Valiants are there? What other people have received them?”

The Pale Tree gestures with her hands at either side, towards the two sylvari standing next to her.
“Both Trahearne and Caithe are two of the foremost Valiants so far, and some with the more complex quests to solve.”

Trahearne nods and looks at Veil, but his eyes seem distant somehow, possibly even concerned.
“My Wyld Hunt involves cleansing the land of Orr, a corrupted isle to the southeast. Once, hundreds of years ago, it was a country belonging to a race we know as ‘humans’, but it was destroyed during a foolish act to prevent them from being overtaken by their enemies. Now, it has been raised to the surface again, controlled by an undead elder dragon.”

Veil widens her eyes.
“Whoa, that…certainly does not sound like an easy task. It’s quite strange too. How are you meant to ‘cleanse’ it?”

He shrugs and sighs heavily.
“At this time, I do not know. It’s part of the difficulty of my task. I admit that there is still much I have to do and learn, before I know how this can be achieved.”
Shortly after, he tries to offer her a reassuring smile.
“However, I heard you were born during the Cycle of Dusk as well. Perhaps it would be possible
for the two of us to discuss this matter in more detail in the future. I would certainly welcome your insight.”

She returns a similar expression to him.  
“Oh, I would definitely enjoy that! I believe I must learn more of the world to begin with, before I try to offer you any valuable advice, but once I’m ready, I shall do my best to aid you.”

“I look forward to that day.”

On the other side, Caithe places her hands at her hips, her gaze sharpening somewhat.  
“My calling is a little bit more specific, but it’s possibly more difficult to achieve, depending on the circumstances.  
In fact, my Wyld Hunt is intertwined with yours, Veilidh – we both seek to fight the elder dragons. Currently, we believe that our visions are focused upon fighting the undead one, Zhaitan. It is the same dragon who holds Orr.”

Veil is surprised to hear this, being quite stunned at first, before she slowly begins to smile.  
“Our Wyld Hunts are the same?”

“As far as I know, yes, or at the very least similar.”

The Pale Tree inclines her head as she glances between the two.  
“From all the Wyld Hunts we have been exposed to thus far, it is a fairly unusual situation, but I believe it might be beneficial, due to the danger involved in this task.”

It’s hard to deny the fact that this will be incredibly dangerous to perform and they will have to be much more prepared before they can throw themselves at it. However, Veil can’t help but feel excited as well and looks curiously at Caithe.

“Does this mean that we…will be spending a lot of time together?”

At first, Caithe arches a brow in surprise, before she smiles and crosses her arms over her chest.  
“I…suppose that is one way to look at it, yes.”

Veil’s smile grows into a grin instead. Similar to her, the Pale Tree appears to approve of this approach.

“She is right. I believe it is good if the two of you coordinate as much as you can, building trust and learning more of one another. Perhaps you should start as soon as possible. Caithe, you can teach Veilidh more of the Grove and what happens here. There is much to do and you both must be prepared to act when the time comes.”
With a sense of intoxicating elation after the success of meeting her mother, Veilidh followed Caithe into her first guided tour of their joint home. There’s a lot to see within the confines of the Pale Tree and while she’s curious about everything, she lets Caithe make any decisions of where to go. It’s not just because she clearly knows more, but also due to feeling safe in letting the Firstborn choose for her, at least for now. She definitely doesn’t have infinite wisdom, but Caithe oozes of confidence and secret knowledge, which she might share if given the chance. Veil wants to do everything to prove that she’s worthy.

As a first step along this journey, Caithe makes the decision to take Veil towards her current home. Veil would’ve guessed that this meant somewhere at the top of the tree, as she is one of the Firstborn after all. But Caithe surprised her somewhat by leading her further down, into the depths of their home, much closer to the ground than anything else. As they arrive, they find themselves in a currently quite sparsely populated area, with lights dimmed, even during daytime.

“We call this area the ‘Garden of Night’”, Caithe tells her. “I think you can surmise which sylvari tend to come here, thus far.”

Veil smiles and nods, although her eyes are currently wandering across the garden, wanting to see and learn as much of her companion as possible.

“Where do you live?”

Caithe gestures for her to follow and takes the younger sylvari past pools of water and shimmering dust in the air, towards some sort of building. Its hide is likely made of material taken from some kind of sturdy gigantic plant, but its shape is that of a flower bud, protecting the people within its grasp. The colors seen across its surface ranges from dark green to a greenish yellow, but there are also white, purple and pink lights illuminating parts of the area. Not bright enough to be a bother, but enough to give visibility.

Veil’s smile grows as they stop in front of it.

“This is where you live?”

“It is indeed, although I don’t do so alone. A few others share it with me, as we have yet to fully expand on our housing arrangements.”

“Doesn’t the Mother Tree do this for us?”

Caithe folds her arms and looks at Veil amusedly.

“Well, yes, partially. She produces most of the materials needed, but she has a lot to do. She can’t make everything happen in an instant, especially not with our people expanding in such an increasing rate.”

Veil scratches her cheek in thought, nodding after she sees Caithe’s point.

“I guess that’s reasonable. Pretty impressive how she manages to keep us all in here to begin with.”

“It is.
Anyhow, I do have a room in here for now, which is mine.”

Caithe begins to move again, approaching the door to the house.
“You will likely be given similar arrangements in the future, and I believe it’s crucial right now to make sure you understand what is involved in this kind of situation. You see, you have to respect those you live with and follow the rules which are decided. It is very possible that you might be assigned to sylvari who are nothing like you and it’s important to keep in mind that there must still be a mutual understanding for…”

After she looks to her side, in order to give Veil a more direct gaze, she doesn’t see the sapling at her side. This makes her blink and she looks around, spotting Veil further behind. Apparently, she hasn’t moved an inch yet.

“Veilidh?”

The other woman appears to be letting her gaze sweep across the house, eyeing every angle and item on its walls and roof.

“It’s very intriguing how you have chosen to build this thing. It makes me wonder how it stays intact and if there’s some special technique to it. How do those lamps work, for example, and how long do they last? How much force is this house able to take? Like, if I get on the roof, could I-“

That’s when she feels Caithe’s hand enveloping her own, the older sylvari sighing at Veil’s behavior and then begins to pull her towards the door.

“You ask too many questions. Don’t get distracted now.”

Veil clears her throat and has no choice but to follow.

“Sorry!”

They wander in through the entrance, which Veil finds intriguing all on its own with how it seems to retract in such an organic way. Caithe continues to pull her along, though, to keep her on track and for now, they don’t really run into anyone.

When they arrive inside the actual room, it’s a fairly small section, although likely as big as the rest of those found in here. There’s a lamp, some tables, a bed and a few shelves to store personal items in. All of these things are very much based on a similar design as the rest of the Grove. The lamp is like a glowing flower, the tables resemble tall mushrooms, the bed is like a thick and large leaf, and the shelves are branches.

However, even though Veil obviously finds everything in here exciting, there’s a few things which intrigues her more than the rest. In one of the corners, she locates a couple of wooden boxes that obviously stand out, as they’re clearly not sylvari creations.

As Caithe begins to explain her choice of design and the purpose of various items, she notes how Veil immediately approaches one of the boxes as soon as they’re spotted and kneels down to look inside. Within, there’s a few interesting objects, most of them technological. Veil doesn’t even know how she knows this, but the Dream likely gave her the basic concepts.

“What are these things?”, Veil asks.

“Did you make them? They don’t look like anything in the Grove. Were you outside when you obtained them, then? Did someone teach you to-“

She has to stop again when someone puts hands on top of hers, and she looks up to see Caithe once more, now kneeling next to her.

“What did I say about getting distracted?”, she says with a slightly humorous tone.

Veil clears her throat and then allows Caithe to help her drop the devices back in their boxes.

“…sorry. They’re just so fascinating.”

“Yes, I know, and I will do my best to explain these things to you later, but for now, I think it would be wise to start with the basics.”
She holds onto Veil’s hand again, making sure to not let her go in another direction this time and
guides her to the edge of the bed instead, which is quite soft to sit on. Caithe places herself next to
her younger companion.
“Now then, the first thing we should deal with, in my opinion, is getting you some clothes.”

Veil arches a confused brow.
“Clothes? Why?”

“Well, for several reasons, really. The first one is likely due to the weather. Our people are fairly
resistant to a lot of different climates and temperatures, but not at all. Wearing clothes is a good
way to protect yourself from the elements.”

“Yes, I know what clothes are but-“

“The second reason”, Caithe says while smiling, “is that it is seen as decent to walk around in…
well, more than you are currently wearing.”

Veil lowers her gaze, inspecting her body and the few leaves which covers certain places of her.
She doesn’t really see the concern and simply shrugs.
“How so?”

“Well, our people are not as fussied about it in general, but a lot of the other races on Tyria tend
to…question nudity in public areas. You may do as you wish, of course, but I am just telling you
that it is wiser if you intend to interact with them.
And the third reason, probably the most important too, is protection. And I’m not just talking of
weather here, but all sorts of dangers. A sturdy set of clothes, or armor, can protect you against
damage of various kinds, or dampen it in some way. If you intend to leave the security of the
Grove, I suggest you get yourself some clothes.”

She can perceive the logic from that perspective, especially as Caithe probably knows more.
“Alright, I see your point. Where can I get some?”

Caithe sighs briefly.
“Well, that’s another thing we don’t yet have in abundance, and we shall have to see to it that our
crafters begin to produce more of them in the future. For now, I believe it would be alright if I lend
you some.”

Veil widens her eyes, before offering a smile.
“Really? You’d do that?”

“Well, that’s another thing we don’t yet have in abundance, and we shall have to see to it that our
crafters begin to produce more of them in the future. For now, I believe it would be alright if I lend
you some.”

Veil widens her eyes, before offering a smile.
“Really? You’d do that?”

“Of course. I don’t mind at all. Besides, it’s not as if I use all of them simultaneously.”
She stands up, starting to look through some of the other containers she has in her room, finding
the articles she was searching for and tosses them onto the bed. She tries to explain further during
this process.
“Most of the clothes designed by our crafters thus far, tend to have a similar theme. They are
inspired by certain types of vegetation found here in the jungle, which shouldn’t really be that
surprising. It is our home, after all, and it does tend to help with blending in too, if that is
necessary. That said, they’re not all the same.
Some prefer leaf, grass or bush-based pieces, while others enjoy more jagged ones, similar to
branches, thorns or bark.”

“Most of these appear to be from the former.”

Caithe smiles as she searches through another container, sliding it open to see what things she
would be willing to give away for now.
“Well, yes, I suppose I have a soft spot for the elegance of long and thin leaves. You should see some of those attached to the stems of our flowers deeper into the forest. They’re utterly gorgeous.”

She’s about to explain even further, but when she turns back, Veil is not on the bed anymore. As always, she has gotten distracted and Caithe finds her standing by a chair close to the table.

“Veilidh…what are you doing now?”

Taking something from the back of the chair, Veil returns with something smooth and black in her hands.

“What’s this? It’s so…soft and bends so easily.”

Caithe looks down at what Veil holds in her hands, before tilting her head curiously.

“Well, that’s…also a piece of clothing, actually. It’s a shirt, made of cotton. I believe I have the trousers attached to it underneath the table over there.”

Veil immediately shifts her attention to gather that up as well, seeing how both of them have the same color.

“Hmm…they’re very nice to hold, but seem different from the other ones you have.

“Of course, because they’re not created by sylvari.”

Veil turns her eyes up, facing Caithe.

“They’re not?”

Caithe shakes her head.

“These ones are preferred by some of the other races around Tyria, especially humans. They’re not very useful against attacks, but they can certainly be comfortable to wear, especially in the cold.”

“I see. Why aren’t you wearing these? Are they not yours?”

“They are, but personally, I’m not very fond of this material and very few sylvari tend to be. I didn’t make them, though, as they were a gift.”

“From whom?”

Caithe sighs briefly, while she moves to sit down on the bed next to the rest of the clothes and crosses her legs.

“It was from about a year or two ago, when I was not as knowledgeable of what lies outside. Me and…a friend of mine had been wandering quite far out into the forest, reaching some places which few other Firstborn had traversed and ran into some trouble. We were attacked by some of the beasts, and didn’t know how to tackle them.

Fortunately, we encountered a diverse group of wanderers from different races. They helped us out by taking down the threat and then patched us up in the aftermath.

One of them, a human, noticed how I wasn’t wearing much at the time and therefore offered me some clothes to put on while we were resting. I wore them for a while, but once we got back to safety and I offered to return them to her, she said it was fine to keep it all. So I did.”

Veil smiles.

“That was nice of her.”

“It was, but I have to admit that I haven’t used them much since. I suppose they have simply been a…nice token to keep, to make me remember that the other races can be fairly decent.”

“You like to collect things?”
Caithe diverts her eyes elsewhere and raises her hand to brush away a few leaves of her hair, which are blocking her view.

“Sometimes.”

“Well, since you are not using them, could I take them instead?”

Caithe blinks in surprise.

“What?”

“Uh, I mean, if you don’t want them. Feels like a waste, if they’re just lying around here.”

When she considers it, Caithe appears somewhat hesitant at first. Even if she never uses these pieces, she does still enjoy hanging onto them. In many ways, they’re a symbol of where she has been, what she has accomplished. However, she realizes this kind of mindset can be quite foolish, even selfish, and sighs.

“Very well, you may have them.”

The young sylvari shines up into a bright smile and moves forward to hug Caithe.

“Thank you! I promise that I’ll cherish them and use them well.”

Not even changing rooms, Veil immediately removes some of the smaller leaves which covers her body, making Caithe look away, before putting on the shirt and pants. They don’t fit her perfectly, as the human who used these were probably quite big, but Veil appears to enjoy them regardless.

Caithe turns back, folds her arms and looks at the other woman thoughtfully.

“How do they feel?”

“Mm, they’re even nicer to actually wear. You’re right, they’re fairly warm.”

She corrects her shirt, making sure that it’s sitting as straight as possible and corrects the large petals of her hair, before she looks at Caithe.

“What do you think?”

Caithe smiles while putting a hand behind her to lean back, eyeing the other sylvari.

“Hmm, does seem to be a bit too large for you, but not necessarily in a bad way. Looks good, I think.”

Veil pouts slightly.

“Just good?”

It makes Caithe chuckle and shake her head at first, before standing up and closing the distance to Veil. She pokes the nose of the younger woman playfully.

“Don’t beg for praise, silly.”

Veil giggles in return, stopping what she was doing and decides to walk around in her new outfit. She feels more pleased with it than she had initially assumed and wonder if it would be possible to get more made elsewhere.

While she does, she is once more momentarily distracted by a small object close to Caithe’s bed. It lies on one of the mushroom-shaped tables, hidden behind a lamp and some minor containers. She approaches and picks it up, finding that it has quite a curious design. It’s like a necklace made of vines, with a fairly interesting center piece. It appears to be a twisted branch attempting to create a circle, holding onto a white petal in its heart. Parts of it also glowing faintly.

“What is this?”, she asks. “A necklace?”

When Caithe turns around, she doesn’t appear very concerned at first, but this immediately changes once she notices the item. She stops breathing for a second, but tries to calm down as she
moves closer to Veil. She hesitates when she gently, but firmly, takes the item from her. “It’s…nothing you need to be concerned about.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, this is still in the early days of the increased amount of sylvari, so Caithe doesn't have her own home yet.
Chance of giving

Several days have passed by since Caithe guided Veilidh around the Grove and while the younger sylvari has become somewhat more used to their home overall, there are still aspects of it which she wants to explore.

One change which has occurred recently is that Veil has received a room of her own within one of the new houses that have been built. There are many more coming, but she managed to get into one from the earliest batches. It’s not like she doesn’t understand why, as Caithe obviously had something to do with it. There are definitely some benefits to have a Firstborn taking care of her and wanting to make sure she’s doing well, and Veil isn’t complaining.

At this time, they can be found wandering through the Maker’s Terrace, an area where most of the various crafters ply their trade. While Veil may have a room, she also needs things to put in it, or at least that seems to be Caithe’s philosophy. For basic things, such as shelves, tables, lamps and more, Caithe has some immediate suggestions and even though they can’t get all of the items now, they at least manage to reserve a spot for Veil on the list of future acquisition, something which has been created due to high demand and production rate not being able to keep up.

For decorative items, Caithe tells Veil of some of her own preferences, but let’s Veil choose mostly for herself. Compared to the Firstborn, she does not stick to any specific colors or design, wanting to test several out, to see which she prefers. Caithe looks mildly skeptical of this notion. “Are you sure this is what you want?” she asks while they leave the stall belonging to one of the vendors who sells flower-based lamps.

“You don’t think this might create too much of a mess? If you have no base theme, I mean.”

Veil simply smiles and shrugs. “Maybe, but I don’t mind. I find it quite creative, actually. It’s boring if I simply have to follow the same patterns that everyone else uses.”

Caithe stands there and merely watches her for a few moments, before she sighs and shakes her head. “I don’t know if I understand your viewpoint, but you are a Dusker, that’s for sure.”

Veil giggles slightly. “I bet Trahearme would understand!”

Caithe smiles and shakes her head, before the two of them keep moving. “He might, I suppose. Have you taken the time to meet your neighbors yet? The ones who live in the same house, I mean.”

“I have, indeed! They seem quite friendly and fairly diverse, just like you suggested. I know we have at least two from every Cycle, but I’m not so sure about the last four. I’ll have a chat with them as soon as I get the chance. They are probably busy preparing just as much as we are.”

“That seems likely”, Caithe agrees and then glances in Veil’s direction. “This should go without saying, but I hope you will do your best not to get into trouble with them.”

Veil arches one of her brows, or the patterns upon her face which appears as one, looking fairly amused. “What? Why would you believe that I’d be the one to cause any trouble?”
Once more, Caithe simply stares at her, hardly thinking it needs to be explained. “Has the past week since your awakening not been enough proof of why?”

“That’s not fair! I haven’t caused all too many problems for you or anyone else! At least I don’t think so.”
She glances at the Firstborn. “Have I?”

Caithe turns her eyes to the path ahead instead, smiling and shrugging. “If you say so, dear.”

Veil smirks at her, moving closer to poke her arm. “Hey! You can’t just dismiss me like that!
Besides, if anything goes wrong, I will simply jump back into your home again.”

An expected response, but one that makes Caithe roll her eyes regardless. “I cannot be the person you run to whenever you face an obstacle in life, you know.”

The younger sylvari begins to pout then and tries to lean against her. “What? But I thought you were here to help me out!”

Even if they have only known each other for about a week, Veil has spent pretty much every single day with Caithe, and the slightly older woman can’t deny that it has been quite pleasant. It also appears that Veil particularly enjoys the fact that the two of them can get rather physical, something Caithe hasn’t opposed. Not yet, anyway. “Not if you get yourself into trouble!”

“Are you saying you wouldn’t trust my every word?”

She gives in slightly and turns to look at Veil once more, but smirks and shakes her head. Shortly after, she tilts forward and leaves a brief kiss on Veil’s cheek, making the younger sylvari start to glow in a blushing manner. “You’re cute, but not that cute.”

That seems to be enough to silence Veil for a while, as she is completely taken by what she received. They get back to focusing on their task of attaining some equipment for her house and once they’re done, they wander off together, as Caithe intends to help her with getting settled in as well. Once more, Veil has no complaints about this.

Along the way, they are momentarily distracted by another building, one which Veil is rather familiar with. It is the same place where a lot of the saplings had to wait for reassignments earlier and Veil used to be one of them. It appears that it is still rather full and perhaps that is not so strange to consider, seeing how many new ones awaken constantly.

Veil looks slightly surprised while she slows down and eyes some of the sylvari who sit around on the outside. “There are still so many saplings in there. I would’ve thought they’d at least be moved elsewhere, somewhere more comfortable.”

Caithe sighs. “It is regrettable and still an issue, but not something we can do much about just yet. I believe our people were not truly prepared for how many new sylvari would awaken. Not even the Pale Tree was and that means many have to wait. This is still one of the few places we have for that purpose, unless they wish to sleep out in the middle of the ground, which is technically possible.”
Veil hesitates, fidgeting a bit with the basket she uses to hold some of the items they brought with them from the crafters. She can’t deny the feeling of guilt which fills her, when she realizes how lucky she has been. Being favored by a Firstborn who wishes to do her utmost to help Veil out has obviously been a boon, which is difficult to forget when others seem to suffer. “This…doesn’t feel fair, somehow.”

Caithe nods curtly. “I agree, but that does not mean we’ll let it stay this way. A lot of people are doing all they can to bring forth more areas for our saplings to stay and sleep. I’ve been doing my best to help them organize and I shall continue utilizing all my abilities to make sure this trend changes before it goes too far.”

Veil realizes that she hadn’t considered what Caithe and the other Firstborn have to struggle with by being among those who everyone else looks up to, and she wonders how many other people try to focus on helping their kin out, rather than personal ventures. “Hmm…you think there are other areas which might need some assistance?”

Caithe views her with interest and begins to smile. “Probably. Most districts of the Grove could use a hand right now, I believe.”

“I see. Perhaps it’s time that I join them, then. Maybe I can check in with some of the builders tomorrow, see if I can help them out with some of their tasks.”

It’s hard to tell, but Veil does feel like Caithe looks particularly proud when she wraps an arm around the younger sylvari’s shoulders. “I think that’s a terrific idea. I’m certain that they will accept anything they can get.”

They are just about to leave, due to Veil feeling excited somehow, wanting to get the decorating in her home done so that she will be completely free the next day. Before they depart, they notice how one of the Secondborn appears to be discussing some things with a few of the saplings, not seeming very happy about what he has to relay. “I apologize to all of you, but we simply do not have enough space yet”, he says. “There are so many areas which needs to be expanded and improved upon before we can fully house all of you. It will be done, but the Mother Tree asks that you be patient.”

A few of the younger ones try to argue, but he can’t really do much for any of them, which quickly makes them give in. When he walks away, Veil’s eyes are drawn towards a person that she somehow feels like she recognizes. “Wait a moment”, she tells Caithe.

The Firstborn arches her brow and looks at Veil. “What is it?”

Veil lifts her hand and points towards a specific individual. “Is that not Sieran?”

Caithe blinks and follows the path to which she’s directed and notices the same woman which she first found Veil with days ago. “Oh, you’re right. Hmm, that’s peculiar.”

While Caithe is curious, Veil is a little bit more concerned. “Why would she be here? She was one of the very first of us in the third batch. She has been waiting here during all those days? That’s…that’s not fair.”

“True, but like I said, it’s not easy to find places for everyone.”
“But Caithe, she was one of the first. She was with me. She has sat around here ever since we awoke and now when I have my own place, she has to remain here. That’s not how it should be! She should’ve been among the first to get personal living quarters too.”

Caithe doesn’t really know what to tell her, seeing as how it does sound like a reasonable argument.
“I’m not saying you’re wrong, but…perhaps there has simply been a misunderstanding of some sort? We could ask the others about it.”

It appears Veil is not about to accept that and shakes her head, immediately starting to walk rather briskly in Sieran’s direction.
“I will make this right.”

“Eh, Veilidh? What are you doing?”

There isn’t any response, and Caithe sighs, having to follow the younger sylvari to make sure she doesn’t create problems for anyone. Again.
Veil stops not too far from Sieran, who appeared to be wandering back into the building.
“Sieran! I haven’t seen you since I left.”

The other woman appeared to be fairly downtrodden at first, but when she hears Veil’s voice, her face shines up and she smiles.
“Veilidh! Oh, there you are! I wasn’t sure what had happened to you. How are you doing?”

Veil smiles and places one of her hands on Sieran’s arms. She has at least been given some clothes, so that’s an improvement.
“I’m fine, thank you, but I’m more concerned for you. You’re still here? Shouldn’t you have been assigned to at least a slightly less crowded area by now? We have been awake just as long, haven’t we?”

Sieran hesitates, her gaze falling to the ground.
“I probably should have, but things have not been…easy.”
She makes an effort to stop herself from grimacing, as if she’s trying not to look all too unhappy.
“I’m…not particularly good at negotiating for myself and those who are tend to be handled first. Besides, a lot of the others, especially the sylvari of the Cycle of Night, seems to really need the care, so…”

“But that doesn’t seem fair. You shouldn’t have to wait for this long.”

Sieran raises her arms and looks at Veil again.
“Oh, that’s alright! I-I don’t mind waiting for others, although I obviously wish our situation was slightly different.”

Veil frowns, not liking what she hears. It appears that Sieran may have been pushed down the ladder, due to not wanting to ask for help nor show that she’s more important than anyone else. A commendable attitude, but it makes her suffer in return. This is not something she should have to do and Veil sees how there’s an opportunity for her to act here.
She grabs Sieran’s hand and then begins to lead her out of the house, with Caithe still watching both of them.
“Come with me.”

“Uh, where are we going?”, she asks, letting herself be pulled along.

“To my home. I’ve received a room in one of the new houses.”
“Oh, that’s nice! Congratulations.”

Veil sighs.
“Well, it doesn’t feel right to keep it for myself when you are sitting in here. Until things change, I want you to sleep in my room.”

The statement is a surprise for both Caithe and Sieran, but the latter soon turns to excitement instead.
“Wait, are you serious?”

Veil smiles at her and squeezes her hand a bit further.
“Of course I’m serious! I will not leave a sister of mine to be uncomfortable when I can share the space I have.”

Caithe hears all of it, not being quite as confident in Veil’s decision.
“But, Veilidh, your room isn’t all that big. It will be rather cramped in there if both of you are to share it.”

“So? We both slept in that big building together with all of the others before. Compared to that situation, letting Sieran and I share my room is no big deal.”
She wraps an arm around the woman next to her.
“I will do anything for a friend, and I hope you and I will become as much.”

Sieran smiles brightly and leans against her, resting her head on Veil’s shoulder.
“I hope so too.”

Caithe sighs as she views the two of them like this, but she’s glad that Veil cares at least. Perhaps this attitude will be the kind of positive influence that the sylvari needs.
Caledon Forest, the place where the Pale Tree has her roots dug into, has gained the status of a homeland for the sylvari, not just for being where they awaken, but also because it is the region where the majority of their people feel most comfortable. The vegetation provides a good environment to blend in, the climate is rather warm and there are excellent opportunities to gather food and resources. It’s not without dangers, of course, but that is why some have chosen to take up arms and defend the rest of their people from any hostile creatures.

While Caithe would not count herself among one of the guards of the forest, she does often travel through it and there are many reasons why. She finds the depth of the jungle a good place to be alone, whenever she yearns for solitude, but it also provides interesting challenges and opportunities to lend a hand to other sylvari who have only just begun their own explorations. Today’s little stroll is partially to get some time for herself, but also to help patrol the jungle. She knows that the Wardens, the small group which may be the only force that can appropriately be called a sylvari military, tends to appreciate Caithe’s aid, due to her skill and general knowledge.

However, Caithe is not only good at staying out of sight from her enemies, but she also tends to be rather observant. That is why she sees how she’s not alone this day. Whenever she passes by a corner to another section of the forest, she makes sure to glance over her shoulder, and even though it’s clear that her pursuers are trying to stay hidden, they are not the subtlest of individuals.

It’s been a couple of weeks since Veilidh and Sieran moved in together and while they have attempted to find a spot for her, the latter still lives with Veil, as things have moved very slowly. Part of Caithe suspects that Sieran might be doing this on purpose due to really enjoying Veil’s company, but she chooses not to say anything. Veil appears to like Sieran a lot as well, so what’s the harm in letting them stay together? By now, they can practically be called sisters and Caithe doesn’t want to get in between that. They will need each other in the future, once they inevitably feel that the Grove isn’t big enough for their curiosity.

Is that perhaps why the duo has followed her today? Caithe feels like she should stop and question them, but she’s also interested in seeing what they’ll do and if they can keep up. She doesn’t like to admit it, but she worries for Veil a lot and cares for her wellbeing, more than she does for others. But that also makes her wonder if she’s being too protective, stopping the younger woman from growing and reaching her full potential. Even in simple scenarios like this one, she believes it might be best to leave Veil be, at least until anything risky occurs.

In the meantime, as Caithe begins to move again, Sieran and Veil stands up from the bush they were hiding behind and stealthily chase after her. They’re in their usual clothes at this time, Veil having chosen her black cloth shirt and pants, with some leather shoes, while Sieran currently prefers to utilize sylvari crafted ones in a combination of large leaves and branches, mostly in shades of bright green and yellow. She has expressed interest in getting a pair of clothes similar to Veil’s, but they have not yet had the opportunity to acquire any. There have been talks of reaching out to more of the people in Tyria, now that it’s pretty clear how the rumors of sylvari are spreading, which means Sieran may get her wish eventually.

At this time, Sieran looks fairly unsure, though, as she follows her sister.

“Veil, you haven’t told me what we’re doing out here. Why are we walking through the forest like this? The Wardens said-“
Veil gestures with her hand for Sieran to lower her voice and whispers shortly after.
“Yes, yes, I know what the Wardens said, but just trust me, alright? I have a good reason for it.”

“Which is?”

Veil hesitates for a moment, her eyes still focused on Caithe in the distance, watching how the slightly older woman moves through this landscape with such incredibly casual grace. She’s silent, efficient and swift, as if she knew where every rock, twig and leaf sprouts from and can avoid them all, to be like the wind above them.
“I…can’t tell you yet. Just…follow me. And try not to make all too much noise.”

Sieran sighs briefly, knowing she shouldn’t argue, but this simply feels strange.
“But it’s Caithe, though. Why would we be following her? Do you expect she’s doing something wrong?”

A reasonable assumption, but Veil doesn’t want her to get the wrong idea.
“No, no, nothing like that. It’s…hard to explain why, though. How about if we just go together and I’ll show you what’s going to happen?”

It’s not like she has much choice, so she shrugs.
“Very well, if you think that’s best.”

They continue to pursue Caithe through the jungle, with Veil moving ahead of her sister and doing all she can to let Sieran keep up across various obstacles.
Unfortunately, as their attention is upon Caithe’s location, they do not quite realize what happens in their surroundings, nor when they stumble right into trouble.
When leap over some more bushes and continue past a set of large rocks, on the other side, they are approached by some strange creatures. There are two of them, not particularly tall, but fairly long. They have black fur, four legs, lengthy tails, somewhat pointed ears and yellow eyes. Most of all, they have sharp claws and fangs, and they bare the latter towards the sylvari once they get close enough, emitting a growling noise.

“Whoa”, Veil says, while widening her eyes, raising her hands and taking a step back.
“Erm, hello there, kitties.”

Sieran notices them as well now and swallows uncertainly.
“Oh dear, this isn’t good. I believe they told us about these in training. Jaguars, right?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

For now, the two predators stay at a slight distance, but they’re spreading out, as if to see what angle would be best to pounce from.
“Look, we just want to continue walking and finding our way through the forest, so if you simply allow us to pass by, we’ll leave you—“

When she takes a step forward, one of the jaguars growl and lashes out with its claws, making Veil jump back, bumping into Sieran.
“Okay, I guess that’s a no.”

Sieran glances between the two cats and feels her own anxiety rising.
“I’m assuming this is not what you wanted to show me.”

“Definitely not.”

“Alright, should we maybe turn around and try to see if we can outrun—“

However, just as she looks behind them, two more of the same type of felines comes in from the other side, slowly approaching in the same menacing way.
“…okay, maybe not.”

The sylvari duo pushes further into each other, their eyes following the predators on either side, getting ready to dodge or whatever else is necessary.

“Well…shit.”

“So, I don’t suppose you had a plan for how to get out of this type of situation?”

“Not really. I wouldn’t have thought that we’d stumble into anything so dangerous this close to the Grove.”

She raises her eyes momentarily, trying to examine their surroundings and hoping to find a solution.

“Don’t worry, I’ll figure something out.”

Sieran takes a deep breath and then scowls.

“I have an idea. My trainer has been trying to teach me a certain move. I can try it now.”

“What? Sieran, didn’t she say that you haven’t-“

“Here we go!”

The young sylvari raises her hand, making a light shine from her fingers and she uses it to draw a magical rune in the air. Once it’s done, she pushes it and gestures with her hand towards the ground. Both of them, along with the four jaguars, all feel how the ground begins to rumble, making Sieran smile.

“Hah, I think it’s working!”

“Are you sure? I’m not confident that it’s supposed to be shaking this-“

And that’s as far as she gets, because a second later she’s being flung into the air by the rocks which burst up from below them. While the cats mostly seem to have avoided the eruption, the two sylvari are thrown towards different sides, both of them emitting shocked screams as they fly a couple of meters and then crashes hard into the dirt.

Once she manages to push herself into a seated position, Veil feels rather dazed, putting a hand on the side of her torso, even though it doesn’t do much to decrease the pain. Unfortunately, the next thing she’s exposed to is how the jaguar duo which was closest to her has begun to advance on her position. They were spooked at first, but now that she’s completely unprotected, they try to seize that advantage as quickly as possible. Thankfully, they are not swift enough.

Another individual lands right in front of Veil, like a shadow descending upon her. This shadow manages to parry the first of the attacks from one of her opponents, before utilizing a finely crafted dagger, with a dark red flower at the top of the hilt, to make a shallow cut in the other jaguar’s side.

Veil looks up to see Caithe standing there, not saying anything to her opponents, only glaring menacingly and holding a firm offensive stance. Due to one of them being damaged, they pull back and hiss towards her, trying to keep up appearances, but being too weak to strike back. Eventually, they flee.

“Caithe! I…I didn’t see you coming.”

The older sylvari gives her a brief skeptical look, before she’s distracted by a shout from Sieran’s direction.

“Stay here, I’ll be back.”

She leaps away again before Veil can even respond and finds the other woman currently trying to keep her opponents away by staying behind a rock and swinging a loose branch at them. It doesn’t go very well, as one swats the branch away and the other tries to bite at her leg.
Fortunately, it does not manage to dig very far, as Caithe appears behind it and slashes her dagger at its leg to make it drop its hold. After that, she makes another shallow cut at the back of the other and these two flee as well.

“Oh, thank you, Caithe! I didn’t think I would make it out of there. I was afraid—“

“That you would get yourself killed? Yes, I noticed as much”, Caithe responds with a rather scolding tone. A second later, she notices something further down Sieran’s body – a golden sap-like liquid.

“Dammit, you’re bleeding.”

Sieran looks somewhat ashamed and tries to put it out with her hand.

“It…it only hurts a little. The jaguar didn’t manage to bite me very hard, so…”

Caithe shakes her head and then moves a hand under her clothes to fish out a thinner and more bendable piece of leaf.

“Let me put this around your leg and it should stop the blood from going too far. We’ll get you to the healers once we return to the Grove.”

About a minute later, after she has wrapped the bandage around Sieran’s wound, Veil comes stumbling towards them.

“Sieran! Are you alright?”

“Yes, I’m fine, mostly. Caithe helped me out and—“

The older woman stands up and scowls at Veil.

“Did I not tell you to stay where you are? I was going to come get you.”

Veil lowers her gaze to the ground and Caithe shakes her head.

“You two are all too eager to risk yourselves. Why don’t you ever listen to me? Did I not say that it’s too dangerous for you to be out here right now?”

The guilt upon both of their faces is rather blatant and they can’t even keep their eyes on Caithe.

“You did”, Veil says quietly.

“And yet you didn’t care. Why did you leave the Grove to begin with? Why are you following me?”

Veil and Sieran share a quick glance, and while the latter is unsure, the former looks even more ashamed. Must’ve been her idea, then.

“I, erm…wanted to see what you were doing. You’re all alone out here in the jungle with all the dangers around. I was worried.”

Caithe arches one of her brows skeptically.

“Worried for me? Veilidh, dear, there’s no point in that. As you surely saw earlier, I know what I’m doing as I have a lot of experience. The two of you do not. Besides, shouldn’t both of you be at the community training right about now? That’s where you’re supposed to learn how to defend yourselves against exactly these types of attacks.”

Veil hesitates, fidgeting with her hands and isn’t sure what to say. Sieran feels similarly reluctant to speak, but doesn’t like the silence either.

“Well, we were, yes, but Veil thought we could do something more fun and useful, so I came with her.”

Of course she did. A few weeks ago, it was Sieran getting Veil into trouble and now she’s doing the same thing in reverse.
“Veilidh? Something you’d like to say?"

For several more moments she really doesn’t, but realizes this won’t last. She takes a deep breath and tries to struggle with her uncertainty.

“I just…didn’t really want to stay there. It wasn’t my thing.”

Caithe rolls her eyes and folds her arms.

“You’re bored, aren’t you? Veilidh, I know that there are a lot of new things that you want to try, examine and explore, but you can’t do that around Tyria without being able to defend yourself. Your attitude is dangerous to have in your situation, especially with what is expected of us in the future. You have to learn how to fight in some capacity.”

Veil exhales and shakes her head.

“No, that’s not what I meant. I’m not saying I don’t want to learn how to fight, but I simply… didn’t want to stay in the community training.”

“Why not? There are lots of talented people that can help you out, you know, even the Luminary. If you want to learn something new, they can give you all you need. I even heard Kahedins expressed interest in teaching you personally.”

“Mm, I know”, Veil says skeptically. “But I…I don’t want to learn from them.”

She raises her eyes, slowly and carefully, to meet Caithe’s gaze.

“I want to learn from you.”

Caithe blinks in surprise and hesitates how to respond. She hadn’t expected such sincerity.

“Me? Why would you want that?”

“Isn’t it obvious? As you mentioned before, you know what you’re doing and your skills can easily surpass most of the other people in there, even the other Firstborn. Plus, I trust you more than anyone else.”

Even the Pale Mother, but she doesn’t go so far as to say this.

“You’re a Firstborn, you’re quick, stealthy and tactically minded, along with moving like a shadow through the woods. Who else than you could teach us how to fight properly?”

Caithe opens her mouth, but has to stop herself as she’s unsure what to say. It is a lot of praise, probably not unfounded either, but there are other problems.

“I’m not saying you’re wrong per se, but, at the same time…I’m not a very good teacher, Veilidh. In fact, I think most would say I’m pretty bad at it. It’s not a good option to follow my path.”

Veil shakes her head and shrugs.

“I don’t care if it’s not good for me. We should be allowed to choose our own paths and I would prefer mine to be linked with yours.”

She both looks and sounds pretty determined, something Caithe hadn’t anticipated either. It really seems she must’ve prepared herself for this or simply knows exactly what her heart tells her.

Caithe glances momentarily at Sieran, who seems mildly surprised as well.

“Is that what you want as well?”

“I…I don’t know. I haven’t thought about it, actually”, Sieran responds.

This isn’t enough to help Caithe with her decision and she wavers. Should she agree and do it anyway? That she cares for Veil is undeniable at this time and it’s possible for them to do a lot of good together, seeing as how they share their Wyld Hunts. But, at the same time…

“I suggest that we go speak with the Pale Tree, see what she thinks. She may be able to give us another perspective.”
She shifts her position to help Sieran, by lifting the young sylvari into her arms and carries her back to the Grove, with Veil following. Secretly, Caithe kinda hopes that the Mother Tree chooses to recommend a more cautious approach.

Chapter End Notes

Of course I was gonna have a chapter where Caithe protects Veilidh. Couldn't avoid it.
"She protec, she attac" - okay I'll stop
Growing prospects

It is with a little bit of caution that the Wardens have viewed Veilidh’s recurring visits to the Omphalos Chamber. It’s not that they are particularly suspicious of that she would do anything to the Mother Tree, but they wonder if she perhaps gets herself into trouble too often. In the past few weeks, she has visited the Avatar of the Pale Tree more than most Secondborn had done in between the months of their birth and the awakening of the third batch of sylvari. That said, Veil’s reasons for coming are rarely unjustified.

Once they arrived and Caithe called for a meeting, the Pale Tree immediately made some space for them, making sure that no one listens in on their conversation. There may be some favoritism at play in here, which Veil isn’t ignorant of and she wonders if that will hurt her in the future somehow.

Soon after, Caithe informs their mother of what occurred out in the forest and all three, Sieran included, can easily notice the lines of worry on the avatar’s facial features.

“I see”, she says, when her older daughter is done.

“So, you went out into the jungle without proper protection or defensive skillsets, practically endangering yourselves to a fairly substantial level.”

Both Veil and Sieran feel bad about it, and lowers their guilty gazes to the ground. The former fidgets with her hands, while the latter nervously nudges her foot into the ground.

“Well”, Veil starts, making Caithe frown slightly, “we uh…we never meant to get into trouble, mother. I mean, it wasn’t entirely our fault. Both of us were certain there would be no immediate dangers this close to the Grove. Isn’t that the Wardens’ jobs, after all? They’re supposed to keep things saf-“

“Veilidh”, Caithe interrupts her gently and the younger sylvari spots a disapproving look on her face.

Veil sighs, knowing she can’t really make excuses here. It wouldn’t be right to blame this on anyone else.

“I’m sorry, mother. It was foolish of u…of me, to get Sieran into this. We promise we won’t do it again.”

The Pale Tree watches the two of them, one of her hands currently resting around her chin, a finger tapping on her lips as she considers the situation.

“It was indeed reckless of you to leave the Grove in this state”, she admits, “and put yourselves at risk. I would never recommend nor condone such actions…but I also understand them.”

This surprises not just the two of them, but Caithe as well.

“You do?”, asks Sieran.

“I do. I figured already from the start that the two of you would seek danger and excitement. This is partially due to your young age, of course, but also your natures. I am able to read each of my children and predict what might occur through examining your personalities and general growth. It was not difficult to guess what paths you might take. It is why I cannot blame you for what you chose to do.”

Caithe folds her arms skeptically.

“But, mother, they could’ve gotten killed. Had I not been there…”

“Yes, I know, my dear, but this is who they are at their very hearts and they should not be
punished for expressing themselves."

Her statement makes both of them smile, happy that the Pale Tree can understand them so well. One who clearly seems to disagree, though, is Caithe.

"Perhaps we should at least take precautions, mother? Thicker and wider patrols for the Wardens, for example. I don't want someone to get hurt."

The Pale Tree turns towards her with a soft gaze.

"If you think that is best, then I shall suggest as much to Niamh. I trust both of your judgements, my dear."

Not wanting to question her mother too loudly, Caithe chooses to push the matter out of her head for now, and moves along with the previous topic.

"So, what do you wish to do now then? With these two, I mean."

The Pale Tree seems to know what she's talking about and nods.

"Ah yes, we should discuss the matter of why Veilidh followed you. The idea of you teaching them sounds rather interesting. What do you feel about this, Caithe?"

She was expecting this approach, but also somewhat dreading it. They can't avoid it now, but perhaps she can at least move carefully.

"Well, first of all, I would like to say that I believe the community training, in general, has been very useful for most of those who have attended it. The majority of saplings seem to enjoy it and they are learning valuable skills for how to defend themselves. Niamh should get special credit for this success. Not only does it promote cooperation, but also helps spread our knowledge on a wider scale."

Caithe doesn't look at Veil, but the younger woman knows what kind of gaze she would be getting.

Shortly after, the rogue falters slightly.

"However, as I can be a somewhat…solitary creature as well, I can see why not everyone enjoys it and might prefer a change."

"You were among the first as well, and did not have to experience it."

"No, that’s true and perhaps I am lucky in this regard. As for what Veilidh asked of me, well…"

She raises a hand and scratches her neck skeptically.

"I have my doubts that I would be capable enough, mother. I am not a teacher, nor have I ever been. You should know this already."

The Pale Tree views her with interest and there is comprehension in her eyes, but it’s uncertain if they’re on the same level.

"Perhaps, but you haven’t really tried it out much so far, correct?"

Caithe hesitates, realizing she can’t deny this statement.

"This is…partially true, yes. I suppose I haven’t had an abundance of followers up until this point, but I have had some."

"No more than a handful."

She can feel some anxiety building up, knowing what way the avatar is pushing her. The Pale Tree may not be forceful, but like a mother, she is ready to nudge her children in the path she sees as most appropriate. In Caithe’s eyes, that can be both advantageous and tiresome.

"Mother, it’s not just about how many I have trained or my skill, but the fact that…my path isn’t an adequate one to wander, especially not for these two. It’s risky and unstable."
The avatar smiles gently.
“I disagree. Your skills and knowledge are rather broad, and even if I know that you are not particularly comfortable in this role, I truly believe you have the opportunity and possibility to grow into it.”

Should she feel proud that her mother has such faith or discomfort that she’s being led down a path that she’s doubtful of? Certain words of the past from another individual flow through her mind, but she tries to let them remain ignored.
“I guess I could, but I’m not sure it’s that simple. Remember that I often travel into the forest and other sections of our lands. It’s dangerous out there.”

“Is that a concern? You will be there with them, my dear, and that should be enough, should it not?”

Caithe shakes her head.
“You shouldn’t be so confident, mother. I have my own doubts that I will be able to protect them at all times. Look at what happened earlier. I took my eyes off them for a minute and didn’t notice how they were assaulted by jaguars until they screamed.”

Veil clears her throat.
“It…wasn’t a scream. More like a cautious shout.”

Caithe rolls her eyes.
“Regardless, if it should happen again and I’m not fast enough, I might lose someone. Is that a risk you wish to take?”

The Pale Tree attempts to smile reassuringly at her, while closing the distance to put a hand at her shoulder.
“You should have more faith in yourself, my child. I trust you in this matter, just as I always have.”

The touch may be soothing, but Caithe is certainly not satisfied with that conclusion. However, one who seems to like her reaction is Veilidh. Quietly, she really enjoys how protective the older woman is being right now. She has shown to be very kind and compassionate thus far, but this also displays a certain overabundance of care to shield Veil from threats.
“But, mother…they haven’t the means to fight if necessary. If I go too far from them at any point, they are vulnerable.”

The avatar shrugs.
“Then we shall find a way to equip them appropriately.”

“Mother!”

The Pale Tree chuckles and lifts her hand to caress Caithe’s cheek.
“Do not be so nervous, my dear. I know and understand how you feel in this matter, but there is no need to falter. This is an excellent opportunity for you to grow as well and I definitely believe that you should seize this chance.”

Caithe shuts her eyes, fighting with the feeling of wanting to please her mother versus her own doubts and fears. It makes her sigh.
“I still don’t like this, despite your trust. There are other obstacles than just the dangers too. What about the actual methods? Sieran uses magic and I have no such skill. How can I help her at all?”

This brings a thoughtful expression to the avatar, who hadn’t considered this angle.
“Ah, yes, you are right, of course. We would have to solve this issue.”
Sieran, would you possibly consider splitting your training somewhat? Perhaps some with the community of spellcasters inside the Grove, to grow your magic and then the more combat-oriented one with Caithe?”

Sieran offers an eager smile for her mother.
“Oh, yes, of course! That sounds rather exciting, actually. Hadn’t thought I’d be able to get such an opportunity. It’s cherry!”

Veil shows a similar expression.
“Well, if she can do that, then so can I. Maybe I’m not a magic user, but I have no interest in becoming a warrior either. I could study various techniques with some of the community here, and then join Sieran during our lessons with Caithe in the jungle.”

This prospect makes the Pale Tree rather excited, while Caithe shakes her head.
“Splendid! Yes, I certainly believe this could be a very valuable step for all of you to evolve and become even stronger.
So, what do you say, Caithe?”

The rogue buries her face in her hands, feeling how all of the defenses she had tried to build up are crumbling around her.
“Fine. Fine! I give up. You both win, I suppose.”

Veil chuckles and Sieran grins, as the two sisters hug each other, and then redirect their attention to the Pale Tree. They run up to her and embrace her as well.
“Thank you, mother, for being so understanding”, Veil tells her.

The Pale Tree wraps her arms around them, patting their backs tenderly and lovingly.
“Always, my sweet children.”
A thorn's range

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

1306 AE – Northern Caledon Forest, Maguuma Jungle

The jungle of Maguuma usually has a certain duality to it, between blissful serenity and eerie tension. The first stems from the various beautiful sights and the lack of any major constructed settlements, as most other people of Tyria have abandoned these territories for a number of reasons.

The latter, however, is created from the fact that, despite a lack of cities and towns, the forest does still teem with life and a lot of it is not one that most would deem as harmless. In fact, much of the reason that humans, charr or even asura – who built their home in the sky – try to stay at a distance, is because of the risks involved in living here. With the arrival of the sylvari, however, this may now change.

While Caledon rarely experiences much noise except for calls from animals or the brief action of predators taking down prey, one of the northern sections in this area is hearing a very different echoing sound, in the form of projectiles being ejected. It’s not quite the same as when other races use their firearms, but it has a similar tinge to it, although drifting closer to the sound of branches being bent or broken. Instead of it coming from people wandering recklessly, though, it’s the purposeful act of a few specific individuals trying to carve a passage through the forest.

During the past year, as Veilidh and Sieran have been following Caithe around, their skills have improved on multiple levels and the progress they’ve made has impressed Caithe more than she expected. Their fighting styles appear to complement each other fairly well too, with Veil usually making sure to deal the most devastating damage with her pistols, while Sieran supports her with various elemental magic. This would give space for another at the front, of course, and Caithe has taken this position for the time being, but often tells them that they need to find a substitute at some point. She won’t be able to travel with them at all times.

Today is a fairly special occasion, at least for Veil. Caithe wanted to take the two of them up into the north and scout the Wychmire Swamp, as the Wardens have been contemplating the idea of building some form of outpost up here. It’s not exactly a safe area, not only due to the beasts who live within, but also the lack of proper visibility.

Sieran would’ve come with them, but as she had to do some extra magical practice closer to the Grove, Veil was the only one available. Caithe wondered if they should cancel it, but Veil insisted that they go anyway. She will admit that this was partially due to the excitement of getting some alone time with Caithe, although it’s difficult to say if the other sylvari shares this feeling.

Veil has definitely been growing into her own person since the days when she first ran into trouble with the jaguars and other dangers during their first trek. She has become surer of herself and there’s certainly notions of what path she’ll choose from here on out. She has been particularly involved with the builders of the Grove, helping to create and develop both new equipment and techniques. That said, the other sylvari have definitely noticed how she’s starting to think in other directions, wanting to branch out. Her skills will remain too limited if she sticks to only one type of skillset.

At this time, she’s utilizing some custom-made pistols – built by herself – made from branches and a special type of bark, which makes the bullets be ejected faster. Caithe hasn’t said it out loud much, but she is proud of seeing Veil performing so well and finds it intriguing how she’s not simply following Caithe’s way of thinking, but doing her own thing.
Both of them have sensed that there’s a notion of something else between them, what could possibly be described as attraction, but it’s hard to tell whether it’s romantic yet or not. Neither have dared to act on it.

As they’re scouting the swamp together, Caithe is in her usual attire, a very fitting dark green outfit which matches most of their surrounding territory. Veil, however, has expanded her selection of clothes, most of them still tied to those of other major races on Tyria. She’s currently equipped with a long burgundy-colored leather coat that has quite a tall collar, a thick belt drawn around her waist, heavy long boots and some grey short cloth pants. Her coat does have some protective capabilities, but it is also equipped with a lot of pockets for the various things she has stored in it, to help her out in difficult situations.

So far, this little scouting session has gone very well, with remarkably little resistance. In fact, they’d almost classify it as too good. As they try to walk along a small path in between some pools of murky water, Veil glances at Caithe, seeing a worried frown on her face.

“What is it?”

Caithe briefly shakes her head.

“I’m not sure. It just feels…wrong, somehow. The Wardens told me about an abundance of danger that their scouts had encountered, but we’ve seen very little so far.”

It’s not like it has been completely empty, though. They did face some very angry and less sentient plants earlier, as well as a few large bugs who got in their path. Both were chased away by smart applications of force.

“You think they might’ve been mistaken?”

The older sylvari shrugs.

“Perhaps, or maybe they simply overestimated what they saw. Some of the Warden scouts are still very young and inexperienced.”

This makes Veil arch her brow and let a small smirk form on her lips.

“Age doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with skill, you know.”

Caithe glances towards her companion, seeing the playful look in her white eyes.

“I meant younger than you, dear.”

“My statement still stands.”

“Veilidh, you know I respect your skills and they can never really be compared to most.”

“Well, I was trained by the best.”

Caithe is about to respond to this in a playful manner of her own, but the frown returns to her and she stops, starting to look around them instead. Veil follows this notion, but doesn’t know why.

“You saw something?”

“No…but I have a bad feeling. I believe we are being watched.”

Instinctively, Veil’s hand travels down to the leaf-crafted holster hanging from her belt and she grips the handle for one of her pistols.

“More beasts?”

This time, Caithe slowly shakes her head and the two of them begin to place themselves back-to-back, something done without any signs having to be given. It’s like second nature to them at this point.
“I get the sense that these are likely sentient.”

Their gazes move around quickly and searchingly, hoping to find what it is that Caithe is sensing. She doesn’t really have magic like Sieran, but both of the younger sylvari have always trusted her instincts. She can see and feel an attack happening with frightening accuracy. Veil has speculated if it’s due to Caithe’s general suspicion or if she’s simply used to sneaking up on others and therefore can spot someone else doing it from miles away.
Either way, with the heavy mist surrounding them, it’s difficult to see much at all, but a few noticeable developments does occur. To Veil’s surprise, the shadows before her practically begins to move towards them.

“What the…
Halt! Identify yourself!”, she exclaims as she raises her gun.
To her surprise, it’s not any of the animals she has seen in the forest before or creatures like the skritt and hylek, but another sylvari. This one wears a similar plant-based outfit as most of their people, but in some very specific colors, most of them involving moss green and mahogany red. In his hand, Veil can see a sharp thorn dagger and his yellow eyes look at her not as an equal, but as prey.
She manages to wrestle herself out of the emotion and pushes Caithe away.

“Look out!”, she says, shortly before utilizing the speed she has been training with Caithe for the past several months to duck, just barely evading the strike.
Veil tries to get some distance and has to jump away from two more slashes made by the opposing sylvari.

“What are you doing?! We’re sylvari!”

“You are nothing more than a brain-washed weed”, he says to her calmly, before trying to strike again. Veil is better prepared to react this time, however, and once she dodges the attack, she grabs his arm and pistol-whips him to the face, letting him drop to the ground.
Once she looks up, she sees that more have arrived and some are already engaged in combat with Caithe.

“There’s no use discussing with them! They’re Nightmare Court!”

Veil blinks and already notices how three more comes moving towards her location, two of them wielding swords and a shield, while the last utilizes a staff, preparing some magic.

“What? Who are they?”

There’s no time for conversation now, however, as they have to deal with their various enemies. Caithe is obviously the one most used to combat and despite having to face off with four, she handles it without much issue. She takes one down with a fist to the gut, another with a brief slash at their leg, the third by tripping them over and the last one getting the butt of her dagger to the back of their head. All of it is done within seconds, with none of the courtiers being killed.

Veil is obviously not quite as talented as Caithe and it shows in the way she immediately goes on the defensive, trying to avoid combat and making mistakes, even letting some of her shots miss. However, she does provide them with quite a bit of trouble regardless.
The first of the knight-types manages to knock her down against a nearby rock, but when he goes in to finish the job, she pulls a small vine by her belt, firing off a thorn trap that gets launched straight at his face and chest, making him scream in pain.
The one next to him tries to take over, but Veil is already back on her feet then, dancing out of the slashes from the other sylvari, before finding a use for another gadget of hers. She leaves a trap on the ground, which gets their foot stuck in a large set of sharp branches, causing both pain and annoyance.
There’s obviously the third and final person, the spellcaster, who tries to utilize necromantic magic
to take her down, but she skillfully avoids these strikes, before firing a few shots, one of them hitting the arm and leg of the magic user and making them fall to the ground.

She’s about to assess Caithe’s situation and what’s going on with the other courtiers, but is distracted by a voice which appears right behind her, as if someone speaks directly into her ear. “Hmm, how very curious”, it says with a humorous tone. “You are much better than I assumed you would be. Not just a little weed, but a spirited blossom, aren’t you? Not that it will help.”

Veil widen her eyes and tries to look over her shoulder, but sees no one standing there. “W-what? Who are you? Where did you-”

“Oh, do not worry about such things, my dear, for you won’t have to contemplate them for long.”

Sensing how something is coming at her, Veil immediately tries to turn around and defend herself, but she’s not ready for what she’s about to see. Three identical shapes stand before her, all of them depicting a female sylvari with grey or possibly sage-colored skin, while wearing a long red leaf dress with a low neckline and shoulder pieces of the same material. Her hair is in the shape of thick branches that reaches quite far, and she holds some kind of scepter in her hand.

“Shit…a mesmer?!”

She doesn’t have time to consider it further, as attacks arrive from all three. Even if she attempts to put her defenses back up, she can’t tackle the entire trio and soon feels how magic pierces her. Shortly after, another attack comes from behind and pain surges through her body, making her scream before falling to her knees. The illusions from the other woman slowly closes in, all of them looking down at her with smug gazes.

“You were an amusing distraction, my dear, but nothing more. At this time, you are in my way, so I’m afraid we shall have to say our farewells here. Good night.”

Veil breathes heavily, clutching her chest in pain, while looking up at the various images surrounding her. She tries to find some way out of this, but she’s in too much agony to act quickly. Her weapons have fallen a few meters away and she won’t have time to do another special maneuver. What gadgets does she have left? Any of them that can take her out of this situation? This is not something she has time to ponder for long, as the mesmer raises her weapon, magic swirling around it and she prepares to strike Veil down. Fortunately, it never comes to fruition.

Only a second before she’s given the chance, the illusion is shattered by the blade from a bloom dagger which slices through it, lashing out at any of those nearby as well. The mesmer looks in surprise at how ferociously Caithe defends Veil, before destroying the last of her clones and creating some distance between them.

“Caithe, my love! As magnificent as ever.”

The rogue squeezes her daggers even harder and she turns a frown towards the other woman, keeping herself in between the attacker and Veil.

“Faolain.”

Veil looks at the exchange with both curiosity and worry. What did that woman just say? She groans as she tries to get up into a better seated position, placing herself on one knee, still panting.

“Caithe, do you…do you know her? How did she-“

“Not now.”
It appears she’s too focused on her opponent to respond properly.

Compared to the sly look from earlier, Faolain appears to have calmed down and displays a gentle smile instead.

“It’s very good to see you again, darling. This little absence between us as of late has been hard for me to endure. I missed you.”

The expression on Caithe does not soften, nor does the grip on her weapons. There’s a tension running all over her, but Veil doesn’t quite know why. This is certainly not the stance she utilizes against an enemy, but an entirely new one.

“What are you doing here?”

“I came to see you of course, what else? I would’ve done so sooner, but the reach of our oh-so-dear ‘mother’ prevents me from getting to you on most days.”

Caithe sighs and shakes her head.

“I thought I made it pretty clear already. There is nothing between us any more, Faolain, not after you joined the Court.”

Faolain merely chuckles.

“Nonsense! Both of us know that can never be true. We belong together, like we always have. You know this.

It’s high time you stop ignoring the reality of our situation and join me already. Surely you see all the good we can do side by side. We can bring the true and glorious future for our people that we’ve always wanted.”

Caithe shuts her eyes, raising a hand to rub at her forehead. She looks troubled, possibly even saddened.

“Faolain, by the Dream, what you’re saying is foolish, bordering on insane. Why do you continue to do this? We should be protecting the sylvari together, not killing each other.”

Some of Faolain’s expression seems to falter now as well and her brow furrows somewhat.

“I am protecting them, Caithe. I shield them from the corruptive influence of the Pale Tree.”

“This again? Faolain, you have to see what madness it is to say such things. There’s no corruption surrounding her whatsoever!”

“Untrue! She is the corruption herself, slowly poisoning and shackling our minds to her will, with all that nonsense of being a mother. Are we humans, Caithe? Do we have to beg at the mercy of some supposedly ‘superior’ being? No, we are sylvari and we have no gods. The Court is free, while the entirety of your Grove is not. Until we’ve cleansed this corruption, you will never be able to understand how wrong you have been.”

She glances at Veil momentarily and waves dismissively.

“The one behind you is the same, nothing more than a puppet.”

Caithe’s gaze now turns to a glare and she clenches her hands further.

“Do not dare speak of her in such terms. She is far worthier than most of your blinded followers, certainly better than to receive your snide commentary.”

While she should perhaps feel insulted or angered by this response, Faolain appears intrigued instead.

“So vicious, darling. Not what I had expected from you at all. You’ve never defended anyone in that manner before. Is there something special with this one?”

She glances towards Veil, who meets her gaze, still sitting on the ground.
“Now that I think about it, why were you out here together to begin with? This was no simple trek through the woods, was it? Hmm…is this one of your new apprentices, Caithe? Or perhaps…something more?”

She gets no response from the rogue, but seeing how her tension seems to grow, there is some indication that she’s on the right track. Faolain smirks.

“Very intriguing, indeed. You there, little blossom, what is your name?”

Veil looks up, facing the Court leader with as much confidence as she can muster, but still definitely feeling how she’s exposed here, vulnerable. This woman is very dangerous and Veil is currently not on such a level that she could ever be a challenge. She feels how Caithe gives her a look, one that seems to say ‘don’t’, but Veil has her own wishes. She refuses to show fear, to be dismissed.

“Veilidh.”

Faolain raises her hand and runs a few fingers over her own lips.

“Veilidh…”, she says, as if tasting the name in her mouth. “Mm, beautiful.”

She displays another sly gaze and locks her eyes with the younger woman’s.

“I believe you and I shall see each other again, dear Veilidh. Make sure to remember me. Until then…farewell.”

She waves with her fingers momentarily, before she disperses similarly to her previous illusions, making them wonder if she was ever truly here. At the same time, the other Courtiers who are still alive, disappear into the shadows.

Caithe actually seems surprised by this development, as does Veil. However, she seizes the opportunity to help her comrade up.

“Are you alright, dear? She must’ve hit you pretty hard.”

Veil still holds onto her chest, but tries to get back up with Caithe’s help.

“Yeah…I think I need some rest.”

“Of course. Come, let’s leave this area and find some place where I can better keep you safe.”

Chapter End Notes

You know, using all these words related to nature kinda makes it seem like I'm doing lots of puns (because sylvari), but it's unintentional, I swear.

And yeah, Veil's outfit looks more like it does in the picture on my blog now, but without any of the tech or metal. It'll come later.
A light rain has started pouring down from the open skies, drenching the jungle and washing away any signs of a tainted soil from various violent activities, including those that occurred in the swamp of Caledon. To take cover from this, Caithe and Veilidh have found an arrangement of tall trees with wide crowns, numerous branches and thick roots, ones that they can easily hide beneath. It will be needed in order to grant the younger of the two a little bit of respite and time to rest.

Most of the damage Veil suffered was not only magical, but also mental, as mesmers operate on a separate level from most other fighters. That’s not to say that Veil did not need any patching up, though, which Caithe noticed when she opened up the leather coat. She made sure to apply leaf-based bandages in order to stop any exterior bleeding and then moved on to find a good spot to let Veil sit comfortably against.

“How is that? Tell me if it hurts. I’ll find a better spot for you in that case.”

Veil shuts her eyes, feeling how her body has moved on from pain to exhaustion. Out of instinct, she still keeps her hands around her belly, where she suffered the most grievous of wounds. “No, I’m fine, thank you. I just need a chance to breathe.”

Caithe nods, even as worry continues to glisten through her eyes. “Of course, I don’t blame you.” She turns around, looking towards her bag. “I could get you something to eat, if you’re hungry.”

“Not right now. Maybe when it has healed a bit. For now, I’m not sure I could really swallow anything.”

It’s rare for Caithe to actually feel helpless, as she tends to be good at taking care of herself but, their current situation is certainly different. She can’t try to push or force this into her own pace, because it’s not she who is ailing. “Well, let me know.”

Veil sighs and redirects her sight towards the area around them, looking towards the swamp in the distance, even if it’s not too far away yet. “Feels like creating an outpost here is not a particularly good idea. At least not anytime soon.”

“You’re probably right”, Caithe agrees reluctantly. “I had hoped the situation would be less dangerous but, looks like we will not have luck on our side in that regard. I will discuss the matter with the Wardens but, with the Court so close, it seems an unlikely location for us to inhabit.”

Except for the rain hitting the ground outside of where they’re sitting and the leaves above, it remains silent for a little while, due to Veil descending into her thoughts. Eventually, she sees no way out of the rising dilemma and forces herself to speak. “I want to discuss Faolain. It’s important.”

Caithe takes a deep breath, obviously hesitant to say anything regarding what they witnessed earlier.
“I…understand. I suppose I probably owe you that much, after all that happened.”

Veil nods, glad to hear that they’re on the same page.
“Who is she? How does she know you?”

There’s a few more contemplative seconds that passes by, ones that Caithe spends biting at her lower lip and choosing her words carefully.
“Faolain is…a Firstborn, one who arose from slumber in the same year as me, Trahearne and the others. She and I awoke practically at the same time, with only a slight delay.”
She turns her gaze over towards Veil, letting their eyes meet.
“She is of the Cycle of Dusk, just like you, and for a time, the two of us were inseparable since we left the pods.
Our personalities blended very well and it did not take long for us to care for each other, while throwing ourselves against various dangers in a united force.”

Veil listens intently to every word, not wanting to forget any of it.
“Is this the…friend who gave you that necklace back home? The one in the corner of your room.”

“Yes, that was given to me by Faolain. She felt it would connect the two of us, to show how we belonged together. She has one of her own, in a similar design.”

The next question is not one she wants to indulge or let herself speak, as she is afraid that she might know the answer, but she realizes that she cannot ignore the truth.
“Were you in love?”

This was one that Caithe had anticipated and despite feeling a very strong sensation to deny what should be obvious, she doesn’t. It wouldn’t be right.
“Yes, we were. Very much so, in fact.
For the first two years, despite having certain disagreements, it was going very well between us. We saw the world in a similar light, could accept the truth it offered, even if we did not do so in the exact same way.”

“And that changed?”

“It did, eventually.”
She puts her hands together, fidgeting with her fingers.
“Something…happened between us, which sort of made everything spiral out of control.
Most of all, our beliefs were not as aligned as we had both initially expected and when they were tested, neither of us could find the same answer. The foremost field that this could be seen was in our feelings for the Pale Tree.”
Caithe closes her eyes and exhales heavily.
“You probably already realized it earlier but, she has such an incredibly fierce contempt for our mother. Faolain often spoke of her not as a caretaker, but as a jailor, holding back the sylvari’s true potential.”

“Did she have any proof of this?”

Caithe raises her hand and scratches her cheek in thought.
“Well…according to her, there exists some blatant evidence in the Pale Tree’s behaviour. She used to criticize mother for not loving everything that her children did, especially if she saw those actions as ‘morally wrong’.”

Somehow, that does not surprise Veil, especially after what she experienced earlier.
“And you felt differently, I guess?”
“For the most part, yes. I suppose I have to admit that Faolain may have had some points regarding mother sometimes being quite strict, but in general, I believe that the Pale Tree is a force for good and she cares about us.”

She folds her arms, continuing to look away, somehow being unable to meet Veil’s gaze, one that would be too hard to face.

“There was a…specific event after the Secondborn had awakened and while I do not wish to get into details, I can reveal that it was what finally shattered our relationship. It was certainly not pretty.”

“She left the Grove at this point?”

“She did, yes. I stayed with the Pale Tree, of course, and the majority of the sylvari within her warm embrace, while Faolain went off to join and eventually lead the Nightmare Court. They are the ones which the two of us faced earlier, and I think you can see why I did not feel comfortable being around them.”

To say anything else would obviously be a rather gruesome lie. The way they dealt with Veil and dismissed her very existence was something that felt foreign and so very frightening. She wasn’t even a person in their eyes, or at least that’s the impression she received.

“Can you explain their organization to me? It feels as if we should have been told more about them earlier, since their territory is so close to ours.”

Caithe sighs and nods.

“Yes, of course. Although, I wouldn’t get mad at anyone for not telling you beforehand. I think mother and many of our kind probably hoped that those who left over a year ago now, had not been serious in their claims or maybe even disappeared. Obviously, we were wrong.

At any rate, the Nightmare Court is a sylvari organization, one that might even espouse the concept of sylvari supremacy in certain aspects of it.

It was founded by a Secondborn named Cadeyrn. Just like him, the Court at large rejects the supposedly ‘shackling’ ideas and philosophies of the Ventari tablet, wanting to instead go their own path.

They are particularly attracted to the idea of the Nightmare within the Dream. They believe that the Nightmare is the sylvari’s natural development and it gives them an opportunity to act with true freedom. Obviously, the ideas of the Pale Tree are therefore false and unnatural. It is why they hope to destroy her and ‘free’ all sylvari from her hold, which is what they believe shall happen if she withers.”

Veil has to admit that she thinks such concepts are ludicrous, that the very nature of killing the Pale Tree is not only foolish, but also frightening. She could not imagine losing her, as the Mother Tree means so much to their people.

But she also has to acknowledge that she has been raised within the confines of the Grove and under the watchful eyes of the tree. She can’t dismiss that this has likely influenced her. It’s questionable whether it’s actually a bad thing or not.

“But, even if they say this, they did try to ambush and kill us earlier. Well, me, at least.”

She hears how Caithe snorts and shakes her head.

“That’s what is so amusing about their philosophy, because their actions contradict their beliefs. They simply seek to convert and shackle sylvari to another mindset, even if it’s against someone’s will. I have tried to tell Faolain this, but she merely dismisses it as concerns of someone who doesn’t understand her brethren. If only she could see that we are both shaped by our surroundings…”

Veil stares at her for a little while, seeing how Caithe is likely caught in regrets of the past. In
some ways, that is understandable, but also worrying for Veil.
“I do find their behaviour detestable, but there is something else I need to ask. It is much more…

personal.”
That gets Caithe’s attention, who slowly turns to look at her. Veil searches her eyes for a few
moments before she continues.
“Do you still love Faolain?”

The first few seconds are silent, eerily so and while Caithe does her very best to keep her
expression even, there are cracks beneath the surface that drifts towards it. She is difficult to read,
has always been, but not as much as she may hope.
“We are not together anymore.”

“That’s not what I asked. Do you love her, Caithe? Do you love her even now, despite all the
things she has done?”

Once more, she hesitates and the breaking of her hidden truth continues, as she swallows
uncertainly.
“It’s…difficult. Most days, I’m not sure.”

Veil is not satisfied with that answer, feeling it is cowardly and vague, which makes her doubt
Caithe’s resolve. Even if she refuses to acknowledge this side of her, Veil does have to see how
she’s letting jealousy run its grasp around her.
Instead of continuing this conversation, Veil corrects her position so that she is faced away from
Caithe.

“We should get some sleep. It’s getting dark and I will need to rest before we walk in the
morning.”

Caithe is a little bit surprised, but also unsure, not knowing if what she said was wrong in this
situation.
“But…would you not want to eat or drink before you go to sleep? I am sure that I can-”

“I am fine, Caithe”, she says with a harsher tone than she meant to.
“I’d rather let myself recuperate and eat in the morning, so that we can leave as early as possible. I
want to get home.”

Caithe opens her mouth, but only briefly. Her shoulders slump and her gaze lowers to the ground
as she feels how guilt settles itself in her chest. She’s worried that she may have hurt their
relationship somehow and Faolain’s actions have been part of it.
If only she could have solved this in her own way.

Chapter End Notes

_Caithe and her lovely Dusk-cycle girls._
_
There’ll be more stuff regarding Faolain, as well as Caithe/Veilidh in the future_
The area which is generally called Maguuma is more than just a jungle, more than the perception of it as a twisting forest of vines, thorns, predators and murky water. While the sylvari call it their home, they are not the only ones, nor are they arrogant enough to claim the entire region as theirs. Well, maybe the Nightmare Court would prefer to do such a thing, but the people of the Grove do not.

When Veilidh and Sieran decided that it was time to begin their own extended journey out from their home, both of them knew that they had to start with the jungle, to learn more where they come from and where they must go.

It has been several months since the incident with Faolain now and while that event did not end in a particularly pleasant way for either Caithe or Veil, the two of them have since then been able to mostly mend their relationship. They have grown to care for each other even more, to extent that a lot of people are starting to assume things, but there are still scars which neither of them can ignore. In an effort to give herself some more time to think, Veil decided to discuss the idea of travelling elsewhere with Sieran, one that her sister felt was very exciting.

The first half or so was spent going around the various areas of Caledon, studying each of them in as much detail as the duo possibly could. They tried to learn more about plant life outside of the Grove, of the predators within, magical application on a whole lot of different materials and sometimes even approaching some of the other sentient creatures who live here, like the skritt or the hylek. So far, their efforts have been met with varying success.

Every few weeks, they returned to the Grove to archive their findings, discuss them with others of their people, as well as meeting some of the newly awakened, ones that come much more irregularly now, rather than the batches they may have been used to. It is through some of these talks that they were given the idea of expanding their research to another area in the west, one that the sylvari’s neighbors - the asura - call Metrica Province.

Once the decision was made, it did not take long for the two of them to execute the idea and get into exploring regions which few members of their people have dared to visit. It’s not that no sylvari have interacted with asura since the unfortunate conflict a couple of years ago, which ended the lives of a few Secondborn, but rather that they have really only had diplomatic relations thus far. A few specific sylvari – most of them Firstborn and diplomats – extended their hands in hope of friendship and cooperation for the future a couple of years ago and despite shaky initial contact, the asura eventually agreed that such an approach was preferable to continued hostilities.

This is where the two women find themselves, travelling along the edge of a land they should know and yet one that feels so very unfamiliar.

Metrica isn’t simply part of the jungle, but more like a carved-out region shaped by the asura. The much smaller species have no wish to shatter their surroundings completely, but they do tend to want to shape their own homes rather than use what nature offers. This is why Veil and Sieran witnessed much interesting architecture and structural design, most of it shaped in very square and rectangular ways.

The duo treated this province in a similar fashion as they did the forest, meticulously and carefully spending a lot of time studying the flora, fauna and inhabitants. They took the opportunity to sleep in a few asuran inns, eat some of their food and discuss what their species tend to see as valuable and interesting.
It’s during this time that Veil suddenly realized that she wants to do more than simply talk to these people, to know who they are, and instead focus on learning. She and Sieran spoke of this notion for several days, contemplating the advantages and disadvantages of trying to actually become some kind of students, based on what they’d seen during the weeks spent interacting with asura. Eventually, they both came to the conclusion that it’s worth a try and therefore chose to ask around, hoping to find out what alternatives they have.

Every asura they spoke to seemed very skeptical of the idea that a couple of sylvari could ever learn from them, much less gain admission into any of the colleges. They were free to try, of course, but their chances would be very low. For quite some time, the two were very heartbroken, until one particular individual suggested a possible solution – an apprenticeship. Becoming one of the asura and joining the colleges may be something the leaders frown upon for other people, but there are some in their society that would be willing – perhaps due to a certain arrogance – to teach others directly. Two people, apparently siblings like Veil and Sieran, were recommended as potential mentors.

After about a week of travel from their last location, the sisters have now arrived in the northern parts of the province, which happens to be their destination. It’s here they’ve heard how they should be able to find those who might be willing to teach them more of asuran technology and theory.

At this time, it’s a relatively early morning. The sun pokes through the sparsely placed trees where they’re walking, the air is filled with the fresh smell of the many flowers that grow nearby and in the distance, they can hear the noise of a bird croaking. Well, combined with Veil’s groaning.

“Ugh, this is impossible. We’ll never find that blasted camp!”

Her words make Sieran divert her eyes from the area around them and instead focus on her sister. Veil has not really upgraded her outfit in any way, still wearing the burgundy leather coat she had made last year. She seems to have grown immensely fond of it.

At the same time, Sieran now wears clothes inspired by the same craftsmanship and is dressed in grey pants, a white shirt and a blue jacket wrapped around it. The only difference is that her outfit is completely made of cloth, rather than having any leather.

Spotting the frown on her sister’s face makes her smile, as she tends to see it a little bit too often. Wandering up to her side, Sieran caresses Veil’s cheek and chin.

“Aww, don’t look so grumpy, Veil. Don’t worry about it! I’m sure we will find this place soon enough.”

She gives Sieran a very unamused look before she sighs.

“I’m not ‘grumpy’, alright? We’ve just been out here for days. We should have found it by now.”

Sieran takes a step back and folds her arms.

“Well, are you sure? Maybe the distance is just a bit longer than we first thought.”

Veil seems unconvinced by that reassurance and instead puts her hand down into her pocket, fishing out a rolled-up piece of paper which she unfurls.

“It can’t be. Look at this map they gave us. We should be here”, she says, while pointing out a location in the northeastern section of it.

“I mean, the dots for the camp is not the same position, but it should be fairly close, certainly within viewing distance by now, but all I see are bushes, trees and huge boulders.”

When Sieran comes closer, she slips in behind Veil, placing her hands on her sister’s shoulders and views the map with interest.

“Hmm…why are you so sure that’s our current location?”
Veil blinks, glancing at Sieran momentarily, then back down at her map. “Well, I mean…you can see the landmarks, can’t you?” She points at a rock formation to the west of their location and then down at the map. “Those boulders should be there, right? And then we have the pond somewhat southwest, as well as the edge of the map to the east of us. This arrangement of trees is obviously where we are now”, she states while tapping the parchment.

Sieran is quiet while she tilts her head back and forth, trying to make sure that they’re viewing the same thing. Eventually, the pieces begin to fall into their correct places. “Well, I think you generally have the right idea, but the location may be somewhat inaccurate.”

At first, Veil arches her brow skeptically, then she furrows her brow and looks down on the map. “What do you mean? Where else could we be?”

“First of all, wouldn’t you say that the pond is somewhat too close to us compared to what you assume to be the rock formations? It should be the opposite, right?”

To test this theory, Veil looks up, glances at them and sees that Sieran may have a point. “I…suppose that might be true. But that shouldn’t matter.”

“And the rock formation that you’re talking about is not only too close to the pond, but I believe it’s too small. Wouldn’t this little thing more likely be that hill in the distance?”

Following the direction which Sieran points to, she spots the indicated area and compares it to the size on the map, seeing that the length in between them might also be comparable to what the map has been telling them. “Well, I…”

“And if that’s true, then the camp should be further north, shouldn’t it?”

Veil’s eyes move around searchingly, trying to process what she’s being told, at the same time that she is attempting to accept her mistake. When it’s finally done, she looks up and glares at Sieran. “…let us not discuss this with anyone else, alright?”

Sieran giggles and leans over, planting a kiss on Veil’s cheek. “Love you too, sister.”

The duo continues their journey after this for a few more hours, walking through the landscape, over some hills and eventually wander into a clearing in amidst some trees. That’s when they believe that they finally spot what they’ve been looking for. A few rather short tents have been placed close to, not only each other, but some kind of machines. One of them appears like a large transparent glass tube, with two thick plates surrounding the top and the bottom. This thing is tied to another, smaller machine, with lots of decorative pieces on top, as well what looks like light shaped into some very complex patterns. It’s very possible that this one controls the tube. The tube itself is not empty either, as there seems to be some kind of murky liquid within, which sloshes around.

“There!”, Sieran calls out. “That has to be them, right?”

The two sylvari spots a duo of asura standing by this console, both of them having light brown skin, large ears and small black spots over their bodies. The one on the right has a white thick and curly hairstyle, while wearing a set of green robes. The one next to this person has the same color of hair, but it being tied into a short ponytail instead, and is dressed in a red and black outfit, made up of a coat, loose pants and a shirt. On the second one’s belt hangs two pistols.
Veil studies them thoughtfully before she nods.
“Yeah, that should be them. I can’t see who else it would be.”

“We should go down and ask them either way, right? It’ll be cherry!”

Before she can even make another comment or suggestion, Sieran has started to walk, making Veil roll her eyes and follow suit. Unfortunately, while they start in a rather slow pace in among the trees, this quickly changes as soon as the scenery does.

Out of nowhere, an explosion can be heard from the machines, making the robed asura shriek and fall to the ground. There’s smoke coming from the controlling mechanism, but the tube is the most immediate concern, due to the hole having opened up and some of the liquid now being poured out of it. As it hits the ground, it splits off into several sections. Small puddles of ooze take form and then begin to move like creatures, attacking the asura.

Veil and Sieran quickly share a look, before they unsheathe their weapons and start running.

The gunslinger grabs her weapons and immediately tries to defend the device next to them, as well as hoping to avoid any attacks. It’s definitely not easy and the creatures give them little chance of resistance, mostly due to how much damage they can take.

“Zebb, you gotta move now! Get those containers!”

The robed asura, Zebb, stands up and attempts to head towards the tents, but some of the ooze are already moving to intercept him, making him very frightened.

“I…dammit, they’re obstructing my path!”

“Then grab a gun and start shooting!”

Turning around in order to get some distance from his attackers, he desperately searching for some place to use as cover.

“B-but… I don’t even know how to-“

He looks over his shoulder just in time to see how one of them shoots some kind of slime ball at him and he manages to dodge it at the last second. As the liquid hits the ground, it melts part of the earth like acid.

“…Siingga, the abominations are hurling acidic liquid at me!”

Siingga rolls her eyes and shakes her head.

“This isn’t going to work if you keep running! Just calm down, dammit!”

Zebb doesn’t get any braver when they start to chase him and no words from Siingga can apparently convince him to go back. At the same time, the gunslinger is realizing how she is losing ground as well. Despite attempting to put up temporary turrets to shoot back, the slime that lands on top of these constructs clog their joints, as well as the shooting mechanism.

Thankfully, they do not fight alone for long. As Siingga contemplates leaving the camp behind instead of going on a counterattack, a ball of fire suddenly comes flying from above and lands in among some of the ooze. It shatters into a small explosion, completely destroying a few of the smaller opponents and making the larger ones retreat out of instinctive fear.

Siingga glances over her shoulder and spots Sieran standing there, magic swirling around her hands. The sylvari smiles and nods.

“Don’t worry, we’re here to assist you!”

Siingga looks seriously skeptical of this notion, but she won’t decline assistance.

“Alright, good enough! Fire will help scatter these slippery bastards, but you have to coordinate your attackers better! They can slip into the soil and surround us before we notice it.”

Sieran stops and bites her lip, before she looks down. She kneels down and plants a hand against
the grass and nods. “If you keep them busy from afar, I shall improve our earthly defenses.”

In the meantime, over by the controlling device, Zebb is not alone either, as several gunshots are fired from Veil at some of the ooze to get their attention away from him and when she thinks the creatures are close enough to each other, she lob a orb in among them which explodes on impact, emitting a shockwave with hundreds of thorns, like some kind of fragmentation grenade. The little asura looks shocked at this development and even more startled at Veil’s approach.

“Aagh! You…you’re one of those deranged sentient plant creations! Please, do not harm me!”

Veil rolls her eyes when she hears it and approaches his side. “I’m not here to hurt anyone! Well…other than whatever monsters you’ve created. Can you fix this thing? Can this be stopped?”

Zebb isn’t sure what to say, obviously still panicked by all that occurs around him, along with knowing that they might not last for much longer. “No! We must run! …well, a-actually, I suppose there is a possibility that we can repair the damage which was caused to the device, but I remain skeptical of the probability of success”, he says exceptionally fast.

“Just tell me what to do!”

“The intended ability of my Extrapolating Intelligence Solidificator can be reactivated to negate the development of these abominations, but it cannot be done while my console is scorching!”

Veil frowns as she looks at the field in front of them. The device, as well as the tube, is not doing particularly well at this point and even if they’re burning, the problem is also to get the oozes to give them a bit of space. “Put out the fires. Got it. You have any water?”

“Yes, inside the tents!”

With a curt nod, she spins her pistols around and then runs off to the east while firing along the way, hoping to draw her enemies’ attention. Luckily, because these things don’t actually seem to be that smart, they follow her intended route and manages to pull them away from the console. Once this is done, she puts her hands to the pouches by her belt once more and gets another contraption out. When this one erupts however, barbed vines grow and shoots out of it, surrounding several of the goo-creations, trying to prevent them from moving. She doubts that this is a permanent solution, but it will at least give her a chance to get around them.

After hurrying into one of the tents, she sees a few containers, one of them being filled water. Grabbing the lid, she immediately begins to drag it out of the tent and hurries towards the console, while seeing how the slimes have already started to escape. She fires a few stray shots in that direction, but does not let it distract her. Once she returns to the console, she quickly glances around. “How in the Pale Tree’s name am I going to-…”

She widens her eyes when she gets an idea and looks over towards the other fighters. “Sieran! I’ve got a lot of water here, help me out!”

The other sylvari blinks in surprise, spotting where Veil is standing and what she’s indicating. It doesn’t take long for the little sister to recognize what’s going on. “Oh, of course! Open it up and I’ll handle the rest!”

Not having enough time to consider how to unlock it properly, it pops open when Veil fires right
into it, tossing the lid off and then uses as much strength as she can muster to hurl the water into the air. Most of it would tumble to the ground, but gets caught in Sieran’s elemental gifts instead. After that, she guides it through the air and suffocates as much of the fire as she can feasibly handle. 

Veil grins at the results. 
“Hah, success! Well done, Serry!”

Their victory is somewhat interrupted by several gunshots being fired by Siinga towards the ooze, which has managed to regroup and form several more groups. 
“No time to slack! Help Zebb and get the EIS working again!”

Veil nods and looks towards the other asura. 
“What now? How do we actually start it up?”

Zebb is standing by his console, assessing the damage that has been done and how much can be rectified. 
“The prospect of regaining full accessibility is minimal at best, but I believe we can establish a temporary connection, if we gather some of the spare parts available in the containers around the back of our tents.”

“Got it!”

Veil hurries to follow his instructions and while Sieran and Siinga do their best to defend her, she helps Zebb with the technology. 
It’s not a swift process, nor is it particularly easy, but thanks to Veil’s confidence and ability to partially soothe Zebb’s alarmed state, the two works together in order to momentarily reactivate the device. 
Some sort of light bursts out from the center of the tube, which attracts the slime and they are naturally drawn to it. When they get too close, magical beams are extracted, capturing each of the creatures until they’re gathered in the center once more. Zebb and Veil then utilize some plates in order to seal everything inside and even if this won’t hold forever, it will do for now.

Once it’s done, they’re all allowed to breathe and take the opportunity to calm down. Zebb especially grips his chest and feels how his heart pumps worryingly fast. 
Hoping to ignore this, he looks towards Veil. 
“I…must admit that to being moderately impressed by your swift actions and ability to accurately apprehend and execute my instructions, especially during such a hectic situation. I would not have expected such acumen from…ones of your origin. No offense.”

Siinga nods and while their opponents are locked up, she hasn’t put away her guns just yet. 
There’s a certain tension to her stance still. 
“Indeed. Wouldn’t have thought we’d ever meet any friendly versions of your kind. Weren’t you the people that Vorpp messed around with a while ago? And later blew up his lab.”

Zebb clears his throat, fidgeting with his hands a bit. 
“Now now, Siinga, let us not…uh, create any redundant hostilities here. They did assist us in a critical moment.”

Veil smiles and folds her arms, while Sieran puts her hands to her own hips, both of them seeming pretty relaxed. 
“Don’t worry”, Veil tells them, “we’re not here to fight. Perhaps our people did quarrel a couple of years ago, but that was actually way before we understood better.”

Sieran nods in agreement. 
“Indeed! In fact, the two of us have been looking for you two. If you happen to be the people we
believe.
Are you Professor Zebb and Peacemaker Siinga, siblings and former students of someone called ‘Snaff’?

Siinga doesn’t change her position much, but Zebb appears very intrigued.
“Ohh, yes! That is indeed our names. You have heard of us? Have our activities and marvelous exploits spread all the way to the forest?”

“Well…in a way”, Veil says tentatively.
“For the most part, though, your names were mentioned when we travelled through Metrica. Sieran and I were looking for potential individuals who would be willing to mentor us in a few specific fields.”

Sieran smiles at the two asura.
“We’ve been searching for ways to expand our knowledge as of late and found a few of your people who told us that the two of you would be appropriate to discuss these subjects with. They apparently believed you might be able to help us.”

Siinga arches her brow skeptically, while Zebb looks perplexed.
“They did?”, the sister asks.
“Not sure why they’d do that. While both of us have graduated, we’re not exactly professors.”

Hearing this, Zebb immediately clears his throat loudly.
“Excuse me? I believe you are disregarding certain events of the recent past, sister!”

Siinga rolls her eyes.
“Oh, okay, this guy is a Junior Professor. He’s not gonna be at the top of the College of Statics anytime soon.”

“Preposterous! You are emitting nothing more than baseless assumptions!”

These two are kinda funny, Veil and Sieran will admit that much, but they are a little bit disappointed by what they hear.
“So, there’s no chance that you can actually teach us some of the stuff we need to know?”, Veil asks.

Siinga shrugs.
“I dunno. What are you interested in?”

“Well, personally, I’m an aspiring engineer and would love the opportunity to learn more of asuran technology. Others have said that you have a lot of interesting and unorthodox techniques, Siinga and I would be very glad if you could teach me some of those concepts.”

Sieran inclines her head towards the other asura.
“And I have heard that your knowledge of thaumaturgical theory is quite advanced, Professor Zebb. If you could teach me some of those ideas, I would be most grateful!”

Zebb’s expression brightens and he looks particularly pleased.
“Indeed? That you have heard of it at all is exceptional! Master Snaff have praised my comprehension of transformative ley-line processes in the past and I would love to discuss the details with someone of a similar intellectual level.”

With a heavy sigh, Siinga holsters her weapons and shrugs.
“Well, looks like you’ve already stroked my brother’s inflated ego and you did help us fix our mess, so I suppose it would be very rude to turn you down now. We’ll take you in, I guess.”
Both Veil and Sieran almost glows in joy from hearing it.
“Thank you!”, the former exclaims. “We’re very grateful that you’re willing to give us a chance. We promise that we won’t disappoint.”

Siinga still looks at her skeptically.
“Yeah, yeah, don’t get ahead of yourself, bushy. I don’t like to go easy on people, not even if I’m supposed to be teaching ‘em.”

Zebb has calmed down and clears his throat.
“And I will admit that I remain skeptical of the sylvari’s potential to fully grasp the complex nature of asuran teachings, but I shall be observing your progress intensively.”

Chapter End Notes

Zebb and Siinga won’t have like, major roles in this fic or anything, but I needed to create two asura that I felt were appropriate for Veil and Sieran. You know, not too famous, but at least experienced enough to make an impact.
Veilidh never expected asuran lessons to be particularly easy, especially with all of the techniques, theories and mechanisms that she would have to expand on rather drastically. Even a couple of months after she and Sieran met with Zebb and Siinga, she can’t say for sure that she knows what she’s doing.

Veil won’t claim that things aren’t going well, though. In fact, it’s quite the opposite, as she feels that she’s constantly getting to learn a lot of new things and improving her skills on multiple levels. Siinga has also praised her, even if not to an astounding degree, and she takes any encouragement to heart almost immediately. The only problem, in her mind, is that she hasn’t yet received many chances to actually start from the beginning and build her own creations. Instead, she is mostly expected to modify and improve upon items that the asura have made and then see what she can do with various other modules. From her point of view, it’s a little bit condescending and she will admit that she has wanted to question Siinga’s methods several times, but for now, she keeps silent. Perhaps it’s all part of the plan and it will alter when Veil least expects it.

Today is a similar lesson as before, as Veil finds herself in the edge of the woods, close to one of the asura’s outposts in the region. She’s currently trying to assemble a type of asuran turret and the keyword here is “assemble”. She is meant to put together a device which already exists in blueprints and have specific parts that belongs to it. She isn’t meant to create something unique or original, nothing from scratch. This is what she’d actually want to do, but Siinga insists that she must follow the steps which the older engineer is providing for her. As Veil sees no reason to start a conflict, she does what she’s told.

However, despite not having been instructed to do so, Veil is trying to create her own unique modifications for the turret, at least bringing it closer to what a potential ‘sylvari-style’ version of this technology might be. This means trying to make a module that converts sunlight into energy for longer usage and better concealed plates, for stealthier future applications in battle. It’s not quite as unique as she may have wanted, due to not having enough different parts, but she’s doing her best.

Once she’s finished and gets ready to show Siinga her work, she stands up and looks around.

“Siinga, I’m done! I believe you’ll find my modifications quite intriguing!”’, she calls out, knowing that the asura should be somewhere in the vicinity. Strangely enough, she receives nothing in return. Veil raises an eyebrow in confusion, wondering what might’ve happened. Did she already leave? If that’s the case, she could’ve at least said something.

“Singa, are you here?”

After she waits a few seconds, she starts to get a little bit nervous when she realizes something – it’s quiet, almost eerily so. Where is all the twittering of birds, the rustling of the wind through the leaves? Where’s the distant sound of howling fern hounds and the music of the insects?

Veil gets too unnerved to simply sit still and decides to leave her position, moving back towards the outpost. Unfortunately, she never gets that far, as she feels how she bumps right into something. And that’s the most interesting aspect here – she feels it, but cannot see anything, not at first anyhow. Soon, she spots something in the air, as if coming from the shimmering nature of a near-invisible barrier. What is this? An illusion?

That’s when she senses how she’s not alone anymore and how something closes in on her.

“No one will you hear, little blossom, so there’s no need to yell”, a voice from behind explains,
making Veil turn around.  
“But there’s no need to worry either, my dear. I only wish to talk.”

Suddenly, another illusion disperses and a familiar figure appears in front of Veil, making her widen her eyes in surprise.  
“Faolain!”

The sylvari mesmer smirks at her, seemingly being highly amused as she continues to close the distance between them. Once there’s almost nothing left, she raises a hand and caresses Veil’s cheek.  
“So, you do remember me. I’m glad. I was afraid you might have forgotten my promise.”

Veil grits her teeth and pushes it away, quickly trying to step back and recreate the initial distance. Sadly, she has no weapons, so she can’t actually force Faolain to leave. Well, not like she’d able to even if she had some, but she could seem like a threat at that point. Right now, she’s nothing more than prey.  
“What are you doing here? What do you want?”

Faolain briefly shakes her head.  
“You’re so very tense and hostile, my dear, but you should relax. Like I said, I only wish to talk alone for a bit, without any prying eyes. No Caithe, no Sieran, no rats. Just the two of us and the forest.”

Veil snorts.  
“And all your magic that can easily destroy me if you wanted it to.”

The mesmer smiles and starts to slowly circle around her.  
“I would never use it against you, sweet little Veilidh. This is merely a precaution in order to keep others outside of something that is not their business. They do not belong in what we have to speak about.”

The manner in which she talks always seems to be rather suggestive and Veil isn’t sure whether it’s simply what she’s like or if Faolain is mocking her. Veil folds her arms, still not looking particularly pleased.  
“Well, if that’s the case, I’ll pass, thanks. I would prefer to be on my own.”

Faolain appears behind her, chuckles and runs a hand slowly down Veil’s back.  
“Unfortunately, you have no choice. I am not leaving until I have said my piece. Don’t worry, though, as I only want a little bit of your time. You can grant me that much, can you not?”

The look Veil is faced with from the other woman is a rather smug one, as Faolain is very aware of how much power she has here. Seeing as how she can continue arguing and possibly make the mesmer even angrier or give in and let her prattle on, the choice seems pretty obvious.  
“Fine, if you must.”

Faolain leans closer and puts a quick kiss on her cheek, making Veil frown.  
“Thank you, blossom.” Shortly after, she starts to wander around the little sealed off area she has created.  
 “During the several months since we last met, I have been studying you from a distance, learning more about you and what you’re capable of. I must apologize for our first encounter, as I completely misunderstood the role which you play. Contrary to my initial belief, you are very special.”
“What do you mean by ‘special’? I’m a sylvari, like any other.”

Amusement shimmers in Faolain’s eyes as she turns them towards Veil. “But that’s not true, though, is it? Look at the gifts you have and the immense amount of creativity and intelligence you possess.”

She gestures down at the turret on the ground. “I would say that you can match or possibly even surpass many within the Court. Unfortunately, you remain shackled.”

Veil arches her brow skepticaly. “Excuse me? How can you possibly say that? I’m doing stuff on my own terms, go wherever I please. I wouldn’t say that’s being ‘shackled’ exactly.”

“Well-“

“And don’t talk shit about Sieran”, she exclaims, while pointing accusatorily, “because I certainly don’t want to hear that. She’s important to me.”

Faolain chuckles. “So very defensive. But do not worry, as I have no such intention. In fact, I quite like her, and your siblinghood is very cute. I am sure that she could find a better place elsewhere, just like you can.

But of course, I’m talking about the Pale Tree and the sort of influence she keeps over all her so-called ‘children’. It has affected you like it does everyone else under her unyielding gaze.”

Before she can continue, Veil sighs and rolls her eyes. “Oh c’mom, you’re not going to do this again, are you? I know all about you and the Nightmare Court from Caithe. There’s no need to explain the kind of useless crap I already know.”

If she’s trying to insult them and get a rise out of Faolain, it doesn’t quite work, as she merely smiles and wags her finger in response. “Now now, let’s not make such sweeping conclusions already, my dear. I believe you have received the wrong perspective of us, from someone who have made very little inquiries herself. Caithe believes she understands us, but she has never really tried. Instead, she relies on her assumptions. Contrary to what she claims, the Court cares deeply for sylvari and our freedom more than anything.”

She ends up right in front of Veil again, running a finger down the middle of Veil’s chest. “We embrace everything that we are, what it means to be sylvari. Compared to the Pale Tree, we see any aspect of our personalities, behaviors and goals as important. From those who contribute, to those who follow, those who find purpose and any other combination, they are all equally crucial to us. We do not want obedient little blossoms who can only think along one set of ideology or morality, those who do not ever question what they’re told. The Court itself is made to be an alternative, to allow us to be ourselves.”

Well, technically, this is sort of what Veil already heard from Caithe, albeit in more flowery terms. It’s not a disturbing ideal, but she remains skeptical. “You say that she doesn’t, but the Pale Tree allows us to be lots of things as well. Surely, you’ve met several people from the Grove, yes? If you have, you must’ve realized that we’re not all the same, nor do we all believe the same thing. There are those who fight, those who read, those who seek companionship and those who crave solitude. There’s more than one type of flower that grows on her soil.”

Faolain tilts her head curiously. “So you say, but you speak from the perspective of someone who has only received one type of teachings and with such a limited core, I wonder if you can ever understand.
Have you never considered the tree to be too guiding, too controlling of your actions? Does she not ask everyone to defer to her with important decisions?
Have you always been protected in the vicinity of the Grove? That is what she promises, yes?
And yet, can you claim that no danger has ever come to any sylvari who follow her?
Can you truly say that you’ve never felt any doubts about the Pale Tree and what she believes in?
Her power is immense, wouldn’t you agree? With such an overwhelming difference, can we ever actually be equal to her and not mere pawns?”

Even if she immediately wants to dismiss what Faolain is telling her, a seed of doubt is growing in the back of her mind. It’s impossible to say that none of that is true, because the Pale Tree is not perfect. But who is?
“Well…”, she starts, sounding a little bit more unsure now. “Does this not prove our freedom then? If we’re allowed to be critical of her, to question her identity and place among us, that tells me that she doesn’t control us in the way you’re trying to convince me of.”

Faolain sighs disappointedly and shakes her head.
“My darling Veilidh, despite your very admirable belief in her, the influence she utilizes is still a facet of control. It’s like the web of a spider; you can struggle, but you can never escape as long as it surrounds you.”

Veil isn’t sure what to respond with and she looks away while she bites her lower lip.
“That’s only your perspective.”

Faolain smirks somewhat again, getting the sense that she’s still making progress. She comes closer once more, enough so that their bodies are almost touching, and she pushes her lips to the extent that it practically brushes against Veil’s cheek.
“I know you instinctively want to reject my ideas, as it goes against everything that you have been taught, but you should try to open your eyes and give it a chance. There’s so much that I can show you, so many things that I can teach you.”

The words are spoken in something only slightly above a whisper and Veil closes her eyes, fidgeting with her hands.
“I…will admit that what you’re telling me is tempting, but I have witnessed what you’re capable of doing. If you really want to win me over, you have to prove that you’re willing to have some kind of standards. I know who I am and I won’t pervert my ideals for you.”

Faolain takes a step back, her features having calmed as she views Veil once more. Their eyes meet for a second and Veil wonders what it is that she’s truly faced with.
“A little bit disappointing to hear, but it seems there might still be an opportunity. If this is really the case, then…perhaps I shall mull it over.”
She raises her hand and caresses Veil’s cheek, without the engineer actually struggling this time.
“For now, I shall leave you. We will meet again at a later date. In the meantime, I suggest you think hard about what I’ve said. There is a place for you among us, should you wish to take it. Remember that.”

Shortly after, the illusions shatter, with the sounds and sights returning to normal. Faolain doesn’t disappear like she did last time, but merely wanders out into the depths of the jungle.
Veil is left to ponder their conversation and why Faolain actually came here. Did she really just want to talk? If Veil hadn’t said the last part, would Faolain have gone even further, tried to force the Nightmare into her? And is she simply trying to gain Caithe by first convincing Veil or is her interests in the two women separate entities?

Chapter End Notes
I'm not sure why I wanted to portray Faolain as being sort of handsy but, yeah, it just happened.
1309 AE – Southern Brisban Wildlands

As another day has dawned within the diverse landscape of Maguuma, Veilidh and Sieran find themselves in another section of their home, one that they have yet to truly explore. They have heard of the rockier and hilly region of the forest, one that somewhat drifts away from the thick jungle they’re used to. Part of their reason for coming here at all was, of course, because it’s in the middle of their path. The two sisters intend to travel further north, but the asura had informed them that many old ruins and sights can be discovered here. They are both intrigued enough that they feel it’s worth studying.

It’s been at least one and a half year now since the duo wandered into Metrica and decided to expand their knowledge under the tutelage of Zebb and Siinga. After they felt like they had learned everything they needed to know in order to have a better grasp of engineering and magical theory, they decided it was time to get back on the road and continue their journey. They obviously intend to see more places, meet more people and do more things, and while Brisban is a good area to start, their real interest is getting into the lands of the other races of Tyria, especially Kryta, which isn’t too far away. That doesn’t mean they’ll skip the Wildlands entirely, though.

That they kept their eyes open was quite a smart thing to do as well, for they spot something they hadn’t expected to encounter all the way out here – a camp. It’s a fairly big one, filled with tents, makeshift defenses and lots of people. Seeing no reason to scout it, they immediately stroll towards it and wander inside. No one stops them, but they obviously get a lot of curious gazes along the way. The most interesting aspect to the sylvari is the blue banner placed in the center. Is that a key symbol? They don’t recall ever seeing that before.

They’re about to go ask around what’s going on here, when they see and hear how two people have some kind of argument by some of the tables that have been set up, with several onlookers merely standing there, probably waiting for the conclusion. One is a fair-skinned female human in light blue leather clothes, while the other is a brown-skinned male asura, dressed in dark blue robes. The sylvari duo are starting to suspect there’s some kind of theme here.

“Listen to me, there’s one problem we’ve got right now, and it should be obvious to everyone”, says the human. “It’s the dangers that this jungle offers, especially from all the living plants and beasts. And what’s the best way to deal with this? Burn ‘em. Let’s grab our flamethrowers and just torch our way through the forest, the good ol’-fashioned way. Nothing will stand in our path when we finally reach our goal.”

She gets a few agreeing nods from some of the others, especially a couple of charr. The asura rolls his eyes.

“Oh yes, your irresponsibly destructive path is surely the most ‘effective’ of them all. I can see no adverse results emerging from such a conclusion. Unless, of course, you actually consider the detrimental costs of scorching the location for all our potential research benefits. If we do not proceed with caution, we will capitulate every opportunity for expanded scientific acquisition.”

“Whatever”, the human says in an unimpressed tone. “What do you suggest we do then, huh?”
The asura places his arms behind his back, looking rather confident. “It’s simple. My suggestion involves careful application of miniature scanning devices throughout our vicinity, that will feed us data regarding the soil, creatures and vegetation, which we can subsequently utilize to formulate a safe passage around the difficulties of the jungle. Not only will we circumvent the unstable elements of our surroundings, but also gain valuable information for future studies.”

His suggestion also gains a few notions of agreement from some in the camp, but the human isn’t interested at all. “Oh c’mon, you can’t seriously tell me you think that’ll work in any way. It’s way too slow and sluggish. You haven’t forgotten we’ve got a mission to do in here, right?”

“And your perceived ‘solution’ will do no more than further complicate our situation. Do you want the entire collection of denizens to descend upon us at the least convenient moment? Preparation is key in the jungle!”

The human then turns towards one of the people nearby who have been watching them. “Wynnet, what do you think? You’re not agreeing with him, are you?”

The woman indicated is not only different from them, but much taller. From the height, Veil and Sieran would assume she’s a norn, as she stands above most others around her. The long hair which hangs down over her shoulders and back is white, and she’s currently standing in some pretty heavy armor. Wynnet exhales and closes her eyes. “I’m not sure what I should tell either of you, other than how this is a fruitless conversation. We won’t get any further by arguing, you know.”

“There is no argument!”, the asura exclaims. “My suggestion is the only solution to our conundrum! Hers is no more than delusional, violent nonsense. It perplexes me how she even made it to the Explorer rank.”

The human chuckles. “You’re just mad because you haven’t surpassed my rank yet! Admit it, I’m up here because you think you’re better than everyone, while your ideas aren’t worth shit.”

“Preposterous!”

In the background, Wynnet’s shoulders slump and by the look on her face, she’s probably getting a headache from listening to them. Arguing may not get them anywhere, but these two won’t give up so easily. Therefore, Veil gives Sieran a pointed glance, making the elementalist smile and nod. Shortly after, both of them move towards this gathering. “Well, if either plan isn’t perfect, perhaps you should scrap both or combine elements of the two”, says Veil rather confidently, drawing the attention to her. “I’ve got a few blueprints for pheromone dispensers that can be built rather swiftly if you’ve got the right material. It’ll make most creatures in the jungle avoid you, and you can proceed quickly without destruction. You may need some stuff to fill them with, of course, but I know a few quick alchemical solutions myself.”

“Also”, Sieran adds, “it’s not too difficult to traverse any part of the jungle if you simply know the way. You might not know it, but there are others who certainly will. Jungle wurms, flesh-eating plants and jaguars aren’t the only ones who live in here, you know. To the north, beneath the mountain, there’s a group of local skritt. You could talk to them, if you wish. All you need is a bit of diplomatic knowhow and sympathy. They’ll help anyone who understands their plight, I’m sure!”
Pretty much everyone else in the vicinity have gone quiet, staring with interest at the duo. Wynnet looks particularly intrigued and she smiles as she approaches them.

“Well hello there. That’s quite an impressive amount of knowledge you’ve got. Hadn’t expected that we might receive help from the outside, but we certainly welcome it. You’re sylvari, are you not? I’ve heard of your people, but never met one.”

Veil smiles and folds her arms, while Sieran places her hands at her hips.

“We certainly are!”, Veil tells her. “And we’re not surprised you haven’t met many. Few of us leave Caledon or Metrica, due to the many dangers out there, but we’ve slowly been expanding our connections.”

“And it’s very fascinating too!”, Sieran exclaims. “Your camp is a very diverse one. I’d love to talk to everyone and hear of your experiences.”

“You’re norn, right? Think we’ve encountered one or two in the jungle before.”

The large leader nods curtly, offering her hand to them. She has to lean down slightly, due to the height difference.

“That’s right. I’m Magister Wynnet, of the Durmand Priory. Some of my peers call me ‘Fairhaired’, and I’m stuck with that now, I suppose.”

Both Veil and Sieran share a surprised look, shortly before shaking her hand, one at a time.

“Durmand Priory?”, Sieran asks. “I don’t think we’ve ever heard of them.”

“No? That’s interesting. We’re a pretty huge organization, one that has been growing for the past two centuries since our creation. We were founded by a human historian, a Krytan by the name of Durmand.”

Veil tilts her head curiously.

“What is it you do?”

“We’re an organization dedicated to knowledge gathering, analyzation and distribution. We travel the world looking for new places to explore and information to attain, especially things pertaining to the elder dragons, the most major threat our generation has to face. As Durmand used to say – ‘Your power is only equal to the sum of your knowledge.’

Our current headquarters are located in the southern Shiverpeaks, but our scholars and explorers can be found all over Tyria. We offer our services as advisors, tutors and chroniclers to a ton of nations, and we were one of the first factions in the continent to accept members from all races.”

Both Veil’s and Sieran’s eyes shimmer with interest and their smiles widen.

“Really?”, the former asks. “In that case, your group sounds like the most fascinating one that we’ve ever encountered.”

“It sounds cherry!”, Sieran says in agreement. “Would you ever consider adding more people?”

Wynnet displays a smile of her own and nods.

“Of course, we’re always interested in having new novices who wish to develop their knowledge, skills and capabilities. Durmand and all of his successors have always felt it was necessary for us to share our findings and skills with others, which is why there was no hesitation when asura asked for membership. Afterwards, both my people and the charr wanted to join. It has expanded ever since.

Sadly, we do not yet have any sylvari among us, as your people have not yet shown any interest. That said, we would never decline any inquiries.”

Sieran especially looks very intrigued at this prospect, as does Veil, although the slightly older
sister still has many questions on her mind.  
“We’d love to spread the word, if that’s what you wish. However, I have to ask, what are you actually doing out here? Seems like you’re running into a lot of trouble.”

“Oh, hah, yes, I suppose we have. Then again, that is the life of the Priory; we’re always in trouble, but it is worth it for the data we might attain. Right now, we’re looking for the remnants of a place called the ‘Henge of Denravi’. It was an old and sacred, possibly magical, area created by a group of druids. Centuries ago, it was also utilized by a human group known as the Shining Blade in their rebellion against the White Mantle. The location has been lost for a long time, after its destruction by the Mantle, but our scholars are confident that we can find it. We hope to unearth some new information and possibly bring the Henge back into the public eye for research and preservation reasons. As archaeology is one of my foremost subjects, I volunteered to lead this crew. Although, I have been questioning that choice from time to time”, she says, while glancing at the argumentative duo behind her.

Sieran smiles brightly.  
“Well, neither of us have been there, so we’d love to come along! If you’ll have us, that is.”

“Certainly. If you can assist us in traversing the jungle with less hassle, we’re more than happy to have you with us. We’d never turn down a helping hand.”

Veil takes a step closer, still looking up at Wynnet to meet her eyes.  
“We might agree to it, if you’d be willing to answer our questions about the Priory’s history and purpose. I can think of several I’d like to ask right away.”

The norn looks fairly amused at how honest and confident this little sylvari is when she makes her request. Wynnet lifts her hand and offers it to Veil once more.

“I believe we have a deal, my young friend.”

Veil grins and shakes the hand.  
“Glad to hear it! I’m Veilidh and this is my sister Sieran. I hope we’ll be friends before this is over, Magister Wynnet.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I was thinking this was their first encounter with the Priory, something which got Sieran very interested (surprise, surprise). As a group, they’ll appear a couple of more times later on.
As for Wynnet, I think she’s actually the second-in-command during the GW2 vanilla storyline? Here, she’s in a high rank but, not quite that far yet.
Tall towers, a variety of different scents from lots of origins, an abundance of people filling the whole area with noise.

Several months back, Veilidh and Sieran took their first steps into the human land of Kryta, getting to experience places and landscapes they’d never seen or even conceptualized previously. When they were invited past the gates of Divinity’s Reach, the capital, the feelings they had at that time can hardly even be accurately described, other than perhaps to say that it was overwhelming.

However, despite having went through that large city, when they walk past the gates of Lion’s Arch, they’re almost on the verge of shock. There’s so many different things to see here, with ships being part of the architecture, individuals from all origins and races traversing the streets, technological designs which neither have witnessed thus far, and many more things. It all happens so quickly that the duo isn’t sure where to begin. For a time, both wonder if they’ll have to study this city as intricately as they’ve done with entire regions.

After a little bit of a discussion, they both feel that the place they should start with is the marketplace. Not only does it have a lot of people putting items on display for them to look at, it’s also apparently where most of the citizens and visitors gather, at least from a quick glance. They wander into this area and push themselves straight into the thick crowds. That seems to be what everyone else does and as they’re fairly unused to this type of thing – except for a brief time browsing in Divinity’s Reach – they follow the example of others.

One thing they notice is that they are certainly not the only sylvari here, even if there’s not a lot present. In some corners, from a distance or even behind a couple of stalls, they spot members of their race being busy with their own endeavors and intermingling with other denizens of Tyria. The duo hadn’t met any during their trip through Kryta, but they will admit that this city is different, which doesn’t surprise them all too much.

Once they get to a particular section of this district, they hear a voice off to the side, one that seems to speak directly to them. It sounds somewhat amused, but also annoyed.

“Well well, who is it that my little eye can spy? I believe this must be Caithe’s small nuisance, yes? And her ever-so-cheerful tagalong too. Lucky me.”

Both Veil and Sieran react to that, of course, blinking in surprise and turning to the source of it. What they see is not quite what they expected – a male sylvari with bright green hide, wearing a mixture of branches and leaf-shaped armor, together with a few plates. His head is decorated with long white leaves imitating a ponytail, with a few thorns poking out from his chin like a beard. The eyes he has are white, similarly to Veil’s. From his belt, they can see a sheathed steel sword and he has a sylvari-based shield strapped to his back.

At this time, he stands with his arms folded, leaning against a wall.

Sieran arches a confused brow, glancing at her sister, but Veil smiles.

“Hey, I recognize you too. Canach, right? Caithe’s little brother?”

He snorts in response to that and rolls his eyes.

“Yes, I suppose it’s true that she tends to treat me that way, but I would like to be known by another epitaph, if you don’t mind. I am my own person, not ruled by the connection to her or any
other Firstborn for that matter.”

Veil chuckles, seeming highly amused, while Sieran is rather curious instead. “What are you even doing here?”, the latter asks. “We’ve seen a few sylvari, but we still don’t know why anyone has come this way. We went through Kryta first, but never met anyone.”

It is his turn to raise a brow, looking a little bit smug as he responds. “Of course, we’re here, why wouldn’t we be? How many years is it now since our people sprung from the earth for the first time? More than enough to be spread to every other nation of Tyria, I would think. While many choose to stay in Maguuma, many more prefer to explore or find something that isn’t so completely dull in life. Naturally, I chose the latter.”

Veil puts her hands at her hips and smiles wryly at him. “You really like Lion’s Arch then?”

Canach tilts his head back and forth, trying to consider the notion. “Well, I’m not sure I’d go that far, but it’s certainly an interesting town.” He turns his eyes away from them, gazing out over the area around them and the rest of the city in the distance. “It’s teeming with opportunities and mysteries, but also trouble, something that one can pretty much expect in any new area that you might traverse. You should probably remember that in the future, especially if you head to the east or south.”

“A little bit of wanderer’s advice from you, hmm?”

“Yes, and for free as well. Am I not generous?”, he states dryly. “And what are you two doing here, then? I’ve seen a couple of Thirdborn on my travels, but I’m fairly certain none of them have come to the city. They chose to stay in calmer places, where they can wander safely.”

Neither Veil nor Sieran care much for words pertaining to their awakening. Only the Firstborn are really noted that way, although Veil has heard how Canach may have a fondness for it. “Do you always remember everyone’s birth?”

“Not always, but it’s more interesting to study generations than cycles. That way, we can compare to the Firstborn much more easily, correct?” He sneers. Another aspect Veil can’t blame him for. She knows some of their people tend to be skeptical of those who came first, and their inherent role as ‘teachers’ and ‘mentors’. Veil can understand the sentiment, even though she feels differently.

Shortly after, Sieran resumes the conversation. “To answer your question, we’re trying to explore as much of this land, of Kryta, as possible. We’ve traversed a lot of the scenery already, and seen what the humans have to offer.”

“Oh? Any conclusions, miss young scholar?”

Sieran either doesn’t get the sarcasm or ignores it, because she raises a hand up to her chin and ponders it. “I would say it has certainly been fascinating from an anthropological point of view, especially in regard to their history and cultural evolution.”

Veil nods in agreement. “I find their customs very intriguing. I think we have to go back there some day and investigate even more, once we’re done with the Shiverpeaks and Ascalon. I heard some nobles might want
to invite us. Lady Vlasic, for example, wanted to let some sylvari see what they think of her
lands.”

That seems to get Sieran going and she smiles as she claps her hands.
“Ooh, yes! We have to do that. It’ll be cherry!”

At the same time, Canach looks thoroughly disinterested.
“I hadn’t realized that the two of you would grow to become such boring people. Perhaps I
should’ve expected as much. Was it Caithe who got you into this line of work? She always tried
to persuade me as well.”

Veil tilts her head and smirks.
“Caithe? No, it certainly wasn’t. We chose our own path and we simply like doing this.”

Sieran inclines her head.
“Indeed! However, I am glad that we got the chance to see you, Canach, and that you seem to
know so much. Perhaps you can offer us a guided tour and tell us about the local districts? There’s
so much that we want to know of this city!”

In response, Canach gains a somewhat disturbed expression.
“No, I certainly cannot. If you wish to explore and act like giddy tourists, you are free to do so on
your own time. Do not bother me with such trifling issues.”

Shortly after this, he pushes himself away from the wall and wanders off. The other two peers
after him, with Sieran seeming fairly disappointed. In contrast, Veil smirks, looking like she’s not
done with him. She grabs her sister’s hand and nudges her head in Canach’s direction.
“Come on.”
“What? What are we-“

She then drags Sieran with her as they pursue him, gesturing for her to follow Veil’s lead. They
surround him, with Veil walking in on his left and Sieran on his right. He is about the same height
as they are, and therefore can’t really do much to escape. He can show his annoyance however,
which he certainly does.
“Now now, Canach”, Veil starts, “you shouldn’t say things like that. Didn’t Mother tell you to be
nicer to younger members of our people? We also need to learn, you know.”

Canach scoffs and folds his arms again.
“And in what definition of the word are you two considered ‘young’? You’re no more than a few
months younger than me. You can travel on your own.”

“Exactly! Younger. Maybe not by much, but it’s still there.
What if we get into trouble, huh? Perhaps with something that we couldn’t predict because you
weren’t there. You would feel bad about that.”

He shakes his head to dismiss this notion.
“If that’s what you believe, then you don’t know me very well, Thirdborn. The problems you
stumble into are your own to unravel and solve, not mine. If I wanted to babysit, I would’ve
stayed in the Grove, not gone all the way out here. As you can most likely see, we are far from the
jungles now, thankfully.”

In reaction to this, Sieran pouts.
“Well, we’re not babies. Just because we might need a little bit of guidance, that doesn’t make us
newly awakened. Have you never needed that before?”
“That is hardly the point”, he responds.

Just as he says this, they all hear a sound from behind them, as another person clears their throat. “Hey, you there, flower guy. You’re Canach, right?”, a rather gruff voice asks.

All three turns around and faces another trio. Compared to the rather even heights of the sylvari, this one looks both more intimidating and comical. In the middle stands a male human, fairly hairy and a little bit scarred. He is flanked by two individuals much taller than him – a female charr and a hairy, very heavily bearded male norn. The last two are also heavily armed and armored. “I am, yes”, Canach replies, not letting any of his worries slip out of him.

“Well, I want a word with you”, the human tells him, displaying a slight glare. “You remember a recent visit to Crow’s Nest?”

Canach lifts a hand to tap a few fingers on his cheek. “Hmm, Crow’s Nest? Ah, yes, the tavern, isn’t it? I don’t recall all too much of the last night I was there, but I suppose that may have been the point.”

“Exactly, and you left a pretty large bill with us a couple of days ago. I hope you realize no one just walks away from that kind of thing.”

By the look on Canach’s face, it appears he probably expected this, as he sighs. “But it’s hardly been any time at all. You can’t seriously believe I can pay all that back so quickly.”

When they hear it, both the norn and the charr look pretty satisfied, starting to crack their knuckles. At the same time, the human smirks. “Should’ve thought of that before you started a nonstop downing of drinks then, shouldn’t ya? Time to pay up, bush, or get ready to be knocked down.”

Canach seems pretty disappointed, not wanting to get into this kind of fight…again, but he may have not a choice. “Let’s hope there’ll be less bruises this time”, he says quietly, while he puts his hand on the hilt of his sword.

Two who seem much less pleased with this conclusion are Veil and Sieran. The latter looks almost horrified, realizing what these people intend to do to one of their own, while Veil’s eyes shimmer with something else, as if an idea just popped into her head. With amusement on her face, she steps in between them. “Wait! There’s no need to get into this kind of violence, is there?”

The human arches his brow and then frowns at Veil, pointing at Canach. “Oh, there definitely will be, if he ain’t giving us the gold he owes us.”

“Well, alright, how much is it?”

“He bought some pretty expensive stuff when he came around, so it should be somewhere close to ten gold. That’s what we’re rounding up to anyway.”

Ten gold in drinks sure sounds like a lot and Canach widens his eyes in shock. “Excuse me? Ten gold? Are you out of your mind?! If I had gotten that drunk, I would’ve likely woken up half-naked on the shores of Bloodtide with a skritt at my side.”

The human isn’t about to bargain, however. “Nope, it’s ten gold and that’s final. Again, pay up, and all this trouble will be over.”
With a rather delighted expression, Veil strides right up to the man, ignoring the two guards and digs her hands into her pockets. Shortly after, she gets exactly that amount of coins into her grip and drops it in the human’s palm.

“And there we go, good sir, ten gold. I think we’re done here, yes? You can be on your way.”

Canach is just as astonished as the human and the two guards are, but the man in the middle soon tries to straighten himself and clears his throat.

“Uh, yeah, guess so. Nice doing business with you.”

The guards seem disappointed by this conclusion, but the human makes sure to deliver one last message to Canach.

“Next time, bring actual cash with you. You should be glad you’ve got such a nice family.”

When they leave and Veil strolls back to him and Sieran with a smug look, Canach remains dumbfounded for a few moments.

“I… I don’t even know what to say. How did this happen? Where did you get that amount of gold from?”

Veil grins and once more plants her hands around her hips.

“Well, what you didn’t know about me is that I’ve grown into a fairly skilled engineer, enough to impress those who lack the knowledge. Many are willing to hire my services, especially Krytans.”

He looks at her, searching her face to find any notions of deceptions, but none are to be located. Soon after, his shoulders slump and he close his eyes.

“…dammit. It appears I am now indebted to you instead. I’m not sure which is worse…”

Sieran’s expression brightens with interest and curiosity.

“Does this mean we will be getting a tour, after all?”

“I don’t have much of a choice, do I?”

Both of the women cheer in response.

Chapter End Notes

At first, I wasn’t gonna have Canach in this story, because I wasn’t sure whether any position in this fic would be suitable for him or if I could write him well enough. But then I realized, how can I have a sylvari fic without an appearance from Canach?

As you may have noticed, I went with his initial appearance in the game, due to it being canon (I believe). He made a change later on, so, I didn’t want to alter that in any way. I think his second is hotter but, that’s not the point
1311 AE – Diessa Plateau, Ascalon

Heat, greenery and grassy fields makes for one enormous change. Both Veilidh and Sieran hadn’t really expected how much they had missed this type of environment, until they arrived in it. They will admit that the area they’ve entered is far from the same as Maguuma in many ways, but it’s definitely preferable to the experience they’ve had lately.

After their journey through Kryta was finally over, they decided to head east, up into the Shiverpeak Mountains. Many people had warned them of it, what would definitely occur once they reached that territory, but the young duo had completely underestimated such concerns. The cold, the snow, the ice, the lack of easier access to food and water, as well as sunlight. Being sylvari, they do sort of have a slightly better resistance to the that type of climate than other sentient races, but it could reach almost extreme heights within the mountains. Before they could even continue their journey or start their research up there, they had to spend a few weeks just acclimatizing to the environment, most of it within some sort of small norn settlement, who thankfully invited them in.

They can’t deny that it was a fascinating journey, though, as they experienced and learned many new things that neither had expected. Sure, their engineering or magical skills were technically not expanded much, but they have learned a lot more about survival, hunting, fishing and fighting. They met a lot of solitary norn, many of whom were quite open to testing themselves against the sylvari, before giving them a few lessons.

Now that they are finally out of that area, the sisters will admit that they will miss the people, but not the mountain itself. They may return there some day, but it will have to wait a while. For now, they have a new territory and a new culture to explore.

Ascalon, a former human nation, now charr territory. In Kryta, they heard many stories from people regarding Ascalon, how their ancestors had either lived there, fought against it or fled it during the Searing. It was a place of much grief and rage for the humans, and while that was definitely interesting, the duo wanted more. Even if the charr were aggressors, who are the people living here now? What do they believe? And most of all, can they help either of the two increasing their skills and knowledge?

Veilidh will not lie in that regard. She has heard, especially from asura, that charr have a surprising interest for technology, even if most of it tends to be much more mechanical and rugged than the small race from Maguuma. She does already know a lot about weaponry, construction and metals, but is that really enough? Sure, humans and norn are not quite as adept as the asura in that field, but even they could teach her something. If the charr are famous for their dangerous tech, then surely, they can give her a few hints too?

This is what has been on her mind ever since they decided that they’d enter Ascalon from the west. Some recommended they speak with charr representatives in Lion’s Arch. The High Legions, the ruling group of the charr, are still at war on many fronts, not the least with the humans. Simply wandering into Ascalon would be quite unwise, from such perspectives, but Sieran and Veil had another. They are sylvari, a relatively new people, who have not been in conflict with anyone. Why would the charr attack them? Besides, if they go through official channels in another city, it’s very possible that their movement will be restricted. At least out here, in the wilderness, they have leeway to move as they please and perhaps meet other types of charr,
even civilians. If they have that sort of thing, of course.

However, any such notions are halted for the time being. On this day, the duo can be found along the northern parts of this region, currently traversing a hilly landscape with the occasional trees. They were on the verge of discussing the creation of a camp, when they spotted something in the distance. Both of them ducked down, and now study the creatures.

“What is that?” Veil asks. “Are they humans?”

Sieran tilts her head curiously, her eyes moving searchingly across the group of perhaps a dozen armed people.

“Well, they certainly stand and walk like humans, but why are they translucent? And so…blue. Reminds me of some entities we saw in the Dream.”

“Also, what’s that mist around them? That doesn’t look very natural.”

There are many questions popping into their minds now, their curiosity rising so much that they forget their surroundings, and even their growing hunger.

“Hmm, true. You think they’d let us approach them? They do kinda look like soldiers, don’t they?”

Veil raises a hand to scratch her cheek.

“Maybe. Then again, there are more people than soldiers who wield weapons like those.”

Sieran widen her eyes and turns her head towards her sister.

“You don’t think it’s bandits, do you?”

They’re suddenly reminded of a certain confrontation back in the wilds of Kryta. They were surrounded and almost robbed of all their possessions by a group that they later found out were usually classified as ‘bandits’. If it wasn’t for the Seraph, and their own prowess, they might not have been here now.

“I don’t know. Feels like they’re wandering a bit too openly for that.”

“Perhaps, but who can say for sure? You think we should investigate?”

The strange humans are currently travelling, or marching, towards the east, away from the sylvari. If they want to meet these people, they’d have to go soon, or be satisfied with following a trail.

“That might be a good idea, at least a little bit. We need to know our surroundings, right?”

Sieran smiles gently.

“That’s just what I was thinking! Come, let’s hurry before they get too far.” It’s the elementalist who leaps up on her feet first, getting ready to pursue the soldiers, and while Veil is about to follow her, she suddenly stops when she hears a noise behind her. It sounded like someone stepping on a branch or something, but when she looks over her shoulder she sees nothing. Did she just imagine that?

“Veil?” she hears Sieran asking. She turns around and sees that her sister is only a few meters away.

“What is it?”

The engineer furrows her brow for a moment, and then shrugs.

“Nothing. I was just...checking something, that’s all. Let’s-“

But before either of them can get very far, both of them witness how an astonishing event occurs. It feels as if the very vegetation and shadows around them start to move, closing in faster than they can react. Both get ready to draw weapons and tools to defend themselves, but it’s too late. An array of guns, swords, axes, heavy shields and much more, are suddenly on display,
everything pointing directly at the two sylvari. All they can really do in response is raise their arms in surrender.

The ones holding the tools are familiar to them, as they have met these creatures before – charr. The physical appearances of the large felines are difficult to mistake at this point, but it’s perhaps due to this size that they’re sort of shocked that anything could happen so quickly. Where did they come from? And how silently did they actually move? They just seemed to pop up out of nowhere and neither sylvari heard a thing.

“Erm, hello”, Sieran tries, but the charr do not respond. They simply stare at the two women, weapons held firmly in their hands, not wavering for a second.

Eventually though, someone decides to speak. “Well, well, and what do we have here?”, asks someone in the back. A couple of them separate in order to allow the speaker to reveal herself. A charr with black and red fur, slightly burnt in some places, a scarred left eye and a horn on the same side having been cut in half at some point, soon stands before them. She’s taller than the duo, but shorter than most of the other charr surrounding her. She currently walks around in dark green light armor. Her one yellow open eye scrutinizes both of them and once she speaks, her voice is somewhat hoarse, with a very commanding tone. “You’re sylvari, aren’t you? What in the Mists would two people like you be doing here? Spies for the humans, perhaps? Although, Ebonhawke is quite far away, admittedly.”

Veil and Sieran sit a few meters away from each other right now, which gives them less of an opportunity to discuss anything, but the older sister still throws her younger a brief glance, before she clears her throat. “Uh, what’s Ebonhawke?”

The charr raises an eyebrow skeptically. “Pretending not to know the name now, are you? Clever, but an expected tactic.”

“What? I…I don’t know who you think we are, but I assure you, we’re not working for Ebonhawke. In fact, we’re not working for any humans. We’re out here of our own accord, to journey through Tyria.”

“Who are you?”, Sieran asks. “Why are you holding us like this? We haven’t done anything wrong! It’s not forbidden to walk, is it?”

The charr glares at the elementalist and snorts. “I am Centurion Centra Grimsnarl of the Ash Legion. And yes, in fact, it is forbidden to walk without permission. You don’t just wander into Ascalon, charr territory, without letting us know first.”

By the sound of her voice, she doesn’t seem like the type of person who would be easy to compromise with. Despite her height, she’s far more intimidating than any of the others. “Well, uh”, Veil starts, “we’re sorry, I guess? We didn’t mean to violate your laws or anything. We just wanted to pass through and maybe find some of your people to speak with.”

Centra frowns at her. “If that is what you wanted, you could’ve gone through Lion’s Arch. Didn’t anybody from the other side of the mountains tell you that?”

“They did, but…well, we wanted to experience things directly.”

The charr continues to glare at her for a little while, possibly trying to make sure if she’s telling the truth or not. Veil hopes that she looks earnest, but there’s still too much skepticism aimed at her.
“Sounds like an excuse to me, and not one I’m willing to accept at face value. I have no idea who you are, or if you can be trusted.”
She looks at the rest of the charr.
“Warband, arrest them and take them back to the camp. We’ll conduct some interrogations and see if they still don’t know the name Ebonhawke once we’re done.”

Veil and Sieran both gain some terrified gazes as they hear it, as that definitely doesn’t sound pleasant. What will the charr do to them? Prison? Torture?
Before any of this can proceed, however, they suddenly hear a weirdly echoing shout in the distance.
“There they are! Attack! For Ascalon!”

The whole warband, along with the two sylvari, turn their eyes towards the east, as they see how the human squad, or whatever they are, have returned and suddenly launch an attack towards their perceived enemy.
“Arrows incoming!”, one of the charr shouts.

For a moment, Sieran and Veil almost believe that the humans might be there to help them in some way, which would be quite surprising and yet very appreciative, but that is a wrong assumption. Instead, the weirdly translucent people shoot at anything alive in the vicinity, including the sylvari. Veil just barely manages to dodge one that flies in her direction.
While the sisters attempt to find some way to get out of harm’s way, several melee fighters charges into the charr, trying to take some down before they can properly react. At least two or three of the felines get stabbed or slashed this way, before the defensive begins, and the charr desperately return the favor.

From afar, they see how Centra tries to call out commands to rally her troops, but she does not sit idly by. She unsheathes one of the axes from her belt, before she raises her other hand and clenches her fingers. Within her palm, dark magic starts to gather and slowly envelops her like some kind of aura. Once a couple of the ghostly figures run at her, she strokes this hand over her axe and then slashes the air in front of herself. She almost seems to carve the air open, and a black stream of magic shoots towards her enemies, knocking them backwards and infects them with painful energies.
After this, she stomps the ground, painting magical runes in the air on both sides, and the ground beneath her seems to whither somewhat, while buzzing noises of insects can be overheard. She spreads all the energy around her, like some kind of field, until she can absorb it all and send it out towards her enemies in the distance. Some of the human archers find themselves captured by a net of locust and necromantic power, trying to eat them up.

The two sylvari mostly sits and watches the events for a little while, but Veil is soon brought into the action as well. One of the ghostly figures try to sneak around the Centurion, and manages to get into a position to attack from behind, drawing two daggers in preparation. Veil realizes that she can’t just sit around and therefore leaps up, runs as quickly as she can, and then tackles Centra to the ground.
“What the hell are you doing?!”, the charr exclaims. “Are you an idiot?! Don’t you under-“

Before her sentence ends, she sees how Veil pulls up a pistol and then fires at the ghost that was trying to stab them. One shot isn’t enough, however, as it only makes the creature stumble. Luckily, her asura-inspired weapon has more bullets than that, and she puts half a magazine into it, before it finally shatters.
Veil breathes out in relief and looks at the charr underneath her.
“Sorry about that. I figured that just shouting at you probably wouldn’t help.”

Centra’s eye is somewhat widened in surprise as she just realized what happens. This disperses
soon after and she offers Veil a curt nod.
“Thanks.”

Sieran is soon by their side, giving them a hand each to help them up on their feet, and the trio then together decide to fight their translucent enemies off. While Centra’s necromantic spells are surely impressive, Veil’s gun skills aren’t all too bad either, and with Sieran summoning an earth barrier and creating spikes to penetrate their enemies, they make for a deadly force on the battlefield, one that these people cannot ignore.

The fight goes very well, and despite how the humans had the number advantage, the training and power on the charr’s side give them the victory. The last few humans who remain on the field are all executed without delay, for it seemed none of them were ready to give in. It is Centra who does the job as well, using her axe in a more direct manner to carve the last one’s chest open.
This is of course another aspect that the sylvari find strange. None of the beings they fought leave normal corpses. Instead, they simply disperse, as if they were nothing more than air. To Veil, it is reminiscent of mesmer illusions, and yet these ones were clearly different.

Once things have calmed down and they are safe again, with the warband patching up their injured, the Centurion strolls up to the sisters. She glares at them for a moment, before she grunts and offers her hand…or paw.
“Gotta say, damn good job, from both of ya. You even saved a couple of my troops out there. I wouldn’t expect this kind of bravery from two spies. Guess I was wrong about that.”

Veil and Sieran, having taken a few scratches themselves, are eager to shake and prove their friendliness.
“Well, we were trying to tell you this from the start but, I suppose the heat of battle was the easiest way for you to understand”, says Veil.

Sieran sighs and folds her arms.
“Next time, please have a bit more understanding, though. Sylvari aren’t humans.”

Centra shrugs.
“Perhaps, we’ll see. However, despite your actions, that doesn’t mean I have any less questions. You’re still in our territory and I’ll have to ask you to come with us. You’ll be there less as prisoners and more as guests, though, after this display.”

While her sister is now rather cautious, Veil tries to remain positive and offers a smile.
“We certainly wouldn’t mind answering them. In fact, we were looking to speak with your people.”

“You did mention as much. That was the truth?”

“Yes! We’ve never visited Ascalon before, but we have certainly met a couple of charr and heard of your technology. I’m an engineer, and I was hoping to learn some new mechanical tricks from you.”

Sieran inclines her head.
“I’m an elementalist, and I’d love to see how you apply magic into your lives and technology as well. We’ve heard of the Searing, and while that was unfortunate, it would be very interesting to study.”

Centra seems a little bit skeptical at the latter, but tilts her head back and forth in contemplation.
“Well, dunno about that second part, but I’ll give you a chance. You’re both pretty good at what you do, and I owe you now. Let me escort you to the Black Citadel later, and I’m sure you can be introduced to some with more scholarly interests.”
“Splendid!”, Veil exclaims. “Maybe you can answer some other questions too. Like, do you know what it was we fought? They seemed to be humans, and yet…not.”

The look that Centra gives her is one of both amusement and mild exhaustion.
“That’s a very long story, but I’ll do my best to summarize it. What do you know of the old Ascalon nation?”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, so, if you've read my other GW2 fic - "Blood bond" - you probably recognize Centra. This was about a year or two before she was promoted to Tribune.

Next week, there won't be a chapter for this fic, as I'm gonna be writing something different during that entire week. This story will return on Sunday the 5th.
Veilidh doesn’t always consider how little the world itself changes. Despite having been gone from her home for a couple of years, when she finally set her eyes on the jungle and the forest once more, she almost felt like she hadn’t even left. The rocks and trees were still there, the predators continued to chase their prey, the wind smelled quite similarly, and the Pale Tree was as tall as ever. In a way, it was both a comforting and confusing experience, mostly due to the fact that she believes she has evolved quite a bit during the same time. Her knowledge, personality, and belief have all altered to some degree and she doesn’t think that can ever be returned. Has the jungle gone through the same thing and she just can’t see it?

Then again, she was perhaps the most thankful to see that Caithe hadn’t changed much either, and the older sylvari was very happy to see her too. They had communicated every now and then through mail, of course, and Caithe had even encountered her in Lion’s Arch once, for when the sylvari received their first asura gate, but none of that is the same thing as when they first met, and how close they were back then.

While she doesn’t yet know if she can acknowledge it, Veil has almost completely forgotten about the incident a few years ago now, and even if it was part of what may have initiated her wish to travel. Perhaps forgiveness should be prioritized, after all.

Her return to the Grove was, somewhat unfortunately, without any company. After they were done with Ascalon and considered where they should go next, Sieran told Veil that she was torn with the decision. The Durmand Priory had impressed her sister to such a degree that Sieran was seriously contemplating joining them. After hours of discussion, they both concluded that Sieran should be free to follow her dreams and Veil did her utmost to get the elementalist to the Shiverpeaks, on the path to joining the Priory. That is where she last saw her sister, but she is more than certain that they’ll meet again.

As morning has turned to noon on this particular day, Veil has finally managed to drag Caithe out of her duties for a while, in order to prove a point. She wanted to show the older sylvari what she has learned and how much progress she has made since they last met.

They’re currently a little bit outside of the Grove, at the edge of the forest, with gardens tended to by their people in the background. Veil stops them underneath a particularly tall tree, to make sure that she has enough materials for what she needs to do.

“Alright, this should be good enough”, she remarks, and turns towards her companion.

Caithe stops a few meters away, folds her arms, and smiles.

“What exactly is it you intend to do?”

Veil grins at her and wiggles her eyebrows.

“Oh, you’ll see. It’ll be exciting, I promise!”

The other woman shakes her head.

“If you say so. Does it have anything to do with your new coat attachments?”

It was one of the first things Caithe noted when they met, although that’s not particularly surprising. Veil has directly reinforced much of her clothes, rather than simply buy armor. Thin
pieces of metal are hiding beneath certain parts of it, with her boots now consisting almost completely of plate. She has also added gold-colored decorations and chains hanging from the front, mostly as an aesthetic move.

The most obviously different sections, however, are the arms and shoulders. Her left arm has a wrist attachment that is connected to various parts of the coat, to help initiate different mechanisms on her clothes. On the right arm and shoulder, she has an even larger slab of metal, protecting most of it, along with the hand. It is not just armor, however, but technology meant to enhance her strength, just in case she really needs to punch someone.

“Heh, maybe a couple of them, yes”, Veil admits.
“For now, though, there are other things I want to show you.”

She moves her hands towards the straps of her backpack, removing it and quickly searches through the contents. She digs her hand into it and fishes up some kind of metal tube. When she puts pressure on the top, three legs are unfolded, and a couple of lights start to blink.
“This looks interesting, right?”

Caithe tilts her head curiously and nods curtly.
“Mm, it does. Looks a little bit like those turrets you were working on with Siinga a couple of years ago.”

“Indeed! But, watch what happens when I drop it.”
She pushes another button and then tosses it to the ground, making it land on its feet. Almost on that same second, it emits a sharp sound, shortly before the light expands. It grows ever larger and more solid, until it has produced what appears to be a barrier created by light. Veil is both proud and amused by the shocked expression on Caithe’s face.
“Cool, right?”

“Veilidh, that’s amazing. Is this, really…?”
She reaches out with her hand, but while she can feel herself touching something, her hand still slips through it.

Veil smiles and shakes her head.
“It is a shield, yes, but it won’t stop you from passing through. It only prevents items that go at a particularly high speed, meaning it’s very useful against projectiles.
The device is inspired by the light-based technology that asura utilize. They have some similar tools in Metrice and Rata Sum.
My engineering expanded a lot in general when I worked with Siinga and other asura, but the best knowledge I received from them were things like this. They did also teach me a lot about magical application for targeting use, energy preservation, and storage capacity, though.”

Caithe smiles and turns to Veil, putting her hands at her hips.
“You’ve become a little genius while I wasn’t looking, huh?”

That makes Veil smirk and arch her eyebrow skeptically.
“Excuse me? Are you implying I wasn’t already before I left?”

“Of course not, dear! Just that I never knew.”

Veil chuckles.
“Fine, fine. I’ll let that one go for now.
Anyway, I didn’t just learn stuff from the asura. All of the other races had much to teach me as well.
From humans, I learned a lot about alchemy, and the inherent use of herbs and plants as an engineer.”

She lifts up a small glass bottle, one of a few others that she apparently keeps in her bag. It holds
some sort of green liquid inside. She walks up to Caithe, removes the lid, and tilts the top towards the other sylvari.
“Here, smell it.”

Caithe does as Veil asks, but has to immediately retract her nose from it.
“Oh, by the Pale Tree…Veilidh, that’s vile!”, she says while coughing.

“Heh, indeed it is! And that’s the purpose as well. Watch this.”

She sees a couple of jaguars sitting on a patch of grass in the distance, watching them from afar. The felines are startled when they see how Veil lobs something towards them, but it actually misses them. However, that thought doesn’t last for long, as they begin to feel the stench and immediately flee the vicinity. Once more, Veil chuckles, while Caithe merely smiles and shake her head.
“Poor cats. They didn’t deserve that.”

“Tsk, don’t worry, they’ll be fine. The krytans helped me develop all kinds of elixirs and potions. I was skeptical at first, but it really has a lot of use. And now, for the norn.”
She separates her coat a little bit, and taps some sort of small mechanism on her belt.
“Watch what this little thing can do.”

She pushes a button next to the device, and suddenly, some kind of projectile shoots out, hitting the trunk of the tree nearby and remains stuck to it. Not only that, there’s a thin rope tied from it, all the way to the belt.
Caithe glances between the item and her friend.
“Is that the tip of a harpoon?”

“Yup, it is! It’s a grappling gun belt attachment. Pretty basic stuff, really. I did most of the work, but without help to reinforce it and implementation of the rope, I don’t think it would’ve been as good as it is. Anyway, let’s get it off. I’m sure one of these buttons did the trick…”

She tilts her head down, moving her fingers back and forth in order to decide which to push. Unfortunately, she chooses the wrong one and the rope starts to pull in, instead of being cut loose, which yanks her forward and she stumbles, falling flat on her face. Caithe widens her eyes as she sees it and approaches to help her friend.
“Veilidh!”

Thankfully, the engineer lifts her hand and groans as rises to her knees.
“No, no, it’s fine! I’m fine.”
She laughs a bit awkwardly and then chooses the other buttons on her belt.
“Guess I still haven’t perfected it.”

Despite what Veil suggested, Caithe aids her in standing up regardless, still smiling while she shakes her head.
“Perhaps you should have tested your trinkets a few more times before you wanted to show off.”

“Pff, nonsense! I know what I’m doing. In fact, let me prove it to you. The charr taught me a lot of techniques too, and most of their stuff was quite…explosive.”

She gets a somewhat mischievous look on her face, and as they’re already pretty close, she only has to take another step, in order to enter the other woman’s vicinity. Caithe is about to make a comment, but instead widens her eyes as Veil places hands firmly at her waist, and then gasps as she feels how she suddenly leaves the ground. She instinctively raises her arms and grips Veil’s
shoulders as they’re fired up into the air together.

“Veilidh!”, is all Caithe manages to say.

They don’t fly all too far, however, only a few meters up, onto one of the thick tree roots above them. Once they do, Caithe rests against the trunk, while Veil smiles and lifts one of her feet to shake it around.

“Rocket boots! Pretty awesome, right?”

Despite her initial shock, Caithe can’t help herself when she suddenly starts to laugh, being both relieved and amused.

“You know what? I’m pretty sure they had other influences on you as well.”

“Tsk. Yeah, I guess. I don’t really mind, though. I certainly enjoyed my time with them.”

After Caithe eventually calms down, both of them realize that she has not yet removed her arms from Veil’s shoulders, and the two are still standing very close, bodies touching. In the distant past, this might have created some kind of negative or surprised reaction from both, but for now, neither of them move, simply staring into each other’s eyes.

“You have been gone quite a lot”, Caithe comments quietly. “I…must confess that I’ve missed you.”

Veil smiles once more, but it has a softer nature than previously.

“How much?”, she asks in a similar tone.

Caithe merely shakes her head, and then raises a hand to gently run it over the petals of Veil’s hair.

“I’m not sure I can properly describe it.”

Those words say more than anything, which also warms Veil’s chest.

“Well, I’m not going to pretend that I didn’t miss you as well. In fact, much of this stuff made me so excited because I knew I’d get to show you all of it at some point.”

Caithe raises an eyebrow amusedly.

“Is that so? Don’t tell me you started practicing just to impress me.”

“Heh, well…not completely, no, but it was definitely an incentive to try harder, I’d say.”

She hadn’t expected to tell anyone the truth of this matter, but if someone deserves to know, it is the very woman she tries so hard for.

Caithe’s lips curl once more, as she continues to watch and study Veil’s face in silence. She lowers the hand from the hair and uses a couple of fingers to caress the engineer’s cheek, as she tries to think. She also bites her own lower lip, as she feels how something, a certain emotion, is trying to make her act now when she has the chance. There has always been a connection between these two, feelings that they both wish to explore, but don’t fully dare to try, afraid of what the end results will be, and the reactions of those around them. However, even while Caithe realizes how much she wants to ignore reality, she feels guilty for even considering it.

“There are…probably a lot of other people that have missed you, and want to see you”, she says in a whisper.

“I know for a fact that Trahearne would like to talk to you. He misses some of your intellectual discussions.”

Normally, Veil would probably appear somewhat disappointed, as she acknowledges the truth of this, but at this time, she doesn’t seem like she intends to follow those procedures.

“I know, and I have as well, but that stuff can wait. The only one I want to speak with at this time
is standing right in front of me. If you want me, I won’t go.”

Caithe feels herself swallowing, trying to contain the excitement building within her.
“But…shouldn’t this be your choice too?”

“It is. You are my choice, Caithe. You always are.”

Once more, the older sylvari bites her lip, even harder this time. She feels herself instinctively leaning back against the trunk behind her, with Veil following, waiting for her to act. Eventually, Caithe cups the other woman’s cheeks and pulls her in. In a soft and yet eagerly awaited motion, the lips of both women connect, their eyes closing, and they feel themselves drawn into the kiss.
The motion and the touch practically light a fire in Veil’s interior. She has waited for this opportunity, this welcoming union, for so long. To be able to feel Caithe and the kiss itself is not even the only thing. There’s a connection between them, a tension that has grown for years and for many reasons. She knew it, and perhaps Caithe did as well, but Veil merely wanted her to accept it.

After what seems like minutes, but probably being no more than seconds, it ends for the time being, and once they tilt their heads back, they’re speechless. Despite how this moment was consensual and very much on purpose, neither were fully ready. Veil looks very happy about it, but Caithe still seems uncertain. Veil feels the need to say something, hoping that she did nothing wrong.
“I care about you, Caithe, I always have. Some days, I can’t stop thinking about you.”

Caithe swallows again, her eyes drifting down, and she speaks with an equally quiet tone as previously.
“It’s…it’s the same for me. I want similar things as you, just…”
She tries to find the heart of the issue, the constant uncertainty in her core, but can do no more than exhale.
“This sort of thing, these feelings…it’s still difficult for me. I hope you understand.”

She doesn’t want to accept the disappointment, but Veil knows she has to. She can’t push Caithe. “I do.” She knows about Faolain all too well by now.

However, Caithe doesn’t pull away immediately. Instead, she continues to caress Veil’s cheek. “Don’t mistake my words, though. I do like you, Veil. I like you a lot. Your presence, your voice, your touch…it awakens emotions in me that few others have ever been able to. I was never sure whether I’d be able to accept it, but I’m coming to terms with it. I just need more time to think.”

Careful, perhaps, but at least the fire still burns. It will not be put out. Not yet.
Veil nods slowly and tilts her cheek into Caithe’s palm.
“Alright. But, before we go…can I have just one more?”

Despite the gravity of the situation, Caithe chuckles and then inclines her head.
“Very well.”

This time, it’s Veil who initiates the kiss, almost unable to prevent her excitement for the expectations. If this is such an important motion, one that might be the first of many, or the last, she wants to at least remember it.

Chapter End Notes
Don’t worry, we’ll get back to this soonish. First, next week, we’re getting a visit from a certain mesmer.
And yeah, Veilidh’s outfit now pretty much looks like that screenshot in the profile page.
The smell of relatively fresh rain on the soil, the sound of squawking birds, and the sight of green and brown, only being temporarily interrupted by the blue of the lakes and rivers. There are certainly some things that don’t change much, like Caledon Forest, but that does not mean its inhabitants mirror this notion. Despite the sound of the jungle around her, there are other noises nearby that help provide her with many other emotions.

How long has it been since Veilidh was considered a sapling? She can only barely remember her first steps into the more dangerous sections of this place, and that moment was not great. Now, she’s the one being a guide, while hoping that others will get a good first impression of their homeland. When she was invited by a few of the Wardens to help walk young saplings through the woods, she wondered if it was really for her. Is she the type of person to do that? Has she really developed enough to be trusted with it? From what they and Caithe said, that seemed to be the case.

Technically, she’s not the main leader of the tour, though, she’s just there to provide assistance and answer potential questions. She has studied a lot of this place more thoroughly than most, especially the Wardens. Still, the fact that anyone wanted her there at all is a pretty astounding concept to her. She doesn’t exactly feel wise in the definition of that word or how people use it, but she will do her utmost to make sure that she can solve any inquiries.

At this time, they’re studying some creatures from afar, at the edge of the thicker parts of the forest. They might go in there at some other point, but Veil knows that the Wardens likely don’t want to expose the saplings to any overly dangerous situations, which can occur in the darkness. There’s not exactly much light from above in there. Veil also can’t help but smile as she watches the younger ones roaming freely, even more so when they approach to seek her knowledge regarding a plant, animal, or something else. A few people ask that she display her engineering tools for them, but the Wardens have pleaded with her to hold out on such things until later, so they don’t get distracted. Veil has agreed to behave, for now.

The whole trip goes rather well, until they suddenly hear a scream in the distance, something that definitely sounds like it came from a sylvari, in the direction of the thicker parts of the forest. As two Wardens run to investigate, with four staying back, Veil joins the advancing duo. Might as well, just in case it’s a particularly tough enemy. What they stumble into are two young saplings currently being held down by a group of five other sylvari, dressed in armors and clothes of darker colors.

Veil frowns and suddenly draws one of her pistols. “The Nightmare Court. Hey, you, release those saplings right now!”

The Courtiers had already noticed their arrival, but they don’t attack. Instead, they hold up the saplings as shields, to keep the rest at bay. “Or what?”, one of them asks. “You’ll shoot your precious weeds? I don’t think so.”

Her expression deepens, and she squeezes her gun harder. “Don’t you dare. If you try it, I’ll make sure to burn you alive, bastard.”

The one who spoke grins back at her, seemingly ready for a challenge, but the Courtier next to this one holds up a hand.
“There’s no need for violence; we don’t seek it, anyway. We have no wish nor reason to hurt these saplings. All we want is the attention of one individual – Veilidh.”

Veil arches her brow skeptically.
“Me? For what?”

“Nothing. But there’s someone deeper in the forest who wishes to speak with you. Either you agree, or…”

The Courtier looks at his companion, who moves a hand over a saplings throat, forcing her head up a bit further, making sure to not actively hurt her, but that they’re definitely ready.

Veil closes her eyes, feeling the rage boil within her. And these people say they have the best for all sylvari in mind? She always knew that was bullshit. That said, she doesn’t have much choice. With a sigh, she lowers her gun.
“Fine, I’ll do it. But if you even put a scratch on either of those two, I’ll find your lair and bombard it until nothing but ashes remain. You don’t want to see what my machines are capable of.”

There’s no response from the Courtiers, but one of the Wardens does, looking quite doubtful.
“Are you sure about this? It has to be a trap.”

Veil takes a deep breath and holsters her weapon.
“I’ll be fine. I think I know who it is, and she won’t hurt me.”

“She?”

The engineer shakes her head.
“Never mind. Just watch the Courtiers, alright? I’ll be back soon.”

Both of the Wardens nod, remaining in their positions as Veil wanders into the woods. Before she enters, she throws the Courtiers a quick glare, hoping that they’ll remember her threat. Maybe she can’t destroy the Court’s entire base, but she will at least make sure that this group regrets messing with her.

It appears that the other scoundrels were not allowed to come with her, as no one follows her. She continues through the relative darkness alone, taking in the smells and noises within. She has to go at least a minute through this vegetation, before she finally stumbles into more activity.

In a small glade that she’s about to pass through, she sees the glimmering light of glass, which shatters when she peers at it, revealing a rather familiar figure, and an even more recognizable voice.
“My dear Veilidh. Have you suddenly become Caithe out of nowhere?”

Veil frowns and crosses her arms, turning her eyes directly into the other woman’s.
“Faolain. You know, your constant interference with my life is becoming quite tiresome.”

The Nightmare Court’s leader merely chuckles as she steps out from the edge of the glade, closer to her companion. She sways her hips a bit extra as she walks.
“My, you certainly have grown, haven’t you? I can see that you’ve become much more confident. I like it.
But how can it be constant? We haven’t seen each other in a long while now, since when you served those little rats.”

Veil rolls her eyes.
“They’re not rats, they’re asura, and while you may be right about the time, I still haven’t forgotten our last meeting. It’s difficult to do so.”
Her words, unfortunately, seem to be quite a delight for Faolain, who looks highly amused when she eventually steps right into Veil’s personal space.

“Is that true? Oh, Veildh, you don’t know how happy it makes me that you can’t stop thinking about me.”

She raises a hand to caress the engineer’s cheek.

“I was afraid you might have become too distracted these past few years. You must have had a lot to do during your trip, after all.”

Veil glares at Faolain, but doesn’t actually push the hand away. She could, but she expected this.

“You should watch yourself. I have become a lot more dangerous and talented with weaponry. They might actually hurt you at this point.”

Faolain merely smirks back at her, their eyes continuously meeting.

“I’m sure you are telling the truth, but I am not worried. After all, you would never hurt me. Don’t try to lie and say otherwise.”

It annoys Veil that Faolain actually has a point, to a certain extent. If Faolain doesn’t strike first, either against Veil or those important to her, she sees no reason to lash out. She may not like Faolain much, especially due to her connection with Caithe, but the Grand Duchess is intriguing in a very weird way.

“We will see. Depends on your actions.”

“Besides, there’s no need to be afraid. I have already told my companions not to hurt the saplings, not as long as you behave.”

Veil emits a brief sigh and shakes her head.

“Fine, whatever. I’m willing to be peaceful if you are. But what do you want? Why did follow me just to call me out? Have we not talked enough?”

Faolain snorts and then takes a step back, starting to stroll through the glade in a casual pace.

“I am not so sure I agree with that assessment, especially not with your absence. Initially, I wished to discuss the topic of your return, but recently, there was something else which caught my attention.”

She turns her head towards Veil as she walks, eyes seeming to shimmer with undetermined emotions.

“I noticed how the elements of yours and Caithe’s relationship have changed. The feelings she holds for you, and which you obviously return, have grown stronger.”

Veil widens her eyes in surprise. She hasn’t spoken to anyone about it, certainly not when Sieran isn’t here anymore. Who would’ve told her of this? The Pale Tree is likely aware, but Faolain finding out through her is an impossibility.

“How would you know that? Are you spying on us?”

The older sylvari smiles in a rather smug way.

“Who knows? I believe I merely have a talent for these things, my dear.”

Even though she tries, Veil isn’t able to prevent herself from clenching her hands. Why does Faolain always have to act so superior? She pretends like she knows everything, but that’s impossible.

“So what? What do you want? Are you jealous all of a sudden, is that it? If that’s the case, too bad. I’m not going anywhere.”

The next noise coming from Faolain is a short laughter. Veil looks for some kind of hesitation, maybe a little bitterness, but there’s nothing.

“Jealous? Oh, sweet Veilidh, you think I would feel threatened by you? Not at all. I’m more than
aware that Caithe still cares for me. She always will.”

Veil scoffs.
“Debatable.”

“You’re making a mistake, one that you have not yet comprehended. While this romance between you is adorable in a way, you have to understand the circumstances. Most of all, you must be cautious of Caithe, in any situation.”

Once more, Veil raises her brow, but she’s not sure if she should be skeptical, amused, or confused.

“That’s some of the funniest words I’ve ever heard coming from you, a traitor and a vicious killer.”

Faolain merely laughs it off.

“If you have such careful doubts of me, my dear, why do you not feel the same regarding Caithe? I hope you don’t think she’s different.”

“She is and that’s not even a guess, it’s a fact. The two of you are nothing alike.”

As the Grand Duchess continues wandering, hands behind her back, she slowly shakes her head. Either she knows something Veil doesn’t, or she pretends to.

“Don’t get me wrong, I can see your viewpoint very well. Sure, Caithe may act as the protector, as the brave older sister of the Grove, but there is much more lurking beneath the surface. Caithe is not who you think, she never has been. She hides a darkness underneath her carefully crafted exterior, and one day, it will hurt you and anyone else who thinks she loves them.”

The words are certainly spoken with conviction, but there’s gotta be more to convince Veil.

“You think that scares me? I’m not afraid, Faolain. Everyone has something they hide, and I never believed it would be different with Caithe.”

Suddenly, Faolain disappears into shattering glass and reappears right in front of Veil, startling her.

“Oh, but it is”, she says with more seriousness in her tone. “Such thoughts are naive, Veilidh. What Caithe withholds is much deeper than you might’ve ever imagined. For your own safety, I suggest you get out now, while you can. If you want to be hurt, fine, go ahead and explore, but don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Veil tries to continue staring into Faolain’s eyes, to show that she isn’t backing down, but the mesmer is slightly better at these contests. Eventually, Veil sighs and looks away, although still seeming suspicious.

“Was that it? Was that all you wanted to say?”

Shortly after, Faolain’s smile returns and she leans forward, kissing Veil’s cheek.

“It was, indeed. I only came here to look out for my favorite genius. If you ever need help, my darling Veilidh, you know where to find me.”

She turns around, gives a brief wave, and then leaves the area. Veil doesn’t try to stop her, but with the fact that this meeting ended in nothing but a warning, Veil is skeptical.

Was this all a ploy, a way to separate the two? Or is there actually some truth in those words, an aspect Veil hasn’t yet looked into?
I decided to add Faolain to the tags now, even though I wouldn't exactly call her a main character, but...I mean, she has had a prominent position in three chapters so far, and she's going to be in at least two more later on. Might as well tag her. Also, more Veilidh/Caithe next week.
Coming back home to the Grove was an enjoyable experience for Veilidh, in terms of what a warm welcome she received, but there was one aspect she hadn’t really expected. Apparently, news of her journey had reached quite a few ears, possibly due to Caithe spreading it, and many people seemed interested in what she was trying to achieve. Not that she and Sieran were the only sylvari doing that sort of thing, but many seemed quite confident that Veil would try to utilize her new abilities for the benefit of everyone. When she finally entered the Pale Tree’s embrace, there were already people lining up to ask for aid with various tasks and constructions, more so than she could’ve anticipated.

She will admit that it wasn’t exactly strange to see crafters asking her for help, especially the people who build the homes within and around the Grove, but she was somewhat surprised by how many other individuals reached out to her. Quite a few asked if they could hire her for various equipment, weapons, or devices, with some just wanting an expert opinion. There are also those, like today, who ask her to help repair things that they don’t know what to do with.

After being through all the major cities and countries of Tyria, she finds it a little strange to be back in a land so focused on incorporating themselves so completely with nature. It is, of course, part of who she is as well, but she has also expanded her understanding, realized that there is more than one path.

The two people who asked her to repair part of their roof and the lamps around it, had probably expected that she’d just do a quick job and then be done with it, perhaps somewhat fancier than others might. But why simply fix something, when you can improve it?

Once she’s done with her task, she leaps down to the ground and ends up next to the two other sylvari.
“And there we go, all done!”, she exclaims with a smile on her face.

The couple watches her for a moment, before they look up at the roof.
“That was…very quick”, the man admits. “We thought it’d take you at least the whole day.”

Veil smirks and folds her arms.
“Underestimated my abilities, huh? Well, now you know not to make that mistake again!”

The woman next to him looks skeptically at the finished work and points at something.
“What’s that thing you’ve placed on the wall? Some kind of vine?”

Taking a step closer to it, Veil nods and tries to indicate to where it leads.
“Yes, I’ve connected it directly from your lamp to this little contraption”, she says and nudges her hand at a small knob attached to the wall.
“If you spin it around, it will change the intensity of your lamp’s light. Can be useful on darker nights, I’m sure.”

As she turns it, they can all see how the lamp does exactly what she explained, and the couple
look astonished.
“That’s amazing!”’, says the man.

“We didn’t ask for this, but thank you for your efforts!”

The duo then immediately runs up to Veil and embraces her from one side each in a tight hug. She’s a bit surprised over the act, but then emits a hearty laugh, while wrapping an arm around each.
“You’re welcome! However, from now on, try not to cause any more damage, will you? I won’t always be here for you.”

“We promise!”, they say before they run inside, probably going to get busy with some other mischief.

Veil sighs, somehow suspecting that she’ll see them again. Perhaps it’s not too awful, though, as she kinda enjoys the company and the recognition. People genuinely seem to appreciate her efforts and that means something.
While she stands there thinking about it, she hears a voice from behind her.
“You are becoming rather well-known around the city, huh?”

Turning around, Veil’s eyes soon find the source – Caithe. The slightly older woman is leaning against a couple of large plants that work as decoration in this district, with a smile on her face and her arms folded, while she studies Veil from afar.
The engineer displays a small smirk and shrugs.
“Well, what can I say? I’m really good at what I do and that makes me popular. Can’t be helped.”

Caithe shakes her head.
“I get the feeling that you are quite enjoying the attention too.”

“Tsk, you have no proof of that.”

“And yet you won’t deny it.”

Veil snorts, but Caithe is right - she certainly can’t say that it’s not fun to have so many people flock around her all the time.
“Whatever. And what are you doing here? I thought you had some meeting with the Wardens.”

Caithe smiles mysteriously, before she nudges her head in another direction, a sign for Veil to follow, as she starts to walk away.
“Well, it has been a few hours since then, so we’re finished. Thought I would make sure that you weren’t getting into trouble.”

“Me? Why would I do that?”

The Firstborn’s eyes shimmer with amusement as she looks at Veil.
“You think I don’t remember what you and Sieran did after your awakening?”

“That was years ago now! We’ve turned into very different people.”

“Evolved, perhaps, but I wouldn’t call it ‘different’. I know you like to mess around from time to time. You can try to deny it, but I see right through you.”

In all honesty, there’s really only one way that she likes to mess around, but she can’t admit that in public like this.
“More like you see what you want!”
Caithe chuckles, but her expression softens soon after. “I have to admit, I am glad that you’re helping out, Veilidh. A lot of people appreciate your efforts and your skill. I’m sure it means a lot to them.”

Veil has placed all of her tools around her belt, as well as the small bag she’s currently carrying. “Well, to be honest, I was fairly skeptical at first. After having moved through so many sections of Tyria and gaining so much experience, I was unsure if I could just come back home and be content.”

Her glance sweeps the district, observing the sylvari walking around and enjoying themselves, the many structures and houses surrounding them. It brings a smile to her lips. “But I was wrong. To be useful to our people in any way, and making them feel better, is a lot more enjoyable than I thought it would be. It fills me with…warmth and joy every time.”

Her words appear to affect Caithe as well, whose reaction widen even further. “It’s due to compassion and generosity. I am proud of you, Veilidh, for having realized what’s important in life and it makes me happy to know that you’ve found your place in the Grove.”

Veil turns her gaze towards the other woman, considering the words. Caithe can often speak like someone who acts as a watchful guardian over her home, as if people have entered her domain. Not necessarily out of ownership, but rather a certain nurturing instinct. “Well, I have a feeling you had a certain part in making that happen. I doubt people simply knew of my skills out of nowhere.”

“Heh, perhaps, but it wouldn’t have developed as it did without your determination and confidence. Although, I have to also admit that I get overwhelmed sometimes. I still can hardly believe how much you’ve grown.”

Sylvari don’t really grow in terms of shape, but rather in personality and experiences. Caithe wasn’t born all too much ahead of her, but there is a slight gap regardless. Veil smirks once more as she hears it being mentioned. “Why not? It’s been many years since I was a sapling, hasn’t it?”

“Well, yes, but I can’t easily forget the days of the past, when I first entered the Dream to aid you. It was…an important time for both of us.”

Veil inclines her head in agreement. “Important and interesting, for many reasons. Certainly much more hectic than most people’s awakenings. I can also still recall when I finally awoke and how you were the first person to offer your arms for me.”

They haven’t actually spoken much of it in detail, as it kind of just passed by them, but now that they do, she watches with interest as Caithe smiles somewhat shyly. “True, but…I didn’t want our hero to simply fall flat on her face immediately after such a grand success.”

The engineer chuckles and shakes her head. “Pffft, I would’ve done no such thing! I have the reflexes of a jaguar.”

“In your dreams, perhaps.”

“Bah. Regardless, your appearance that day was quite…convenient, I must admit, but I’m obviously thankful for your choice of going to me before anyone else. I also don’t think you should feel it’s such a strange concept. Like I said, it has been a few years now, and everyone grows, right? Even you must have changed.”
With a more solemn expression, Caithe nods slowly. “I suppose it would be silly to ignore that, because you’re right. I have become much more devoted and dedicated to where my place should be. The Pale Tree needs me here, as do the Wardens, and many other aspects. Our home is more important to me now than ever, and I want our people to know where they have me, should they require my assistance.”

Not that Veil doesn’t appreciate that choice, but where does it come from? She can’t remember the Grove being threatened by anything in particular as of late, not in terms of major events. What has increased Caithe’s protective nature? “Well, you haven’t been inside the Grove constantly, have you?”

Caithe briefly shakes her head. “Not all the time, no. In fact, once the asura gate opened, I decided to travel for a few weeks as well. But, similarly to you, I eventually returned here. I obviously did so at a much smaller time frame than you had, but it was necessary for me. I need a home, a place of safety.”

The engineer goes quiet for a short while then. How would Caithe feel if Veil disappeared or simply left the Grove? If she had chosen to go with Sieran, would Caithe have been saddened by the news, tried to change her mind, or simply accepted it? It’s a serious question, but Veil isn’t in a serious mood and instead tries to stay playful. “I wonder exactly how much you have grown, though. Have you become faster?”

Caithe arches her brow. “Huh? Faster?”

Veil quickly wiggles her own eyebrows and then starts running. “Race to your house!”

And she’s already off before Caithe even has a chance to respond. “W-what? Veilidh, wait!”

“That’s not how races work!”, she exclaims while laughing.

Somewhere behind her, Caithe smirks, pursues her, and tries to pick up her pace as to not fall too far behind. “It’s not fair to start without giving the other contestant an equal chance.”

“It is! I needed the boost!”

“You’re going to regret challenging me!”

“Prove it!”

They run as quickly as they can, leaping over small streams of water, bushes, trying to make it past bridges, sturdy roots, and vines that provide them with shortcuts. A lot of people stand in their path to begin with, but quickly get out of the way when it seems clear that neither of them will slow down. During most of the race, Veil is in a comfortable lead, which surprises her quite a bit. She was sure that Caithe would’ve been able to catch up without any trouble at all, but perhaps she overestimated the Firstborn’s capabilities, or underestimated her own. Unfortunately, that ends up being hubris.

Eventually, she is almost at the house, seeing it get closer and closer to her vision. She’s only a few seconds away when something happens, and the door opens up. She only barely recognizes the trace of a darkened figure ahead, making her widen her eyes at first, before she gasps.
Veil leaps into the opened doorway and sees Caithe already standing there, leaning against the wall.
“You…you shadowstepped!”

The kind of abilities Caithe possesses are not quite pure magic, but more than simple physical effects as well. She can utilize the shadows and surroundings in order to gain benefits in a fight… or during an event like this.
“Hmm? Not sure what you’re talking about. I think you were just too slow”, she says, trying her best to lie as confidently as possible.

Veil breathes heavily as she enters the house, having to lean against the wall for support. The speed she used took a lot of energy out of her.
“This is not fair!”

“It’s alright, dear, you just need to train a bit more before you catch up to my level.”

“You cheated!”

Caithe tilts her head and isn’t quite able to wipe the smugness off her face.
“Cheated? I’m fairly sure you never actually made the rules for this race clear.”

“A race always has established rules!”

“Not even remotely true. You shouldn’t be such a sore loser.”

Still resting against the wall, her chest heaving with each breath, Veil can’t help but laugh. She wants to protest, to call Caithe out, but in a way, it is quite amusing. She did just get beaten at her own game, didn’t she? Start by cheating and you’ll lose to cheaters.
“You’re a bastard.”

Caithe is about to respond, but she stops herself and lets her eyes sweep the corridor. They’re alone, with no noise coming from any other section of the place. There are more rooms in this house that belongs to others, but none of them seem to be present. Without explaining why, she slides closer to Veil over the wall and looks at her with interest.
“Should I start to feel threatened?”, she asks quietly.

Veil blink and looks towards her companion.
“What?”

“You know, with how much you do for the rest of the Grove. Will I…not be getting enough of your attention anymore?”

The suggestive tone and the mischievous look in her eyes surprises Veil at first. She hadn’t expected such a sudden reversal, as she rarely gets to see this side of her companion.
“I…I don’t know. Is that something you want?”

Amusement plays across Caithe’s features and she takes a few steps closer.
“Well, I still remember what you told me when you first got back, and we met outside the city. I have considered those words very carefully and…what it is that I want.”

There’s obviously contemplation at display, but Caithe also seems a lot more confident in this regard than what Veil is used to. Such notions are both surprising and pleasant.
“And what did you conclude?”

Shocking her even further, Caithe stops right in front of her, placing one arm on the wall next to the engineer and uses the other hand to caress Veil’s cheek. As their bodies collide, she connects
their lips in a fierce kiss, not allowing there to be any ambiguous ideas of what it is she desires. The pleasant anticipation Veil felt earlier is now quickly growing into joy. She shifts the location of her own arms, wrapping them around Caithe’s waist as she allows the older sylvari to devour her. She doesn’t stand still, of course, as she does her best to reciprocate each motion, gasping excitedly. She wants to let her companion know how much she yearns for this.

Once they eventually stop, they’re both sort of out of breath, Veil even more so. Caithe doesn’t push away this time, her eyes closed as she leans her forehead against Veil’s. “That is…a good answer”, the engineer admits in a whisper.

Caithe smiles, nudging her nose into Veil’s cheek. “I know. I’ve come to realize that I can’t hesitate any more, that I have to reach out if I want to explore. If we don’t give this a try, we will never know what we might’ve missed, right?”

Veil returns a similar motion, while her hands roam across other parts of Caithe’s body. “Absolutely.”

Now that she has the other woman here, she can’t really allow it to end either. With one hand on Caithe’s rear end, she pulls the rogue into another embrace, this one more passionate than the last. She lets one of her legs stroke against Caithe’s thigh, somehow trying to invite her. She feels the hand leaving her cheek, travelling further down as it pushes against her clothes, hoping to find gaps. “You’re…surprisingly good at this”, Caithe admits in between the motions. “I didn’t know you’d be so skilled. Where does it come from?”

Veil lets her eyes flutter open at least momentarily, meeting Caithe’s gaze. “Oh, you know, I may have practiced on a few humans back in Kryta. They are…very cute, and they know a lot about this.”

Caithe giggles and shakes her head. “I should have known. Maybe I should spread the rumor of Veilidh, the human charmer.”

“Tsk, you’d only do it so that you can tell everyone you’ve tamed me.”

Caithe smirks and lifts one of her hand to grab the hem of Caithe’s coat. “Perhaps it is time that you demonstrate this skill with the same vigor you used for your trinkets.”

The desire in Veil’s eyes is even more blatant now as she bites at her own lower lip. “Anything for you.”

“Thought so. Perhaps out of view from the others?”, Caithe suggests, before dragging the engineer into her room. There is no resistance to this request.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, so now they’re kind of in a relationship…I guess. This fic is far from over, though.
A romantic relationship, is that what they call it? It’s probably the term that the humans would use to define what they have become. Veilidh herself isn’t so sure. It’s a strange thing to consider, even to this day, that she and Caithe have grown so close, accepted each other as something more. Not that Veil has anything to complain about; to be together with someone she cares so much for is incredible, but she still doesn’t know if they consider this to be true. It’s not like they refer to each in any different manner, even when speaking to others. They are who they are, except closer together.

Something that has changed in the past two years, though, is the amount of time they spend in each other’s company. It’s much more common to see the two heading off to share a bed or to go somewhere private, where they will only have to pay attention to one another. One such activity that they like to do is head out into Caledon Forest and enjoy the waters of the inlets that flow through the jungle. There are other pools closer to the Grove, but they prefer to use Ventry Bay, in the middle section of the woods, where there usually aren’t a lot of people. In that area, they can wander the beach side by side and discuss life before they dive in.

As night descends on the forest today, this is exactly what they have chosen to do. Trips and excursions through the various nearby regions can often be quite fun for them, as they get to mess around. The closer Veil has grown to Caithe, the more she has realized that the rogue is much more mischievous than what she appears to be. She doesn’t mind getting into trouble, if she gets something out of it. Veil can certainly understand why, as the slightly older sylvari has quite deft hands, being able to reach for whatever she wants. If Caithe wants something from Veil, however, there’s no need to steal - she’ll give it willingly.

In these intimate moments, it’s usually Veil who does most of the touching, while Caithe teases her, sometimes pinching or nibbling where the engineer would least expect it. After they feel that they’ve had enough of this for now, they head towards the waters, getting ready to swim, but these thoughts are interrupted. Caithe suddenly stops and grabs Veil’s hand, making the engineer blink in surprise.

“What?”, she asks, seeing how her companion is looking at something.

Veil glances at Caithe, who has a look of curiosity and suspicion in her eyes.

“Do you see those two over there?”

Following to the indicated area, Veil spots two people out on the beach, close to the bay. They’re both crouched, dipping their hands into the waters and occasionally looking at each other. It’s possible that they’re talking, but Veil can’t hear anything from over here. The most interesting detail, though, is that one is quite a bit larger than the other. Once she narrows her eyes too, Veil is pretty sure that she can see a tail on one of them.

“Hmm, yeah, I see them”, she replies quietly. “Looks like a…charr? And possibly one of ours.”

“Indeed. I haven’t spotted many of their people in our woods previously.”

Veil glances at Caithe, who has a look of curiosity and suspicion in her eyes.

“You want to go see what’s going on?”

The rogue nods briefly in return.
“We might as well just get a closer look, find out what they’re talking about.”

Seeing no need to discuss it further, the two go completely silent as they sneak up to that area, hoping not to be spotted. When they’re almost there, Caithe’s instincts react and she puts a hand on Veil’s shoulder, pulling her down. The two get into crouched positions instead and about a second or two later, the charr decides gaze in that direction, letting her eyes sweep the darkened forest, but then returns into her previous position. Seems they just barely managed to avoid detection. Veil is glad that Caithe is with her by now; no one has reflexes like her.

Eventually, the duo stops behind some tall grass, looking through the gaps in between to watch the ones out on the beach. They can definitely hear how those two are talking about something now. They seem to be poking and dipping items into the lake as well.
“You recognize them?”, Caithe whispers.

It’s pretty dark, but even then, they can see the light green skin of the sylvari nearby, with long dark green leaves on top, shaped like a ponytail. They can’t observe distinct features, but Veil isn’t familiar with the voice either.
“No. Never met either of them.”

Shortly after she says this, they notice how the sylvari uses some kind of tool on the waters, and parts of it start to darken, creating a small dot that grows into a puddle.
“See what I mean?”, she says to her charr companion.

The charr nods briefly and scratches her own chin with a claw.
“Yeah, now that you demonstrate it, that is kind of worrying.”

“So, what should we do about it? We can’t just let it stay like this.”

“I know, I know, and we’re not going to, but I believe it’s best if we conduct a few more tests first.”

Even in the darkness, thanks to some of the slightly glowing sections of her face, they can see how the sylvari looks worried.
“Are you sure that’s wise? We wouldn’t want to attract…attention.”

“And how else will we find out the truth? This needs to be stopped now, before it gets worse.”

Before they can get much further, however, a bit of noise interrupts their discussion, but it does not come from the spying women. Instead, it originates from the waters. The lake stirs as something appears to rise from it, shambling up towards the sands in a heap of tattered clothes, decay and pained groans. At first, it’s just one, but then at least two more joins the first and there are even further seemingly appearing from beneath the surface.

“Shit”, they hear the charr saying as she rises to her feet. “Seems we’ve got company after all.”

The sylvari stands up next to her, as the charr goes for some kind of weapon on her back, a rifle.
“Damn. What do we do?”

“Take ‘em out, before anyone finds out, of course.”

In the meantime, Caithe and Veil observes the entire event, and the former starts to frown.
“Those are undead.”

Veil widen her eyes, never having actually seen any that don’t look like the minions of necromancers. These are entirely different, like actual corpses of dead people.
“Undead. You mean…from Orr?”
“Looks like it.”

“What would they be doing here?”

Caithe slowly shakes her head, her hands now going to her daggers. “No idea. I’ve never seen them in Caledon before. This isn’t just implausible, but also dangerous. Come, we have to do something about it. We cannot allow an outbreak in the forest.”

As the engineer agrees, the two of them make their way through the grass and closes in on the undead’s positions.

In the meantime, shots are fired by the charr, as her sylvari companion prepares some kind of magic. By the look of the purple-pink eruptions and the sound of cracking glass, it would seem she’s a mesmer.

Shortly before a few of the undead are about to close in on the charr, before she has time to reload, Caithe appears out of nowhere between three walking corpses. She digs both blades into the back of the one in front and slices outwards, ripping this section open and then kicks it to the ground. After its two comrades tries to redirect their attention to her, she swiftly ducks beneath their attacks, spins around to slash at the leg of the one to her right and then jumps up to quickly decapitate the other. It all goes so fast that the charr barely has time to react.

“And who in Khan-Ur’s name are you?”

Caithe only offers a brief frown, before looking at the sea, as more undead appear. “No time to explain now. We have to focus on the fight!”

There’s no protest from the charr, as she puts bullets into her rifle again. “Fine, but just keep ‘em off me and I’ll blow their heads up.”

Where the unknown sylvari is standing, more undead are trying to approach her from a variety of directions. She’s doing an admirable job, but she can’t take care of all of them.

Luckily, a bottle comes flying towards the batch of corpses. When it shatters, some kind of oil spills everywhere. Veil leaps out from her hiding spot, having unfolded some kind of rifle of her own. Once she lifts and aims it, pushing the trigger, a line of fire erupts from the front. Not only does it spread fire in that location, but as soon as it combines with the liquid, the flames in that region grow even stronger, almost creating an explosion.

The other woman blinks in surprise and then glances at Veil. “Wow, that’s…quite impressive!”

Veil smirks back at her. “That’s what I do. Ready for the next wave?”

Magic swirls from the sylvari’s hand, which she uses to surround herself with. From the pieces of glass-like magic, two illusions appear, pretty much mimicking her exact appearance. “Definitely. They won’t enter the forest as long as we are here!”

The fight continues and what surprises Veil isn’t just that the undead are actually here, in her forest, but how many there are. When the battle is practically done, with the living group standing as victors, the total death toll that she can see is up at around two dozen. Where did that many corpses come from? Certainly not sylvari, as Trahearne has told her that they can’t be turned. And why would they even be sent out here? To gather what few skritt and hylek live in these realms? Then they shouldn’t have come towards regions that sylvari inhabit.

She considers asking the people who were here, the ones that tried to test something in the bay, but it appears that this won’t be so easy. While the chaos is dying down, the charr sneaks up
towards the mesmer.
“Hey, let’s scurry off, now that we have the chance”, she says in a whisper.

The sylvari looks a little bit unsure, hesitantly gazing at Caithe and Veil.
“Can we just leave the place like this? They’re still fighting.”

“Yeah, but they seem to have the situation under control. They won’t need us to clean up. And besides, can’t afford being discovered now. We have to report back to headquarters with this.”

The mesmer sighs and then nods.
“If you say so. Let’s go then.”

They turn around, heading towards the grass, which is the easiest place to start their escape. Unfortunately, before they even reach it, they see the contours of a shadow approaching, one that eventually ends up right in front of them. Caithe gets in their way, standing there with a frown and her arms folded, daggers still in her hands.
“Going somewhere?”, she asks.

The charr bares her fangs, lifting her rifle up.
“Get out of our way. We’re leaving.”

“Are you now? I don’t think that would be wise.”

“Yeah, I agree”, they hear from behind them, and while they look over their shoulders, they see how Veil stands there with her flamethrower, having also deployed a few of her portable turrets.
“What you two were doing out there earlier was highly suspicious and I don’t think you’re going anywhere until you’ve answered our questions.”

The situation grows very tense, especially with the silence now surrounding them. There really is nothing else than them here, which means that an escape would not be easy. It gets even worse for the intruding duo, as they all hear other sounds in the distance; Warden troops are closing in, probably due to all the noises of combat earlier. There’s a small sylvari outpost nearby, which was likely alerted to the battle.

The duo looks at each other, before the charr huffs and lowers her gun.
“Fine, seems we have no choice. We surrender.”
The return back to the Grove may have been a bit more ceremonial than Veilidh had intended. Once the charr and the unknown sylvari were captured, the Wardens arrived to help them out, but while Veil and Caithe recommended that they do this as privately as possible, the Wardens decided that it was time to march the guilty duo directly through their home, up towards the lair of the Pale Tree’s avatar. Caithe was the one to suggest who they should speak to, but not the method. It’s not that Veil blames her partner either, as she also wants to make sure that these two won’t lie, but now it became a spectacle. Oh well, perhaps the truth will at least be revealed.

Once they arrive, Veil notices that the Pale Tree is not alone in the Omphalos Chamber, and she smiles widely when she waves at the man discussing something with their mother. “Trahearne! I didn’t know you had come home as well.”

The Firstborn returns her expression, but nods his head respectfully instead. “I have, indeed. I needed to discuss certain information I have gained recently. It’s good to see you as well, dear sister. Did you read the report I sent you last month?”

“About the siege machines they used on the shores of Orr? Yes, I did! I might actually have a solution for how to dismantle them, if that’s what you wanted.”

He chuckles briefly. “I thought you might, which is why I entrusted you with the knowledge. I would be very interested in hearing your conclusions.”

Caithe clears her throat to interrupt both of them. “I’m sure you can do that at a later date. We have more pressing concerns at this time.” She turns towards the glowing figure in the center and bows her head slightly. “Mother, I hope we’re not disturbing you.”

The Pale Tree smiles at her, as well as Veil. “Of course not, my dear child. You will never be a disturbance to me, nor will you, Veilidh. What is it you have brought me?”

She steps aside, revealing the charr and the sylvari, both of them flanked by Warden guards. The sylvari is currently gazing down at the ground, looking quite embarrassed, but the charr seems fairly defiant, a constant scowl on her face. Now that it’s daytime, it’s easier to see her pale brown fur, her curved twin horns and the strange combination of a green and a white eye. Veil still can’t remember ever seeing her, but she is certainly intriguing.

“Mother, Veilidh and I found these two snooping around by the southern beach of Ventry Bay, conducting some kind of suspicious activity, which seemed to contaminate the waters. Shortly after, it attracted attention, as undead rose from the bay.”
Both the Pale Tree and Trahearne widen their eyes in surprise.
“Undead?”, Trahearne asks. “Are you speaking of the Risen, the ones from Orr?”

Caithe nods sharply.
“It would seem so, at least from what we saw. Veilidh and I witnessed the events and aided them in defeating the undead – or the Risen – and when we wanted to get an explanation, they attempted to flee. We did not allow that.”

The attention soon shifts to the two prisoners. The Pale Tree only glances briefly at the charr, but looks much more thoroughly at the sylvari.
“Valenze, is this true? Why would you do something like this? You have always been such a clever child.”

Both Veil and Caithe looks curiously at the Pale Tree, as they did not hear the name previously, but it is not strange that their maker would know every identity, of course. Valenze herself seems a bit ambiguous, both embarrassed and skeptical. She pushes one of her feet into the ground, kicking at some of the loose bits of the branches.
“I… I’m sorry. I did not intend for anything bad to happen, mother, I swear. We were only trying to investigate.”

Veil folds her arms and turns to the Pale Tree.
“Do you know her, mother?”

The avatar inclines her head slightly.
“Of course, I do. I know all my children, Veilidh, and the way you awakened.”

“I know her as well”, Trahearne admits. “I believe we have met once or twice. Valenze is one of the Fifthborn, one of the cleverest from her generation.”

It’s somewhat surprising that anyone could keep track of such things, but if there’s someone who could, it would be Trahearne. He seems to keep an internal register of the various generations, even though most hardly ever use any other than First and Secondborn.
“I see. That was a few generations ago, now.”

Valenze clears her throat and gazes at the engineer.
“Greetings, Veilidh. I recognize you as well. I have heard of how you defeated the shadow dragon in the Dream a decade ago.”

Veil arches her brow.
“Have you?”

“Yes! The story has spread across the Grove. Many people have been impressed and inspired by your bravery.”

“Hmm, well, I never intended to become gossip or whatever, and I didn’t really defeat it on my own. We were a whole team out there. Besides, admiring such actions doesn’t really exonerate you.”

Valenze hesitates once more, turning her gaze to the ground. They hear a snort from the charr then, who folds her arms.
“Don’t be so harsh on her. She only wanted to do what she believed to be best for your home. If the stories of this shadow dragon are true, I’m pretty sure you would do the same.”

Veil shrugs.
“That remains to be seen. And who are you anyway? Are you the one who dragged her into
The charr rolls her eyes. “No, I’m certainly not. My name is Halvora Snapdagger. I represent the Order of Whispers.”

Both of the Firstborn look quite surprised by her words, their eyes widened. “Order of Whispers? I’ve heard of them”, Caithe admits.

“As have I”, Trahearne remarks. “I have encountered them a few times during my research of Orr. We share an interest in the elder dragons.”

This explanation does win them a little bit of favor, but Veil still eyes the charr with mild suspicious. “Is that true? You deal with dragons?”

Halvora snorts. “Dealing with them is one way to put it, but we do more than that. We constantly investigate their movements, their activities, their goals, and ways for how to defeat them. The very purpose of our organization is to keep the world safe from the elder dragons’ influence. And no, whatever any of you people think, I am not responsible for what happened out there, nor is Valenze.”

“Well, it certainly looked like you were. The Risen didn’t appear until you people acted and contaminated the water.”

Valenze sighs briefly. “We didn’t contaminate anything. We were merely doing research.”

Halvora glances at her companion and nods. “The organization I am part of sent me to help her investigate, after she had given us vital intel. She was getting worried about the situation in Caledon.”

Most people have now shifted from suspicion to interest, and a little bit of anxiety. Trahearne looks especially intrigued and tilts his head curiously. “Hmm, this does sound like something we would like to hear more of. Could you explain it to us?”

“I certainly can”, she says, but stops to look around herself, “but I don’t believe this kind of information should be spread too widely. It’s better if as few ears as possible are privy to it.”

The Pale Tree nods her head. “I agree. Wardens, you have my gratitude for your vigilance and the aid you offered to your fellow sylvari, but it is best if you return to your posts. I am sure that the Firstborn, Veilidh and I can solve this situation.”

Some of the guards look a little skeptical or even disappointed, but they salute their leader. “Yes, Mother Tree. Call on us again if you need us.”

Not only the Wardens, but other people who were temporarily stationed there, all leave through the pod elevator down to the level below. Eventually, only the avatar, Trahearne, Caithe, Veilidh, Halvora and Valenze remain. “Right”, Caithe says, “time to start talking.”

Halvora has relaxed somewhat now that she’s not surrounded by guards, although it’s hard to say how cordial she’ll be. “I’ll do my best. Valenze here has been associated with us since a little while back now, as she has
shown interest in combating the elder dragons. Her information was tied to a larger chain of events.
For the last several months, our Order has sighted movements from Zhaitan and its minions, which has been spreading to several other nations across Tyria. Its agents have tried to get into a lot of different places in order to dispatch troops. It is starting to become an issue.”

“How is that possible? If it had moved large bands of troops everywhere, the armies of Tyria would notice.”

“Of course, but it doesn’t operate like that. Instead, Zhaitan uses creatures that can blend into their surroundings to sneak through the lands, and then drop off special magical items. These objects can open portals connected directly to Orr, which makes it possible for the elder dragon to teleport troops into whatever area it wants to access.”

Trahearne strokes a hand over his chin and nods in thought.

“Ah yes, I believe I have observed similar objects. A mirror, correct?”

Halvora looks mildly surprised by his conclusion.

“Hmm, you’re quite knowledgeable, huh?”

He offers a smile in return.

“It is my life’s work to investigate Orr. I try to learn everything I can about its truths and secrets.”

“Right. Well, you are correct – they do indeed look like mirrors and the undead use them.”

Valenze chooses to speak up next.

“As a mesmer, I am quite attuned to such spells, and I was able to sense the magic deep in the forest. It is what originally drew me to ask questions.
I was already fairly intrigued by the Order of Whispers, but when I made this discovery, I decided to contact them directly and relay what I knew. As I had heard what vast knowledge they had of the dragons, I figured that they would know of a way to stop the whole situation from getting worse.”

Next to her, Halvora snorts amusedly and shakes her head.

“Well, you certainly got our attention.
After Valenze explained this to some of our representatives, I was dispatched to investigate further. Both of us attempted to act on it, and we found the proof we needed.”

She glances between Caithe and Veil.

“What you believed to be some sort of contamination device, was actually a tool we utilize to spot the magical energy of the mirror and track its source. It’s in that bay.
As the undead arrived, and the two of you stopped us from going any further, you also stopped us from fishing the mirror out from its location.”

Caithe frowns at the accusation.

“And how were we supposed to know? You didn’t explain to us and immediately tried to sneak off as soon as the fight was over. Why did you people not come to us from the very start? That could have prevented this. Especially you, Valenze. You are one of us. You should have trusted us.”

While the charr doesn’t appreciate the tone, Valenze continues to look uncertain.

“I know, I… I apologize. I simply believed it would create more chaos if I started to spread rumors of what was happening. This seemed like the wiser choice.”

“And it was”, Halvora agrees. “I did not approach your commanders, because that is not how we operate. We try to keep our secrets within the Order before we act. If we can stop disaster without
anyone else getting involved, all the better.”

Caithe shakes her head.
“Yes, and look how it turned out. What would’ve happened if we weren’t there? The undead might’ve swarmed and killed you.”

“And look how it turned out. What would’ve happened if we weren’t there? The undead might’ve swarmed and killed you.”

“Hah! Seems you underestimate us more than the dragons do. Perhaps you should speak with the Blood Legion and join them. They share your attitude.”

Valenze clears her throat, not wanting to create more hostility.
“But…we do appreciate your aid. Without it, we might have had some difficulties.”

Veil may have doubts about their methods, but she can certainly see where they’re coming from. It isn’t entirely unreasonable to handle these kinds of situations without letting everyone know. Rumors can have quite devastating effects, after all.
“I suppose the most important aspect is that we defeated them. Now we just have to find that mirror.”

If there’s notions of rivalry from Caithe, Trahearne is completely uninterested by it. His eyes have gone somewhat distant, continuing to ponder the information.
“Indeed, but this whole situation is very peculiar. Sylvari cannot be turned by the undead dragon, as our essence does not align with it. I don’t see what it would be doing here, why it would come to Caledon.”

Halvora scratches her chin in thought.
“I admit that we don’t yet have the answers for this either. So far, we have only gathered information about where it goes, not what its goals are. Either way, it’s dangerous movement.”

Most of those present seem to agree, but the Pale Tree decides to give Veil a particularly intrigued gaze.
“You have not commented much on the undead themselves, Veilidh. Do you have any thoughts you wish to add?”

Veil turns to address her mother, but she merely shrugs.
“Honestly, I don’t know what to say. The minions of the dragons are still largely unknown to me, as I haven’t encountered them much, even during my travels. All I can say is that I’m worried.”
She lowers her eyes to the ground, contemplating her role in this endeavor and the potential truth of her ignorance.
“I keep being reminded of my Wyld Hunt, what I believe I am meant to do. Perhaps I can no longer ignore it.”

Caithe looks curiously at her girlfriend, not sure what kind of answers she will find if she starts to poke.
“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that it may be time for me to act, to expand my knowledge on these enemies of Tyria. But I can’t do that here, hiding in the Grove. I believe I may have to send a letter to the Shiverpeaks and find out where Sieran is located.”

Chapter End Notes

I imagine that this is before Trahearne got involved with the Order of Whispers,
which is why Halvora didn't know him. Also, Valenze was obviously not in a high rank yet!
I was originally gonna make Halvora joke about Caithe joining the Vigil, but then I was like "Oh wait, this is five years before the Vigil is created. SHIT". So yeah, switched to the Blood Legion.
And yeah, this is kinda what drives Veilidh to the Priory. OFF TO SEE SIERAN NEXT WEEK
1316 AE – Western Lornar’s Pass, Shiverpeak Mountains

Cold. It has been a while since Veilidh was last up in the mountains far to the northeast of her homeland and felt the freezing wind on her skin. While the Shiverpeaks were no less harsh back then, at least her last trip was not made alone, as she had Sieran by her side. Her only comfort in this particular journey is that she will be able to reunite with her sister and also encounter a lot of new faces that await her up on the end of these slopes.

She doesn’t know why, but she had forgotten what a long climb it would be to reach the top of the roads that end in the building placed at the side of the mountain. It feels like she has been wandering for days in the snowy chaos, and perhaps it is the headwind itself that has made her feel such misery about being here. She won’t deny that she has contemplated turning back on several occasions, but what good would that do? She has to press on, or she’ll never reach the end.

When she’s not far from the bridge that leads onto the correct side of the terrain, she makes a mistake and slips on some ice, making her fall to the ground with a thud. She groans and tries to correct her position, cursing at the mountain, the weather, Tyria and perhaps even herself. This might be what is heard from afar, because when she looks up next, she sees how something, or someone, approaches through the snow, a rather large being that dares defy the storm. It is a norn of some kind, wearing thick furs and somewhat heavier armor beneath.

“Need some help, friend?” she asks Veil loudly, trying to get above the sound of the wind.

Veil groans and sighs.
“I…I guess so, yes. Not having the best of luck today, I’m afraid.”

The norn chuckles and offers one of her big hands down to the sylvari, letting Veil grab it before she pulls the other woman up.
“I guess our mountain is not as friendly to your kind as it tends to be with us. Still, this is probably a bit worse than your last visit.”

Veil blinks confusedly and looks up, wondering what’s going on.
“Wait, how did you know I have been here before?”

Wynnet laughs somewhat louder and shakes her head.
“Forgot about me for a moment, did you? We received your letters and Sieran showed me some of them. Decided I’d keep a lookout, in case you’d come by any time soon. Guess it was a good choice. Come, let me take you up to our facilities.”
With Wynnet’s help, she gets through the snowstorm, allowing the norn to protect and shield her at times. The two haven’t met on many occasions, but it seems that she is already fairly familiar with Sieran, and the sylvari has apparently been telling a lot of stories of her sister. Once they enter the Priory itself and walk past the many people both on the outside and the inside, Veil notes how she and Sieran are not the only sylvari here. Several have decided to join already, and many of them are both curious and excited to see a new face, with some of them even recognizing her. While Veil would want to greet them properly, Wynnet gestures for her to follow, because they have more important matters to deal with for now.

Eventually, she is guided into the depths of the building, taken into areas filled with offices and private quarters. At the heart of it, they enter one with a metal plaque over a wooden door which reads ‘Steward’s Office’. On the inside, they see an asura with brown or possibly dark beige skin, black hair and green eyes, dressed in a set of blue and black robes with grey lines. He’s seemingly writing something down on a paper when he looks up.

“Wynnet, something on your mind? This is not the most appropriate of visitations. I am quite busy at this time”, he tells her, only barely gazing at her.

The norn smiles and folds her arms.
“I realize that, Steward, but I think you might want to put those things down for a moment. I encountered a guest who you probably wish to speak with yourself.”

She steps aside and reveals the sylvari behind her.
“This is Veilidh. I found her slipping on some ice down the mountain.”

Veil opens her mouth at first, but then she pouts when she hears the last few words, half-glaring at Wynnet.
“…you didn’t have to tell him that last bit!”

Wynnet merely chuckles, but doesn’t say anything. The asura looks up from his scroll and appears a lot more interested than he was previously.
“Indeed? I was skeptical whether she would actually arrive.”

He slides off his chair and wanders over quite gracefully to the front of his desk, standing a bit below the other two.
“Salutations to you, young Veilidh. I am Steward Gixx, leader of the organization known as Durmand Priory. I see you already know my second-in-command as well.”

Veil blinks and glances over towards Wynnet.
“Second-in-command?”

The other woman nods.
“That’s right. I’m not a Magister anymore, but an Archon, the Master Archaeologist and second to Gixx in terms of leadership. We don’t quite operate like a military or anything, but in regard to official meetings, I am often the one to turn to, after the Steward.”

Gixx inclines his head, keeping his arms behind him.
“Quite so. Archon Wynnet is one of the Priory’s most esteemed and knowledgeable members within this field and I must confess that she has been virtually invaluable in certain diplomatic endeavors. As for me, I-”

He is just about to further introduce himself, when the door suddenly flies open and someone else bursts inside. It’s not just anyone either, but a rather familiar sylvari with yellow skin and thin dark red leaves as hair. Her clothes are similar to Gixx’s, although less ornate. The sight makes Veil widen her eyes.
“…Sieran?”

Her sister swirls around in the correct direction, breaks out into the widest smile Veil has seen in quite a while and then practically leaps at her, almost tackling her to the ground.

“Veilidh!” Shortly after hugging her, Sieran nuzzles against her sister’s cheek, holding her as tightly as she can.

“Oh, it’s so good to see you! I’ve missed you so much.”

Veil can’t help but laugh, as she hadn’t quite expected this greeting.

“And I’ve missed you, dear sister. I was wondering where you were, but I am glad to see that you’re alright and doing well here.”

“Oh, yes, of course. I’m sorry I didn’t come see you at the door. I was busy conducting an experiment in one of the other halls and some people needed my help.”

She tilts her head back slightly and gazes into Veil’s eyes. Sieran looks far more than happy, practically delighted as she caresses her sister’s cheek.

“I always knew that you would be convinced to come here at some point. You belong in the Priory with the rest of us.”

Veil arches her brow somewhat amusedly, before she chuckles and shakes her head.

“Well, let’s not rush off to any conclusions all too quickly, shall we? I’ve only just arrived, and I haven’t been able to form any opinions yet. That said, I am very intrigued by what is in store for me.”

Sieran is about to respond, perhaps in order to defend the decision, but Gixx clears his throat and interrupts her.

“I believe that is the very reason for why Archon Wynnet escorted you into my office. My intention was to further describe the elaborate processes which we administer for our new initiates, but it appears that Scholar Sieran has forgotten the correct procedures for how to pass through the hallways of her superiors.”

The sylvari hesitates and looks down at the ground.

“…sorry, Steward. I promise it won’t happen again.”

Gixx sighs and shakes his head.

“While I will not dispute that you will very likely attempt to act more cordially, it would be quite advantageous if you actually chose to follow these promises for once, Scholar.

In a short gap of the conversation, Veil turns to look at Sieran.

“Scholar?”

“Mhm”, Sieran says, looking fairly proud. “I was promoted just a year ago, actually. My field research and analytical reasoning was apparently quite a boon for the Priory!”

Once more, Gixx looks rather skeptical of what she says.

“…indeed. Despite indications to the contrary, Sieran has proven herself to be of a brilliant mind, somewhere in the depths of that delusional disposition.

Nevertheless, we are not here to discuss Sieran, but you, Veilidh. One of your missives to her was delivered to me recently, about your request to become initiated into the Durmand Priory. After receiving a description of your reputation, I decided to ponder your prospects.”

He turns around and starts to pace through the room.

“How much do you know of our organization, Veilidh?”

Veilidh straightens herself somewhat, trying to look more serious while she clears her throat.

“Uh, I know the basics, that you are a knowledge-seeking-and-distributing organization across
Tyria. Wynnet provided it to us."

“Splendid. Then you realize our purpose and what is expected from one of those who join under our banners. You must conduct yourself in the utmost professional manner, with at least a modicum of polite behavior for diplomatic purposes. It is also expected that you have a passion for knowledge and a fascination for learning new concepts, whatever they may be. We also do not hoard such knowledge, which is why you must be ready to share any new finds with the rest of the Priory. We are not the Order of Whispers, after all.”

Veil smiles.
“Of course, Steward. I’m actually quite glad that you feel this way.”

“I hope you do not consider it to be a surprise. As our founder so eloquently stated – your power is only equal to the sum of your knowledge. And it cannot be questioned that we gather the widest variety of knowledge there is in Tyria, nor that we are prepared to distribute it across every nation, if necessary. Knowledge is useless if it is not used.”

“You will get no argument from me. It is the very reason why I studied to become an engineer in the first place.”

Gixx stops momentarily and nods.
“I am pleased to hear we are at a similar wavelength. However, we also cannot deny that the Priory has a long and proud tradition, and while everyone is welcome, no matter what race or origin they may be from, we also have certain standards. We do not want warmongers, schemers or people seeking unnecessarily complex rivalries. This organization is for scholars, builders and explorers. And perhaps this does not apply to you, as sylvari are so young to this world, but we will not tolerate antagonism between the races. Once more, the Priory is for everyone, and therefore, those who join must leave potential biases and questionable ideas at the gate. Such notions do not belong in a house of science.”

Veil widens her smile.
“Don’t worry, Steward, I have no such intentions. As I have travelled around Tyria with Sieran, I find intriguing aspects in all nations and cultures across this continent, and I only seek friendship from them, if they will have me.”

She can see how he shows a very faint smile, but only for a short time, before he proceeds.
“Excellent. Well then, I must ask the most blatant of inquiries – why is it that you have come to us?
You did accompany Scholar Sieran here a few years ago, and I recall hearing of your arrival, even if I was not involved in the process of greeting you. Sieran has been a good, albeit sometimes marginally unstable addition to our ranks. But why have you changed your mind from disinterest to a wish to join us now?”

Veil takes a deep breath and folds her arms.
“Well, I guess there’s no point in lying, is there?
A few years ago, after our long journey was almost over, I was certain that my place was among my people, in the Grove. I thought I needed to stay at home and help them advance, to protect them from our surroundings.”
She hesitates for a moment, furrowing her brow.
“However, events from months ago have made me realize how foolish that belief was, how I can’t really rely only on myself and my own knowledge to defend my people. It seems I had forgotten what I saw during our travels and the purpose behind them. Tyria is bigger than Maguuma, with more people and more things to offer. When bad things happen, a lot of nations are affected everywhere, not just ours. I believe I finally realized this when
dragon minions attacked Caledon Forest and we almost didn’t notice that they had invaded.”

The mood in the room gets even more serious and Gixx nods gravely, but it’s Wynnet who responds.
“Ah, we did hear about that unfortunate incident. If I’m not mistaken, it was minions of Zhaitan, correct?”

“Indeed, it was. It is why I realized that I cannot sit idly by and pretend that I can only learn about myself and how to defend the Grove from Caledon. I have the skills, a curious mind, and the intelligence to seek more, which is why I believe I need to utilize it in order to protect Tyria as a whole. However, to be able to succeed with this endeavor, I need to gain knowledge, which is of much more interest to me than spying or wars.”

Gixx nods, seemingly understanding.
“Of course, your viewpoint is adequate and sensible. It is similar to what our founder once had, and you are wise to acknowledge it, young Veilidh. I can certainly appreciate it and the Priory is definitely the recommended destination for what you seek.”
He turns from them, directing himself to the desk again.
“Fortunately for you, Wynnet has already provided her recommendation years ago.”

Veil blinks in surprise and shifts her eyes towards the norn.
“…you did?”

Wynnet smiles and nods.
“Of course. I was very impressed with how you and Sieran helped us in the jungle, and it was the least I could do, should you ever change your mind.”

“And it is therefore”, Gixx says, “without hesitation, that I am most pleased to accept your application. Welcome to the Durmand Priory, Novice Veilidh. I hope you will seize this opportunity to learn and expand your own capabilities while you are here.”

“Congratulations, Veilidh”, Wynnet says and pats the sylvari’s shoulder.

As Veil is very glad to hear it, even if she hadn’t really doubted the chance, she smiles brightly.
“Thank you, Steward Gixx! I am immensely grateful that you are willing to accept me so handily.”

The asura moves around the desk and gets back on his chair.
“I hope you also understand that we do not accept favoritism among us. It is why you shall start as a Novice and work your way up the ranks, just like the rest.”

She bows her head respectfully.
“I would expect nothing else, Steward, and I welcome the chance to learn. I look forward to all the challenges that this includes.”

Before anyone else can say anything, Sieran takes a step closer to her sister, and wraps an arm around Veil’s shoulders.
“Well, since you’re a Novice here now, I wouldn’t mind taking you in as an apprentice, if you need a skilled tutor.”

Veil blinks at first, not having considered this angle. That sounds a bit weird to come from someone she knows, but—…
Ah, yes of course. She wouldn’t be doing this for no reason. Veil smirks, turns towards her and starts to tickle Sieran.
“Tsk, you must be loving this, aren’t you?”

Sieran laughs and tries to squirm away from the hands.
“Of course I do – we’re finally together again! This will be cherry!”

Chapter End Notes

*I'm not sure if others see it this way, but I've always imagined Steward Gixx as like, a leader that has been there for at least 15-20 years. Since this is about nine years before GW2, I felt like it was reasonable that he put up Wynnet as his second around this time, even though it's never completely stated what her position is.*
When Veilidh joined the Durmand Priory, she doesn’t think she fully realized what this would mean. She did of course understand that it would involve a lot of studying, intellectual discussions, and writing, but what she hadn’t predicted was how fun it would be. Not only does she have to constantly push her mind and expectations to new levels, but her physical prowess and technical ingenuity as well. Being in the Priory doesn’t just mean reading lots of scrolls and examining artifacts, but actually going out into the world and finding those things. During her two years in the organization, she has gone on several expeditions and been in all sorts of dangerous situations already. Fighting is apparently as vital to her current life as exploring new fields.

Due to her close connection and sibling-like relationship with Sieran, the two of them have often been assigned to the same projects, especially now when Veil has been promoted to Scholar as well. The two of them almost work better together than they do separately, and they complement each other, due to their expertise lying in different areas.

One such example is happening at this time, in some of the northern sections of the world. The remnants of some kind of unknown ruins in the Shiverpeaks had been located by a Priory Explorer known as Xiu, a human from Kryta, with Canthan ancestry. When she called for scholarly aid, the organization sent the sylvari duo to assist her, along with a bunch of novices. For a few days now, they’ve been digging through a tunnel that was obviously created in the past, but had experienced a cave-in at some point after it was likely abandoned. For the time being, neither Veil nor Sieran have been able to find out how old it is, nor who might’ve built it. All they know is that it’s ancient.

After excavating for a few days, they eventually arrived at some kind of door made of very sturdy and thick stone, one that couldn’t be opened all too easily. Veil theorized that it might be barricaded from the inside and therefore went to work on a solution.

In the meantime, the rest of the people, particularly Xiu and Sieran, have been trying to further investigate the tunnel and the door, just in case. As old Shiverpeak cultures isn’t exactly Xiu’s best topic, she sighs, corrects her long black hair and shakes her head, moving towards her companion. Her beige skin looks somewhat paler than usual in this cold climate.

“I’m giving up. I still don’t know a single thing about any of this here. It’s impossible to decipher, at least for me.”

Sieran is standing a few meters away, and just like Xiu, she’s dressed in a set of warm clothes, with a heavy coat, boots, gloves, sturdy pants, and a scarf around her neck. In one hand, she has some kind of notebook that she’s scribbling in, with the pen she holds in the other. She smiles eagerly as she tries to write down what she’s seeing.

“I know, but it’s exciting, isn’t it? Perhaps we should ask Archon Wynnet to come up here after we’re done. She would likely know more.”

Xiu sighs, folds her arms and leans against an outcropping in the wall, like some sort of pillar, while she gazes at Sieran.

“Yeah, wish they’d sent her to begin with. That might’ve made this situation a lot easier to interpret.”
Sieran turns her eyes towards Xiu and grins. “Oh, c’mon, Explorer. Where’s your sense of adventure? It’s the unknown that brings out all the exciting parts of being in the Priory! This is our chance to learn more.”

Xiu rolls her eyes. “Look, I appreciate that element, as that’s why I’m in the Priory, but it’s just…I don’t like fumbling in the dark.”

Shortly after, she turns to look past Sieran, towards the one obstacle that has been barring their progress. “We might need some heavier equipment to get through that, you know. Maybe we should acquire some explosives.”

After she blinks, Sieran follows Xiu’s gaze and inspects the door once more. She doesn’t seem as concerned, though, as she simply shrugs. “I wouldn’t worry about that. Sure, it might get dangerous, but I know Veil will provide us with an alternative.”

This is something that Sieran has been mentioning ever since Veil first told them what she was going to do, but Xiu remains skeptical. “You really think she can succeed? I mean, not that I doubt her skills, but this door doesn’t seem like something you can get through by conventional means.”

Sieran giggles. “Oh, if there’s something that my sister knows, it’s thinking outside the conventional. Trust me.”

It is actually around this point that they hear a noise from the entrance to the tunnel, like something heavy is being pulled over the ground and shoved deeper in. That’s when Veil and two novices enter, pushing some kind of heavy square-shaped item that they’ve placed on a flat wooden sleigh. The other sylvari raises one hand. “I’m back! Finally managed to finish the device I’ve been working on.”

It takes about a minute to fully get it up to the door, but once they stop, the two novices collapse on the ground, to catch their breaths, while the two women who were waiting examines the device. It appears to be a metallic box of some sort, with a drill-like creation on the front and some kind of instruments in the back. It doesn’t look too intricate, but there’s probably more details hiding on the inside.

“Uh, what’s this?”, Xiu asks.

Veil smiles and plants her hands at her own hips. “This is…well, I haven’t actually given it a name yet. A magic heat-drill, I guess?”

Having put her notebook back into her coat, Sieran tilts her head curiously, running a hand over her chin. “What does it do?”

“It’s a drill, obviously, but one with a slight twist – it does not only bore into material that it touches, but heats it up as well, to be able to melt through it faster. I have placed a magical absorption crystal inside, and if a certain individual - such as an elementalist - shoots fire into the back, the crystal will consume it and infuse the drill with this essence. These two combined mechanisms should be able to take us through the door and whatever is barricading it.”

Seeming quite excited about it, Sieran smiles widely and claps her hands. “Ooh, now that sounds like fun! I definitely want to be part of this.”
Xiu nods slowly.
“Right…if there even is anything doing that.”

Veil snorts amusedly.
“Trust me, Explorer, if there’s something in this world that I’m knowledgeable about, it’s when you’re in need of a good destructive machine.
I’m not completely sure that this contraption will have enough power behind it, but with what little material we actually have in the camp and our surroundings, this is the best I could do.”

“Well, it certainly looks impressive!”, Sieran agrees. “Don’t worry, Veil, I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

Xiu glances between them, her arms crossed and she’s not as sure as the two sylvari just yet.
“Let’s hope it won’t destroy everything. We do wanna find out what the room behind this door contains, after all.”

For the next several minutes after this, the team works together, using the novices’ help as well.
Combining a bit of muscle power, Xiu’s directions, and Sieran’s magic, they manage to initiate the machine, dig into the door and gradually push through it, carving a path to their goal.

What they reach on the other side is a somewhat larger and taller room, certainly with more space than the tunnel, although not necessarily something that might be called a hall. It is filled with ice, debris, and all sorts of ancient carvings and remnants, still being somewhat difficult to read. On the opposite end of the room, there is one specific section that is cleanly cut off, with very fine wall of ice, which bars some kind of pathway.

When they enter, the team starts off by walking over the debris and spreading out through the room to examine everything.
“This must be…very early”, Sieran says, with awe still in her eyes. “It’s rare for norn to ever build structures, so either it’s something that they crafted in another era or it could be a different civilization entirely.”

Xiu nods in agreement, and by the look in her eyes, it’s likely that she is quite interested now as well.
“Getting any specific vibes from it, Scholar?”

Sieran shrugs.
“Not any immediate ones, but archaeology is not my main field. Must be an entrance chamber of sorts, though.”

Veil inclines her head and points towards the four corners.
“Yeah, I think so too. Look at these…altars, or whatever they are. They seem like they represent different things. Don’t know what purpose they might have.”

“Me neither”, Sieran replies, while stroking a few fingers over her chin.

“Hmm…a temple, maybe?”, Xiu suggests.

The elementalist tilts her head back and forth as she runs the idea through her mind.
“Not impossible, but I don’t see any specific items of worship, nor main elements of the room that one can direct such thoughts towards, unless these corners are supposed to represent that.”

“Yeah, and I don’t think any one of us know anything about what they might’ve worshipped up here, at this time period”, Veil adds.

Even though they may be ignorant of the details, that doesn’t stop them from continuing to study what they’re offered. No one wishes to move on yet, as they want to see and collect items from all
over the area. More things to be preserved, of course.
In the middle of this search, however, it is Xiu who eventually discovers something new and
different in here. When she walks past one specific section of the wall, she notices how something
Glimmers on the floor, which is definitely unusual. Nothing shiny could’ve survived down here,
right?

“Hey, I found something”, she says, immediately getting Sieran and Veil’s attention as they move
towards her. She picks up the piece and tries to study it. It’s very small too, no larger than her nail,
and about as thin.
“What is this? Glass?”

The sylvari sisters join her, all of them twisting their heads and narrowing their eyes to see more,
but Veil eventually gives up.
“I can’t see much at this range. Let me get my magnifying tool.”
She moves towards the bag she left by the entrance and returns with a round piece of glass held by
some metal, and uses it to visually enlarge the item they found.
“Hmm, if I’m not mistaken, this sort of looks like a piece of crystal? A sliver of it.”

“Of what material?”, Sieran asks.

“I’m…not sure. Guess we’d have to study it further, back at the base.”

While the two of them do that, Xiu’s sharp eyes notices another shimmer in the distance, from
another wall, and hurries towards it.
“Hey, I think I found a second! Looks to be of the same substance.”
Her companions approach her, and they compare the two pieces, seeing that they indeed appear to
be similar.
“You’re probably right, yeah”, says Veil. “I don’t see what else they could be.”

At the same time, Sieran appears both intrigued and uncertain.
“What could have produced them, though? They don’t seem as if they belong to the rest of the
chamber, at least not with the material we have found thus far. Perhaps another visitor came here
at some point.”

“For what reason?”, Xiu asks. “To study this chamber? And what did they do in here that made
them leave this kind of stuff behind?”
Veil shakes her head, and then gazes at the door.
“No idea, but that might be why all this debris has been barricading the door. Could’ve been the
one who caused the cave-in.”

“Let’s search for more clues”, Sieran tells them. “There could be other small details hiding in the
rubble. Look for anything that stands out.”
They do as she instructs, and the novices follow the same idea, trying to collect all of the little
crystal slivers that hide in the room. Unfortunately, there doesn’t seem to be much else than these
things, but at least the items offer a hint that something more has occurred within.
While they’re lost in how to actually proceed, it is Sieran who spots a second element.
“Wait, there’s…something here.”

The others look at her expectantly.
“What do you mean?”, Veil asks. “You sense someone?”
Sieran furrows her brow in concentration.
“Not…someone, but another type of presence. Magical, I think. There’s a pull from the elements
in different sections of this room, like enchanted focal points.”
She shifts her eyes towards the slivers as well.
“And…from these crystals. I think they’re connected somehow.”

There’s only about one or two other magic users among the group, and none of them are at a similarly advanced level of learning, which is why they don’t seem to recognize the same thing.
“Well, what do you suggest we do?”, Veil asks. “You have to guide us.”

Sieran hesitates momentarily, tentatively running a hand through her hair.
“I’m uncertain, but I believe there must be something between the focal points and the crystals. They’re definitely of a similar origin, I can tell that much.”

“Maybe we have to bring the slivers to those hotspots?”, Xiu asks. “You know, fuse them somehow?”

Both recognition and excitement enter Sieran’s eyes as she smiles.
“Yes, of course! Brilliant deduction, Explorer! That is definitely what we should do. Come, I’ll guide you all and we shall place each crystal sliver at the appropriate location. I think it’s best if we have one person for each, trying to hold them somehow.”

The group decides to do just that, and they follow all of Sieran’s directions as she coordinates the crystals at the correct spots, where she believes she can sense more magic than anywhere else. There are six of them in total, which seem to create a specific pattern, that can almost be directed towards the middle.
Once it’s all in place, light is emitted from each of the crystals, which collide in the center. Their union appears to create something, which looks like some kind of shimmering translucent entity. It makes Sieran gasp.

“Extraordinary! It summoned a magical apparition!”

What it eventually turns into appears like a human, a woman that they can only see distant colors of. She has dark brown skin, sharp green eyes, long wavy brown and somewhat greying hair. She wears a lengthy purple cloak and what looks like travelling clothes over a medium-heavy armor. Veil has to admit that she’s quite pretty for…whatever she’s supposed to be. A ghost? A hologram?
The woman doesn’t gaze at anyone in particular, just at the room in general, before she begins to talk. The language she speaks isn’t all too different from the general one that can be heard in much of Tyria.

“Alright, unless something has gone wrong, then this message should be distributed upon the arrival of whoever entered this room”, she says in an even, albeit somewhat concerned tone.

Sieran runs a hand over her cheek in thought.
“Hmm, something obviously did, since the message didn’t start on its own.”

“Shh!”, Xiu emits, her eyes drawn very intensely to the human.

“Greetings, travelers. My name is Miljana Vlasic. To some, I am known by the title of Baroness of the Broadhollow barony in Kryta, but I prefer to be known as an adventurer of the world and a former soldier of Ascalon. The chamber that you have arrived at now is one with a pathway on the other side. This road leads further into the depths of the earth, lands once built by the dwarves. Unfortunately, it has been connected towards much of the dangers that now lurk in the dark further down, to creations that must never be released.
I can’t know exactly what age will reveal this message, but I can provide general information.
There are creatures known in Tyria as ‘elder dragons’. They are ancient destructors of this world, who have come and gone for generations, and who will one day rise again. They are enemies to all races of Tyria and their very essence spreads corruption onto anything they touch.”

She takes a deep breath, her shoulders slumping somewhat. “In my age”, she continues, “the people of this world are not yet at the level where we can defend ourselves against such dangers. We do not have the right power, and we are too splintered to properly work together. The dragons must not awaken yet, or we will experience only devastation. This is why I have done everything I can to prevent this development.”

Turning slightly to the side, she points at the same smooth ice wall that they noticed upon entry. “The pathway I mentioned is over there, and unless something has gone wrong, it should still be sealed with a special kind of crystal magic I have in my possession. Please, I ask any visitors to this chamber not to open it; all you will find is your own doom. Turn back now and save yourselves the trouble. I know how strong the urge of curiosity can be, but trust in my warning instead. Don’t risk your lives for nothing.”

After this, the image shatters and silence descend upon the room once more, leaving the people to contemplate. A few humans look quite intrigued, while Xiu seems absolutely shocked. “What’s wrong, Explorer?”, Veil asks. “Interesting mechanic, I guess?”

Xiu soon snaps out of it and then gazes at her. “What? Oh, uh…yeah, sure, I guess, but did you not hear what she said?”

Sieran nods, an unusually grave look on her face. “We did, indeed. She had a very important message, one we should probably listen to.”

“No! That’s not…wait. I mean, yes, the message was important too, but did you not hear her name? See her appearance? That was the Miljana Vlasic!”

Both Veil and Sieran, along with most of the novices, seem confused. “Uh…who?”, Veil asks.

Xiu rolls her eyes once more. “Oh, c’mon, you have to know this! Haven’t you heard of the Ascendants? The heroes of Kryta? Miljana Vlasic was the leader of that famous group of adventurers, who travelled all over the world! She was known as a protector of humanity, and chosen of the gods, along with her companions. They went to all human nations, and performed much to save Kryta, Elona, and even Cantha. Miljana herself was married to Sayaki, a member of the royal family of Cantha. They have noble descendants back in Kryta.”

There is some recognition in various eyes around the room by now. “Wow, I didn’t even know that”, Sieran says. “How long ago was this?”

“Oh, a very long time, probably past two centuries. I believe Miljana herself died some…180 or 190 years ago, although there are no records whatsoever that has mentioned her ability to use magic. It’s kinda strange.”

The wall looks like ice from afar, but it is likely due to how long it has stood here, probably having frozen over. Regardless, they now acknowledge the gravity of the situation. “Well”, Veil starts, “she seemed pretty convinced in what she said. Perhaps we should listen to this old hero and not stumble into any unnecessary danger. Let’s send letters to the academy and see what the Steward thinks is best.”
Yeah, if you haven’t seen or read it, Miljana Vlasic is my main GW1 hero, both in the actual game and in the series of fics I’m writing for it. Her picture can be seen on my blog. Well, she’s obviously older in the message of this chapter than she is on that profile, but still. Sovica Vlasic, the lead character of the Blood Bond fic, is her descendant. Veilidh and Sovica may meet at some point in the future. Who knows? (of course they will)
Truth of a dagger

Chapter Notes

Yeah, I know it's a holiday in certain parts of the world right now (like here), but I don't really do breaks, so here's the regularly scheduled chapter.
Anyone want some gay salad drama? No? Well, you're getting it anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With a brief and pleased sigh, Veilidh leans back against the vegetation she’s seated next to, letting the wind wash over and envelop her. It is gentle and only barely present, while the sun from above fills her with a warmth that almost purges any internal aches and inconsistencies. Since Veil joined the Priory, she has not had as much time to simply sit down, rest and enjoy herself, absorbing the stillness of her home. Caledon forest offers a lot of sights and experiences across its vast space, but there are few things that are as pleasant as lying on the grass or the beach close to the waters.

Included in this notion is of course the company, one who she knows lies not too far away. During the few years she has spent with her new organization, she has not cut her ties with Caithe. The two of them are still very close, perhaps more so than ever, now that they know each other so well. Some days, they practically need each other, to find a united inner peace that can be difficult to attain otherwise. Due to the many asura gates and other portals around, it’s also very possible for them to go meet whenever they require it, despite Veil’s constant absence.

Today, due to the lazy activity they’re indulging in, both are dressed in less clothes than usual. They wanted to get away from everything else in the world for one day, to focus on each other, which is why they’re out here in the first place. Because of the warmth in the air and the lack of other people, they don’t mind spending some time dressed in little else than a few longer leaves that cover certain private parts, but not much else.

At this time, Veil rests on some sort of root from a tree that has grown exceptionally long, almost reaching the sands, and she is leaning back against it, letting the sunrays cover her and swallow her in their natural radiance. Many other people in Tyria need and enjoy the sun a lot, but it’s more of a requirement for sylvari, due to what their bodies are based on. Veil doesn’t really mind sitting like this either, as it’s quite peaceful.

After a few moments, Veil feels something stirring in the air, poking her somewhat. She initially believes it’s something touching her physically, but soon comes to realize that her mind is telling her something, which is why she opens her eyes.

What it turns out being is someone else focusing on her intently, the woman lying on the ground not too far away. Caithe is resting on her side, head on her arm, as her gaze slowly roams across Veil’s body. She doesn’t seem to cover it up, even when Veil has obviously noticed. The attention given is an aspect that Veil can practically sense, due to their bond.

With a small smirk on her lips, Veil stretches her body suggestively, clearly showing off. “Enjoying the view? I don’t blame you”, she says with a rather smug tone.

In return, Caithe smirks and rolls her eyes, before she gets up and crawls over on all fours. Once she’s in range, Caithe moves her legs so that she can straddle the other sylvari. She strokes one
hand along Veil’s jaw, caressing it, while giving a similar treatment to the engineer’s side.
“Tsk, watch that smugness. Might attract some thorns, you know.”

Veil’s expression doesn’t disperse as she meets Caithe’s gaze.
“Hey, don’t you know that’s my favorite?”

Sinking down on Veil even further, Caithe pushes her lips towards her partner’s, letting their bodies become intertwined. There’s a certain bliss for them to be lying like this together, trying to let the moment take them away. Despite that they’ve had many days like this, they are often few and far between, to the extent where it almost becomes a new journey every time, even though it tends to be very familiar. If only it could last forever.

Unfortunately, while they’re in the middle of this sensation, they don’t notice how someone else approaches them, until this person is close enough to speak.
“Aww, how touching. It’s practically astonishing that the two of you still manage to find the time for each other. I suppose you make a lot of sacrifices for it, hmm?”

The duo had reacted already on the first few words and appear quite surprised. By pure instinct, they disentangle themselves and try to separate, in order to get a better view of the intruder. It is Caithe who looks particularly annoyed when she sees the woman who approaches.
“Faolain?! What are you doing here?”

The mesmer is dressed in her usual attire and stands some ten to twenty meters away, with her arms folded. She seems amused, but not very impressed. They can’t say that they know the answer for sure, but an adequate guess is probably that Faolain isn’t fond of this sight.
“I happened to be in the area, when I sensed a familiar presence. Since you were nearby, I figured I’d come see if you were interested in some company.”

There’s no way that Faolain simply wandered here on a whim, but there’s no point in challenging her excuse. Caithe’s frown deepens.
“Why would we be?! Least of all yours.”

The rogue’s hands are clenched as she glares at Faolain, and Veil senses a particularly strong tension. She wonders if it’s due to how underdressed they both are, but it is likely a far deeper discomfort than that.
“What?”, Faolain asks. “Come now, dearheart, you know as well as I that you still think about me all too often. Perhaps it is occupied by another thought as well, but I know you can let a lot of them roam through that lovely mind of yours.”

It’s clear that she’s getting to Caithe, but Veil tries to stay slightly calmer, which is interesting to see after all this time. Logically, she should be the one being so upset, but she has somehow gotten used to Faolain interrupting her life. Besides, what else has the mesmer done, other than speak to her? It’s annoying, but not threatening. Obviously, she’s still tense, albeit to a lesser degree.
“What do you want, Faolain?”, Veil asks. “Don’t remember asking you to come here, so if you really want to intrude, we’d like to know why. Some other nonsense you’d like to throw at us?”

Faolain continues to close the distance towards them, although she retains a rather slow speed for now.
“Is it so strange to believe that I simply wish to spend some time with my two favorite women, hmm? It’s a bit unfair that Caithe gets to have all the fun, after all.”

Eventually, she’s very close to both of them and even though neither really wants her to be here all that much, they don’t do anything actively physical to oppose her, nor do they attack her. They can’t say they hate her enough, or at least Veil can’t. This slowly starts to change when they watch how Faolain circles the younger of the two for a
moment and then approaches her back.

“My my, Veildh, you have certainly grown more beautiful over the years.”

The engineer arches a brow and glances over her shoulder, before she feels how Faolain wraps arms around her waist from behind.

“Eh, not sure if you’re right. I haven’t really changed my look much.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about.”

She leans her head down towards Veil’s neck and puts very slow and deliberate kisses along its length.

“Your aura and presence have grown so much stronger and healthier. You practically seem to glow with an appealing radiance. I can understand why Caithe has a difficulty in tearing her eyes off you.”

It’s not until Caithe notices how Faolain’s hands begins to touch certain much more private regions that she has had enough. She tries to leap towards her, to lash out, making the mesmer let go and take a few steps back, even if her expression remains amused. While no one states it, Faolain and Veil are somewhat aware of how this is probably based on jealousy, which is amusing in a way, if they compare it to the engineer’s former viewpoint.

“Don’t touch her”, Caithe tells Faolain in a dangerous tone, while glaring at her.

“No what? You will hurt me? Both of us know how unlikely that is.”

With a sigh, Veil folds her arms and looks at the mesmer.

“Stop teasing her, Faolain, and be honest for once.”

It seems her interference was effective enough, and Faolain gets some more distance from them, but her circling continues, slowly moving around them.

“Well, I suppose I still find it quite curious how you manage to stay so close to Caithe, despite never fully knowing her.

Veil raises her hand to rub her own temples, while her eyes are shut.

“This again...

You keep saying it from time to time, and yet I just continue to believe this is a very weak ploy. It’s getting quite silly.”

“It’s what she does”, Caithe practically spits out. “She manipulates, but there’s never anything within, if you actually look.”

Being challenged and doubted so openly, creates a glint in Faolain’s eye, and she starts looking at them with interest.

“Is that so? Nothing at all, dear Caithe?”

“You know there isn’t. Prove us wrong, if there is.”

If she had hoped to scare Faolain off, she is sorely mistaken. Instead, she begins to smirk and turns her gaze towards Veil.

“Tell me, sweet Veilidh, what do you think is the worst thing that Caithe has ever done in her life?”

Suddenly, Caithe’s eyes widen, as she hadn’t thought the challenge would be met. She’s not really going to—...is she?
“Faolain”, she tries to warn the mesmer.
Unfortunately, Faolain ignores her.
“Come, Veilidh, take a guess. I know you must have something.”

While Caithe’s sudden agitation opens a certain curiosity in her, Veil tries to ignore it. Faolain is probably just trying to be mean.
“To be honest, I don’t really know, nor do I care. It’s not important.”

“Hah! Not even you believe that. Not if you knew the truth.”

“Faolain, stop”, is all Caithe says, not wanting to give anything away.

The mesmer raises a hand to rub her chin somewhat playfully.
“What could it be? Did she once hurt a small animal? Burn down a tree, perhaps? Maybe she punched someone who didn’t deserve it?”

“I’m telling you to stop this, Faolain, right now.”

Okay, Veil will say that she is getting worried at this point, since Caithe is unusually tense. Does Veil want to know? Can she survive not knowing? Faolain grins.
“Or what if…she murdered someone in cold blood?”

Caithe clenches her hands, while Veil looks confused.
“What?”

Caithe moves away, shadowstepping out of the area, not giving any explanation why. What they don’t see is how she attempts to find her weapons, her daggers.
“Oh yes’, Faolain tells her. “Caithe has indulged her darker desires a few times. Would you like to hear the tale?”

Before she can get any further, they see how Caithe leaps over the vegetation that is in her way and tries to rush Faolain, to attack her before she can reveal too much, but someone obstructs the rogue’s path.
Veil prevents Caithe from reaching her target and when she has to stop as to not collide with Veil, the engineer wraps her hands around Caithe’s wrists and holds them up.

“Caithe, calm down!”, Veil tells her, while looking right at her.

Trying to give her as intense and meaningful gaze as possible, Caithe stares into her beloved’s eyes.
“Veilidh, please…don’t get in my way.”

“This is insane! You can’t just attack her.”

“I have to stop her. She’s—…you don’t want to hear this. Either we leave, or you let me take care of her.”

Veil continues to study Caithe’s expression, her eyes, to see if there’s something that can lead her onto the right track, but all she faces is some kind of desperation. That does not bode well.
She glances over her shoulder at Faolain.
“Continue.”

Faolain moves her arms behind her back, looking both pleased and smug.
“How many Firstborn does there exist today?”

“Veilidh!”, Caithe calls out.
Ignoring her partner, and letting her own eyes drift down, Veil starts to count out loud.

“Uh, let’s see…you, Caithe, Trahearne, Kahedins…”

She stops speaking the names and counts the rest in her mind.

“…ten, I believe?”

“Correct”, Faolain admits. “We used to be twelve, but there were a few losses. There was
Riannoc, of course, the foolish boy who got himself killed during his stupid quest. He probably
deserved it after such idiocy anyway.
But…then there is the lovely Wynne. Have you ever heard of her?”

Trying to ponder it, Veil slowly shakes her head.

“I…don’t think so. I’ve heard her name, but not much else than that.”

Suddenly, Caithe tries to struggle again, forcing Veil to do something to prevent her from breaking
free.

“Veilidh, let me go! Don’t listen to this madness, it’s all lies!”

Veil frowns at her, even if she remains uncertain.

“If it’s all lies, then why are you trying to attack her?”

That silences the other Firstborn, lowering her gaze somewhat. She is not yet resigned, but she
doesn’t know what to tell her partner. Faolain sees that as her chance to continue.

“You probably know very little of her, since she was not around by the time you awakened.
You see, she was involved in something dark, which the wider parts of our people didn’t know of.
There was some kind of knowledge that she kept hidden, refusing to tell anyone else. Obviously, I
wanted to find out, to see what secrets she withheld. Caithe went with me and we decided to
chase her down.”

“Chase her? Where?”

“To the Silverwastes, much further to the west from here.
Unfortunately, while I planned to simply interrogate her, I never managed to, since Caithe got to
her first. I found Wynne on the ground, nothing more than a corpse…with Caithe’s dagger pierced
through her.”

Even if she wants to believe it’s a lie, that it’s just another trick, Veil looks distraught and
immediately turns to Caithe. What she finds there doesn’t do much to discourage this notion,
however, as Caithe’s head is hanging down, her arms and shoulders shivering, the leaves of her
hair following the same dismay. Veil can virtually smell guilt in the air.

“Caithe…is this true?”

Slowly, the rogue swallows, trying to get something out, but she can’t even look at Veil.

“I…”

“You…you murdered one of your own? One of your closest?”

“She did”, Faolain tries to reconfirm. “Like I have always told you, Veilidh, Caithe has a darker
side to her, which she hides from you. She is not who you believe.”

Still waiting to hear an explanation, or anything whatsoever, it takes a few moments until Caithe
manages to speak. The next words are filled with spite and anger.

“I did it…to keep her away from you”, she says and directs her tilted eyes towards Faolain.

In return, the mesmer arches her brow.

“Pardon? I don’t understand.”
“Neither do I”, says Veilidh.

Caithe sighs deeply, not wishing to dig up this memory, but knowing she has to reveal something. “I didn’t kill Wynne because I wanted to. In fact, I rejected at first, didn’t want to consider it, but both Wynne and I knew what Faolain would do to her, the pain she would have to go through. Wynne preferred death over that sentence. She…begged me to kill her.”
She closes her eyes, biting her lip for a few seconds, as the pictures sting in her chest. “I tried to talk her out of it, but I couldn’t refuse a sister’s request. She was of the Night, like me. I…had to oblige.”

It takes her a little while to come to terms with it, but Veil eventually let’s go of Caithe’s wrists and steps back, not meeting the eyes of her partner. At the same time, Faolain looks quite surprised. “You never told me this. I thought you were merely too shocked by your own actions, but you… actually gave in to her?”, Faolain asks.
“No…”, she says and shakes her head. “I refuse to believe it. You are the one lying now! I will find the truth.”

Both of the other women pretty much ignore Faolain as she disappears out into the woods once more. As for Caithe, she simply wants to see that Veil is alright, to make sure she was not hurt too badly. “Veilidh?”, she asks, trying to come closer. “Please, talk to me.”

Before she can get too close, the engineer holds up a hand, gesturing not to approach. “I…I don’t know what to… Why didn’t you tell me of this sooner?”

Caithe shuts her eyes, hanging her arms down, shoulders slumping. “I’m sorry. I didn’t want you to know this. In fact, I didn’t mean for anyone to ever hear of it. This is knowledge I believed was better left in the past.”

Veil stands with her arms folded, practically hugging herself, while she looks unsure, hesitant. She has a lot of things she wants to tell Caithe, to ask her, but no idea where to begin. “…I don’t know what to think, what to do.”
She sighs and slowly turns away completely. “I need some time alone.”

Before Caithe can say anything else, Veil promptly leaves the area, gathers up her belongings and disappears. With misery looming above her, Caithe finds no other way out than to sink down to the ground, bending her knees and pushing them up to her chest. She clenches her fists, cursing Faolain, cursing herself and anything else around. Why does she always have to ruin everything?

Chapter End Notes

I know we don't get this information until much later, over a decade from now, but this was something fun to put into the mix right away instead. It gives some tension to their relationship, while at the same time Caithe still hides the truth of that incident. Veil has no idea of the more critical aspects of that tragedy, after all. Well, not yet anyway.
Plus, I mean, Veilidh’s story is very different from the "canon" sylvari PC, as she awakens two decades earlier. Just felt more reasonable that she would get this
knowledge at some point.

I also realize that Veilidh said there are ten living Firstborn, but we don't actually know that, since the last two Firstborn names have not yet been revealed. But hey, I gotta go with the information I have.
A new year has dawned on Tyria, according to the human Mouvelian calendar, and life seems to continue as normal. The world goes through its seasons, the crops grow and get harvested, production of materials proceeds, newly awakened rise from their pods, students join and leave their colleges, and the time for new hunts rises. It should feel boring and useless, like an endless cycle that never evolves, but it is the lives they have and it’s impossible to ignore or forget this.

Unfortunately, for one particular person, life has not felt the same for the last few months. Veilidh has tried to keep herself busy with work for the Priory, while at the same time maintaining a balance with her home, assisting them with what they need, but that’s not the real reason why she visited the Grove more often than usual.

After the incident in the forest and Veil’s rather drastic reaction, it apparently broke Caithe in some way as well. She realized that she had made a mistake and could not stay where she was, so she didn’t. Veil doesn’t know how or why, but apparently, the Firstborn merely left through the asura gate one day and disappeared. She hasn’t come back since.

The time since then has left Veil in a problematic situation, a dilemma of what she should do. At first, she considered simply giving Caithe some space, let the older sylvari linger in contemplation and make her up own mind. Perhaps she comes to some sort of decision that she and Veil can discuss later – after all, she was the one who had her secret revealed, not Veil.

Then again, Caithe can be very…difficult. If she departs, it’s not actually entirely certain that she will ever come back. What if she felt that she hurt her girlfriend too much, and can therefore no longer stay at home in fear of somehow repeating the same mistake? She might decide it’s for the best to keep her distance forever and that is not at all what Veil asked for. The engineer just wanted time to think, to consider the surrounding truths.

Days after the incident, Veil visited the Pale Tree’s chamber, to see what their mother might tell her, but it was not an easy encounter. The avatar looked filled with sorrow, partially due to having to remember a beloved daughter’s death, but also that this had to be revealed to Veil. Apparently, she was of the same opinion as Caithe, that it should have stayed in the past. Perhaps that is why they it was kept hidden, because the Pale Tree requested it? Veil has to admit that she doesn’t like the idea of her mother preferring to obscure such facts, rather than be honest, but she also acknowledges that she doesn’t know enough of the situation to judge.

Now that months have gone by, Veil is starting to get really worried whether she mistook Caithe’s reaction. She can’t say that she has entirely made up her mind on how she feels about this, but that doesn’t mean she doesn’t want to see Caithe at all. In fact, she’d love the chance to talk and discuss the entire scenario, to work it out together. How can she do that if her girlfriend isn’t around and perhaps never will be again?

Thankfully, it is apparently a wise decision to visit the Grove quite often, which is something she comes to realize one early morning. After breakfast, she gathers her belongings, preparing for another journey back to the Shiverpeaks through various portals, when someone bursts into the house she shares with several others.

“Veilidh! Where is Veilidh?”, she hears a voice asking outside, one that is unfamiliar to her.

When she approaches, she sees a man - a Warden of some kind - standing in the center, looking
around.
“I’m here”, she says once she arrives. “Did you need me for something?”

He quickly shakes his head.
“Not at all. Well, not personally anyway. I just came to say that I saw Caithe stepping out from the asura gate. She’s here, in the Grove.”

Veil widens her eyes, feeling senses of shock and relief entering her mind. Perhaps her fears were mistaken all along, and this scenario can find a solution. However, doubt fills her once more, when she considers the facts. Is it actually wise to go see Caithe at this point? She has to admit that there’s a lot of uncertainties between them, and with how it ended last time, is the Firstborn even prepared to talk? At least there’s no Faolain to get in the way now.

After thanking the man, Veil leaves her house and heads in the direction of Caithe’s home, even if she still doesn’t know that this is the right choice. She is somehow just naturally drawn to it, whether she wants to or not. When she enters the building, she notes how Caithe’s door is already open and she locates the Firstborn inside her room, currently having a backpack on the floor, which she is apparently filling up with items. Is she packing again? What is this about?

“Caithe?”, she asks, still standing outside the entrance.

The rogue seems to flinch at first, before she whirls around and faces her companion with widened eyes.
“Veilidh? I…wasn’t aware you were in the Grove right now.”
“I see. Had you expected me to be somewhere else?”

For a brief moment, Veil is pretty sure that she can see guilt in Caithe’s eyes, before she looks away.
“I suppose so. I mean, you are so often at the Priory, that I thought…” She shakes her head and clears her throat.
“Perhaps it doesn’t matter. I am glad you’re here.”

Is she? Or is she just saying that? Veil can’t tell what’s genuine right now, which worries her. She should be able to sense it, but Caithe is keeping herself shrouded, which she has done before.
“Can I come in?”

“Oh, yes, of course. Please do.”

She waits until Veil has entered, before she closes the door. There is no intimacy offered, however, but it’s impossible to tell if it’s due to Caithe not wanting it or not being sure of herself.
“Are you packing? I thought you just recently returned. What’s going on?”

Caithe opens her mouth, but hesitates and turns her gaze away. She appears somewhat embarrassed while she proceeds to her belongings.
“I did indeed. And I am packing, yes.”

“Why? Are you leaving again?”

”Another correct assumption.”
She gets all the way up to the bag, before she stops and glances over her shoulder.
“This time, I…may be gone for a lot longer, depending on the circumstances. I believe I have found a new purpose and I wish to explore its possibilities.”
Gone for only a few months and she has found something this meaningful? Hopefully not someone. Veil hasn’t given up on their relationship just yet and it wouldn’t be fair if Caithe has.

“A new purpose? Can you tell me about it?”

Caithe clears her throat and then leans against a nearby table.

“Sure, if that’s what you want. After our…incident, I decided that your instincts may have been useful, and that I should also try to clear my head and my heart a bit, consider who I am and what I do here in the Grove. Travelling seemed like a good opportunity, as I felt that Caledon and the Grove would not be enough to give me another perspective of what I have done. I started off by going into Ascalon, where I encountered two individuals – a human called Logan, and a charr by the name of Rytlock.”

“A human in Ascalon? I thought they hardly even exist there anymore.”

Caithe slowly shakes her head.

“They don’t, at least not as a nation, but there are remnants in certain corners. Regardless, these two were fighting at the time I found them, and while I didn’t know for sure what I should do in that situation, I eventually decided to act when I noticed how they were ambushed by destroyers and ogres. They needed my help, so I could not merely stand by and watch. I intervened to aid them, and after a time, all three of us ended up in Lion’s Arch. Upon arrival, we were arrested.”

Veil looks confused.

“Wait, what? Arrested? Why? And how did you get all the way from Ascalon to Lion’s Arch?”

There seems to be a lot more to this story than what Caithe is telling and going through all of the details in her mind now, seems to make her sigh.

“It’s…such a long tale that I don’t really have time to discuss, but in short, we found an ancient asura gate that teleported us across the continent. Apparently, the citizens of Lion’s Arch do not enjoy when people simply come bursting inside, which is why they threw us in jail. However, our billet was purchased by someone from the local arena, who made us fight for our freedom.”

Made two new friends, fought dragon minions, got arrested in Lion’s Arch and then became a gladiator? It seems Caithe has stayed very busy during her absent months.

“I…didn’t even know that was allowed. Is this why you have been gone for so long?”

With another sigh, Caithe folds her arms and directs her eyes to the floor.

“Not quite. You see, during our time in the arena, we encountered another team. We called ourselves the ‘Edge of Steel’, but while we were initially successful, it wasn’t until we faced the team known as ‘Dragonspawn’s Destiny’ that we met our match. This other team had come there out of necessity, and included the norn Eir, along with her two asura companions, Snaff and Zojja. They bested us, but in their victory, they chose to acquire our debt in order to defeat a particularly powerful dragonspawn. That was the very reason they challenged us.”

Veil does her best to follow the story, but it is getting quite farfetched.

“Right, okay. What type of dragonspawn?”

“A powerful minion of Jormag that threatened Hoelbrak. Eir was sure that the six of us could do it together, and that is why she wanted capable fighters. We decided to form the guild ‘Destiny’s Edge’, by merging our two identities. United, we vanquished the dragonspawn and fulfilled the plan that Eir had for us. With this success, we all realized that we can perhaps do a lot of good if we join forces, which is
why we have now decided to see what else we can do against these foes. We will travel more of Tyria together and throw our strength against the opposition of other dragon lieutenants.”

As she had kind of expected her girlfriend to either be wandering the plains filled with guilt or stuck in some dark place with regret on our mind, Veil isn’t sure what to think. Caithe wants to suddenly dedicate her life to fighting dragons? That is a noble goal, and similar to her Wyld Hunt, but what about the two of them?
“I see. Not…quite what I had expected. Are they your friends?”

Caithe ponders the notion, running a hand over her chin.
“Hmm, I don’t know. They are a diverse group, quite strange and different, but I like them. Logan and Rytlock bicker like a couple, Eir is eager to seize the role of leadership at all times and show the way for the rest of us, while the two asura act like a father and daughter or something similar. I believe Snaff is Zojja’s mentor too.
I wasn’t sure I’d fit in there, especially due to being sylvari, but it has been unexpectedly enjoyable thus far. I would like to give them a chance to see what else I can learn in their company.”

Veil won’t blame her for seeking challenge, as she constantly does the same thing. Other elements still linger, though.
“Not unreasonable, I suppose. But are you certain they can fight dragon lieutenants? Those things aren’t easy to defeat.”

“Oh, I’m quite aware already, but after seeing us kill that dragonspawn, I have a good feeling about these people. They are very smart, versatile and we have a wide range of abilities between us. I’m not exactly sure why, whether due to fate or hope, but I somehow sense that we stand a chance to beat the odds.”

Well, it’s not like Caithe shouldn’t be allowed to do whatever she wants with her own life, when she is given such opportunities, but Veil can’t do anything else than acknowledge the fact that this isn’t what she personally wanted. She was mad at Caithe for holding some truths away from her, that the rogue was omitting the reality of her actions. But to completely disappear for a time, perhaps several years? Is this something Veil can accept without consequence or questioning?

“Well”, Veil starts, “while this is very sudden to me, I will not prevent you from following your dreams, if this is truly what you wish. But have you thought the entire scenario through? Do you understand what it would mean for your place here? What it would mean for…our future?”

At first, it may have sounded like she meant the Grove, but the second question quickly alters this belief. Caithe spends a few moments simply staring at her, seeming neutral and unperturbed, but that disappears shortly after.
“I have, and…perhaps it is time I explain it directly. I…was going to send some letters to you, to describe what I was feeling and going through, but I never found the words, nor what could help you understand my stance.
After many days, even weeks of pondering, I had to accept the only reasonable scenario – that you don’t need to comprehend it.”

“What? What are you talking about?”

With a heavy sigh and a reluctant gaze, Caithe closes the gap between them. She merely stands there to begin with, her eyes having a difficult time to decide where they want to go. Gathering some courage, she at least manages to take one of Veil’s hands.
“I can’t ignore what I have done any more, Veilidh, nor how I feel. The guilt of how I treated you almost crippled me at first and it keeps lingering, even after months of living with the outcome of our confrontation. I shouldn’t have let it be silent for that long, as it was practically inevitable that
Faolain would eventually break it, which I must have somehow known, deep in my heart. Perhaps some temporary distance could provide us with new perspectives, other opportunities. You know, to see what life might be when it is less…bonded.”

Veil can hardly even believe what she’s hearing. Is this how it’s supposed to end? She senses a shiver through her body, one that she does her best to suppress. “Do you…not want to be with me anymore?”

Caithe blinks confusedly. “What?”

She sighs and shakes her head, before she moves up even closer, putting a hand on Veil’s cheek. “No, that’s…that’s not what I meant. I just…I simply wish to try what it is like without one another for a while, to see if perhaps that is better for both of us. I somehow suspect that I am the trouble in your life, the one who’s holding you back. You should be allowed to make some new friends, to form…close companionships. Perhaps you will find increased joy that way.”

It’s not an unreasonable request, which is what Veil wants to say…but she can’t. Her mind knows it, and her heart refuses any other path. “And what if no one else can make me happy?”, she practically whispers.

Caithe shuts her eyes and steps back, letting their hands be torn from each other. “I hope that’s not true, Veilidh. You are so beautiful, smart, magnificent…you deserve someone better than me and the disaster that I bring.”

Chapter End Notes

*I'm not sure if the info is entirely accurate regarding how Caithe joins Destiny's Edge. I have not read the novel, so I'm mostly going on info in-game, plus what I can find on the official wiki. Who cares about canon anyway, RIGHT?*

*This fic will be on a break next week, because I intend to spend most of it trying to finish my current GW1 story. This one will be back on January 14th.*
Missed me?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Broken, twisted, cracked in half. Veilidh isn’t sure which terms are the best to describe the situation, how she would explain to someone what she is feeling at this time. She has spent over a decade trying to mold and define herself, to find the place where she can fit in best and what she believes of her own character. It has certainly not been easy, and she has made a lot of mistakes along the road, but she would never have considered the outcome she has now arrived at.

In all of the potential futures she imagined, one without Caithe was not possible. It just couldn’t be accepted, due to how important the Firstborn has been to her life. That woman was with her from the very beginning, she aided Veil in the Dream and then picked her up when she awoke. So many decisions in the last decade has somehow been to improve herself in Caithe’s eyes, to impress or persuade the rogue of her prowess, to the extent that she may have somehow defined her very being in connection to the rogue’s nightly presence.

But now? She doesn’t know anymore. She isn’t sure if she has lost part of identity or if she’s just on the verge of transforming into another, due to what has occurred. It’s not like she hasn’t been without Caithe before, especially during the journey around Tyria with Sieran, but to imagine a potential several years without her? How long is Destiny’s Edge going to travel together and what bonds will Caithe make out there without her? It’s been a while since jealousy was part of her mindset, and now it’s starting to worm itself into her again.

Ever since the day when Caithe revealed her intentions, Veil has tried to maintain the ideal of normalcy. She attempted to approach the Priory and continue her work like she always does, but was constantly torn, distracted from all the important parts of it. Is she even doing the right thing? Was joining the Priory just another side of being with Caithe, to impress her? She does care about her homeland, but is her affection for Caithe stronger than that?

This is why she can now be found out in Caledon once more, deep within the thick forest and the darkness under its boughs. It’s comforting and lonely, just the way she likes it. She’s quite aware how many dangers from predators, traps, krait, Risen or other factions there might be, but she just doesn’t care right now. If someone finds her and drags her away, perhaps that’s for the best. Maybe it’s better than the alternative.

After having disappeared so deep inside that she can no longer remember exactly where she is, she senses how she is not alone. Well, in general, she is never completely bereft of company, due to the constant presence of the wildlife, but she can recognize the distinctive feeling of another sentient being, another sylvari, coming towards her. It can be no doubt who it is either, as she is somehow naturally drawn to Veil, perhaps in the same fashion as they’re both drawn to Caithe.

“Did I not tell you that she hid something darker?”

The other woman’s voice is soft, almost sympathetic. Is that on purpose, or is she actually being genuine?
Veil sighs. “Faolain, please… I’m tired”, she says, but at the same time, can she just brush the mesmer off? She has been truthful, even kind in certain ways. “Just go.”

Faolain peers out past some trees, noticing how the engineer sits down on the ground by some rocks, bends her knees and wraps her arms around them. Those words were never going to convince Faolain, but the Grand Duchess appears to have more in mind than simple mockery today. “I will not. I won’t leave you alone in the forest like this, Veilidh. You may not say it, but I know that complete solitude has never been your favorite.”

Veil furrows her brow, but doesn’t look at the other woman. “Why would you say that? You don’t know enough about me.”

“Not true. You think I haven’t studied you, attempted to understand you? You wouldn’t keep all those noisy machines around if that’s what you wanted.”

Veil’s frown grows even further, but she doesn’t respond. Perhaps it acts as a certain acknowledgment that Faolain has a point. Once the mesmer has come to her side, she sits down and wraps an arm around Veil’s shoulders. Veil doesn’t fight it. “Caithe has always been like this, Veilidh. She is hard to read and never fully honest. She keeps her secrets, like many night blooms do. How many more hidden truths does she have under her beautiful hide? Not even I know, but that is why I had to expose you to one, so that you may understand my predicament as well.”

The hostile notions are slowly dispersing now, and Veil sighs, instinctively leaning somewhat closer to the Firstborn. She will admit that Faolain’s arms are comforting. “Thank you for telling me. I… appreciate it, but I haven’t yet decided how I feel. It’s a complicated situation.”

Faolain lifts her other hand, running a few fingers slowly over the large leaves of Veil’s hair. “I’m sorry that you had to suffer like this, that you had to find out the depths of her actions without her ever explaining them to you. You deserve better, my dear. You are such a wonderful woman, which I have grown to appreciate. Caithe squandered her place with you.”

That might be a bit harsh, something that Veil has to reject. Even if she’s miserable now, did they not have a lot of pleasant times? “I… I don’t know. She was good to me and she cared. The way we were connected was… on a level I’ve never experienced before.”

“Of course, because she needed you. She wanted someone that would care for her, to embrace her, like she has not been in a long time. Why do you think she was drawn so much to another dusk lily? I can’t deny that you have a very appealing pull, even for me. There are so many attractive and tempting traits about you, which I have seen in few others. I understand why Caithe enjoyed being with you so much.”

Obviously, Veil enjoys the attention. She can’t exactly ignore that idea, as she wants to be important to someone else as well. She always thought that someone would be Caithe. “I wanted to believe in her. She had done so much for me, supported me in every turn of my life. Even our Wyld Hunts are aligned.”

“Yes, of course, that is a completely rational response, but you must also consider the facts. What did you end up with after all this time? You were deceived and then discarded, when the truth was
finally unveiled. Maybe she tells you that I’m manipulative, but is there not a possibility that she might be projecting that somewhat?”

With the result she has on hand, that certainly can’t be denied completely, but is it fair to paint her only with that brush? Perhaps to a certain extent, but that doesn’t necessarily mean it is all she is. She has done many good things too, especially to me.”

Faolain nods slightly and pushes her hand towards Veil’s, entwining their fingers. “Oh, I am not trying to say that she doesn’t. My only point was that she and I don’t utilize the same methods. While I may be…urging people in certain directions, I do not perform these things under a shroud of apparent goodness. With me, you know what you’re getting, that my only intention is to show you a different perspective of reality, which can certainly be enjoyable. A lot of other people do.”

Of course, it’d be impossible to have a conversation with Faolain without somehow mentioning this other side, this potential different life. Then again, would it be fair to simply shrug it off? Perhaps she has a point. “The Nightmare Court.”

“I know you have not been given the most pleasant of impressions from them, but they are better than what you may assume. If you accept them, they can be a family to you as well, as they have been to me.”

Finally raising her eyes, she tries to lock them with Faolain’s, but also searches the duchess’ face in full. What she’s saying is not unreasonable or revolting, but is it simply another shroud? “I’m not sure I would actually enjoy it, but your offer is…tempting. It would be intriguing to see what I could do if I was someone else.”

With a smile spreading on her lips, Faolain seems pleased, enough to tilt her head close and place a soft kiss on Veil’s cheek. “There will always be a reserved position waiting for you in my Court, Veilidh. Whether you want it or not, it shall be there. Maybe you do not enjoy the philosophy that the Court follows, or what many see themselves as, but you would be free to assume whatever role or personality that you wish. Compared to the whims of the Pale Tree, we do not determine who you might develop into.”

She raises her hand, to caress the other side of Veil’s face, while nuzzling into hair. “And consider how you would be able to serve your own people, just like I’m sure you wish to do at your current home. You could care for them and improve their lives in whatever way you see fit. There is so much you could provide for them. The sylvari need spirits like yours.”

Things are starting to grow more intimate between them now, as a static nature seems to ignite in the vicinity. There’s a warmth in the air that swoops down upon them, enveloping and encouraging their interaction. For Veil, it is like she is being drawn into an embrace, the compassionate branches of one tree trying to shield and cherish another, as if they would potentially be the perfect match she never was under the night’s gleaming stars.

As Veil doesn’t attempt to push Faolain away, the mesmer shifts her position and slowly straddles the somewhat younger sylvari, running one hand down her chest, while the other caresses the petals of her hair. Instinctively, Veil even wraps her arms around Faolain’s waist. She doesn’t know why, but suspects that she somehow craves the companionship of one who cares and treasures her, that she can be important to someone else. Does Faolain truly want to be that someone?
Is this another trick? That’s the difficult aspect of dealing with Faolain; one never knows if they’re interacting with the actual person or whatever she wants them to see. While Veil certainly enjoys her company and thinks that Faolain can be quite satisfying when she wants to, the Firstborn is more of a mesmer than she may realize. The mirrors, the illusions, the constantly flickering reflections have dug themselves in under the bark of her skin, and changed who she is or was. Perhaps it was always the real truth of her, that there is none.

When Faolain kisses her, it’s electrifying, astoundingly pleasing. She feels like she’s being pulled right into those lovely lips, almost as if she is the one who wants it more than Faolain. That is quite impossible, as it was the mesmer who started it, but how can she be entirely sure? That’s the mystery of being with this woman, as she can’t tell who it is that wants what. It’s hard to say whether Caithe or Faolain is the most talented at this, but it has to be acknowledged that they’re certainly close.

Is this actually what she believes, though? Is this her opinion, or a spell thrown upon her by Faolain, her magical influence? Veil doesn’t know if she can find the truth, but she also isn’t sure whether she actually cares. If it’s engaging and distracts her from reality, what does it matter? Does it have to be real, or can she simply wallow in this far off dream world for a while longer? Who would blame her if she chose to embrace it?

After the interaction finally ends, Veil leans back against the rocks behind her and closes her eyes, as Faolain continues her own journey, over the engineer’s cheeks and down to her neck. Occasionally, she stops to say a few words.

“If you accept my offer and become one of us, I will give you everything you desire, my dear Veilidh. Any potentially hidden genius that you have yet to discover, I will draw them out for you to polish.”

Veil contemplates it and it’s hard to ignore how enticing the offer is. She almost feels compelled to say yes. Or is it just a presumption on her part, because of her beliefs of how the Court acts? “I…I’m not so sure that I can simply leave the Grove and the Pale Tree.”

Faolain hasn’t stopped her ministrations as she snorts.

“What has our so-called mother really given you, hmm? You don’t think she knew of Caithe’s deeds? Surely, she must have told you the truth, and how she was completely fine with obscuring it forever. She is as much of a liar as the rest, just like Caithe. Is there even anyone over there who is truly worthy of you, who you can trust without a single ounce of doubt?”

As Faolain’s hands start to roam over her body, while kissing her so very tenderly and carefully, Veil breathes somewhat heavier as senses how her own yearning rises. It feels like she has been fighting this conclusion for so long, that she has been ignoring her own desires and the potential of this union, which is why it’s now…good to finally give in, to let both of them have what they want. Does the rest of Tyria really need her? Does anyone else, when she can be here, in Faolain’s arms?

But whenever she tries to accept one existence, the questions arrive in the back of her mind. Is this what Veil herself is thinking? Does she want to be Faolain’s, or is the mesmer merely influencing her to believe that? She is questioning everything right now, even her own thoughts. Surprisingly, just before she considers pushing herself against the woman in her arms, another image pops up into her mind. It is the sweet, innocent and happy smile of Sieran. Following it shortly after, the thoughts and memories from their time together, all of the things that she has done and achieved with her sister…all of those might be for naught, if she discards her life now. Can she live with that reality?

“No”, Veil finally says, breaking the reverie of the situation.
Faolain looks up, expectant but also hesitant.
“…what?”

Veil seems to have broken whatever her mind was being distracted by – whether Faolain’s magic or just Veil’s own insecurity – and she finds purpose in someone else. She offers Faolain a brief and soft kiss, but it doesn’t last for long.
“I’m sorry, Faolain, I can’t do it. There are still aspects of the Grove that I love, people that… depend on me. I can’t betray her.”

Faolain stares at Veil for several moments, as if she can’t believe what she’s hearing. But, the mentioning of that last person makes the mesmer realize what’s going on, without even hearing a name. She sighs and slowly shakes her head in mild disappointment.
“You are too attached to family. It will break you someday.”

“Perhaps, but until that day, I will continue to cherish it.”

Slowly, and possibly somewhat unwillingly, Faolain slides off Veil’s body, and sits down on the grass next to them instead. Even if Veil had expected something brusque or angry, that is not what Faolain gives her. Instead, she leans close and pecks Veil’s cheek, in the same tender way as before, potentially infused with sorrow.
“And I will continue to wait, sweet Veilidh. One day, you will see how right I’ve always been.”

As Faolain stands up and slowly disappears into the depths of the forest, Veil follows the Firstborn with her eyes. She is starting to regain some of her comprehension for her own identity, but also recognizes her attraction for that woman. It is unmistakable and so very alluring, but she can’t let herself be controlled by it.

Chapter End Notes

So, yeah...more complications for Veilidh. Does Faolain actually want her, or just want to go through her to get Caithe? That's part of a mystery she'll need to solve at some point.

The next three chapters will sort of have a mini-arc, I guess you could call it. It involves Destiny's Edge, and a Vlasic, actually (not Sovica).
Unplanned encounters

Chapter Notes

I'd just like to start this chapter by saying I have not read Edge of Destiny.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Kessex Hills. For many, it’s a difficult region to both inhabit and traverse, and has been for quite a while. The occasional human town exists in this area, as it’s part of Kryta, but those who live here face a lot of troubles. Marauding centaur tribes, destructive ettin groups, hostile wildlife and now recently even invading Risen. There’s a lot of reasons to be concerned about going into a land like this without preparations, but a certain group currently located in the northwest – not far outside of Fort Salma - do not seem to be particularly deterred by the dangers.

“You have everything we need now?”, Veilidh asks her companion.

Sieran is sitting down on the ground next to some crates that they’re going to put on a wagon and utilize a dolyak for transport. She’s looking through them now and nods briefly.

“Mhm.”

“Are you absolutely sure? We can’t forget anything. You did pick up the bandage packs I ordered, right?”

“Yup. It’s right here in the middle.”

“And the rations?”

Proceeding towards the crate on the far side, Sieran eventually gives her sister another inclination of her head.

“Yes, I have them. Some of the others might not like the dried vegetables and drake meat, but I’m sure they will adapt.”

“They will have to. If they want to be part of an expedition, certain sacrifices are necessary. What about the extra clothes? Remember that we have to get different uniforms and sizes. The charr can’t wear the same as the humans or the asura or-”

Sieran lets out a brief laugh, before she glances over her shoulder, looking at Veil who is rearranging some scrolls in another bag a few meters away.

“Don’t worry, Veil, we’ll be fine. We have everything we need, and we know what we’re doing. This will be cherry!”

Looking at her sister somewhat skeptically, Veil sighs.

“I think so too, but this is our expedition and we have to remember that there’s a lot of novices with us this time. Their lives are in our hands.”

Standing up and planting her hands at her hips, Sieran smiles towards her friend.

“And, what, you don’t trust our hands? I think they’re very capable!”

Veil rolls her eyes.

“Of course I do, but I also don’t want anyone to get hurt. For some, this will be their very first
experience. We can’t allow that to be tainted.”

“How would it ever be tainted? This is such an exciting event! We’re going into an old Krytan temple. Think about how many ancient human scrolls and artifacts and remains might be hiding down there.”

“And undead or ghosts or other horrors. There’s a reason that it was abandoned, Sieran, and with the Risen around, the situation has probably not improved.”

Running up to her research partner, Sieran wraps her arms around Veil’s waist from behind and plants her chin on the left shoulder.

“But that just increases the exciting aspect of it! What’s exploring old tombs without some monsters to slay, hmm?”

Veil exhales, but she can’t really hide her smile, because Sieran’s happiness can be very infectious. She raises a hand and playfully pokes Sieran’s nose.

“One day, your enthusiasm is going to get us into trouble. I just know it.”

Sieran giggles and then hugs her sister somewhat tighter, as they try to forget about any unpleasant thoughts for a short while. The one and a half dozen novices that are coming with them, are currently inside Fort Salma, apparently getting a tour so that they know a bit more about the landscape. The sylvari duo already know enough of this place to skip it, so that they could focus on preparations.

While they stand inside the small Priory camp and discuss something else, they notice how a vessel comes approaching from the southern road. It’s a carriage being pulled by two horses, with a human rider sitting behind it. As it stops not too far away, four other humans exit the vehicle, with three of them seemingly being Seraph soldiers. The last one is a young woman, dressed in a high-quality navy-blue coat, pants and gloves, a white blouse, and some heavy black boots.

Neither sylvari have seen this woman before, but they note how she has dark brown skin, long brown hair in a braided ponytail which rests on her shoulder and lighter brown eyes. Veil doesn’t say anything, but she’s certainly an attractive sight.

The soldiers follow the young woman as she confidently strides up to the sylvari, and she sends them both a charming smile.

“Excuse me, strangers. Is this the camp belonging to the Durmand Priory expedition that is heading south?”

The sisters glance at each other, before they return to the woman.

“That’s right”, Veil tells her. “Are you the Krytan representative that wanted to come with us?”

She steps closer and then offers her hand.

“That is correct. My name is Derija Vlasic and I’m a member of Grenth’s Grasp Society.”

Veil is just about to reach out with her own hand to take the human’s, but the name makes both sylvari look fairly surprised.

“Wait, did you just say…Vlasic?”

Derija gently envelops Veil’s hand and shakes it, shortly before she blinks and tilts her head curiously.

“Hmm? Yes, that’s my name. Why?”

Turning back to Sieran, Veil lowers her voice, even though the human can clearly still hear them both.

“You think this is related somehow?”
“Like, being connected with that thing in the cave?”, Sieran asks. “I…don’t know. It’s hard to tell.”

“Maybe we should ask.”

Derija looks confused and clears her throat. She has now retracted her arm and folds both over her chest. “Excuse me. What are you two whispering about?”

Hoping not to anger their potential tagalong, Sieran smiles at her. “Sorry, didn’t mean to look suspicious. We were just discussing a previous excursion. Tell me, are you possibly related to the human hero known as ‘Miljana Vlasic’?”

At those words, Derija’s smile returns. “Ah, you know of the Ascendants? Yes, Miljana was one of my ancestors, who roamed Tyria ages ago. Since those days, House Vlasic has grown rather large, and there are a lot of families and manors owned by those from our house. We also own at least three baronies. The primary descendant to Miljana, though, is from Broadhollow barony, far to the east of here. It’s inhabited by my aunt, her husband and her two daughters.”

Both Veil and Sieran look very fascinated. As the latter initiated the inquiry, she’s the one to continue. “That is very intriguing! We have actually met one of your family before, we believe, up in Queensdale. Oh, and we also encountered a magical apparition last year, which was a remnant from Miljana in the Shiverpeaks.”

Derija widens her eyes in surprise. “What? An apparition?”

Veil nods. “Indeed. It was a message from her, in the shape of a ghostly figure. Or I guess you could call it a warning, as she was talking about the elder dragons. If you wish to see it, you can head to the Priory headquarters in the mountains, as the remnants are being kept and preserved in our repository.”

She had apparently not been ready for such a revelation, which is why Derija now strokes her chin in thought. “I…had not expected this at all. I think I might just go there when I next get a chance. My cousin is very much into history and would probably be very excited if I told her this.”

Shortly after, the young human shakes these thoughts off. “But for now, I don’t have the time. I’m here because I wish to accompany you to the temple. Your expedition will take you there, yes?”

Sieran inclines her head. “That’s right! We were given permission by the Krytan officials we spoke with, as no one has touched it in ages. Are you sure you wish to follow us there, though? It will probably be dangerous.”

Derija arches her eyebrow skeptically. “Are you doubting my capabilities? I will have you know that I’m one of the most talented necromancers in Kryta at this time, and my knowledge is quite vast. This temple you’re going to was once dedicated to Grenth and a powerful priest was its foremost custodian. It was destroyed by the White Mantle, even if much of its ruin still persists.”
You will likely need my expertise in there, you know.”

Well, she’s certainly confident for someone so young. Not like the two sylvari are much older in years, but they’ve definitely spent a longer time exploring the world than this person. Veil gains a somewhat mischievous gaze shortly after.

“...But, my lady, are you certain that this is suitable? An old, dusty and monster-filled tomb isn’t really the place for a precious young noblewoman, is it?”

It appears that Veil hit the right spot, because Derija smirks at her and then slowly strolls forward. Surprisingly, she raises a hand and then playfully pokes Veil’s nose.

“Don’t you worry about me, little blossom. I am more than capable of handling myself.”

‘Little’ is of course an interesting word to use, as the engineer is taller than her, but Veil chuckles regardless.

“Alright, fine. Don’t blame us if you break a nail or something, though.”

“Tsk, watch yourself, Scholar. I’ve punished people for less insolence”, she says, but still with a humorous undertone.

“Now then, how soon will your expedition leave? I shall have to ask my guards to stay at the fort, but I could send them on some errands first.”

Veil is about to answer, but before she does so, they hear another voice in the distance.

“Scholars! Scholars!”

When they turn towards the north, they see how one of the novices in their group, an asura, comes running towards them.

“Are we preparing to depart? Because we’ve just encountered another group that wishes to join us.”

The engineer raises her eyebrow skeptically. Already another group? Feels like they’re getting crowded.

“Oh? Why?”

“They have some interest in the elder dragons and the old priest that was in charge of the temple. Apparently, they are making the assumption that he may have become a dangerous minion of Zhaitan.”

The sylvari sisters glance at each other again, both of them noticing some concern in the other’s eyes.

“Well, that’s certainly troubling”, Sieran tells the novice. “Very well, let them come speak with us.”

It appears that this other team was waiting not too far away, so the asura doesn’t need to go far in order to relay the news. Unfortunately, any fascination they may have felt quickly dissipates as soon as they see the assortment of people.

There’s six of them, plus two golems, but it’s one particular person from this posse which makes Veil freeze up – Caithe.

At the same time, Sieran widens her eyes, as she is definitely aware of the slight conflict between her sister and the Firstborn, if one wishes to call it that.

“...oh dear.”

Most of this group doesn’t seem to have noticed the worry on the sylvari’s faces yet, and it’s not until they come closer and Veil lowers her gaze to the ground, that Caithe recognizes them both. Her expression alters into one of shock as well.

The rest of the team is oblivious of this and it’s the red-haired light-skinned norn woman in the
“Greetings. This is the expedition going to the abandoned temple of the human god Grenth?”

Sieran glances at her sister, noticing how Veil is not in a talkative mood at all, and therefore clears her throat awkwardly and tries to force herself to smile.

“Uh, yes! We are. By the look of your members, can I assume that you are Destiny’s Edge?”

The heavily armed and armored charr in the group snorts amusedly.

“Rumors about us have already spread this far? That was quick.”

The light-skinned male human not too far from his side nods briefly.

“People like to talk about heroes, you know, especially in these times.”

“Heroes, huh? Dunno about that.”

The norn ignores her two companions and continues to focus on the sylvari.

“But you are correct, of course. We are Destiny’s Edge. It’s a pleasure to meet you. Are the two of you the team leaders?”

Sieran puts her hands together and inclines her head slightly.

“We certainly are! My name is Sieran, a Scholar of the Durmand Priory and this is my sister, Veilidh. She has the same rank.”

“Ah, I see. That’s good to hear. I am Eir Stegalkin, leader of our guild. We represent cultures and races from all over Tyria. With me are Rytlock Brimstone of the High Legions”, she says and gestures at the charr.

Rytlock frowns and then points a claw at them, shortly before redirecting it to the weapon at his belt – a burning sword.

“Stay away from the blade, twigs. It’s mine.”

Eir rolls her eyes, before she continues.

“Logan Thackeray of the Seraph.”

The human puts a hand to his chest and bows his head slightly.

“A pleasure to meet you. I’ve heard a lot of good about the Priory from-…well, it doesn’t matter.”

Next, she turns to the other side, and gestures at the asuran duo, who sit on their mechanical golems.

“Master Snaff, from Rata Sum.”

The short and probably fairly old man, based on his white hair, smiles and waves at them.

“Salutations, my fellow scholars! It is always a pleasure to meet with young inquisitive minds.”

“And next to him is his apprentice, Zojja”, Eir informs them.

Zojja doesn’t seem to appreciate that as she frowns at the norn.

“Hey, I am more than a simple progeny! I am a master in my own right. You’ll see.”

Eir sighs and proceeds, hoping that the scholars are not getting a poor impression from the rather…colorful group.

“And, lastly, we have Caithe, who I’m not sure whether you’ve heard of. She is from the Grove, though, like I assume most sylvari are.”

Once more, Sieran glances at her sister, who still don’t seem to be doing very well, with her eyes downcast and half-closed.
“Erm, yes, that’s…”, Sieran says hesitantly.

After taking a deep breath, Caithe decides to interject before there’s too much of a gap.
“Hello, Veilidh. And hello to you too, Sieran. It’s good to see you two are doing well.”

She speaks with a rather casual tone, which makes the rest of her guild either intrigued or surprised.
“Do you…know each other?”, Eir asks carefully.

Caithe continues to gaze at Veil, doing her best not to relinquish her emotions.
“We…we do, yes. In a way.”

Veil snorts.
“We are…acquainted.”

Silence. That is what follows this rather stiff moment, not just among the Destiny’s Edge group, but also with Sieran and Derija.
Logan clears his throat, while Rytlock is the one to make the first small comment.
“…awkward.”

Eir sighs and folds her arms with a troubled look on her face.
“We’re sorry if our arrival has made you uncomfortable, Scholars. We did not mean to cause any problems.”

Several more seconds passes by and Sieran thinks to make a comment on her sister’s behalf, but that’s when Veil finally decides to shake off her discomfort, steel herself and gaze directly at Eir.
“No trouble whatsoever, miss Stegalkin. You could not have known, of course. If you wish to join our expedition, you are more than welcome. Just try not to get in the way of our work.”
Lastly, she glances at the older asura.
“Master Snaff, it’s a pleasure to finally meet you as well. Sieran and I used to study under two of our old students – Siinga and Zebb. Perhaps we will have a chance to talk more later.”

Snaff coughs and switches into a rather pleasant smile.
“Ah, of course! I haven’t seen those two in ages. It would be quite enjoyable to speak of old memories.”

Soon after she has said this, Veil turns around and walks back towards their crates, ignoring the rest. Sieran follows her sister with her eyes and exhales. Perhaps this won’t be as exciting as she had hoped.
She then addresses the guild once more.
“I apologize on behalf of my sister. She…wasn’t ready for this.”

The rest of the guild all look at Caithe, to see if she aims to do anything about it, but the rogue turns in the opposite direction and strolls away as well.
The only one who looks somewhat amused is Derija.
“It seems this trip will be more intriguing than I initially presumed.”

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, haven't read Edge of Destiny, but I've heard Snaff was really polite and friendly and stuff, and Zojja was publicly kinda snappy at him, so I tried to shape
their comments based on that. Well, not like there was a lot, anyway. I wasn't gonna
delve deeply into Snaff when I don't know him very well.

There'll be about two more chapters here. The next one will focus on some
interaction between Veilidh and Eir.
Derija is a secondary character of some importance who will appear more in future
Blood Bond fics. I mean, obviously, since she's related to Sovica.
You can find her profile under the "Secondary character” section on my blog.
Although, this is like, 4 or 5 years before she gets the haircut in the picture, so keep
that in mind.

As for the horse thing, I debated if I should use this or not, since I can't remember
seeing horses in-game, but they are mentioned and referenced in the lore. That's why
I'm going with the 'horses exist, but they're not used for a lot of things' approach.
Mostly travel, I guess.
Veilidh has sometimes wondered if the weather is connected with the rest of the world, if it can feel the emotions of the people wandering the land and alter itself based on what it can sense. There’s nothing that she has found which proves this theory, but today, it seems like a very apt conclusion.

As she herself is not doing very well, and hasn’t done since the start of this trip, rain pours down from above, drenching most of those who travel below. Well, it would do, if it wasn’t for the protection they brought, but that doesn’t make it any less annoying.

The Priory expedition, which was supposed to be so exciting, has almost reached its destination now. They have arrived just a little bit north of Lychcroft Mere, a swamp in the southwestern sections of the Kessex Hills. There are supposed to be centaurs somewhere nearby, but none have been spotted for the time being, which isn’t that surprising. They’re likely deterred by the ruined building situated in among some of the hills within this region.

It is the remnant of a Temple of Grenth, a place lost to history and time. Whatever the White Mantle did to the structure when they destroyed it, has made everyone else stay away and let it fester into this land. If this place had some old lost glory to it, those days have long since passed. Even from a distance, there is a certain eerie sensation from simply looking upon it, despite how there’s practically no more than a few broken walls left.

Veilidh knows that the interesting aspect of it isn’t what they can see, but what remains obscured. There are many tunnels beneath, leading to various tombs and crypts. This was a monument to the God of Death, after all.

Even if Veil is mostly annoyed because of some of the company they’ve had to take with them, she also feels somewhat guilty. The novices have obviously had many questions they’ve wanted to discuss, but Veil has not been in a mood to answer them. Instead, she has left most of this responsibility to Sieran. Her sister shouldn’t have to take her burden like this, but Veil knows that she is not in an emotional state where she can do much to help. All of her answers would just be…muddled by her inability to think straight.

For now, the group has made camp several hundred meters outside of the temple grounds. It’s still in view, but they’re not close enough to be in any danger. Or so they hope, anyway.

Veil has chosen to sit alone for the time being, pretty much on the other side of where Caithe is located. Perhaps she shouldn’t feel this way, but she is still preoccupied with hurt emotions. Caithe was willing to leave everything behind, to abandon Veil in order to go her own way, rather than solve their problems. Does she really deserve Veil’s time now?

As she sits alone and prepares some food for herself, somewhat protected by a tent she has created to shield her from the rain, she is not left alone. She hears heavy footsteps on the ground and while she peers through the entrance, she spots one of the tallest member of the camp heading in her direction.

Eir’s stroll is pretty casual, but her expression is contemplative and a bit hesitant. She raises her hand towards Veil in a greeting before she has arrived and while the engineer is not in a great mood, she chooses to give the norn a nod in response. She apparently sees that as an invitation.

Once she is not too far from the sylvari, she clears her throat.

“Excuse me. I was wondering if I could sit down with you. It’s a bit crowded over there.”
Veil is almost on the verge of brushing her off, telling her to go find her own place to be at, but then realizes how rude and unfair that would be. What has Eir done to hurt her? The ranger has been nothing but polite.

“I…suppose that’s alright. Not a lot of space here, though.”

“Thank you.”

Luckily, Veil’s tent is somewhat taller than she needs it to be, as they brought some larger equipment with them specifically for their norn and charr novices. Eir may have to slightly lower her head while she finds a location to sit down and avoid the rain, but not too much.

“Quite a…cozy little spot you’ve found.”

Veil shrugs and takes a first bite off her food.

“I guess. Just wanted to be alone for a while, really.”

Eir views the sylvari while she speaks, interest shimmering through her eyes, but she only nods briefly after.

“Sounds reasonable.”

She decides to glance around the area, taking in their surroundings and the environment.

“Quite a brave choice, though. This place is kind of…spooky, wouldn’t you say? Reminds me of an old shrine to Owl that I visited once. It was said to be corrupted by Jormag and the whole area had an unnerving sensation to it. Few ever go there now.”

While Veil does listen, she both seems and sounds rather uninterested, or at least distant. She merely shrugs after Eir is done speaking.

“Yeah, I guess.”

The norn takes another few seconds to study Veil in silence after this response, before she continues their conversation.

“Been to many places like this?”

It is nice of Eir that she wants to keep Veil company, but the sylvari herself doesn’t know if she can handle a conversation right now. Eir is trying, though. Perhaps it’s rude to give her this treatment.

“Well, I suppose so. I have spent a few years with the Priory now and that often means going into old and abandoned places, to study what has been left behind. I don’t think we have encountered any that has been so obviously ‘haunted’, though.”

“I see. Do you think that’s due to the Risen?”

“I’m not entirely sure, but I speculate it’s more than that. The people who used to live here did worship Grenth, after all, and they were brought down in a very unjust manner, if the stories are to be believed. Could be that it triggered something.”

Eir looks like she doesn’t have much to argue with and therefore inclines her head.

“I agree. It will be intriguing to see what we find inside. I’m sure Caithe feels the same way.”

Veil frowns. Did she have to go and mention that woman’s name right in the middle of this? Did Eir mean to agitate her?

“Well, that’s good for her, I suppose.”

The ranger watches her carefully.

“You don’t care about her opinion, then?”

“…I didn’t say that.”
After giving herself a moment to sigh, Eir slowly shakes her head. “I’m sorry. I didn’t come here to bicker, nor did I wish to distract you with questions of the area.”

“I know. It was quite obvious.”

“So, you know why I’m here?”

“Probably.”

Now that they’ve gotten past small talk, and potential diversions, Eir gets a rather solemn gaze coming over her, trying to decide which angle she should approach this problem from. “I…realize you don’t wish to talk about her, but…I wanted to come here and see if there was anything I could do. I want to understand more about what’s going on between you.”

Veil snorts derisively, perhaps more harshly than she intended. “Why don’t you ask her?”

“Well, erm, there are a few reasons for that. The first one may mostly be…an excuse, I guess. I haven’t known her for very long, so it would be hard for me to pry into her background too fiercely.”

The engineer looks very puzzled and arches her eyebrow in Eir’s direction. “Uh, yeah, that’s a very strange reason. You haven’t known me for more than a few days.”

“Yes, I’m aware, which is why I mentioned it was merely an excuse. The real one is…well, you probably know this already, but she can be very difficult when trying to explain her feelings. She is often vague and secretive.”

So Caithe has given others this impression as well? Good to hear that Veil isn’t the only one, at least. “Yes, I know. Probably better than anyone, I expect.”

Eir nods, but also gazes at Veil with interest. The way she says it is fairly intriguing. “So, you do have a history together then?”

Veil takes a deep breath, trying to steady herself for what’s to come. Is she really going to explain her entire situation with Caithe? That might be…long. Should she tell the truth? A lie would be easy to construct, as Eir likely couldn’t tell the difference, but… “Yes, we do. A lot.”

Instead of continuing, she quickly turns to face the norn, watching her eyes cautiously. “But why do you care? Why are you trying to help? Why does this matter to you?”

Luckily, Eir doesn’t shy away from the questions in any particularly adverse way, but she does look at least somewhat overwhelmed by it all, which makes her shrug. “I suppose there’s no use in trying to deny it. I have gotten to know Caithe more and more in the past several months and I have to admit that I like her. I see her as…a friend. Not sure if that is too early or not, but I guess I get quite attached. However, if there is something hurting her – or if she is hurting someone else – I’d like to know, so that I can prevent future mistakes. Friends can’t survive with too many vital secrets surrounding them.”

Her response is successful, which is why Veil’s expression softens and she lowers her gaze to the ground. “Your perspective is…reasonable. You might deserve the truth from me, after all.”

“I’d appreciate it, but only if you’re willing. I won’t take something from you that you deem too
precious to share. I do realize we’re still strangers to each other, even if I hope that will come to change.”

Veil takes another breath, hoping to prepare herself for what she’s about to explain.
“I have known Caithe now for…well, about a decade and a half, I suppose, if we count the coming and going of the seasons. We met each other even before I had awakened, as there were troubles in my section of the Dream, so she had to help. Ever since then, our lives have been intertwined. At first, I sort of believed she might have only viewed me as a student, as someone to help, but I… I fell for her very early on.”

She isn’t meeting Eir’s eyes, as her own are lost in thought, facing the ground. She runs a hand up to her hair, correcting it somewhat.
“I didn’t even fully understand my emotions at the time, but I knew I was drawn to her. Sometimes, I couldn’t think of anyone or anything else. Because of her, I have been through jealousy, self-doubt, drama, and all sorts of hazards, but we have had a lot of good moments too. Without her, I would never have experienced some of the best years of my life. Several years back, Caithe did finally accept that our love, our…romance, was mutual and embraced me. We have enjoyed a lot of pleasant days together, while also enduring conflicts and hardships side by side. Back then, I never even thought it would falter.”

Eir is viewing the other woman with interest, obviously receiving more information than she ever thought she’d get. It might not be in detail, but still useful.
“People rarely expect when unpleasantries happen.”

“I guess not, but…this was so very sudden that I still haven’t fully recuperated. Parts of her secrets were revealed to me and I could no longer ignore who she had been.”

The norn opens her mouth to respond, but hesitates. How can she say this without being insensitive?
“You uh, you don’t have to tell me what it was, if you don’t want to.”

Should she? If they aren’t aware, then it could potentially ruin Caithe’s reputation with her new team as well. Is she petty enough to get that kind of revenge?
“It’s probably best if you don’t hear it, yes. Either way, both of us took this revelation in…rather drastic fashions. It created a rift between us, separating our previously strong bond. Caithe decided to leave the Grove, to…leave me. And, well, personally, I don’t know if I can accept her anymore, for who she has become now.”

“So, you’re separated? Your relationship has ended?”

Veil is ready to pick the most obvious option to begin with, but then remembers what Caithe told her months ago. How should she interpret it? Is it a definitive end? She shrugs.
“Honestly? I don’t know. I suppose we’re at an emotional crossroads at this time, where we have to choose which path we want to go. I can’t ignore that I was hurt by her decision, that Caithe refused to give me the chance to offer my side of the issue. To see her like this now is…difficult.”

Eir inclines her head.
“Of course, I understand. I don’t aim to belittle any of your experiences, as I’m sure they’ve very real and important to you. However, if you want me to, I could go speak with Caithe. I can tell her that you’d like to talk.”

This makes Veil quickly shake her head.
“No, that won’t be necessary. It’s better to let it be. I don’t want her to be forced back to me. She
should make this decision on her own.”

It’s pretty clear that this is a difficult situation for both, which is why Caithe has not said anything about Veil during their trip so far.

Eir remains silent and thoughtful for a few moments, as she ponders whether to accept Veil’s choice or do something for her. She realizes that something in between is more manageable.

“Look, I don’t want to give you advice as if I know either of you very well, because I obviously don’t, but…I also do know what it’s like to make mistakes, the sting of failure and heartbreak. Sometimes, you make decisions in the heat of the moment and even though you regret it later, you leave it be, because you don’t know if your judgement at the time was right or not. However, even if that forces you into a lingering state of doubt, it might be wise to question yourself early on, before this thought starts to fester and control you. That way, it is possible to avoid the consequences and the fear that follows.”

She sighs and shrugs.

“I don’t know, maybe I’m just rambling here, and this angle doesn’t work for you, but it might be something to consider regardless.”

Eir’s words do have an impact, perhaps more than she had anticipated. Veil hadn’t looked at it from this perspective, but now that she does, she’s not sure if this is what she wanted to hear or if it’s even useful to her. Either way, it does make her think, and perhaps that’s all it needed to do.

“Thank you for trying. It’s…comforting to know that Caithe has found a friend with such wisdom.”

Chapter End Notes

_I felt like, if anyone knows how to give advice about mistakes and regrets, it’d probably be Eir. And this is even before Destiny's Edge disbanded. Anyway, I'll write the conclusion to this mini-arc next week. After it's done, I'll jump ahead a few months to the aftermath of a certain event. If you know Caithe's history, you can probably predict what happens in that one._
Groaning, cracking, wailing, crunching. The Risen make a lot of noises in battle, some of them to an unnerving degree. For a portion of their opponents, it is just another aspect which makes it so difficult to fight these remnants of actual people that come from the soil, the walls and the darkness, to haunt and destroy their intruders. Most of these originate from a distant past, definitely not corpses that would be familiar to the living invaders, but at least enough to look unsettling. These are not creations of lawful necromancers.

Luckily, the group that faces the undead is not a meagre one. Not only do they have a fairly sizeable number among them, but the capabilities of some of its members are too powerful to be stopped by shambling formations of death. With Destiny’s Edge, the two sylvari scholars and Derija, there is no easy way for the Risen to beat them.

During the fight, Veilidh keeps her eyes on three people – Sieran, Caithe and Derija. She wants to make sure that she loses none of them. Letting the young Vlasic fall would be quite disastrous for their relationship with Kryta. Luckily, none of them are easy targets. Sieran manages to manipulate the earth around them in order to crush her foes, Caithe slices any targets nearby open with her daggers or disappears into the shadows – and there a lot of shadows – while Derija has enough energy and materials here to summon several minions.

As Rytlock swings his burning sword, easily cutting down another three Risen that tries to ambush him from behind, he growls in annoyance afterwards.

“C’mon you rotting furless fleshbags! Can’t you give us a proper fight for once? I’ve seen better from angry dolyaks!”

After he kicks away another corpse, he glances at Derija. The young human has several necromantic minions constantly surrounding her, and at this time, she lets all of them fight another group of Risen, while she drains the energy from her foes to utilize for further spells.

“Hey, kid, this god of yours isn’t so impressive, if this is all he can do.”

Derija momentarily stops to glare at him. Veil knows that part of this is likely due to the insult, but one cannot forget that there’s still a war going between their two people as well. Not here, but in Ascalon.

“This is not the power of Grenth, you fool. Grenth does not teach us to summon entire bodies and skeletons, but to utilize death to our advantage. He gives us the strength from life beyond, in hopes that we will create minions of our own design. It is what most true necromancers do. The pretenders do not. They have no artistic skill. And I am not a ‘kid’.”

The charr snorts amusedly, especially at her defensive behavior towards the end. Somewhere to the side, Logan rolls his eyes, likely knowing what’s coming.

“Art?” Rytlock asks. “That’s how you see these piles of meat and bones?”

The young Krytan raises her hand and points at him sharply.

“Do not mock my minions, Brimstone! You have already seen what they’re capable of.”

“They’d ignite under my blade, just like any of these walking corpses.”

Derija clenches her first, obviously ready to continue their clash, but Eir raises her voice to prevent them, after she has fired two accurate arrows to take down three enemies.
“Stop, both of you! We should focus on fighting the hostile undead, not ourselves. Lady Derija, if this is not Grenth’s doing, can we assume it’s one of the dragons that make these creatures move?”

The necromancer corrects her clothes and offers a brief nod. “Yes, this can only be due to the power of Zhaitan. Its reanimations are less refined than those of my profession, but also much more widespread. It’s like a wave of energy, to take all corpses into the dragon’s grasp and make them move to its whims. Also, due to your charr’s overconfidence, let me issue this warning – this is far from over. It will get worse, very soon.”

Rytlock narrows his eyes and decides to sweep the dark area they’re in. “How do you know?”

“Because I can feel it in the air. The magical essence of the priest oozes all around us. Well, for those capable of seeing it, at least.”

From her corner, Veil scorches a pile of corpses with her flamethrower, before she stops and gazes towards the noblewoman. “Well, then let’s try to find him, shall we? We can’t start searching through the other halls of this place until his corruption has been purged.”

The necromancer nods with satisfaction. “Agreed.”

“Since you obviously know best, you lead us, my lady.”

Derija seems quite pleased to be given authority and gestures for them to follow her. For now, the group keeps a slow pace, not wanting to rush into any potential traps or ambushes. Whenever they do enter an area where they have to face opponents, Derija stands ready to direct the group towards these forces, so that they can be swiftly dealt with. There is one unnerving aspect, however – the fog that keeps growing thicker the further in they go. It can’t be explained where it came from or why it seems dependent on the distance they go, but it is an undeniable element of their descent. It obscures their sights and no matter how much the noblewoman attempts to find its source in the air, she receives no such trace. Not yet, anyhow.

While they’re in the middle of one of these dark tunnels, another eerie thing occurs, as they hear an echoing voice of unknown origin and direction. It is slow and calm, but sends chills up their spines. “Intruders. You have come into the heart of our sanctuary, without comprehension or purpose. You do not belong here.”

Some of the group feels somewhat disconcerted by the warning, but Derija does not. She frowns and clenches one of her hands. “Not true! I am a follower of Grenth, just as you once were.”

“Grenth has no place here anymore, little human. He abandoned his disciples in this realm long ago. Only the master remains now. You may all join it, if you prefer to stay.”

Rytlock snarls. “I don’t think we’ll be staying anywhere, dirtbag. Pretty sure you will burn just as nicely as the rest of your minions. Just come over here and I’ll show you.”

The voice of what they can assume to be the priest scoffs. “You believe the peasants at the gates was all I had within my arsenal? You stand on the graves of
hundreds of generations, of forces unseen elsewhere. Behold the power of Zhaitan, mortals, and tremble.”

Before they have a chance to move or react to what’s going on, black smoke seeps up from cracks in the soil. It slips in front of them, trying to surround each person and block out their perceptive abilities. It hopes to devour them and despite being mere smoke, it is far from harmless. For those without fur, they sense how the essence inserts itself into their skin, and sting them. The sylvari are able to endure it somewhat better than some of the others, but they do not remain undeterred.

Veil desperately attempts to search for tools that can help her, ones that can disperse whatever is blinding her, and in doing so, she finds herself stumbling around. This is smoke, after all, so there has to be a way out of it, right? She refuses to be consumed by some ancient spirit. After trying to utilize her flamethrower to carve a path, she keeps walking, but to her surprise, she realizes that she’s lost. She has entered a corridor that she doesn’t recognize, with symbols and markers she hasn’t seen before. Where are the others? Why can’t she hear them anymore?

Was that cloud worse than she anticipated or is she somehow trapped in an illusion? It’s hard to tell, but he wasn’t supposed to be a mesmer. If she only knew anything about advanced spellcasting…

“Sieran!”, she calls out into the darkness. “Caithe! Eir! Lady Derija! Anyone!”

No response. She isn’t sure if she actually expected one, but she had hoped to at least run into someone. Is the entire expedition lost as well, or is she the only one who doesn’t have a partner? What if this creature picked her to single out specifically? That would be…unsettling. Eventually, she does hear some noise in the distance, but all she can distinguish are moans and groans. Do they belong to her team or the undead? She tries check her belt and what gear is on her body right now, but there is nothing that can provide her with the answers she requires. She will simply have to rely on her senses and hope she doesn’t stumble into anything.

As she continues through these shadowed halls, she starts hearing voices, something not spoken any higher than a whisper.

“Craving. You cannot stop thinking of her, can you? She is your utmost desire and fear.”

Veil frowns and quickly turns on her heel, to make sure no one follows her, but there is nothing. She tries to look around the hallway, gazing at the roof, the walls, but her viewing distance in this corridor is quite limited, so she can only see what’s closest to her. For now, she at least appears to be alone.

“I know who you are, what you are. You don’t scare me, spirit.”

“In this realm, your fear is not an emotion. It takes shape.”

Suddenly, when she directs herself to the passage she was previously traversing, she sees a familiar figure - Caithe. The other sylvari, her girlfriend, looks at her skeptically for a few moments, before she turns around and leaves. Veil widen her eyes and raises her hand, trying to pursue her companion.

“Caithe, wait!”

“Abandoned”, the whispers tell her. “She is not there for you. She never will be.”

There is a voice within her own mind, trying to convince her that this isn’t real. She knows it isn’t, that it can’t be. This is nothing more than an illusion, created by Zhaitan or the priest or… whatever it is that control these events. Caithe would never… Whatever she believes, her feet carry her forward, doing her best to reach the corner where Caithe disappears. As she gets there, she sees a totally different landscape beyond. Caithe is in another place, another world, drifting into the depths ice and snow.
“Caithe, please! Wait for me!”, she yells, but there is no stopping the rogue.

She continues, and even though Veil is the one running, the distance between them grows and grows, like an inevitable barrier.

Finally, Caithe is taken right into the corner of some kind of area without escape, where she is surrounded by creatures, beings amassed by the corrupted dragons. There, in the depths of the darkness – outside of Veil’s power – she witnesses as the beautiful Firstborn is torn apart, devoured by the minions, before being consumed and crafted into a mere tool.

Veil falls to her knees in despair and tries to reach out.

“No, Caithe! NO!”

She feels shivers through her body, how her whole mind is being overwhelmed by sorrow, anxiety and desperation. All she has ever cared for, the love of her life and the woman she has tried her best to be worthy of is-

Just prior to reaching the ultimate bottom of misery, she manages to get a grip, snapping back into her own reality.

“No, this…this can’t be real”, she tells herself, hoping to be her own reassuring element. “This hasn’t happened.”

“But it will. It is inevitable. She is outside of your reach, your protection.”

She closes her eyes, gritting her teeth. She wants to tell those whispers to shut up and leave her alone.

“Caithe…will not fall like this.”

“No one lasts forever. Only death is eternal.”

“Shut up! You don’t know that!”

Suddenly, she spots something coming towards her from another corner nearby. It is the shadow of a creature, putting fear into Veil’s core once more. She rises and holds a hand at her belt, close to her pistol, just in case. If this is a vision, it is far more…tangible than the previous sights.

She sees Caithe stumbling towards her, but not the Caithe she knows. The Firstborn’s eyes are blank and without life, the leaves of her hair are withered, the bark molded and stained, her whole stance reeking of a consumed entity.

“Why did you abandon me, Veilidh?”, she asks with a hoarse, slow and detached tone. “Why could you not accept me for who I am?”

Horror. That is all Veil feels. She should know that this isn’t real, but the sight is so very…disturbingly authentic that the engineer flinches and takes a step back.

“No…no, you’re not real. G-go away!”

“Betraying me again? Is this what you believe that I deserve? Death and misery?”

Veil continues, hoping to get some distance, but compared to when she was trying to pursue the Firstborn, this time, she seems to constantly be drawn closer, no matter what she does. Seeing no other alternative, Veil grabs her pistol again and fires at this vision. One shot, two shots, three…and it continues, until she has littered it with bullets.

The mist of Caithe’s form finally evaporates…only to reappear once more, much closer. She is not alone either.

Veil finds herself surrounded by withered creations, of people she knows. Sieran, Trahearne, Canach, the Pale Tree, Faolain…all dead, all no more than a mockery of their living counterparts. They surround, approach and reach out for her, trying to get a piece of her, to pull her apart.
At the same time, her own mind haunts her, telling her of the suffering she has created. Her choices can and will hurt each of them. They all depend on her and she is not worthy. Why must she cause such pain?

This isn’t real. Veil keeps telling herself that, to make it her mantra, knowing that the truth of this should be able to disperse their illusions and ignore their presences, but…it’s impossible. They look so convincing, and when they grab her, the touch is definitely palpable. It makes her tremble and she screams.

She tries to tackle them, to get loose, to run for her life, but they won’t stop. Their constant wish to have and devour her both infuriates and terrifies her. She can never be free. She has trapped herself in this nightmare by her own choice. It is all her fault.

Just as she is about to give up and surrender to the visions, to her own failures, she hears another whisper.

“Don’t listen to them. Resist, Veilidh. Do you hear me? Do not give in to the fear. They are not real. Their words are lies.”

Veil tries to steady herself, to listen to the voice. She realizes now that it isn’t actually a whisper, but merely muffled, as if something is trying to block it, but it struggles against such bindings.

“I…I can’t see you. Where are you? What do I do?”

“Just listen and remain calm. I will guide you out of this. Trust me.”

Trust? The last time she gave in to trust, it punched her in the gut and left her behind. She doesn’t know if she can ever do so again, or if it’s even worth it. It’s better to remain bitter and not—no. If she wants out of this hallucination, then she must succeed.

“What do I do?”

“Stand tall, turn your eyes towards them and tell yourself they are not real. Don’t just say it, consume it, accept it as the truth. Anything else will be surrender.”

She has kept running, but soon finds herself in a corner, without anywhere else to go. All of her pursuers are still after her, still hungering for her light.

“But…but they look and feel so real…”

“They are not. Remain steadfast and use your resolve. You can do this, Veilidh.”

Despite all of the doubts, Veil does her best. She takes a deep breath, clutches her hands and stares right at the oncoming visions. She tries to use the aid of the voice to strengthen herself, to build up a defense.

At first, it seems as futile as anything, and the nightmares continue to wander towards her. It isn’t until the very last moment, that something seems to change and they are somehow drawn away, pulled into the darkness ever so slowly.

“Good. You’re doing it! I knew you could, Veilidh. C’mon, just a little more.”

Another minute or so, and each of the visions have disappeared. She is left alone again, without noise or sights. Somewhere in this fog, she suddenly sees a figure and a face that somehow looks familiar, but she can’t discern all of its features. Is that…Caithe? Was she the one helping all along?

Without getting a proper view, Veil runs towards her.

“Oh, by the Pale Tree, I’m so glad you’re alright!”

Instead of waiting and confirming that it is this woman, Veil throws her arms around this being, believing it has to be Caithe. Despite all the scorn and bitterness that she has tossed in the rogue’s direction these past few days, seeing the other sylvari alive and well, after going through this terror, is somehow a relief. For a time, she practically believed that Caithe was dead for real, even
if she would prefer to deny it.

She doesn’t care if anyone is watching at this time, which is why she wraps her arms around Caithe, pushing her lips towards that beautiful face and kisses her deeply. It is a lengthy motion, a craving and a desperate need for affection that drives her. She hasn’t been with her lover for months now and the separation has affected her entire being. Not having Caithe close to her is like missing something, as if her whole body is divided. To have her back is...

Now that the mist has finally dispersed, she realizes that something is wrong. Not only do the lips taste...different, the person ahead of her is softer and shorter. This isn’t Caithe, is it? She tilts her head back and opens her eyes, and a look of shock comes over her. The woman in her arms is none other than lady Derija Vlasic, who appears quite puzzled.

“...oh.”

All around her, she spots other people standing in the same corridor that they had been fighting in earlier. Right now, most eyes are turned towards her and Derija. The noblewoman herself clears her throat.

“Well, that was certainly...interesting. Don’t think I’ve ever received this kind of thanks for removing a curse before.”

“What...just happened?”

“I dispelled the priest’s magic. He was infecting our minds with a hallucinogenic toxin. His actual body is probably in here somewhere, but his illusionary power has now been disabled.”

No, that can’t be. Did she just...?

“But I thought you were-“

She stops and glances in another direction, seeing Caithe standing further away. The actual Caithe, safe and sound. She looks like she doesn’t know if she should be amused or confused. Veil coughs awkwardly and her face starts to glow.

“...I’m sorry, my lady.”

Derija smirks at her.

“Apolo...
Tragedies of time

Chapter Notes

Right, time to return to Veilidh/Caithe stuff.
This chapter occur after one of the events in the book Edge of Destiny (which I've not read), but is also talked a lot about during most of the personal stories in-game.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

1320 AE – The Grove, Maguuma Jungle

Serenity.
Veilidh has long since understood where her calling is, what she was meant to do, whether chosen by fate or her own decision. To build, fix or enhance other people’s possessions has always been something that she has enjoyed, an activity which is not just something that entertains her, but also calms her down. If she’s ever upset, anxious or angry for whatever reason, she knows that she can always delve into the design of some new piece of gear or repair an item that has been broken. Tinkering all on its own has enough power to soothe her. That feeling can disperse once she gets back into reality, but the temporary freedom is enough for her.

This is likely why her heart has been so calm as of late, why she is not bothered by the unfortunate circumstances of the past. Despite not having resumed the bond with her beloved, she has not let herself become consumed by it. There is no denying that some pain still lingers, which occasionally reaches her mind and she becomes distracted, but she is not absolutely devastated. She has accepted what Caithe told her and realizes that she can simply wait.

It’s not just her work, of course. Eir’s words from last year had an impact on her, realizing that she can’t be bitter forever. And then there is of course the companionship from her friends, like Sieran and Trahearne, the tasks she gets to perform for the Priory, the support she gains from her superiors in the same organization or even the love given to her by the Pale Tree. Patience is something she has decided is a good virtue to embrace.

It’s not like she has completely given up on a potential future with Caithe, but she won’t push it anymore. The Firstborn needs time and whatever she chooses, Veil will be around.

On this early afternoon, Veil is walking back towards her home, carrying a bag filled with gear over her shoulder. She has completed another successful repair in one of the lower sections of the Grove, on some items that a young sylvari had brought with him from the wilderness, but didn’t know what to do with. It feels good to help out, to be useful to her people. Even if she loves being in the Priory, the Grove is special, giving her the sensation that she’s part of something greater. She can never understand groups like the Nightmare Court, or the Soundless, for not wanting this companionship, the unified consciousness that embraces them for simply existing. Wouldn’t it feel lonely without it?

All of these thoughts almost immediately shatter when she reaches the house she shares with a few others. Outside of it, she spots a familiar figure – it is none other than Caithe. At first, Veil is shocked, brought into a state of mixed elation, confusion and hesitation. What would the Firstborn be doing here? Veil hasn’t received news that she’d suddenly return. The engineer is even more bewildered when she watches how Caithe raises her hand as if to
knock on the door, but then bites her lip tentatively and halts her motion. She seems caught in her choices, uncertain what to do.

After the initial confusion, Veil decides that it’s time to reach out. She’s too curious not to. “Caithe?”

The Firstborn, who is usually so very difficult to surprise, gasps and flinches, before she swirls around to look at the other woman. “V-Veildh”, she stammers.

From this angle, the engineer gets a better view of the other woman. She is…not looking very well, for some reason. Her hair is somewhat wilted, her clothes are torn and dirty in certain places, and her bark skin is visibly drier than usual.

Veil decides to approach her, carefully, almost as if she’s closing in on a frightened animal. Caithe doesn’t shy away from it, but that doesn’t remove Veil’s hesitation.

“Are you…alright?”

Caithe opens her mouth to say something, to establish that she’s still herself, but before any words leave her mouth, she hesitates and lowers her gaze. Her arms rise to circle around her, practically like she’s hugging herself.

“…no.”

This sight ignites dormant protective instincts in Veil, something she hasn’t felt since that day in the tomb. It motivates her to hurry closer. She reaches out with a hand towards Caithe’s arm, to caress it and surprisingly, Caithe actively leans against her. They used to be very intimate in the past, but after all that has happened – especially due to the revelation of Wynne’s fate – Veil wasn’t sure they would be able to embrace it once more. Her shock does not last very long, as she takes the opportunity to drop her bag and wrap both arms around the Firstborn.

“What-“

“Snaff is dead”, Caithe whispers to her.

Veil widen her eyes, gaining flashbacks from her discussions with the old master on their encounter. “W…what?”

“He is dead. The dragon…it killed him. Destiny’s Edge is gone.”

This is a lot of information at once, almost too much to process. Master Snaff, the brilliant asura technician, is deceased? She starts to feel emotions of regret now, that she didn’t take the chance to speak with him more when she actually had it. Zebb already taught her the basics of engineering years ago, but she had wondered if Snaff couldn’t have helped expand her knowledge even further. Now, she’ll never get that chance.

During this revelation, Veil isn’t sure what to say. Something tragic has obviously occurred, more so than she is used to handling. But she has to do something, right?

“Do you wish to come in?”

Caithe nuzzles into her shoulder and speaks quietly once more. “…yes.”

All along the way into her apartment, Caithe leans against Veil, seeking comfort in her arms. Veil doesn’t oppose it, unable to struggle. Perhaps she should be, after the Firstborn simply came back like this without asking for permission, but…this is Caithe.
Once they get inside, Veil throws the bag that she brought to the side and locks the door behind them. She takes Caithe with her towards the bed, as it’s the largest and softest spot in the area, but she has no other intentions than that. When they sit down, the rogue leans into Veil’s arms, practically craving their touch. The sorrow is blatant on her face, in her eyes, her very being is filled with a sense of loss. She radiates regret and it infects Veil too.

“I’m here, Caithe.”

“I know, I just…” It sounds like she swallows, trying to steady herself before she gets into any further descriptions.

“It was horrible. All we set out to do, all we hoped to achieve…dashed against the cruelty of reality. We will never have this moment again. It’s all gone.”

While Veil gently runs a hand over Caithe’s head and through the leaves of her hair, she still feels like she’s not quite following.

“Hold on. Caithe, I…can you explain? I’m not sure I get what you’re trying to say.”

Caithe starts by shivering in Veil’s arms, cuddling even closer. Half of her is trying to think, while the other half desperately desires the intimacy, to just lie here, possibly forever. At least that’s the sensation Veil gets.

“Do you really want to hear it?”

“Unless it makes you uncomfortable.”

The Firstborn takes a deep breath, which she slowly emits a few seconds later.

“It all began after we journeyed into the Crystal Desert. After months of having travelled around and defeated various minions, we believed we were ready for a real challenge, to fight one of the elder dragons. We took aim and found an opportunity. It was not just with anyone either, but the crystal dragon, Kralkatorrik.

To achieve this goal, we received aid from a dragon whose mind was her own – Glint.”

Veil widens her eyes slightly.

“Wait, I know this name. I’ve read about her in books stored in the Priory. She was involved with the human ritual, Ascension, right?”

“Yes. She used to be a minion of the elder dragon, but was freed by an ancient race known as the Forgotten, long ago. After that, she gained visions of all sorts, of what would happen to the world. She has helped many people ever since and she wished to aid us as well, in order to take her old master down.

Together, we devised a plan that seemed feasible in order to kill it, but things did not transpire the way we had hoped…”

She shuts her eyes and pushes closer to Veil, making the engineer slowly run a hand down Caithe’s back.

“Take your time, if you wish. You don’t have to hurry.”

Caithe sighs, but it’s somewhat shaky.

“I know. Thank you, but you deserve to hear this. It’s…important.”

She continues to talk, but she needs the embrace in order to have enough courage.

“Before the battle even started, Logan had disappeared. Instead of helping us, he chose to aid his Queen, who apparently needed him. That left us with a gap, but we saw no other choice than to proceed anyway. This was a fatal mistake.

During the assault itself, Glint was killed by Kralkatorrik, and while Snaff managed to gain control of the elder dragon, it was not enough. Its Branded minions went after him, destroyed his golem and then broke through the last of his defenses. Logan was supposed to be there, to help
She can’t continue, which is obvious. She sinks together, clutching herself even harder, trying to come to terms with it all. Looking at the whole picture of those events is obviously awful.

“Caithe…”

“I’m a failure, Veilidh”, she whispers.

The engineer blinks confusedly.

“What? You’re not-“

“I am. I failed them at a critical moment. It was part of my task to kill the elder dragon, but I was not quick enough.”

“You were not the only one there, Caithe. You can’t just-“

The Firstborn raises her head, turning her sorrow-filled gaze right into Veil’s and caresses her cheek.

“I failed you. I abandoned you when I shouldn’t have, after the truth was revealed. I went my own way, ran like a coward…only to make new friends that I failed as well. I’m a miserable wretch. Everything I do turns to dust.”

It’s hard to tell whether it’s Caithe’s emotions that affect Veil or if it’s just the general sensation from the words, but she suddenly feels very saddened too. She wraps her arms around Caithe again, pulling her close. Despite what she said about distance last time, the Firstborn now very clearly seeks comfort, and Veil gives it to her.

“You are not a failure, Caithe, not to me. What happened there, it— you can’t take responsibility for it. The whole situation with Logan, the loss of morale, the uncertainty of fighting a dragon, it’s…obviously complicated.”

Caithe leans against Veil’s neck, under her chin and holds herself there. Veil encourages the gesture and slowly stroke her fingers over Caithe’s body, hoping it imbues her with pleasant sensations.

“A Dream of taking about our loss and your arms”, she whispers.

“My arms?”

“You are my solace, Veilidh, my one path to serenity—and I walked away from it. This is why I’m a fool.”

Well, technically, Veil can’t argue with her there, if it really was so important to her. It’s not the choice she would’ve made, even if she allowed Caithe to do as she wished. Caithe hesitates again, trying to find the words for what it is she wants, without being insolent.

“Can you—ever forgive me for what I did? I have hurt you, I know that, but—I want to make up for it, to mend what I have broken. I will do anything you require of me. Anything you wish.”

It’s here that Veil enters a crossroad, one out of many she has had to choose during her relatively short life. What sort of happiness should she prioritize here? Whose safety and feelings are most important? Depending on who she asks, she would likely get different answers. Perhaps it’s best to simply trust her gut, what she knows in her heart.

She turns her head slightly and nuzzles into Caithe’s hair, no matter how it currently looks.

“I forgive you, Caithe. You are always welcome here.”
I mean, it's not the best situation. Caithe is basically asking Veil to take her back only after losing everything, being her safety net, in a way. That's not the most fair request, but...

This isn't tagged with "complicated romance" for no reason

The next few chapters will deal with another aspect of Veilidh's life and a person who becomes rather important to her.
Stolen blood

Chapter Notes

So, here comes another arc, but longer than the last one. It features mostly Veil and an actual main character from Blood Bond. In a way, this is quite an important development in Veil's life, so I wanted to feature this properly. Caithe, Sieran and Faolain will all still be in some of the chapters, though.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

1321 AE – The Grove, Maguuma Jungle

Resting at night within the Grove is special, as it’s unlike any other place Veilidh has ever stayed at. While many inns and beds around Tyria can be pleasant for the physical alleviation, nothing compares to the mental strength given to her in this realm.

She still comes here fairly often, whenever she feels like she needs to connect with her people. It’s the same for many sylvari, even though they have a constant link to the Dream and the Pale Tree. There’s something unique in the air, whenever they actually get to be close to each other, and that is too comforting to simply discard. Well, for most of them, anyway.

It is this link that triggers inside her mind right now, in the middle of the night. She feels as if something is poking her, gently trying to get her attention and while her body wants to sleep, it can’t last forever. Eventually, she is pulled out of her slumber.

As she opens her eyes and blinks them in order to remove any blurriness, she sits up and looks around. Part of her practically expects someone to be here, maybe having broken into her room, but she finds nothing out of the ordinary. There is something wrong here, though, but not inside her home. What is it?

After putting her coat and some of her gear on, she heads out into the streets of the Grove, wanting to see if there’s some kind of event she’s missing. At this time, there are still some of her people out and about too, but not nearly as much as on daytime. Many night blooms do love the darkness.

Whatever this feeling in her chest is, it’s not natural, because it isn’t just warning her, but also guiding her. She’s being drawn towards the area where the growth field is, with the golden pods holding the soon-to-be newly awakened sylvari.

Immediately upon arrival, she is unnerved by a particular sight – she finds some of the Wardens and caretakers that guard this area at night lying on the ground. She moves up to them and put her hand to their skins, but still feels life energy within. They’re only unconscious. She considers waking them up, but that would be a waste of time. If someone knocked these people out, couldn’t they still be in the vicinity? And even worse, threaten their youngest members?

Instead of waiting around, Veil gets back up and runs straight for the pods, hoping to see that they’re alright. Before she even reaches her goal, she hears people in that section, speaking to each other in hushed voices. Proceeding cautiously, the engineer observes how six individuals – all of them sylvari – move around at the stem of the large tree, which the pods are attached to. Strangely enough, these people are attempting to pull the pods off and dispatch them on the ground.

“So, what do we now? How do we proceed?”, one of them asks.
Another fold their arms and studies while two are desperately struggling with a pod that practically seems stuck. “It takes too much effort to remove them with care. We can’t stay here forever. More guards will arrive at some point.”

“But we can’t just leave! We need these saplings.”

“Then just pull harder”, a third suggests. “Tear all of them off if you have to.”

“But…what if we damage them? The Duchess wants these preserved, not damaged.”

Having heard enough of their plans, Veil frowns and jumps out of her hiding spot behind a wall, standing in full view of the rest. “What’s going on here? What in the Mists do you think you’re doing??”

When they turn around, she suddenly realizes who they are by observing their clothes and appearances – the Nightmare Court. Of course, who else would break in like this and be so callous?

Most of them look pretty panicked that someone discovered them. “Shit! I thought you said that you dealt with all the guards?!”, one asks hurriedly.

“I did!” another insists. “None of them are supposed to be awake. Your illusion must’ve broken.”

“Did not!”

One particularly large sylvari, with heavy armor, pulls out his weapons – a shield and a sword – and glares at Veil, while he gestures for the others to leave. “Stop squabbling, you fools, and get going. Three of us should take care of this gnat, while the rest of you prepare for departure right away. Come on, go!”

A group of three moves to stand in front of Veil then, facing her in order to block her path. “I dunno who you are, little flower, but you’re not going any further.”

Veil glares back at him and draws her pistols. “We’ll see about that.”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were-“

He doesn’t even manage to finish his sentence. To their surprise, Veil suddenly initiates her rocket boots and utilizes them to shoot herself forward with such speed that they can’t react. She bursts straight into the warrior’s abdomen, tackling him with a combination of high velocity and a calculated impact zone, making both of them fly backwards. He is knocked unconscious when he slams into the ground.

As Veil slides away on top of him, she turns around and aims her pistols at the other two, unloading several shots into their flanks. She doesn’t kill them, but their injuries are too grave to actually stay in this fight and they fall down.

After she leaps back on her feet, a tall sylvari with clear signs of Guardian magic attempts to ambush her with a large sword, but Veil has already noticed her. The engineer quickly steps back and evades the attack, before she raises her arm and opens a small hatch on the mechanical glove. A big ball of brown sticky slime ejects and hits the other woman, splashing all over her. Due to the slippery nature of it, the Guardian loses her footing and drops to the ground, becoming even more tangled into it. Veil would feel sorry for her due to how long it’ll take to get out of there, but this is a thief of saplings, and she will abide no such actions.

As four of them are out of this fight, Veil directs herself towards the last two, who are now
attempting to escape. The mesmer casts some magic to prepare a portal, which the last one uses to pull a pod into and at least have one that they can take back with them to their lair. Unfortunately for the mesmer, she won’t be joining him. As soon as she tries to get to that location, she feels a hand on her shoulder and glances over it in time to see Veil standing there. The engineer glares at her, before initiating another mechanism inside the technological gear – an electric shock. A bolt of lightning surges through the mesmer’s body, stunning and causing enough damage to her that she pretty much passes out instantly. Veil makes sure she doesn’t fall on anything hurtful, before glancing at the portal.

With all her speed and strength, she leaps towards the flickering gateway in order to go after the last person before it shatters. Once she uses it to teleport, the portal disperses, and Veil finds herself somewhere outside the Grove. She has ended up close to a stream of water that she knows flows nearby, but the vegetation is so thick here that it’s rather easy to disappear. That was likely the plan too.

In the distance, Veil spots the last courtier still doing his best to run, dragging the pod with him as quickly as he possibly can. She doesn’t know what the hell the courtiers would want with pods like these, but she also doesn’t wish to find out. There’s no way she’ll let a newly awakened be taken away for experimentation or whatever sick fascination these people have. She raises one of her guns, closes an eye and takes aim. She adjusts for the wind, potential trajectory and the speed of the courtier, doing all of the calculations in her mind. After a few seconds, she fires.

A well-placed shot hits the man’s leg and with a groan, he stumbles to the ground, falling face first, while also dropping the pod. He grits his teeth and touches his leg, feeling how the golden sap within him is running down over his skin, but he can’t let this stop him. He desperately tries to get back up, but doesn’t come further than sitting on his knees. Before he has a chance to stand, he can only see how Veil has reached his side. A second later, he loses consciousness as she uses her plated hand to punch him in the face, knocking him out instantly.

Veil takes a second to breathe out and tilt her head back, glad that she managed to get there in time. She’s not sure what might’ve happened if she didn’t solve this situation. Is the Nightmare Court really abducting saplings now? Veil remembers hearing them mention ‘Duchess’. Is Faolain involved in this? She is the Grand Duchess, but still. It doesn’t take long for Veil to end her relaxed state, as she realizes that she’s still outside the Grove, with no backup. It’s not too far from their home, but other courtiers could be waiting nearby. Better not linger.

Her eyes are also drawn towards the pod and she lean down to touch its surface. Through her connection to the Dream, she can sense that there’s at least life energy inside of it, so this sapling is still alive, but Veil is worried. They’re not supposed to be taken off the Pale Tree, not until they’ve awakened. The pods are then brought back to their mother, who recycles and reuses the material once more. What if this sapling has been hurt somehow?

After bandaging the courtier and tying him up, Veil uses all her strength and willpower to drag both the pod and him back to the entrance of the Grove, where she finally gets some help. She informs the Wardens what happened and that they should probably capture the rest of their enemies, so that they can imprison and question these people later. In the meantime, Veil decides to go with the pod, just to be safe.

It takes several hours until anything happens, a time during which Veil has hardly even been moving. The caretakers who were woken up have tried to determine how the sapling is doing, but it’s hard to tell now that the pod has been without nourishment from the Tree for a while. They’ve
done their best to mend this through magic instead. They tried to tell Veil that she should get some rest, but she couldn’t. She somehow felt responsible for it, even if none of this incident was her fault.

Eventually, as noon arrives on the next day, something erupts, and Veil can hear noise from the pod. The startling fact is that it sounds rather panicked. It’s as if someone is hammering on the shell of the pod, trying to get it open but being unable to. Veil hurries up to that location and looks around, trying to search for a way to help out, but can’t think of anything good. The caretakers are too far away, so instead she uses her own ingenuity and gear. She fastens some hooks and rope to the edge of the pod’s hatch and ties them to one of her machines, giving herself some added strength to forcefully pull off the top.

When it flies off, a young sylvari is revealed inside. She has purple skin with small brown highlights, short red hair with yellow streaks and brilliant amber eyes. This young woman lies naked, confused and panicked, trying to look around with an uncertain gaze. “W…what’s going on?”, she asks in a frightened tone. “Where am I? What…”

Feeling very sympathetic for the young being, Veil hurries up to her side. “You’re in the Grove, with your people”, she tells her calmly, which makes the sapling flinch. Probably best to take it slowly. “Hey, it’s alright. Don’t be afraid. I’m a friend, here to help you. I’m a sylvari, just like you.” The sapling watches her, surveying Veil’s appearance, possibly trying to find out more. Thankfully, she doesn’t move and allows the engineer to gently caress her cheek. Veil smiles. “Everything is going to be okay.”

It seems to work, and the sapling’s breathing is slowing down, as her eyes remain locked with Veil’s, taking solace in her presence. She likely senses the kindness and gentle nature of the older woman. “Who…who are you?”

“My name is Veilidh. I am an ally and one of the older sylvari. What’s your name?”

The sapling ponders it for a moment, trying to search her own mind and thoughts, before she reaches for a response. “…Daeynwe.”

Veil’s smile brightens. “A fine name, indeed. Welcome to Tyria, sapling.”

Chapter End Notes

*Not sure if Veilidh was a bit too badass here or whatever, but I mean...she is the Pact Commander and these were some pretty low-ranked Nightmare courtiers. Figured she could take care of them.*

*But yeah, compared to Derija, Daeynwe is actually one of the main characters from Blood Bond. This arc focuses on how their sibling connection grew and to let Dae be presented to some of Veil’s most important friends.*
Lately, Veilidh has been questioning herself whether she was ever completely ready. Perhaps she should have been, especially as she has been in this world longer than many of the younger generations of sylvari, and yet it had never occurred to her what it would be like. Sure, she has helped out around the Grove in the past, she has even tutored occasionally in the Priory, but to actually have a proper student in life? It’s beyond anything else.

She wishes that she could say she now knows what Caithe must have felt back when they first met, but this is different. Caithe was not born all too many years ahead of her, and even the rogue had aspects to develop, things to learn before she could fully say that she was ready for the world. Between Veilidh and Daeynwe, there’s a much wider gap in generations and experience. Veil has been around the continent already, seen the expansion of sylvari diplomacy, adventures and self-expressions, met pretty much every other sentient species available in these lands. She has fought dragon minions, developed weapons, struggled with starting and almost ending a relationship. Veil knows she’s not done learning yet, but that doesn’t help with this particular mindset.

It has been a few weeks since Veil rescued the sapling from the fate of being caught in the Court’s clutches, and despite not needing to, Veil has decided to stay close. She can’t deny the fact that she feels very responsible for Dae - she was the one who found the sapling and saved her. If she had failed, Dae might be dead…or worse.

For this reason, Veil decided to take the role of a mentor, just like Caithe did for her. There is clearly a link between them, a connection that sometimes merges their emotions, intertwines their hearts.

However, comparing it to the one she shares with Caithe is inadequate, because the sensations involved in this process are not the same. With Caithe, that was clearly romantic love, which she found out later, but she can’t classify her connection with Dae in the same fashion. No, it would perhaps be better to compare it to what she has with Sieran instead, as Dae certainly feels like having another sister. Sadly, there are a bit too many parallels between them.

The most startling similarity is how much of a noon sylvari the younger sister is. She’s eager and direct, wanting to see action and adventure constantly. Veil appreciates it, as such attitudes can be fun and healthy, but the scholar in her feels like Dae has to learn more before she goes anywhere. She’ll only get into trouble if she doesn’t consider every angle, after all.

Is this possibly how Caithe felt when they first met? She remembers being fairly difficult to begin with, but even she wasn’t this fierce…was she?

During the past few weeks, she has taught her student as much as she can about wielding different weapons, which would prepare Dae for combat in the real world and the young sylvari appears to prefer a combination of dual blades, together with a pistol. Her style is certainly unorthodox too – she has the strength and skill of a warrior type, like many of the Wardens, but also the agility and stealth of thieves like Caithe. Perhaps Veil should discuss this with the Firstborn later on.
At this time, the duo is out in the wilds of Caledon Forest once more, as Veil attempts to give Dae another lesson. She is trying to relay information about some of the jungle’s various aspects, hoping to provide a few pointers regarding what to look for. Dae didn’t really specifically ask to gain Veil as a teacher, but she also didn’t oppose it. She does seem to like Veil’s company. As they walk along some kind of well-trodden road, the engineer stops and indicates a painted rock on the left side, close to some trees.

“You see this sign here? It’s one planted by the hylek. They are sentient amphibians who live in tribes of different origins, beliefs and purposes. Usually, they are quite friendly, but it’s wise to study their belongings before you step into their territory. It can help you understand what their purpose is and how you will be greeted if you choose to enter.”

Veil moves even closer, kneels down and points at a symbol on the top of the rock.

“Do you see this mark? It is the symbol of the sun, which is part of what they worship, although they don’t quite call it that. In their various cultures, putting this mark up here can have different connotations. In its current position, I would say that these hylek should be friendly to us.”

After she’s done, she stands up and glances over her shoulder. Sadly, the young sylvari is not actually watching.

“…Dae, are you paying attention? This is important.”

The young woman folds her arms and rolls her eyes. She is currently wearing a set of moss green leaves and branches as armor, but has requested to receive gear similar to Veil’s instead. They’ll have to get her a set in the future.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m listening.”

The tone of the voice does not sound encouraging and Veil frowns.

“You’re not. Don’t lie to me.”

Dae sighs and swirls around, showing her back to her teacher.

“It’s just so booring. I want to do something fun and exciting.”

“…it’s not boring! This is crucial information, things that can determine life or death scenarios for you in the future!”

Instead of sticking around, the sapling slowly walks away, trying to get onto the road again.

“We should try to find some adventure instead, not go around talking about the forest all day long. If you want me to learn, let me do so with something tangible. I want to see and touch the danger.”

It seems this is constantly the problem with Dae. She wants to do and act, not sit around. What was it Ventari said? ‘Act with wisdom, but act’? Sure, that’s a nice sentiment, but the wisdom part is also important. Very important, in certain circumstances.

“If you don’t listen, you could get in terrible danger one day. I just want you to be prepared.”

“Bah, I’m always prepared! Besides, talking about danger is so dull and slow. I won’t remember all this later anyway.”

“Not with that attitude!”

Before Veil can suggest that they continue the lesson, Dae suddenly gasps and runs towards some trees, in order to look past them.

“Veil, come here! Something is going on down there.”

Despite sighing in a tired fashion, Veil follows and decides to observe the same view. When she gets into position, she sees how Dae points down a hill towards an outpost.

“What’s happening over there?”
Well, it’s clearly a sylvari outpost, being guarded by what she assumes to be Wardens. However, a weird group has gathered on the outskirts of it, containing mostly humans, some asura and a couple of norn. All of them are together, but they don’t wear uniforms, as their gear seems kinda haphazard. On top of this, they are also armed.

“Hmm, they could be bandits”, Veil states as she narrows her eyes. “There are a few groups that operate in Brisban to the northwest. Occasionally, they do wander down here, looking for prey. Not sure why they would target an outpost. They’re clearly outmatched.”

Dae contemplates the answer for a moment and taps her chin in thought.

“Hmm…’bandits’. I think I know that word. Aren’t they criminals? We should get involved, teach them a lesson.”

Veil raises an eyebrow skeptically as she views her little sister.

“What? Certainly not. The Wardens are more than capable, Dae. They can handle it.”

This is apparently not a satisfactory conclusion, as Dae pouts and folds her arms.

“And we’re just supposed to watch? This is my chance to learn how to fight!”

“Dear, you just received your blades about two weeks ago. I doubt you can do much against them.”

“Not true! I can fight, I swear!” Unfortunately, they hear how commotion starts down below. The bandits get agitated and one of the norn punches a sylvari, which makes all hell break loose. The bandits yell excitedly and attack the Wardens. Dae gasps and looks really alarmed.

“We have to help them!”

Now that they’re watching, it seems like even more of these scoundrels appear from positions further back. Maybe it would be wise to act after all.

“Hmm. You could be right. You should stay here, though. I’ll move in and take-“

Unfortunately, Dae stopped listening seconds ago, and has already started running for this position.

“…Daeynwe! Dammit, come back here!”

She does not stop and the young sylvari keeps running all the way to the outpost. The angle they approach from is useful for flanking maneuvers on the bandits, which thankfully makes them unseen to begin with. Veil tries to catch up, but Dae is just way too quick.

The young rogue starts out by drawing one blade from her belt, as well as her pistol. She takes aim, and to the engineer’s surprise, actually manages hit one bandit in their upper back. Unfortunately, Dae stopped listening seconds ago, and has already started running for this position.

“…Daeynwe! Dammit, come back here!”

Dae looks overwhelmed for a few moments, but then tosses her pistol to the side and pulls out her other blade.

“Yeah, that’s right! That was me! C’mon then, you soft skinned bastard! Show me what you’ve got!”

…so, not only is she impulsive, but filled with attitude too? Dammit, why did Veil have to get such a self-destructive student?

Surprisingly, when they attack, Dae shows some excellent use of dexterity and speed. She is very quick and evades several slashes, getting just barely out of reach. If only her counterattacks were as effective. Instead, she mostly just grazes her enemies and as they are wearing armor, that does practically no damage.

Eventually, she does manage to injure one foe, by slashing at a gap on his thigh. It does make him stagger and he loses momentum, but this loss does not deter his friends. As Dae’s defenses are
down, she receives a cut on her right arm, dropping her weapon, and then a hard punch right to her abdomen. She tumbles to the ground and clutches her stomach, coughing quite violently. She has never really been injured before, so this surely hurts.

Despite being downed, she will not let herself be finished off. She attempts to roll away, but doesn’t actually need to.

One with a rather large axe raises it above himself and goes for an overhead strike, but instead of coming anywhere with it, he receives a gunshot straight to his chest. This is followed up by two more, killing him on the spot.

As they turn in the direction of the shooter, they see a pissed off Veil standing there. She grits her teeth and her eyes almost seem to be burning.

They redirect their attention fully to the engineer, but she starts utilizing more of her gear. She drops two of her portable turrets, with one shooting bullets and the other breathing fire. She unleashes one of her oily liquids to make them lose balance and stumble to the ground. When they’re vulnerable, the flame turret ignites the substance and burns some of them alive.

To further increase the destruction, she goes for some special equipment in one of her pouches, grabbing a few grenades. As they explode very close to the area that’s already on fire, this spreads the devastation to a fearsome degree.

Her entire attack is quite over-the-top and causes more deaths than she likely meant to. Due to suffering too many casualties, the bandits eventually decide to flee. Even the Wardens seem a bit surprised by Veil’s eagerness to help defend the outpost and once their attackers have fled, the elementalists stationed here receive orders to put out the flames before they become unmanageable.

Once it’s all over, she hurries up to Dae’s position and pulls the sapling to her feet. The young rogue actually looks quite excited.

“Veil, I don’t know even know what to say! That was really amazing what you-“

“You fool!”, Veil yells back at her. She makes Dae flinch and immediately goes silent.

In the interim, the engineer quickly checks Dae’s wounds. Seeing the golden sap on the arm, Veil almost feels herself going haywire and quickly throws off her bag to get the medkit, in order to bandage Dae up.

“Never do this again, do you hear me?”, she tells the sapling in a stern voice. “You were lucky this time to only receive a small injury, but if you’re not careful, this might get serious. You are not prepared for these types of fights.”

Dae hesitates somewhat before she responds, letting Veil mend her for now.

“Veil, I’m not sure why you’re overreacting like this. Didn’t you see what I did? I could almost hold my own against several of them. I’m a lot tougher than you think.”

It’s not like Dae dislikes the concern, as she actually enjoys seeing and hearing how Veil cares for her. The older sylvari is always so nice to her. It can occasionally become cumbersome, though.

After she’s done, Veil raises her eyes again, letting their gazes meet, and she places both hands on Dae’s cheeks.

“Don’t throw yourself into perils like this without my permission, please. I am your teacher and I need to protect you from harm for as long as I can. You are not ready yet, and next time won’t be this easy, unless you grow stronger.”

With a bit of guilt and some disappointment, Dae lowers her eyes.

“I understand why you’re afraid, but I just want to help, Veil.”

“Yes, I know, and I get it, but this isn’t that simple. You are important to me. Our connection is something special.”
Raising her gaze again, Dae looks at her and wraps arms around Veil’s waist. “I feel the same way about you too. You’re, like, my sister. I just want to make you proud.”

Veil actually manages to smile, and instead of gripping the cheeks, she now caresses one, while running the other hand through Dae’s hair. “You already have. You are so very precious, Dae. Like a sweet little…”, she slowly shakes her head, looking for the right word, “…petal.”

If there was anything nice flowing between them previously, Dae now suddenly looks skeptical. “…what? Petal?”

“Yes, because of how adorable you are.”

“I’m not a petal, Veil. I’m more like a fierce thorn or a sturdy branch. Did you see how awesome and strong I was out there? I can handle anything!”

Ignoring the previous fear, Veil now begins to chuckle. “Sure you are, Petal.”

Dae scowls and pushes slightly at Veil’s shoulder. “…please don’t call me that.”

Veil’s amusement is steadily growing with Dae’s distaste of it. “Why not? What’s wrong with it?”

“…it sounds silly and embarrassing. I don’t want others to think of me like that!”

“I’m embarrassing, huh? Fine, if that’s what you think, then that’s what I am, Petal.”

Chapter End Notes

Daeynwe is a very reckless and annoying little sister, but Veilidh loves her anyway. Caithe will be in next week’s chapter.
With widened eyes, a racing heart and her mouth agape, Daeynwe steps out of the asura gate and lets her gaze sweep across the territory before her. The loud and exciting sounds everywhere, the peculiar sights of buildings and decorations, the smell of the sea and an abundance of people. It’s like the Grove, but larger, noisier and more diverse than anything she could’ve anticipated. She hadn’t expected what Lion’s Arch would be like, but she is already loving it.

It’s been several more weeks since the notorious first fight against bandits. During that time, Veilidh has made sure to constantly keep check on Dae, that she pays attention and learns how to defend herself properly. After showing how capable she has become, Veil finally agreed to the request that the young rogue asked for – she wanted to see Lion’s Arch. Since it was time to take her outside of Maguuma anyway, this seemed like a wise first trip.

Going to this large city was preferable according to Veil for several reasons. Not only is it fairly secure and nowhere near any potential warzones, but it’s also filled with all kinds of aspects from the world, challenges and new exciting flavors that Dae has never had the chance to experience. As they wander away from the portal area, the young sylvari corrects her new outfit that she received not too long ago. It consists of a cinnamon-colored jacket, navy blue pants, a green shirt and sturdy leather shoes. She did ask for clothes similar to Veil’s, after all, albeit not the exact same design.

“Now, before you go running off anywhere”, Veil tells her, “there are a few things you must know about this city.
The most important part is probably its leadership. Lion’s Arch does not have anyone like the Pale Tree, but is instead ruled by the Captain’s Council – a group of seafarers who are wealthy, influential and in charge of their own ships.”

Dae actually listens to what she has to say now, even if the wish to seek adventure is still quite strong in her. She knows by now that Veil has a lot of important information that can help her understand the world around her. Doesn’t always stop her from making foolish choices, but Veil can usually get her out of any trouble too.

“Really?”, she asks confusedly. “That sounds…strange, somehow. We’re at the coast, sure, but we’re not actually at sea. Why would Captains rule the people here?”

“Well, Lion’s Arch has a long history. It used to be the capital of the human nation, Kryta, but the awakening of Zhaitan completely flooded the whole place. It wasn’t until a decade later that the new one would rise from its ashes, but by that time it was inhabited by smugglers, pirates, independent sailors and others who had taken refuge here. It’s been almost a century since those days, however, and now this city is sort of a central meeting spot for races across Tyria. This is where we got the materials for the clothes you’re now wearing and certainly a good location to find the other stuff we’re looking for.”

Dae starts to smile, realizing what her sister is talking about.
““You mean the weapon you’re making for me?”

“Quite so. There are lots of merchants in this city and some of them sell rare raw materials that I cannot ahold of in the Grove. If we’re going to make you that special pistol, I have to purchase these things from them.”
At first, Dae merely nods to show that she understands, but this is followed by her eyes slowly surveying her mentor’s outfit.

“Do you have a lot of coins with you?”

Without thinking too much about it, Veil moves her hands down across her clothes, to check where she put her coin pouch, and detects it in one of the pockets within.

“Some, yes. Why do you ask?”

When their eyes meet again, Veil seems skeptical, while Dae tries to offer her as sweet of a look as possible.

“Well...you mentioned something about a festival, right? Just wondering if we could maybe have some fun.”

The engineer should’ve expected such a reaction, of course, but she can’t really complain, as she was the one who suggested this course of action to begin with.

“Hmm. I suppose you’re right. They’re celebrating the creation of the Council around this time of year, which means lots of food, music, fun games and similar activities. There are a lot of chances for you to meet new people here.”

Dae already heard some of this back in the Grove, but it does not make her any less excited to be told of it again.

“Ooh, it’s going to be so good! If you’ll allow me to participate, of course. And I’ll probably need some coins too, if these events cost anything.”

Veil takes a deep breath as she moves a hand down into her coat.

“Well, I would prefer that you don’t stray all too far from me, but...I guess I shouldn’t restrict what you can do on your spare time.”

She grabs a handful of silver coins and a few gold ones too, which she hands over to the Dae, so that she can place them in her jacket.

“Don’t lose any of this, though. My funds aren’t endless, and this experience is meant to be educational too, not just entertaining.”

She isn’t entirely sure if the rogue is listening, especially as she’s grinning quite widely when she shoves the coins down into her pockets.

“I’ll do my best to learn, I swear! I promise I’ll only get into a few fights.”

Even if Veil is going to be quite busy, she realizes that she also has to keep an eye on Dae. Doesn’t want her sister to get lost in here or somehow end up in trouble. The latter seems like a very plausible conclusion, without supervision. After they step away from the portal area and head towards the market district, they hear another voice, which at least one of them recognizes.

“Ah, there you are, Veilidh. Canach told me that you had planned for a trip here, together with ‘a new troublemaker’.”

Veil widens her eyes and even though she turns to look at this newcomer, the name of the speaker already pops into her mind before she has locked eyes with this person.

“Caithe?”

The Firstborn comes walking towards the duo from the east, currently dressed in a more casual attire than her usual one. It appears more local, to fit in with the pirate types. She has a blue vest over a white shirt, with a few buttons at the top being opened. Further down they see black pants and neat crimson-red flat shoes.

She offers both of them a gentle smile.
“You sound surprised, dear. Hope I didn’t arrive at an inappropriate time.”

Veil’s expression quickly shifts into something much more pleased and she shakes her head.
“Of course not! I’m glad to see you, obviously, but I hadn’t expected you to be here. Where have you been? Last we spoke, you said you were travelling somewhere to help with negotiations.”

The older sylvari stops only a few meters away, putting her hands at her hips.
“True, and that’s what I did. The Wardens asked me to help out, as they wanted to negotiate with Kryta regarding new outposts in the south of the nation. Due to my actions in the last few years, my name is well-known and respected now, so they figured it might help.”

“How did it go?”

“Well, we were invited to Divinity’s Reach, which was pleasant enough. Hadn’t been there in a few years. The Queen’s people are still reluctant, it seems, as humans can be quite fickle when it comes to sharing territory. They have opened up to the idea, at least, so we’re not too far away from a potential deal.”

Veil nods slowly.
“Sounds good to me. I remember visiting some of those places out in Kessex. The humans really ought to understand that we aren’t interested in being rivals with them, though. Guess they still have a particular mindset like that.”

“Indeed”, Caithe agrees, but her eyes are already turning in another direction, losing interest in the topic at hand.
“However, I believe we have a much more fascinating aspect right in front of us. Who is this lovely woman next to you?”

Having been caught up in her own thoughts for a moment, Veil blinks and glances at her friend, who is watching Caithe very curiously as well. Shortly after, the engineer smiles and clears her throat.
“Oh, heh. Erm, I suppose this is a good opportunity to introduce you. This is my apprentice, in a way, Daeynwe.”

Caithe closes the distance between them and reaches out with her hand.
“I did receive one of your letters not all too long ago, so I do remember the name. It is very good to finally put a face to it now, though. Greetings, young lady. As you no doubt already heard, I’m Caithe.”

Dae looks very excited as she takes Caithe’s hand and shakes it eagerly.
“I know! It’s very good to meet you! Are you the same Caithe as the hero from Destiny’s Edge?”

They hear how Veil clears her throat in a somewhat hesitant manner.
“Uh, I’m…not sure that’s a wise topic, but…”

Fortunately, Caithe does not seem bothered at all and merely continues to smile.
“The one and only, yes.”

“Oh, amazing!”, Dae exclaims. “I’ve heard a lot of rumors about you! It’s so exciting to finally meet someone who fought dragon minions! It’s what I want to do someday too.”

It’s almost impressive how swiftly Veil goes from hesitation to skepticism. Her face is very close to pouting.
“Hey…I fought such minions too, you know.”
Dae winks at her teasingly, while Caithe starts to giggle.
“Aww, darling, you don’t need to sulk just because you missed the best fights”, the Firstborn tells her. “I’m sure you will get to see some very exciting ones of your own in the future.”

“…don’t patronize me.”

Once they’ve let go of each other, Caithe folds her arms, but Dae puts a hand on one of them.
“Don’t know how many questions I have!”, Dae remarks. “Veil has spoken of you a little, but not much.”

Caithe arches her brow in surprise and glances at her girlfriend.
“Really? Didn’t even feel like mentioning me, Veilidh? After all these years we’ve known each other.”

Her statement has some amusement hiding beneath it, but Veil still looks awkward.
“Uh, well…you know, I wanted to wait until she got to see you for herself. Sounded more intriguing to me. And then there were some things that I…”
Her words trail off, as she doesn’t really want to explain that in front of Dae, so she quickly changes topic.
“Anyway, Daelynwe actually fights a bit more like you.”

“Is that so? That’s very interesting.”

“Not entirely, though. She doesn’t have the same control and precision as you do, and she gets way too excited. She did awaken during noon, after all.”

In response to this, Dae rolls her eyes.
“Hey, that’s not fair. My time of birth shouldn’t be a point against me. Just because I want action and excitement, it doesn’t mean I can’t sneak around too.”

“Actually, I do believe charging in and stealth are two separate activities.”

Caithe glances between them, already starting to learn what type of relationship they have. She will have to see more later on.
“Well, since we’ve just met, I would love to spar with you some time, see what you’re capable of. I could potentially give you a few lessons too, if you think you can keep up.”

This makes Dae grin eagerly, probably not having expected this response.
“Oh, yes! Definitely. Damn right I can keep up! I’m faster than Veil, you know.”

“Eh…only at running”, Veil adds skeptically.

“Also”, Dae starts, “I don’t quite understand how you two know each other. Veil said she awakened a few years after you, and that you’re friends, but not much else than that. Has to be more to it, right?”

Caithe blinks a few times, before her gaze slowly turns towards Veil. As she does, it gradually becomes slyer.
“She hasn’t told you?”

Veil coughs awkwardly, eyes diverted to the ground.
“Well, we are…uh, close friends. Sort of.”

Caithe smirks and slowly strides closer, as something sensual enters her gaze and voice.
“Very close friends, indeed.”
“Due to your experiences?”, Dae asks, curiously viewing their interaction.

The closer Caithe gets, the more Veil’s face starts to glow due to a blush. It’s been a while since she has felt shy in the Firstborn’s company, but she doesn’t quite know how she’s supposed to inform her sister of this.
“Y…yeah, sort of.”

“Some very specific experiences”, Caithe explains. “Here, let me demonstrate.”

“W-wait, Caithe, maybe we should-“

Unfortunately, Caithe doesn’t let Veil escape nor protest. She slips her arms around the engineer’s neck, pushes herself into Veil’s chest and then tilts her head slightly. As their faces practically collide, their lips become connected in some of the deepest and fiercest kisses they’ve shared in a while.

Veil can’t ignore that she’s kind of embarrassed that this is how Dae finds out about the link she shares with Caithe. At the same time, she is immensely delighted too, that Caithe is so enthusiastic about making it as obvious as possible.

Veil wraps her arms around Caithe’s waist, pulling her even closer.

During this process, Dae tilts her head and watches them inquisitively. This is the first time she observes anyone kissing.

Once their lips part a few inches, Caithe stays near, angling her head to whisper straight into Veil’s ear.
“Just so you know, I think it’s very sweet that you chose to take an apprentice. I’m proud of you.”

“…thanks”, Veil responds in a similar volume.

“She is adorable as well.”

“I know, but she can be a handful sometimes.”

This makes Caithe smirk.
“Oh? Reminds me of someone I know.”

“Tsk. Shut up.”

Eventually, Caithe takes a few steps back, but keeps her hand interlocked with one of Veil’s.
“So, what are you both doing here?”, she asks in a more conversational tone.

“Well, for the most part, we came here because I wanted Dae to experience Lion’s Arch and to enjoy ourselves during the festival. However, I also intend to purchase some materials, as she wants me to build a pistol for her.”

“Ooh, sounds like fun. I’d love to join you. In fact, if this is your first time in Lion’s Arch, I could show you around, Daeynwe. I know some areas you might enjoy and not just for the food. There’s all kinds of action and entertainment available here.”

Dae’s ears perk up at one of those words.
“Action?”

“Indeed. They have some shooting ranges, climbing areas and docks where you can try out sailing. Not to mention the fighting arena where-“

That’s when Veil raises her other hand to interrupt the Firstborn.
“Uh-uh, there will be none of that.”

Both Caithe and Dae looks surprised at first. Shortly after, Caithe is amused that Veil would be so protective, while Dae frowns.
“Excuse me? You can’t decide what I can and can’t do!”

“I can, and I will. You are not a gladiator and you never will be. There will be no fighting in the arena – end of story.”

Chapter End Notes

*The next chapter is kind of a followup to this one. The focus will be on Caithe/Veilidh, though.*
The challenge of distractions

Chapter Notes

More Caithe teasing Veilidh in this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She doesn’t quite know how, but Veilidh feels as if she lost the battle of who gets to decide their schedule. Despite her previous protests, she has had to indulge a lot of Caithe and Daeynwe’s preferences and follow them into whatever chaos that entails. Some of these things included activities that Veil hoped to discourage Dae from ever trying. Too late for that now. Sure, they never went to the arena, but they did sail out on the sea for a while, took Dae to a shooting range, went climbing with her – with much less safety gear than Veil recommended – and even sat down for a few drinks together. That last part was quite an experience and she can’t even remember how Caithe persuaded her that this was okay.

After a few days, she still hasn’t picked up all the materials that she was supposed to purchase. Her two companions are simply too distracting, and she couldn’t maintain focus for long. During this time, most of Caithe’s arguments have pretty much boiled down to telling Veil she should stop worrying and try to live a little. Work doesn’t have to be her entire life and the engineer has reluctantly had to agree that she can become somewhat fatigued at times. This experience should be relaxing in comparison, if only they didn’t crave excitement all the time.

Despite their fights in the past, Veil can’t say that Caithe has imbued her with any large amount of anger or annoyance during the last year. Their relationship has mostly mended and while the scars remain, happiness is more important than the grudges. It can’t be ignored that Caithe does often attempt to appease Veil, perhaps as some form of prolonged apology, but it doesn’t always take obvious shapes. Convincing Veil to relax and have fun is one such thing, to make sure she remains healthy.

However, when they enter the festival area on this day, Veil decides that she has had enough of excitement.
“Alright, stop, both of you.”
The other two women had been discussing the possibility of exploring some caves to the south, but now blinks and does as Veil tells them, turning their attentions to her.
“For the last few days, we have done exactly what you want to do. I think it’s time that I decide what’s next.”

Caithe and Dae shares a glance, with the former folding her arms and the latter shrugging.
“I…suppose that’s fair”, Caithe admits. “What would you like to do?”

She’s glad that they don’t oppose her at least and Veil raises her hand to stroke her chin thoughtfully, while she views the various buildings around them.
“There were some historical exhibitions that I wanted to view, regarding dwarven architecture…”

Dae’s shoulders slump and she tilts her head back while she groans.
“Ugh, please no…”

Veil snorts.
“But I suppose you would simply try to sneak away. I might enjoy playing a game, though. I saw
The trio managed to find an open spot among some of the chess tables in a tent conducted by humans, seeing how much of it wasn’t being used at this time. After about an hour of playing, however, it appears that they have already come to their conclusion, as Dae does not seem particularly enthralled. She sighs and raises her hands in defeat. “Alright, I give up. I can’t beat you. Two losses were enough.”

Veil offers a smile and rests her arms on the table. “Are you sure? You are getting better, Petal. You just need more practice.”

“No thank you! This game is not for me. It’s too slow, too much thinking involved. I’m also confused by these rules; they don’t make sense.”

“I can explain them again, if you prefer.”

“It won’t help! You’re too smart for me. When I finally know what to do, you’ve already made a long and complicated plan. I’m never going to beat you.”

During this process, Caithe has mostly sat silently on the side and observed the entire thing, but she now opens her mouth to comment. “That is because you are not thinking about this the right way.”

Dae had hoped Caithe would agree with her, but perhaps the Firstborn also enjoys this stuff. She shrugs in response. “I dunno. I think this so called ‘game’ is too much about logic for my taste. I don’t like to sit around for this long.”

“And that is your first mistake, Daeynwe. Chess is not about logic.”

If she thought this claim would go uncontested, she is sorely mistaken. Veil watches her confusedly for a second or two, before she proceeds. “Excuse me? Yes, it is. Logic, strategy and analytical thinking – that is the very essence of chess and how you win.”

Caithe shifts around to smile at her mysteriously. “Wrong. It is one way to success, but not the only and certainly not the best. Social interaction, observation and guile is what I would say is the foremost path to victory.”

Veil snorts amusedly and shakes her head. “What are you even talking about? Chess has too strict rules for that to ever happen.”
“You might think so, but that is because you have never faced someone who utilizes them to perfection.”

Veil narrows her eyes slightly, viewing Caithe suspiciously. It sounds like a challenge, which she should ignore, but instead walks right into.

“Alright, since you sound so damn confident, care to face me? Let’s see if your ‘guile’ can beat my strategy.”

The rogue shrugs and stands up, switching positions with Dae.

“Very well. Don’t be upset when I best you, though.”

“Hah! Unlikely.”

Normally, Dae would be way too bored to stick around, but somehow, she is very intrigued by how these two interact and a potential rivalry is not something she’s going to miss. Caithe corrects her hair somewhat and another amusing thought comes to mind.

“Now, while it would be fun just to play, how about we make this a little more exciting and up the stakes?”

Veil arches a skeptical brow.

“In what way?”

“How about a bet? The winner chooses what we do next.”

Dae suddenly grins and claps her hand.

“Ooh, a contest! I love it.”

The engineer seems confused, not seeing the purpose, but she’s too confident to decline and therefore merely shrugs.

“Okay, fine. If I win, all three of us shall go see the lecture on Thaumaturgical Elevation Velocity theory. Professor Zebb, my old teacher, is holding it.”

Despite having been excited, Dae now flinches and looks distraught.

“Wait, what?! Why am I being included in this?”

“Because we will do this as a team. Whatever we do next, all three should be involved.”

Dae buries her head in her hands.

“Ugh…Caithe, please don’t lose.”

For whatever reason, Caithe simply keeps smiling as she views her girlfriend.

“As you wish. If I win, though, we will go to the music hall, where you and I will enter the dance floor together.”

If Veil had previously been rather self-assured, this disperses somewhat at Caithe’s suggestion.

“…pardon? Dancing?”

“Mhm.”

While her gaze drifts away, Veil raises a hand to scratch the back of her head.

“I…I don’t know. That’s not really my thing.”

“Does that mean you’re giving up?”

“…I didn’t say that.”
She senses a lot of reluctance at the prospect of being forced into such an activity, but it is also
very appealing to be able to get her companions into an intellectual pursuit too. Perhaps she should simply gamble. It’s not like she can lose anyway. Caithe may be older, but she is not wiser.

“Alright, fine. I accept your terms. Let’s do this.”

Neither of the two needs to get the rules explained to them, so they can start right after everything has been set up.
The initial pace is quite slow, with Veil taking charge. Her moves are very tactical and coordinated, like she already has a plan. This was exactly what Dae had to experience before. Caithe’s choices, however, seem somewhat more random, potentially like she’s making it up as she goes, although it’s hard to tell if that is also a strategy. Either way, it makes Veil more confident.

After a couple of minutes, once it’s Caithe’s turn, she strokes a hand under her chin, eyes trained on the board, while she contemplates her next decision.

“So, you’ve never danced?”

Veil clears her throat.

“Well, I mean…I have, but it has been a while. Remember that celebration a few years ago? When Treahearn suggested we hold one for the first sylvari-published scholarly work?”

Caithe considers this for a moment, before she laughs briefly.

“Oh yes, I remember. The others seemed quite confused about the occasion, but just wanted to have fun.

Was that your last dance?”

“No really. I was also invited to a human ball once, about two years ago. It…wasn’t a pretty sight.”

“Was this related to your Priory work?”

“Pretty much, yeah. I had been operating in Kryta and the noblewoman in charge of the land insisted I join them. Kinda wish I had declined.”

The Firstborn seems highly entertained and makes her next move shortly after. This is followed by another minute of silence as they go back and forth with their turns. Just as Veil is altering her strategy somewhat, and lifts one piece, Caithe speaks again.

“Did you know I won a dancing contest once?”

Veil holds the piece in the air, but now blinks her eyes and redirects her attention.

“What? When?”

“When I was in the Shiverpeaks with Destiny’s Edge. There was a big party in one of the homesteads we visited and some of them decided to challenge us. I won.”

This isn’t entirely impossible, but Veil somehow isn’t sure if she believes it.

“Really? You danced with norn?”

Caithe doesn’t hesitate or look particularly suspicious, though.

“Mhm. Eir and I partnered up and performed amazingly together. All of them completely fell for my grace.”

“…you’re lying. Norn don’t care about grace.”

The rogue leaves her arms on the table, resting her chin in the palm of her hand and gives Veil a fairly smug look.

“I even have a trophy. Beat me and maybe I will show you.”
This can’t really be true, can it? Veil wonders if it’s possible, as it does sound kind of farfetched. Can she even remember the last time she saw Caithe dance? The memory of that celebration kinda blurs in her mind. However, Caithe does walk and run quite elegantly…

Wait. Did Caithe and Eir actually dance together? What would that have been like? Their bodies don’t seem to be compatible, even if Eir’s appearance is very…intriguing. To see the two of them so close together makes for a fairly alluring image.

Suddenly, she is brought out of her thoughts, by the sound of Caithe snapping her fingers. “Veilidh? It’s your turn.”

The engineer raises her eyes to meet with her girlfriend’s. “What? Oh, right. Sorry, I was—never mind.”

Some embarrassment fills her head as she realizes that she was fantasizing, which regretfully makes her lose track of her strategy and she has to work her way back, to understand what situation she’s in. She shouldn’t allow herself to become distracted by details like this, as it plays right into what Caithe may have planned for her. She will have to rectify this and ignore future conversations. Unfortunately, Caithe is not done.

“Hmm. Is that a new shirt?”

Veil glances at the Firstborn to begin with, before she looks down to view the black and green cloth item. “What?”

“I don’t believe I’ve seen it before.”

“Oh, well, not terribly recent, but I got it a few months ago. Bought it from a vendor in Divinity’s Reach.”

This makes Caithe smile. “Mm, looks very nice. Brings out your eyes, you know.”

Veil hadn’t expected flattery at this time either, but Caithe would be one to notice such details. When she views her girlfriend again, Caithe winks, making Veil clear her throat. “Erm, thanks.”

This is only briefly before she looks down at the board and feels that it appears a bit strange. “…wait, did you move a few of these pieces?”

“Hmm?”

She raises a hand and points towards one corner. “I’m pretty sure your Queen was not standing over here.”

“It was.”

Veil decides to stare suspiciously at Caithe, but either the rogue is completely innocent or she’s doing her best to emulate that sensation. “I dunno…”

Caithe tilts her head skeptically. “Are you accusing me of cheating, darling?”

“Well, I…”
After a few moments of hesitation, Veil looks towards the third party here. “Petal, did you see anything?”

Unfortunately, the youngest sylvari snaps out of whatever daydreaming she was doing as well. “What?”

“Did you see Caithe move these pieces when she shouldn’t have?”

“Uh…well, no. Sorry, I wasn’t paying attention. I was listening to the two of you talking and then I also looked at your shirt. I didn’t see any cheating.”

“Well then”, Caithe starts, “I believe there is no proof against me, which should make me innocent, yes?”

Veil emits a heavy sigh and shrugs in defeat. “I suppose so…but I will be watching you.”

“Go ahead. I have nothing to hide.”

While Veil sincerely doubts that, she also can’t make accusations based on nothing. Several more minutes passes by and the game continues, much more even than it started. Once they seem to be closing in on the end, with only a few pieces left on each side, Caithe goes in for the last strike. Her girlfriend has attempted to stay alert, but she doesn’t fully recognize the mental game that the rogue is playing here.

“So, you’re building a weapon for Daeynwe?”

“Yup”, Veil says confidently. “Thought I could make her a pistol. She works rather well with both hands simultaneously, so she should be able to use it efficiently.”

“Could you explain what you’re doing with it?”

It’s not like Caithe has never been interested in Veil’s work before, but this is still somewhat unusual. Not that it will stop her from explaining, though. “Sure, I guess. I was thinking of going for a combined design of asura, charr and sylvari techniques.”

“Sylvari? I didn’t know we had personalized engineering methods.”

“Well, we do! It’s mostly me and a few others who have expanded upon it. It’s based around systems of recycling and retrofitting materials, quicker recovery, and increased use of alchemy. We have a lot of ingredients that no one has ever utilized before. Some of this is of course developed from asuran and human ideas, but we’ve been able to make our own processes out of it.”

“So, you’re copying the asura?”

Veil furrows her brow, some pride starting to work itself into her mind. “Well…no, I wouldn’t call it ‘copying’. More like, inspired by.”

There’s an amused glint in Caithe’s eyes as she tilts her head. “Is there a difference?”

“Of course there is! Miles! Being original and being unique are two separate concepts. You can still improve objects that already exist and create something that belongs to you.”
“Intriguing. You’re basically saying that you have improved upon asuran technology?”

Veil nods sharply.
“Some of them, definitely.”

“You sound very confident, dear.”

Veil raises her hand to point at Caithe.
“Damn right I do. I know what I’m doing, Caithe. I’m one of the best in my field at this time, and I’m very adamant that we are recognized as engineers and not just ‘warriors’ or ‘menders of nature’. We can help advance the state of technology and mechanical theories, as much as anyone else.”

She notes how Caithe is lifting another piece, which is why Veil looks down towards the board and spots something confusing.
“Hold on, are you sure you want to do that?”

Caithe inclines her head.
“Yes, I do.”

“You realize you’re playing right into my hand, don’t you?”

“If you say so.”

After it’s done, Veil quickly looks towards Caithe, trying to examine the rogue’s expression for any deception. Caithe doesn’t flinch, but merely stares right back to her. It’s frustrating how adequate she is at hiding her emotions, both mentally and physically. Veil just can’t read her.

When she realizes she has to proceed, she moves the piece according to her strategy.
“Check.”

Suddenly, Caithe’s face shifts into a very sly smile.
“Splendid. I guess I shall finish this then.”

“What?”, Veil asks in surprise…shortly before she notices that she has completely exposed her King’s flank.
“Wait, no!”

“Oh yes”, Caithe says confidently and then makes the last move in this game. She eliminates the piece that was threatening her own King and corners Veil’s leader.
“Checkmate.”

Veil is stunned into silence, and Dae is just as shocked.
“Holy crap!”, the young sylvari exclaims. “How did you even do that?”

“Wait”, Veil mumbles, “this…this isn’t- No, I-I was sure that I-…this can’t be.”

Caithe seems very pleased with Veil’s reaction, before she stands up and smiles brightly.
“Did I not tell you? You should pay more attention to your surroundings, dear.”

Veil leaves both of her hands on her cheeks.
“But…I…”

Soon, she can’t watch what she did wrong any longer, as Caithe’s extended hand blocks her view, forcing her to look into the rogue’s eyes.
“Come, let’s get you into some better clothes. You can’t dance in that outfit.”
Veil sighs heavily and leans back in her chair, her head spinning with defeat. She should’ve expected this. Caithe played her the entire time.

Chapter End Notes

_Did Caithe actually cheat? We’ll never know_  
_No Caithe in the next chapter, though, as Veilidh intends to introduce Daeynwe to another important woman in her life._
Veilidh won’t deny that she had kinda been dreading it. The idea of taking her dear little sister outside of Maguuma to begin with was quite frightening, as she wasn’t sure what would happen. Daeynwe got into enough trouble inside of the jungle, where her people have a lot of control. What would it be like elsewhere? How would she react to the customs of other races and would she create trouble among them? The answer seemed to be inevitable.

It’s been a couple of weeks since they last met Caithe in Lion’s Arch. The Firstborn had duties to perform back home and Dae wanted to continue her journey with her mentor. Parts of Veil thought it was much more worthwhile to stay in Caledon and the Grove, make sure that Dae’s education continues at a steadier pace instead of being erratic, but she knew that wouldn’t last. She has more responsibilities than tutoring Dae, after all, especially with the Priory.

It can’t really be denied that Dae still has much to learn and as Veil didn’t specifically have anything against it, she decided to take the young sylvari with her towards the site where she’s supposed to meet with another woman, which happens to be her other sister. They have arrived in eastern Kryta, on the edge of the Shiverpeaks. This region is called Shiverspur Front and lies within the Gendarran Fields.

This section of the land occasionally sees confrontations between the Lionguard, roaming ettins and aggressive dredge, and apparently, a certain Priory representative thought that was a good place to travel into the middle of with an expedition. Veil shouldn’t really be surprised. During the journey, Dae gets temporarily distracted, as this is the first time that she has personally witnessed snow. She saw it in the Dream, of course, but that is completely different from experiencing something firsthand.

Eventually, as they are on the approach towards the Priory camp, Dae lifts some snow up in a small pile. She looks at it, sniffs and then opens her mouth to put it in. Veil blinks confusedly and before Dae manages to eat it, she gets a hand on her wrist, preventing the action.

The young rogue glances at her sister.

“What are you doing?”, Veil asks.

“Trying to taste it, of course.”

Veil sighs and rolls her eyes.

“Yes, thank you, I can see that. But it’s snow.”

“Well, I don’t know what that means. It certainly looks tasty!”

“Snow is miniature frozen crystalline water which forms in the atmosphere and it has converted into this state under specific cold conditions, usually somewhere far up among the clouds. You don’t want to eat it.”

Dae looks confused, glancing between the snow and her sister.

“But…it’s just water?”

“Yes, but it could contain all sorts of particles inside of it when it has been lying around for a while, especially within territories with civilizations and animal life, where various smoke, gases, fur, urine and bacteria might have contaminated it. Their interactions with the snow may not be
completely hygienic, so I suggest you don’t just…put it in your mouth.”

“What’s the worst thing that can happen?”

Veil sighs, getting a little frustrated that she has to justify this somehow. Technically, she isn’t really sure what would occur, though.

“Well, humans get sick.”

“Yes, but I’m not human, am I?”

“I don’t want you to tempt fate.”

Eventually, Dae groans and drops the ball from her hand.

“Ugh, fine. If you’re going to whine about it…”

“Thank you”, Veil says and lets go of the wrist. Unfortunately, as soon as she does, Dae suddenly allows herself to fall to the ground, face first into the snow. When she looks back up at her mentor again, she has a smug smile on her lips, while she chews on the snow. This white substance is also currently on other parts of her face, along with her hair. Veil exhales through her nose.

“You’re hopeless.”

“Hmm. Not so tasty after all.”

“You don’t say?”, Veil states in a rather unimpressed fashion.

The camp that they enter is one on the outskirts of what looks to be some sort of remnants from a civilization. It’s hard to tell which, but if Veil were to guess, she’d say it is dwarven in origin. Not so surprising that the dredge would be present, as they probably wish to destroy it, and the Priory is obviously here to preserve what they can. At the same time, Dae seems thoroughly dissatisfied.

“Oh no…please, don’t tell me you’re taking me into another dusty old ruin”, she complains.

“Didn’t we already visit one in Brisban a while ago?”

It really is unfortunate to Veil that her sister has no interest in history and ancient remnants. She would’ve hoped to inspire Dae to join the Priory in the future, but that probably won’t happen.

“You’re in luck, because that’s not actually why we’re here. We’re going to visit the one in charge of this expedition.”

One of the things that does intrigue Dae, however, is the fact that many of the people present in the camp greets Veil upon approach, apparently recognizing her. They show her respect and call her by a certain word that Dae isn’t familiar with.

When they’re given some space, Dae views her mentor curiously.

“Why do these people call you ‘Magister’?”

Veil smiles at her.

“It’s my rank in the Priory, one of the highest.”

“Whoa. So, you’re important then?”

“I guess you could say that, but mostly it just shows I have more experience and expertise. I was promoted shortly before you awakened, and a couple of months after the one who we’re about to meet.”

Now Dae actually looks kinda intrigued.
“Really? Huh. Is this another sylvari?”

“Indeed she is. I think she will find you most curious as well.”

The woman they’re looking for is located inside the tall tunnel that the Priory is working in, on top of some rocks positioned along a wall, the entrance into some sort of cave room. She is sitting on her knees several meters above them in her blue robes, with a white scarf around her neck and seems to be rather distracted. In her hands, she holds some kind of notebook that she occasionally checks and scribbles something in.

As they approach, Veil smiles and looks up at that location.

“Sieran! Do you have time to talk?”

Usually, Sieran is eager to meet with her sister, but she is currently so focused on her work that she hardly even hears the engineer.

“Mm, a minute”, she says absent-mindedly. “I have to translate this section. I’ll be done soon. Hmm, what could this be? ‘Passage’, perhaps? Or maybe ‘hallway’ is more suitable”, she mutters to herself.

It’s no surprise that Sieran would be so distracted by her tasks, as she loves history and strange magical phenomenon.

“Watch out. These old ruins can contain all sorts of old magic, you know.”

Sieran either ignores her or doesn’t hear, at least to begin with. This continues for about another minute, before the elementalist suddenly pushes something along the dwarven symbols, which releases a small flash from the wall. She gets startled by it and winces, which takes her to the brink of the ledge. Without looking, she stumbles off it, letting out a brief and shocked scream.

Veil widens her eyes and rushes towards this location.

“Sieran!”

The engineer spreads her arms, running to capture her sister, which sadly isn’t the best solution. With the height and velocity, Sieran becomes quite a heavy object. Veil is not the strongest of people either and even though she does manage to reach the right location, she doesn’t remain standing. Instead, Sieran drops right on top of her, pushing her to the ground and practically flattens her against it.

This commotion attracts the attention of some Priory novices, who hurry to offer aid.

“Magister Sieran! Magister Veilidh! Are you both alright?”, a human asks them.

Veil is lying with her back against the ground, grimacing with eyes closed, while Sieran lies on top of her, just looking kinda confused.

“Dammit”, Veil mutters.

Sieran blinks, looks at her students and shrugs.

“I’m fine, thanks. Landed pretty softly.”

“…yeah, because you fell on top of me, you clumsy fool.”

The elementalist suddenly looks down and smiles.

“Oh, Veilidh! It’s you! Sorry, I didn’t notice.”

“Ugh… I even called out your name.”

“Well, I was busy! These ruins require my attention, you know.”

After Veil finally manages to push herself into a seated position, Sieran ends up in her lap. The
somewhat younger sister wraps arms around Veil and kisses her cheek in a friendly manner. “It’s good to see you, though.”

Veil stares at her, not sure if she should be angry or not. “You are such a disaster.”

“So are you! That's why we work so well together.”

Before any further retort can be made, they hear laughing and both of them turn to look at Dae, who seems very amused by their interaction. “Amazing. This was definitely not what I had expected! Is this another girlfriend of yours, Veil?”

Sieran tilts her head curiously as she views Dae, while Veil shakes her head, a somewhat uncomfortable look on her face. “What? No, she’s not. This is Sieran, my sister. She and I were born at almost the same time.”

“Oh, she’s a Thirdborn too? Damn. Sorry! Didn’t know you had someone like that.”

After getting back on her feet, Sieran offers her hand to Veil, pulling the engineer up as well. They dust off their clothes, before turning to the young woman. “Well then, who might you be?”, Sieran asks.

Trying to make herself look impressive, Dae straightens her back, puts hands on her hips and pushes her chest out. “Daeynwe, one of the new talented warriors of the Grove! Slayer of bandits, conqueror of festivals, hero of Skrittsburgh! Oh, and also Veilidh’s little sister.”

Veil looks quite unimpressed with all the boasting and glances at Sieran. “She’s exaggerating. Even calling her ‘talented’ is questionable, but we’re working on it. She’s not just my sister, but my apprentice.”

Sieran gasps excitedly and smiles. “Really? She’s an engineer?”

That makes Dae snort in vehement rejection. “Absolutely not! I’m not some kind of bookworm.”

Veil rolls her eyes. “Petal, that’s not what an engineer doe-…you know what? Never mind. You’ll just twist it anyway.”

She turns to view Sieran instead. “Daeynwe doesn’t really have the patience and acute sensitivities to become an engineer.”

For some reason, Dae opens her mouth and looks offended by this explanation. “What?! I do too! I just don’t want to waste my time on Tyria by studying boring tech, books and running around in things of the past.”

Veil could mention that her work in the Priory isn’t really connected directly to her profession, but there’s no point. She wouldn’t like either of them. “She is more of my apprentice in life and combat”, she explains to Sieran. “I have taught her how to survive and given her useful tips to traverse the land.”

Sieran nods in recognition. “Ahh, right, of course. That makes sense and will probably be very useful. Tyria is a perilous
place.
Though, if she’s a warrior, I’m not sure you’re an adequate choice.”

“I will do, for now. I can easily teach the basics, you know.”

“Hmm, maybe. What cycle did she awaken during?”

Ah, yes, of course. Now they come to the part that Veil had waited with telling Sieran. She’ll probably be delighted.
“I’m sure you will be thrilled to hear that she is actually a Nooner.”

Naturally, she’s not surprised, as Sieran gasps again and shifts into a bright smile.
“Oh, a fellow sylvari of noon!”
She suddenly closes the distance to Dae and hugs her, without prior warning.
“This is great to hear! I suppose we do flock around dear Veilidh.”

Dae blinks in a perplexed fashion, obviously not having anticipated such a reaction, but this changes into a smile soon enough, as she returns the embrace.
“It would certainly be nice to get to know someone like you.”

“Do you have any magical talents?”

“Nope, not really. Well, nothing advanced anyway. Caithe is trying to teach me how to use the shadows, but that’s about it.”

“Hmm, that’s a shame. I would have been more than happy to share my knowledge.”

After a few more moments, Sieran takes a step back and glances between her two guests.
“So, what takes you both here? Wanted to investigate our dig site or was there another reason?”

Veil approaches them, so that they can all stand next to each other.
“Well, partially, we came because I wished to introduce you to each other. Daeynwe has become important to me and I wanted her to encounter another woman who is.”

Once more, Sieran looks rather delighted. She leans against Veil and nuzzles her cheek.
“Aww, Veil. I’ve missed you too.”

Veil exhales again, but this time heavier than before. It’s not that she doesn’t like this intimacy, but she wants to be a bit more serious and it’s not easy while Sieran clings to her.
“…anyway, the other reason was because I was hoping you could help me find an assignment for Dae. She needs more experiences of this world.”

After taking a small step back, Sieran ponders this notion and raises a hand to tap her own chin.
“Hmm. Well, I believe we could certainly use another hand in the expedition. We need help to catalog all of the artifacts, notes and scriptures which we’ve-“

Hearing all of these words makes Dae groan and she slowly sinks to the ground, pretending to fall apart in the soil.
“Ugghh…no, please. Don’t do this to me.
No ruins, no artifacts, no scrolls, no skeletons. No more nonsense! I’m not going to join your club of nerds.”

Sieran arches her brow in slight confusion and glances at her sister. Veil shrugs.
“Like I said, she’s no scholar. Her task would have to be more…practical.”

Thankfully, the other Magister seems to have an idea.
“Oh, I see! Well, I think we can arrange something.
We actually located a small infestation of Icebrood – Jormag’s minions – not all too far from here, in the northeast. We are here to preserve these artifacts from both the dredge and the Icebrood’s destructive tendencies, while the Explorers tackle the threat. However, I am sure they could use some assistance if—

She has to stop when Dae suddenly leaps back onto her feet, rushing to the elementalist excitedly. “Fighting dragon minions? Oh yes, please! Let’s do it!”

Veil slowly shakes her head and puts a hand over her eyes. “…you are so predictable.”

“Let’s do it, Veil! C’mon, no time to waste! I want to smash some ugly walking ice!”

Before any protest can be made, Dae has already begun to run towards the exit. She hasn’t even asked for directions. Veil lets her eyes follow the young rogue for a moment, feeling a headache descending upon her. Eventually, she shares another look with Sieran. “…never a dull moment.”

Sieran giggles. “She’s very cute, you know.”

“Yes, I’m aware. And ridiculously self-destructive. Reminds me of you. Guess that’s why I’m so attached to her.”

This seems to warm Sieran’s heart once more and she hugs Veil. “You say you get annoyed with us, and yet you can’t stay away.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m a masochist, I suppose. Anyway, we’re going to be in the region for a little while. You want to come with us?”

Sieran grins, with only a slight bit of surprise, as she hadn’t quite expected this offer. “Oh, definitely! They might miss me here, but I’ll assign one of the Scholars to take charge while I’m gone. I wouldn’t want to miss the opportunity to get to know a new sister.”

Chapter End Notes

Yep, finally Magister Sieran (and Veilidh)! Took a while, but they’re now both at that level. Oh, and if you’ve read the first Blood Bond fic, you probably know that Sovica and her family live in the Gendarran Fields (although further to the west), Dae’s future girlfriend. So close and yet so far away.
The broken lair

Chapter Notes

Right, here comes the last chapter specific to the year of 1321 AE and the whole mentor thing. There is one more sylvari they haven't dealt with, right?

The journey through Kryta had gone better than expected. Meeting Sieran had been quite a success for both of them and after they defeated a group of Icebrood – where Daeynwe impressed Veilidh – it gave the engineer the feeling that her apprentice might be ready for some tougher challenges. They started planning trips to other regions of Kryta, perhaps to see the Hinterlands with the centaur tribes or help humans against the many bandit groups that roam their lands. Unfortunately, all of that had to be postponed.

The duo hadn’t gotten very far when a letter arrived from Magума. It was Veil’s old teachers, Peacemaker Siinga and Professor Zebb who wanted to see her in the Metrica Province, regarding a special project.

Veil had been reluctant to give Dae the news, because she presumed the young rogue would complain, but this was a wrong assumption. On the contrary, Dae was very eager to join, as she had yet to see much of asura lands and this would be an opportunity.

At this time, they are located in the outskirts of an asura outpost in the eastern sections of the province. They’re outside, and Veil is helping the sibling duo with a particular project, a contraption that they needed to build. It was apparently started months ago, but the purpose behind it is simple – it is a new device to help measure the strength of the elder dragon’s powers, something which they want to create specifically to honor their deceased teacher, Snaff. They weren’t present when he fell, and there may be some remnants of guilt interwoven in their actions.

Naturally, such a project needed extraordinary touches, as Snaff was a special man, one who believed in interacting with other races and spreading knowledge outside of Rata Sum. When it came to get insights from a sylvari, they could think of no better person for it than Veil.

While they’re running calibrations on the device, Dae is currently away, apparently wanting to explore the surrounding territory. Veil was a little bit worried, but she didn’t protest. Dae promised that she wouldn’t go all too far, after all.

With Siinga working under a large control board, utilizing tools to rearrange internal components, she speaks to her old apprentice at the same time.

“Your friend is quite an excitable little progeny, isn’t she?”

At the same time, Veil is standing in front of the device, checking the readings connected to a screen. She smiles at the comment.

“She certainly is. It’s part of her personality, but likely influenced by her connection to the cycle of Noon.”

“That so? Hah, she did remind me of Sieran.”

Off to the side, trying to read through some of his notes, Zebb looks up from his seated position and peers at the sylvari.

“I agree to a certain extent, but it cannot be ignored how she does not appear to facilitate the same
level of intellectual pursuit as Sieran was always eager to explore.”

Veil glances in his direction and then sighs. “I know. I’ve heard that before and seen the same reaction myself. It is unfortunate that she doesn’t let her mind be open to the possibilities, but I can’t control her destiny. She has to be allowed to do what she wants.”

Siinga temporarily slides out from the area where she disappeared into, by rolling out on a board with wheels, in order to get a different set of tools. “If you wish, I could try to show her some of my weapons. Some exciting action might sway her onto our path, don’t you think? That’s certainly something we can provide.”

The suggestion makes Veil chuckle, but she still shakes her head. “Could be an interesting choice, I suppose, but I think it’s unnecessary. I don’t want to force her onto my path. Let her choose her own.”

“Well, contact us if you wish to collaborate for further discussions regarding this subject”, says Zebb. “Now, about the calibrations. Do you suppose that the regenerative properties of the component you have brought us will be capable of generating the appropriate energy levels? My own calculations do not display the same results as yours.”

Veil is just about to answer him, but is interrupted by a sudden internal sensation. There is something familiar in there, something that…stands out. It shouldn’t be here. “…Veilidh?”, he asks.

Veil furrows her brow and turns her eyes towards the more thickly forested region to the east of the outpost. “Something is wrong.”

“What?”, Zebb asks and stands up, approaching the analytical tools. “I cannot see anything amiss on the charts.”

“And everything is working just fine down here”, says Siinga from the interior.

Veil sighs. “No, that’s…that’s not what I…”

She drifts away again, ignoring her immediate surroundings and instead tries to focus on that feeling she got earlier. What could it be? Where is it coming from?

An image pops into her mind and she realizes what it is she’s sensing. With a gasp, she darts away from this location. “Shit!”

“What? Wait, Veilidh! Where are you going?”, Zebb yells after her, but she doesn’t stop to explain herself. She rushes away and leaves the asura by the device.

Veil continues to run all the way past the initial trees, disappearing into the thickness of the woods. She can’t slow down, not when this person is here. Who else could it be? It has to be her, the one who always attempts to meddle in affairs where she doesn’t belong. Perhaps Veil should have expected that this day would come sooner or later, even if she preferred to ignore the possibility. Probably doesn’t matter anyhow, as she needs to end it.

When she reaches a clearing a few minutes later, that she’s sure Dae is located at, Veil hears a very familiar voice from that direction. “Ah, so…you are the Daeynwe I’ve heard so much about. Most intriguing.”

From this distance, Veil can see how her precious apprentice is standing in the middle of the
clearing in her usual clothes, currently being circled in a slow pace by none other than Faolain. The rogue herself seems pretty oblivious of the potential danger she’s in and she definitely doesn’t look afraid.

“**You know me?**”

“**Not quite, but I have been able to acquire some information about you. Your name has become...**, she pauses to search for the right word, "important to someone I care for.”

“**Oh? Are you talking about Veilidh?**”

“**Precisely.**”

“**Hmm. She hasn’t mentioned you, though. Who are you to her?**”

Before Faolain can actually respond and explain herself, a gun is suddenly fired and the shot flies past her in very close proximity. It clearly misses on purpose, but it is actually enough to startle the mesmer. She quickly turns around and faces the engineer. Faolain’s expression changes into another smile and she folds her arms.

“**Well now, would you look at that. How timely.**”

Veil gives the Firstborn a sharp glare, still holding the pistol, but doesn’t aim it directly at her.

“**Step away from her right now, Faolain.**”

“**Well...that explains a lot**, mutters Dae.

“**Or what?**, asks Faolain nonchalantly. “**Will you use that weapon on me? Somehow, I doubt it.**”

Veil’s grip hardens, but she doesn’t change her position in any other way.

“**I don’t want to hurt you, but I won’t allow you to take her.**”

The mesmer arches a curious eyebrow, before she chuckles.

“**Take her? Why would you assume I want her?**”

“**Step back, Faolain. I won’t warn you again.**”

Seeming rather bored with the threats, Faolain rolls her eyes and begins to move. Instead of simply backing off, however, she walks forward and approaches the engineer herself. She doesn’t stop until she’s right by Veil’s side. While there, she grabs one of the Thirdborn’s hands and raises the other to caress Veil’s cheek.

“**Why so agitated, my dear? You didn’t really assume I would do anything to her, did you?**”

Veil frowns, rips her own hand away and quickly leaves the mesmer where she stopped. Shortly after, she approaches Dae, stroking the rogue’s cheek with a worried look in her eyes.

“**Are you alright, Petal?**, she whispers.

Dae had been glancing between them, but now focuses on Veil. She actually looks quite confused, perhaps a bit overwhelmed.

“**Uh, yeah, of course I am. Why wouldn’t I be?**”

“**Indeed, why would she not be fine, sweet Veilidh?**, asks Faolain from behind. “**What kind of unfair presumptions are you making about me now? After all this time we’ve known each other, after the things I have helped you see, you still only offer me suspicion and contempt. How is that fair?**”

Veil slowly relaxes, even if a small section of tension remains. She shifts her stance and gazes at Faolain. Veil doesn’t act hostile, just protective. It’s like she suddenly understands how Caithe felt
that first time.
“I don’t hate you, Faolain, I never have. But don’t pretend like you don’t know what this is. You know what happened.”

“With what?”

“Months ago now, your very own Court attacked and attempted to kidnap members of Daeynwe’s generation. Dae herself was one of those proposed victims.”

Faolain snorts and shakes her head.
“And you truly believe I was behind this incident?”

“Those involved did mutter something about a ‘Duchess’, yes. I couldn’t be sure.”

“And why would you assume I was to blame? There are several Duchesses and Dukes in the Nightmare Court, but I am the Grand Duchess.”

“They may have shortened it.”

Another exhale from the mesmer, before she begins to slowly circle around them from a distance.
“Listen to me, Veilidh. I know of the event itself, but I had nothing to do with it. It was conducted by a high-ranking member of the Court, who was interested in those saplings.”

Is that supposed to make Veil feel better? Definitely isn’t working, in that case.
“But you’re still their leader. You must have known what was going on and what they intended.”

“I did. They wished to experiment on young saplings, to see how their bodies might react to the influence of the Nightmare before awakening.”

Veil’s previous frown grows even further.
“And you were just okay with this?”

“I didn’t say I was, although I will admit that the results would certainly have been intriguing to observe.”

Veil groans and puts a hand to her face, starting to get frustrated. Why must she always be like this?
“Dammit, Faolain. You have told me that the Court is about freedom, about accepting yourself for who you truly are, with all the flaws involved. How is it a choice, if they are taken and transformed before they are able to make any decisions at all?”

“I could ask you the same thing in return. How is being indoctrinated by the Pale Tree any better?”

The engineer turns to her apprentice, giving Dae a glance that displays a certain exhaustion.
“Not this again… We aren’t being forced, alright? Neither was Dae. I had to save her, you know, to make sure that your people didn’t get their thorns all over her. She might not have become the person she developed into otherwise.”

Finally, Faolain approaches them once more, but Veil still looks very tense. She has holstered her weapon by now, but seems quite prepared to draw it again, if necessary. The Firstborn holds up her hands, showing no weapons in them. That doesn’t make her harmless, though, of course.
“Calm down, dear, I won’t attempt anything. I only wish to see her. That is not too much to ask, is it?”
Despite a certain reluctance, Veil lets go of the holster and crosses her arms over her chest instead. “Fine, go ahead. But I will be watching.”

As she slowly comes closer, Dae leans against Veil and whispers. “Uh, who exactly is she?”

Veil responds in a similar volume. “Faolain is…in charge of the Nightmare Court.”

“Aren’t they the bad guys?”

“…it’s not quite that simple, but some perceive them that way, yes.”

Dae raises her eyes to study her mentor’s face. “Do you?”

Veil meets that curious gaze for a second or two, before she takes a deep breath. “I…don’t know.”

No more can be said, as Faolain now stops in front of them and displays a pleasant smile. Some might call it deceptive, but that is likely a biased opinion. Either way, she reaches out with her hand, offering it to Dae. Even if she also feels reluctant, the rogue takes it and they join in a gentle handshake.

“I did not have the chance earlier, but I will say it now – it is delightful to finally meet you, Daeynwe. From what my scouts have told me, you are Veilidh’s newest and perhaps first proper apprentice.”

“Yeah, that’s right, I am”, Dae responds confidently. “I have been learning a lot about Tyria and how to fight its dangers from Veil, to be able to explore who I can be and what I want to do.”

“That is an admirable goal. She allows you to choose for yourself?”

“Well, mostly. Sometimes she asks me not to do certain things, as it can be dangerous, but she doesn’t stop me from being who I am. Haven’t even forced me into the Priory or anything.”

Faolain nods, giving Veil a rather satisfied glance. “Did you know that this is something I taught her to embrace?”


Perhaps she should’ve expected such a statement. It’s interesting how certain Faolain sounds when she says it. “No, she didn’t.”

“Come now, Veilidh, don’t lie to the dear girl”, the mesmer comments.

Veil sighs and diverts her eyes elsewhere. “Okay, fine. There…might have been elements that she helped me with, yes. But don’t let her trick you into believing that it was all her, though.”

Being quite pleased with this response as well, Faolain resumes her focus on Dae, lifting a hand to gently caress the rogue’s arm. “And I am more than capable of teaching you such things too, Daeynwe, about how to grow as a person. I am aware that you have likely heard of the many scary stories regarding the Nightmare Court,
but that is not the truth. Our real concern is freedom, about accepting all facets of sylvari life, not just the propaganda by the Pale Tree. We want what is best for our people.”

Dae doesn’t actually push Faolain away, as she instead tries to study the older woman. Veil can’t tell if she’s doing it to look past the deception, if she’s simply curious or if she’s really buying these statements.

“I heard you fight the Pale Tree, though.”

“It is true, we do bicker with her, both verbally and physically, but all of it has a purpose – she wishes to control us, to only leave us one route to prosperity. This goes against all our beliefs and teachings, and we will not let her control us.” She raises her free hand up to Dae’s cheek, stroking it softly.

“I’m not saying you have to join us, Daeynwe, nor that I would force you to. All I offer is a chance to learn new things, new truths. If your sweet sister would agree, I could show you such marvelous things.”

Dae listens to her, her curiosity obviously growing, but she doesn’t seem to swing either way. Instead, she turns to look at Veil.

“Would you?”

Yeah, that’s the question. Would she? Even if she confirms it here, would she be able to stay away in the future? She can’t deny the similarities to Caithe’s dilemma again. She almost wishes the other Firstborn was here, but that likely wouldn’t help. She would only have clouded this situation further.

“I… dunno. Maybe. Is that really what you want, though, Petal?”

As this gives her an opportunity to ponder her decision, Dae faces Faolain once more. She studies the mesmer, her face and her eyes. While she does this, her expression is surprisingly neutral. Dae has always been so obvious with her emotions, but this very moment is an unusual exception.

Eventually, she shakes her head.

“Sorry, I’ll have to pass. I don’t need anyone else, to know how I should grow.”

Faolain arches her brow skeptically.

“How can you be so sure? You have hardly even seen much of this world yet, nor what we offer.”

“Because I know what’s in my heart, in my spirit. I look at you and I don’t see this reflected anywhere. Besides, I don’t really have any interest in helping or advancing the sylvari as a people. I’ll leave that to others, like you, Veilidh or Caithe. Personally, I want to explore Tyria, see what else is out there. It’s more exciting to me than this boring old jungle.”

Both Faolain and Veilidh look mildly surprised by this statement. Dae doesn’t only sound very sure of herself, but almost wise. Neither of them had expected such clarity.

Eventually, Veil smiles, seeming quite proud. Faolain sighs and shrugs in defeat.

“A questionable decision, but I suppose I can’t force you.”

“You certainly can’t”, Veil confirms. “My apprentice has made her choice.”

Faolain then takes a step towards the engineer instead, leans against her and places a soft kiss on her cheek.

“And I suppose a new offer for you would be rather futile at this point, so I won’t bother. Take care of yourself, dearheart.”

As Faolain departs the clearing, leaving the two women to themselves, Veil gazes at Dae with a
rather happy expression.
“You are full of surprises sometimes.”

Dae grins back at her.
“I was taught by the best.”

Chapter End Notes

*The next two chapters will jump forward to 1325 AE and the personal story. It will deal with the events of Claw Island. Yes, that event. I’m actually doing my own spin on it, though, so expect it to be...different.
Also, I should mention here that, as there is only a handful of chapters left for this fic, I'm speeding up the pace somewhat. There will now be two chapters per week. One will be posted...well, on Monday, less than 24 hours after this one and then the second on Sunday as usual. I could have postponed it, but I had an open slot in my schedule.*
When the air rained sorrow

Chapter Notes

Yeah, so, for this and subsequent chapters, this fic will contain spoilers for the in-game story. It'll only be ones related to the "personal story", though. This particular chapter contains my own version of the end to the Battle of Claw Island. Not the one with the united Orders, but where you fight next to your mentor against the initial Risen attack. Although, in this story, Sieran is of course Veilidh's sister, not her mentor.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

1325 AE – Claw Island, Sea of Sorrows

When the city of Lion’s Arch was rebuilt after the initial settlement was destroyed by Zhaitan’s awakening, the people who flocked to it realized that they must have some kind of defenses against the elder dragon’s potential future attacks.

A location was chosen on a set of isles only a few miles to the south, where a fortress was built and given the name ‘Claw Island’. For nearly a hundred years, this defensive fortification has stood firm, protected by the ever watchful Lionguard. After having survived so many onslaughts, no one truly believed that it could ever be taken; not by the dragon, not by living forces, not anyone. Perhaps hubris had taken ahold of their hearts a bit too adamantly.

Today, the entire fortress is filled with sounds that send chills down every spine of the living guards - clashing weapons, painful screams and unnatural groans. All of this terror is enhanced by a foul aura that sweeps in over the land, practically poisoning the air.

This latest battle against the Risen has been fought for much longer than any of the defenders can truly withstand and they are overwhelmed from every angle. On the sea in every direction floats Dead Ships, firing volley after volley, and legions of walking corpses keep appearing from the waters.

In the middle of all this chaos, three sylvari are fighting for their lives, with a very specific goal in mind. Magister Veilidh, Magister Sieran and the Firstborn known as Trahearne are all fighting their way up through a set of stairs, side by side. Their purpose is to get up to the northern watchtower in the corner of the fortress, which must be ignited to warn the city of what’s going on and that a proper invasion from the elder dragon is coming. It may be its only hope.

The trio moves as a single unit and they are quite devastating as well. Their physical abilities are not just fairly powerful, but they also share a mental link in certain ways, through their connection to the Dream. While Sieran is attuned to the air in order to unleash lightning around her, Veilidh wields her customized flamethrower that spews flaming destruction in waves. Intermingled with these weapons is Trahearne’s magic linked to the afterlife, which twists even these walking corpses and he can later turn their unmoving bodies to his own purposes, either as bombs or to craft his own minions.

After several minutes of fighting, they have finally arrived at the controls of the watchtower and make swift work of the undead that waited for them, in hopes of stopping them.

“Veilidh, you know the most about these types of contraptions”, says Trahearne. “Think you can
take care of it?"

The engineer is already eyeing the various handles, cogs and buttons, in order to craft a solution, which is why she simply nods without facing him.
“Sure, no problem. I might need a minute, though.”

Sieran summons a whip made out of lightning in her hand and lashes out with it at one Risen that tried to crawl up along the wall, making the creature fall back down.
“Don’t worry, Veil, we’ll hold them off! Just work as quickly as you can.”

Veil hurries up to the activation mechanisms and begins pushing the buttons, spinning a few cogs and then grabs onto a handle that should initiate the process that will ignite all watchtowers simultaneously. Unfortunately, this thing hasn’t been used in ages and has therefore become somewhat stuck.
“Ugh, dammit. Who designed this thing? Every engineer knows you need to grease the gears occasionally”, she mutters.

Knowing that she can’t just keep pulling and hoping for the best, Veil climbs on top of the device and positions herself with her foot against the handle, while her hands holds onto something that can keep her steady. Using all the strength she can muster, she kicks the handle a few times until it finally slips into place. As it activates, light bursts out from the top of the tower, which seems to herald the ignition of everything else too. All three of the watchtowers soon display lights, which should be more than sufficient as a sign for the people back in the city.

After she gets a second to breathe, Sieran smiles at the sight.
“We did it! Lion’s Arch will be able to prepare now.”

On her side, Trahearne utilizes his magic to shatter one Risen, before he ducks beneath the attack of another and delivers a kick to its chest, which makes it stumble backwards and fall off a ledge.
“Indeed”, he agrees, “but do not get distracted. We still have to find a way off this island.”

Even if the trio had sort of rushed here and potentially boxed themselves in, it isn’t too much trouble to turn the fight back around and create a path down the stairs. Unfortunately, as they do everything they can to get back to ground level, they come to a frightening realization – in the main section of the battlefield, almost the entire Lionguard forces have now been obliterated. Only about a fourth remains of the initial troops.

One of those who still lives is Deputy Mira, the soldier in charge of shore patrols. She helped them deal with the initial assault, but now she’s pretty much the only officer left. She fights with everything she has next to the other troops, but it’s likely that she won’t last long at this rate. The sylvari understand this and try their best to hurry.

“Hold out, Mira”, Veil says as she scorches another few undead. “We’re on our way! The watchtowers are activated, so the city has been warned!”

It appears the human overhears the sound and responds with a shout of her own.
“Then get down here and let’s leave! We’ll protect this escape route for as long as we can!”

They could have leapt off the walls, but that might have been too dangerous, and they still have to somehow create a gap between themselves and the Risen. The easiest way to accomplish this is by trapping them at the front gate.
Unfortunately, it’s almost exactly at this moment that they hear another noise from the sea – a roar, that practically makes the island shake. The strength of it is unlike any beast they’ve ever encountered.
Suddenly, an enormous creature appears in the darkened skies, of massive proportions. It has two huge wings, four large legs and a head that practically doesn’t seem to have eyes. The gazes of the living are instinctively drawn to it and they almost instantly understand what it is.

“…a dragon”, Veil says in shock.

This isn’t the first time that she has ever seen a creature like this, as it is similar in size to what she encountered shortly before her awakening. Images of the plant-based dragon of shadows and nightmares that tried to drain the saplings a few decades ago now, appear in Veil’s mind. She hadn’t thought of it for a long time, but she also wasn’t sure when she’d have to confront something like this again. And this is the real deal.

“We have to hurry!”, the engineer insists.

While Trahearne and Sieran follows her, they are not fast enough. The Risen dragon minion comes flying straight for the fortress and with a ruthless dive, crushes the far wall with its claws, sending debris and rocks flying everywhere. In the gap, more undead bursts inside.

Veil tries to ignore the destruction and instead make a break for the Lionguard, as they are still several meters away, but Trahearne seizes her shoulder.

“Veilidh, wait! It’s going to attack! Stay close to me!”

As the Firstborn summons necromantic energies, the dragon opens its maw and they spot swirling mists inside. Sieran widens her eyes in both fear and shock.

“Its breath is filled with corruption! Lionguard, take cover!”

Unfortunately, for most, it is too late. Trahearne just barely manages to summon a bone wall that acts as a shield against the wave of corruptive aura that washes over the trio, but the Lionguard is not so lucky. While some manage to find a place to hide, the majority of them get overwhelmed by the plague attack. Some of this energy surges onto Mira too, who screams.

“Ahh! Gods, my eyes! By Kormir, it burns!”

Once the dragon has to recover, the sylvari resume their fight and try to carve a safe route to the exit. Upon arrival, they notice how only a few soldiers have survived and the whole group is severely outnumbered.

Switching attunement by utilizing a talisman on her body, Sieran summons flames around her hands and unleashes a ball of fire onto the undead horde, which explodes in the middle, shattering several of them. Trahearne seizes the opportunity to resummon his minions with the bones of the fallen Risen and Veil decides to sacrifice a few of her portable turrets, putting them in a line as a barrier that tries to keep the undead busy.

Trahearne leans down towards Mira, who lies motionless on the ground. He sees how the plague has eaten away at parts of her skin and hair.

“The Deputy is alive, but she won’t survive for long lying like this. We need to get her back to the city and find a healer.”

A few Risen tries to get around the flank of the turrets and ambush the diminished defenders, but Veil is there with her pistols, shooting them down with bullet after bullet.

“The ships, we have to reach them! There should still be a few left at the docks!”

Fire surges out from the tips of Sieran’s fingers, shortly before she attunes herself to the earth beneath them and employs it to send some of the Risen flying into the air.

“But Veil, how are we supposed to make it out? They will swarm us before we get anywhere!”

Veil gives the area around them a sweep, looking at the soldiers and sees that most of them are too injured to go anywhere quickly or help much in this fight. Sieran is right, but the engineer still
looks dissatisfied.
“So, what should we do? We can’t just give up!”

“But we can’t form a defensive perimeter either.”

On the ground, Trahearne is wrapping a protective cloth around Mira’s prone body. “We have to think of a strategy and soon.”

Mimicking what Veil did, Sieran surveys their situation, checking the Lionguard that suffer, looking at her sister who fights so bravely and Trahearne trying to save Mira. She takes a deep breath and comes to a decision. “Someone has to hold them off, while the rest of our forces escape”, she says in a solemn tone.

The whole idea sounds absurd, and Veil has no qualms with expressing this opinion. “What? That’s suicide, Sieran!”

“I know, but it’s the only way that anyone can make it out of here and you know it.”
She pauses for a moment in reluctance, knowing how difficult it will be to not just accept this fate, but also face Veil’s protests. “I will do it.”

Veil has to stop in her tracks, right after firing another bullet and whirls in Sieran’s direction. She searches the elementalist’s face, looking both distraught and terrified when she sees such determination. “…you can’t be serious.”

“I am. Veil, you see the situation around us, don’t you? We can’t make it out of here, not if we want survivors. There…has to be a sacrifice.”

It’s almost impossible for Veil to listen to this without wanting to push it out of her mind. She wants to close her ears and stop, to forget that this is even being suggested, but can’t. It is happening, and they can’t proceed without a conclusion to the dilemma. “…no. No, you can’t…if anyone should sacrifice themselves here, it should be me.”

Sieran sighs, practically having anticipated this response. “Don’t be foolish. You are more important than me.”

“I’m not! No one here is more important than anyone else!”

Before she can respond again, Sieran has to summon another wall of earth, to knock a few Risen away. It is still Veil’s turrets and Trahearne’s minions that do most of the work and they will likely perish here anyway. “Yes, you are! Veilidh, you are smarter than me, stronger than me, and a better leader than I will ever be!”

“Don’t…don’t say that! It’s not true! You are the brilliant scholar here, not me!”

“But that doesn’t matter in this war. Look at that dragon!”, she yells and gestures at it. For the time being, it is still soaring in the sky, saving its strength for potential future battles. “Do you see it? Do you think one measly scholar will truly be enough to defeat that and hordes like it? The Priory needs you, not me.”

Veil has to stop and search through her bags for more weapons. She finds a few grenades in her backpack and tosses them onto the battlefield, briefly crafting another gap for them. Trahearne has managed to wrap Mira in the cloth, but waits for their decision. “…don’t make me do this, Sieran”, Veil says, only slightly above a whisper.
They look at each other, their eyes glistening in the faint light, the winds blowing past them, rustling the leaves of their hairs.
“There’s no other way, Veilidh. I know you don’t want to, but you have to allow me to make this choice.”
“I…I won’t leave you.”
“You have to.”
“This isn’t fair!”
“Yes, it is! It’s the only way! Now stop arguing and go, dammit!”

She tries to approach Veil and push her back, but the engineer seizes her wrist and refuses to let go.
“But I…I can’t go on if you are not there, Sieran. Without you…I am nothing.”

Her voice is strained now, a sob hiding in the depth of her throat. Sieran changes direction of her hand and instead puts it on Veil’s cheek, looking deeply into her eyes.
“That’s not true. You are so much more important, Veilidh. You are more valuable than me, Caith, Wynnet, Gixx, all of us. You will do great things, I know it. Besides, this is beyond us. You have to do this for Tyria, for all the people out there who will suffer under the destruction of the dragons. They need you.”

“Sieran…don’t…”

“Please, Veilidh – go. Allow me to do this. Allow me to perform one last act for the person I love most in this world. “

It hurts. Her chest, her eyes, her legs, her heart. Veil grits her teeth, clenching her fists and she feels how her body almost breaks, like she simply wants to lie down and cry. She has no words to stop this from happening.
From behind, Trahearne plants a hand on her shoulder and speaks to her softly.
“Veilidh…she has made her choice. Let us follow her wishes and not squander it. We must survive.”

She wants to continue fighting it, but the Firstborn slowly pulls her away, just as another undead wave arrives. She has to leave, but her eyes can’t let go of Sieran. Her sister tries to offer her a reassuring smile, but it doesn’t really help. This isn’t the last sight she wishes to see of Sieran, the last memory she wants of the two of them being together. It might haunt her forever, tear off a part of who she is. She will do anything to stop it.

As if her prayers somehow get answered, something suddenly happens. Everyone feels how the air around them grows thicker and heavier, and vibrations surge through the ground. They all stop and look up to the sky, where a purple-black object of some kind materializes. Some form of circle takes shape in the air and opens a hole, which it spews out energy from. A beam appears from its maw, that slams down in the center of the courtyard, blasting everything in its path, creating a shockwave that kills several undead and knocks away many others.

After the dust settles, the sylvari and the remaining Lionguard see a small group of people standing in the center of a minor crater. It is a group consisting of six people – a human, a sylvari, a charr, an asura and two norn. There is, of course, also a polar bear standing next to one of the norn.
The sight itself is familiar to Veil and she widens her eyes in shock.
“Blood Bond?”

Chapter End Notes

I know, right? Not quite what happens during the Battle of Claw Island in-game. That is the purpose as well. If you don't know what Blood Bond is, I suggest checking out another fic of mine. There's a second chapter for this fight on Sunday, which will describe the characters better and conclude the struggle on Claw Island.
Dust surges out over the landscape after the impact, with an inescapable ringing sound appearing in every living ear, due to the explosion that followed the unforeseen impact. Many people had expected either a last stand for a glorious death, or that they’d make a desperately attempted escape towards the ships waiting for them at the docks. It would’ve been impossible to anticipate the arrival of a new set of individuals, nor what their intentions are. Do they wish to save Claw Island, or do they have other motives?

Once the dust is gone, the first thing that happens is that some of the group begins to cough. A charr in a set of leather gear, with a coat on top, is the first to fully glance around. The audience that the team has received can spot the stripped red and black fur, his light grey eyes and the four horns that bend in opposite directions. His body is littered with all types of gear that likely marks him as an engineer.

“Now where the hell did we end up? This constant jumping around is getting kinda frustrating.”

Next to him stands a shorter and smaller creature, a dark brown-skinned human, with brown hair and inquisitive brown eyes. She wears much lighter clothes, but with a distinctive violet scarf which holds a small symbol on it, depicting a golden bird spreading its wings – the mark of House Vlasic.

“I’m not a hundred percent sure, but it feels like we’re back in Tyria.”

Both of the norn have light skin, but the somewhat shorter one with red-black hair and black triangular tattooed lines across her left cheek and forehead, nods in agreement. She also wears lighter armor, consisting of fur and leather, with a metallic snow leopard head on her right shoulder.

“She narrows her blue eyes, raises her head and sniffs, and the polar bear next to her mimics the movement. Both of them grimaces soon enough.

“Ugh, but damn it’s foul, though.”

The shortest member of this group is an asura, with brown skin and ashen spots over his face. His fire-red hair rustles in the wind and his pale green eyes searches the area for something beyond the physical.

“And yet these sensations are…familiar. I detect death magic around us.”

The only sylvari from the six needs very little introduction, as it’s none other than Daeynwe. Her eyes are drawn further up, and she points at some of the structures.

“Hey, those are the watchtowers of Claw Island! I’ve seen ‘em before, though they weren’t lit back then. What’s going on?”

The very last member, and by far the tallest, is a scarred and muscular norn, with black hair and grey eyes. She wears the heaviest armor and holds the largest weapon - some kind of greatsword - on her back. She raises her hand up to the hilt of her weapon and a magical aura appears around
her, with clear spiritual origins.
“I can sense undead. The Risen are here.”

Just like she suspected, past the crater, they spot several waves of Risen coming straight for the
group. Most of them widen their eyes in shock.
“Well, burn me. That’s a lot of walking corpses!”, the charr exclaims.

The human directs her hand to her side, magical lights beginning to glow from her fingers as she
frowns.
“Yeah, the portal was definitely an exit from the Mists. Didn’t think it would drop us right into a
battlefield, though.”

Dae shifts her gaze somewhat to the side, still turned upwards, and views the portal instead.
“You think the others came after us?”

The human briefly shakes her head.
“I doubt they had time to pursue anyone, but that doesn’t explain why we ended up in this
location.”

“The path could have been altered somehow, potentially by their interference”, the asura suggests.

“Hmm, you’ve got a point, Professor. I wouldn’t really want to think of them having those types
of powers over pathways in the Mists, though.”

It’s shortly after this that they realize that they’re not alone.
“Petal? And Sovica, Katla, Rea, Razok, Ovillus. I-“
The polar bear emits a dissatisfied growl.
“…yes, and you too, Grawdr.”

The team turns their attentions around and Dae blinks confusedly.
“Hold on – Veildih? What are you doing here?”

“You’re asking me? What in the Pale Tree’s name are you doing here!!?”

The rest of the survivors look just as astonished.
“And where did you even come from?”, Trahearne inquires.

Before anyone has a chance to respond, they hear a roar from the dragon in the sky and the Risen
begin their advance once more.
“No time to explain!”, Dae insists. “We have to fight these rotting fleshbags!”

The human – Sovica - sighs.
“…sweetie, please. Show a little respect.”

“Sorry! I wasn’t talking about any of you.”

Stomping on the ground, Sovica attunes herself to the earth and when she moves her hand around,
the soil follows her commands. She crafts a small wall that protects the injured and those who are
positioned closest to her. After she’s done with the defenses, she molds a large ball made of earth
and tosses it right into a big group of Risen, letting them be crushed beneath it and shatter like
nothing more than minor obstacles.

The tallest norn, Katla, strokes her hand at the flat side of her greatsword, creating Guardian runes
along its length, which makes the sharp edge burn with a righteous fire. She charges straight into
the closest group of undead and swings it around wildly, scorching anything in its path. Because
of the spiritual nature of this magic, it is highly effective against these types of enemies, being tied
to a similar energy.

At the same time, the shorter norn – Rea – stands not too far from Sovica and pulls out her bow, along with a few arrows. She takes aim at some of the caster types at the back and launches several shots that flies through the air, hitting every target she aims for and almost impales them on the ground. Norn arrows are a bit larger than human ones, and as most of these foes are human-sized, it becomes quite devastating. Grawdr aids his companion by staying close to her and fending off any potential flankers.

The asura, also known to some as ‘Professor’ Ovillus, sees the advantage of having so many undead around and easily draws from the same strength. He channels energy from the fallen and then creates a deadly aura that protects him, shrouding him in darkness. This increases the levels of his output and instead of focusing on producing minions, like Traheerne did, this necromancer continues to drain his enemies, rejuvenating any stamina that he loses almost instantly.

The charr in the group, known as Razok, pulls out a customized shotgun from his gear. He loads it with the correct bullets, but also utilizes a second slot which he places two grenades into. He starts the fight by launching the grenades at two different locations, immediately causing havoc among the undead, before he releases a few shotgun slugs too, to finish off any stragglers that somehow managed to survive.

It has been a few years since Daeynwe was the young apprentice that almost got herself killed by bandits in the first few weeks of her lifecycle. This is easily witnessed by how she follows Katla onto the frontlines to begin with, before she disappears into the shadows, using the same leaping techniques as Caithne and sneaks up behind her enemies, stabbing her blades into their backs when they aren’t looking. One tries to tackle her from the back, but she ducks beneath the blow and then kicks them in the gut, before she decapitates them. She fights with much more agility than Katla’s brute strength.

Not wanting to be left behind, Veilidh, Sieran and Trahearne all step in to help out, creating all sorts of destruction on the battlefield, but not for long. They have other concerns.

“We’re thankful that you’re here”, Veil tells them, “but we’ve already had this fight for too long. There are too many Risen, and we have to escape! If we linger, they’ll eventually overwhelm us!”

Sieran shakes her head.

“But what Veil isn’t telling you, is that there’s no way we can make it out of here unless someone stays behind and fends them off!”

Veil furrows her brow, refusing to accept this idea. No, there must be hope now that they finally have some reinforcements.

“That is, unless you can provide us with another solution?”, she asks, directing her attention mostly to Dae and Sov.

When she hears it, Dae snorts.

“What? That’s stupid. Leaving someone behind against all these undead? Not happening! We have to think of something else.”

The rest of the group hears the conversation as well, and Katla is desperately slashing and punching any Risen that dares to approach. There is actually a little bit of hesitation among some of the undead regarding coming too close to her.

“I can eliminate a bunch of them, but not an entire horde.”

Ovillus directs his eyes towards their enemy in the skies.

“For now, I believe we can conclude that the dragon will not come into the vicinity of our position. It likely fears the remnants of the portal.”
“A dead monster afraid of the Mists? Hah, that’s kinda brilliant”, Raz remarks.

Rea fires another arrow and pierces the head of an undead, but her eyes are soon drawn to her comrades.
“Maybe we should use that to our advantage? Sovi, you know more about this – any ideas?”

The noblewoman narrows her eyes as she glances up at the flickering entity that still lingers above them.
“Hmm. I might have, yeah. I think I can potentially destabilize the portal, which would pull more of its energy into our realm.”

Veil blinks confusedly.
“Wait, that thing?” She points at the same entity. “Isn’t that…dangerous?”

“Of course, but it would only be temporary. I could transfer my magic into it, in order to widen the gap and create a vortex, which should be a sufficient distraction. If we’re quick, we could easily get out before it detonates, as long as you have an escape route.”

Trahearne inclines his head.
“Indeed, there are ships waiting for us by the docks, as Veilidh mentioned. One of those should be capable of taking us all out of here.”

Sieran had already focused her mind on the conclusion that she would be dying for her friends, but now that there might be a way out for all of them, she looks unsure.
“If you want to do something, we should act quickly, before it’s too late.”

Sov nods and begins casting another spell, attuning herself to the air.
“Very well. This will take a minute or two, so I need you to hold off the undead, while I expand the portal. It will begin to fluctuate and potentially absorb materials around it, so keep your distance.”

Everyone backs away from this location, moving their defensive perimeters to a slightly different position. During this process, Sov shuts her eyes and tries to focus, letting the magic envelop her completely. She becomes like the center of a storm, with fierce winds and twisting lightning.
"Kormir, give me the inner strength to endure this trial. Dwayna, please, protect my friends", she mumbles to herself.

When she believes she has gathered enough energy, she unleashes the wave right up towards the portal, grabbing onto the edges and tries to alter its purpose. The portal is on the verge of closing, but she influences its movement so that it widens instead. This won’t last forever, as it will eventually explode, but by that point they will hopefully be long gone.
Connecting herself to it has certain consequences, though, and Sov’s magic begins to glow in purple and pink instead of its natural blue or white.

The strange tear in the world grows bigger and bigger with Sov’s efforts, and the very air seems to vibrate around them.
Simultaneously with this process, black tendrils shoot out from its opening, occasionally striking nearby creatures, which happens to be Risen. Other times, some type of stray beams erupt from the center and explodes on the ground, usually close to the undead.

The Blood Bond guild, the sylvari trio and the Lionguard survivors continue to fight for their lives and for the most part, they ignore Sov’s work. It’s when the ground actually begins to shake that they get worried.
“I am not all too familiar with this particular type of magic”, Trahearne admits, “but since it is of the Mists, I sense that we should not tarry. I believe we should leave right away!”
Shortly after he makes this comment, the spell disperses around Sov and the elementalist takes a
step back. Her legs are a bit wobbly, but Dae quickly runs over to her beloved and helps her stand
correctly. Once the human opens her eyes, a purple-pink aura lingers in them.
“You’re right, we should get out of here. You had ships?”

The destabilizing portal is clearly enough to distract the undead, as it is now growing so big that
they can hardly even reach the living anymore, unless they wish to pass into its vicinity, which is
very risky. Some try to anyway and most of them are consumed.
The living seizes the chance to flee as quickly as they can, with the injured getting help from
Blood Bond. Once they reach the entrance, Katla, Veil and Razok shut the large doors behind
them together.

On the way down to the ship, a few more undead have managed to obstruct their path, but they
are not nearly enough to match the strength of the survivors, especially not with Blood Bond here.
Veil is helping one of the injured Lionguard walk, but her attention is drawn to their saviors.
“I have no idea what happened out there, nor how you got to us, but I’m immensely grateful!”

She is smiling as she speaks and glances towards Sieran who runs next to her. They hold hands
for a moment and the elementalist seems somewhat embarrassed, but also happy, relieved that she
will get to spend more time with her sister.
“Indeed, you came just in time.”

Dae uses her pistol to blast another undead, before she offers a grin for the duo.
“Well, that wasn’t exactly our plan, but we’re glad too! Gotta protect family, right?”

Eventually, they all reach the sturdiest ship and the one that they seem most capable of sailing
through the chaos. It doesn’t take long until they’ve made whatever preparations necessary and
depart from the docks. When the island disappears behind them, they finally hear an explosion, as
the portal erupts inside the fortress. Claw Island remains standing, but quite a bit of damage was
probably done to both the structure and the Risen. It will still be in the undead’s grasp, though, for
now.

As they sail through the fog that has been created in the area, Veil approaches Dae and Sov once
more. The human is leaning against her lover, being quite drained after what she had to perform in
order to save them.
“Petal, Sovica…I can’t thank you enough for what you did back there. We…we might have lost
everyone if it weren’t for your team.”

Dae smiles and wraps her free arm around Veil, pulling her close.
“You’ve helped us before, so there’s no need to say you owe us or anything. We’re just glad
you’re safe.”

Sov mirrors her expression and leans back against the railing.
“It was certainly fortunate. We didn’t even know we’d be able to get back to Tyria.”

Glancing between the two of them, Veil snorts amusedly and shakes her head.
“You have to explain exactly what happened here at some point, though. I’m still confused.”

“Don’t worry, we will, eventually. It’s been…quite a journey, we’ll say that much.”

Chapter End Notes
Yeah, I'm basically just teasing a future fic here, but...I had a really good idea for it and I didn't want to kill Sieran. I think the 'mentor's' death is, like, just for shock value and I don't enjoy that. This would give me a chance to include Sieran in future story arcs.

Regarding Blood Bond's presence, I obviously can't provide the full truth of what happened, but yes, they were teleported from the Mists. What were they doing there? That's something I intend to reveal later down the line in the Blood Bond series. I also tried to keep the details of their appearances somewhat vague. This is two years after the initial Blood Bond fic and I haven't yet decided if I'm going to give them different hairstyles and whatnot yet.
This chapter is a few weeks after the last one. If you've played this section of the in-game story, you already know this, but I thought I should clarify for those who may not have.

Bright blue skies, glistening sunlight and the virtually endless length of the sea. After what felt like an eternity, such sights can finally be experienced once more on the slopes of Claw Island. Only weeks ago, defeat and destruction felt like an inevitable conclusion for this area, that the Risen would forever inhabit the isle. Some had given up on the place, believed it was foolish to even make an attempt at freeing the fortress and instead view it as more lost territory to the elder dragons. Fortunately, not everyone shared this opinion.

It was a grueling battle with many losses, but if one gazes upon the length of the fortress’ grounds now, the majority of the fallen belong to the undead. Included in this equation is of course the huge dragon champion that floats somewhere in the sea, after it was downed. People said it had been impossible, that only Destiny’s Edge could achieve such a result, but they apparently underestimated how far Tyria is ready to go in order to survive.

At this time, many people run around within the fortress, trying to secure the area and clean up remains. Among these people moves one of the main individuals responsible for this victory, Magister Veilidh. After having survived the initial assault, she helped organize the entire counterattack and has been seen as one of the most hopeful signs for a better future. Currently, she’s trying to make sure that everything proceeds towards one goal.

In one of the corners of the stronghold, she spots a group of Priory Scholars with paper in their hands, trying to check some of the Risen corpses. It makes her sigh.

“Hey, Scholars! You don’t have time to take notes now. The Vigil and Lionguard need help with the repairs. Get to it!”

Most of them twitch in surprise as they look up to view the skeptical sylvari and quickly try to pocket their gear again.

“Y-Yes, Magister. Sorry!”

Veilidh shakes her head. She realizes why they’re so intrigued, but this can’t be their focus.

“We already have what we need. If you encounter any Risen bodies, burn them. We leave nothing for Zhaitan.”

“Yes, Magister!”

They soon scurry to follow her orders and Veil waits until they’re all gone, before she gets back towards the center of the courtyard. Once she does, she decides to glance around and watch how the work progresses. She has to admit that it’s inspiring to see the Vigil, the Order of Whispers and the Durmand Priory all working side by side. It felt like an impossible task to bring them together, despite the dire need for unity, but she and her closest companions had refused to accept defeat. The three Tyrian Orders could only succeed if they cooperated and with the profound victory here at Claw Island, they have probably proved that point.
Feeling like she can’t just stand around, Veil begins to approach some of those who make repairs, to see what she can do to help out. Before she reaches her destination, she hears another voice calling out for her.

“Veildh! There you are. Don’t go anywhere!”

Veil blinks and then turns her head towards the direction of the voice. Immediately upon spotting this person, her face brightens into a smile and she begins to run in order to meet the other woman halfway. Eventually, she throws her arms around the other sylvari’s neck, nuzzles her cheek and hugs her tightly.

“Sieran, I’m glad to see you’re up.”

Obviously, the other Magister mirrors the expression and returns the gesture, but she also rolls her eyes. Ever since they managed to escape Claw Island together, Veil has wanted to hug her pretty much once every few hours. Not consistently, perhaps, but it has been fairly frequent.

“Not that I mind your hugs, but you are getting kinda clingy, you know.”

“Damn right I am. I’m not done thanking fate or whatever, for keeping you alive.”

Sieran sighs.

“It’s been weeks, Veil.”

“Yes, but don’t expect me to forget that easily.” She tilts her head back somewhat, looks into Sieran’s eyes and caresses her cheek. “If you truly love your sister as much as you say, you’ll indulge me.”

“Bah. Fine.”

After they’re finally done hugging for now, Sieran does get a bit of space and she surveys their surroundings.

“So, how do you think it’s going so far?”

Veil follows the gaze and nods slowly.

“Pretty well, I think, although there is still much to do. This entire effort is…amazing. I never thought we’d be able to see all three Orders working together and yet here we are. The only problem is the question of duration. I wonder how long we can last like this, as we haven’t exactly gotten along in the past.”

Her eyes are soon refocused on Sieran, when her sister puts a hand on her shoulder.

“It’s interesting that you mention it, as I believe some people wish to discuss this very topic with you.”

Veil arches her brow inquisitively.

“With me?”

“Mhm. Trahearne and a few others are waiting up on the battlements. You should probably head there right away.”

Sieran indicates this area with her thumb and Veil can see the people she mentioned in that direction. Before she leaves, however, she grabs her sister’s hand and starts dragging her along.

“Come on then, let’s go see them.”

Sieran blinks confusedly as she gets pulled forward.

“Uh, what? You want me to come with you?”

“Of course! You don’t honestly expect me to let you out of my sight now, do you?”
They proceed through the courtyard and walk up a set of stone stairs, to a platform that lies at the back of the fortress, not too far from the entrance. It’s hard to call it a typical set of battlements, but more of an intermediate area. In this section, the man that everyone has rallied around during this process – Trahearne – is standing and discussing the previous days’ events, as well as what is going to happen now.

Veil will admit that it was quite exciting to watch Trahearne leading the united forces of these organizations, letting them put their faith in someone who isn’t specifically allied with any. He shocked them all and is clearly a better leader than they imagined, Veil included. The people who stand with him are not just any, though – the duo can of course see their own Archon Wynnet, who is still dressed in the heavy Priory-crafted plate armor. Next to her is a human in a lighter gold and red armor, the Whispers agent known as Doern Velazquez, and a rather stout asuran woman, named Warmaster Efut, the foremost Vigil officer on the island.

Upon approach, the duo sees how the rest turn to view them, especially Trahearne who is smiling. “Ah, there you are, Veilidh. Welcome”, he says. “And I see you brought Sieran too. It has been reassuring to see that you are both alright and willing to work so hard after our success.”

Veil stops only a few meters away, lets go of her sister and folds her arms, smiling at their temporary leader.

“Well, this is a momentous day, Trahearne. I never thought we’d actually get here, so obviously we want to be part of the recovery efforts.”

“Don’t worry, I completely understand.”

Efut looks at the duo and displays a small smirk for them.

“I believe you mean ‘Marshal Trahearne’, Magister.”

A title or rank that they have not heard of up until this point and Veil looks quite confused.

“Marshal?”

Sieran raises a hand to scratch her cheek.

“Huh. That sounds fancy.”

Trahearne clears his throat somewhat awkwardly and looks down to the ground.

“Yes, they—we have decided upon a title for the leader of this Pact. Marshal seemed fitting.”

They all take a moment to mull on it, to consider the angle and the meaning of this development. Eventually, Veil’s smile reappears and widens.

“Pact Marshal Trahearne – I like it. It does suit you, I think.”

“As I still have my doubts, I’ll take your word for it.”

“So”, Sieran starts, “if you’ve chosen a leader, does this mean that the Pact will stay intact?”

The new Marshal inclines his head in confirmation.

“It will, yes. This entire battle has proven to everyone that we need to operate on a combined front, if we are to succeed. It has brought hope to many people, that we can potentially create a dent in the elder dragons’ seemingly invincible forces.”

Doern puts his hands on his hips and nods briefly.

“Yeah, despite certain doubts regarding our allies, it can’t be denied that we’ve all seen the benefits.”

“That doesn’t necessarily mean we don’t still have questions, though”, Wynnet points out.
Trahearne positions himself so that he’s sort of in the middle, being able to easily address either the three leaders or the two sylvari.
“Of course, but that can wait for the time being. Plans and strategies need to be prepared for how we proceed from this day forward. We need to know that we can do this, before we get into the details.”

“Well, I have a few important questions myself”, says Veil. “What about the structure of the Pact? How will we be organized? I assume the Orders still stay.”

“Naturally. This is a pact, not a merge. I have spoken briefly with the leaders of the Orders and they have assigned these three to command their respective groups within the Pact. Archon Wynnet, Preceptor Doern and Warmaster Efut are all skilled in combat, as well as knowledgeable about their Order’s various abilities. They are fitting to have at the frontlines.”

Veil strokes her chin thoughtfully, seeing both the advantages and the potential weaknesses. “Is it wise to keep them so separated?”

“Well, we won’t be quite that divided”, Wynnet tells her. “We will be working together in every camp and outpost, but we also know our respective ‘troops’ the best. We all have different ways to tackle conflicts like this.”

Efut corrects her armor somewhat before she speaks. “Indeed, I doubt anyone can lead Vigil soldiers better than a Vigil commander.”

Doern smiles. “And no Vigil officer is skilled enough to supervise our agents.”

“Nor our scholars”, Wynnet remarks.

Seeing their angles now, Veil shrugs and discards her previous concerns. “Some fair points. Guess this is the best way to proceed, then. So, Sieran and I report to Wynnet, I suppose?”

There is a brief pause before anyone responds, where Wynnet and Trahearne share a look. “Do you want to tell her, Marshal, or should I?”

Trahearne takes a deep breath and straightens his back. “I believe I should do it, as I was the one to make the choice.”

Veil slowly arches her brow, starting to feel somewhat suspicious. “…hold on, what are you talking about?”

The Firstborn takes a few steps forward, standing closer to the engineer than he did previously. “Veilidh, while they chose me as their leader, for being a neutral party, I can’t do this alone. I will need someone at my side, to help me coordinate our efforts and keep the Orders united, to remind them why we do this. I need a…Commander, if you will. I could have decided to look elsewhere and find someone on the outside, but I want an individual for this role who also knows what it’s like to live and work with these Orders, and who is familiar to all three. During your many journeys across Tyria, you have studied and fought with the Priory, but also occasionally accompanied and cooperated with both the Order of Whispers and the Vigil. You are beloved in the Priory and while that emotion may not exist throughout the other two, they still know and respect you. I can think of no other person that I would want as my second-in-command.”
While it may be expected of her to respond, Veil merely stands there to begin with, completely stunned into silence, with her eyes widened. The other three leaders smile at her and Sieran is utterly delighted, immediately moving to hug her sister.

“Oh, that sounds cherry! Congratulations, Veilidh!”

It takes several seconds, but Veil finally manages to force a few words out of her throat.

“You want to…make me Pact Commander?”

Trahearne smiles at her.

“Of course. During all the years I’ve known you, Veilidh, you and I have always tried to study and discuss the various entities, concepts and philosophies of this world. There are many brilliant scholars, builders, fighters and artists among our people, but none that I feel so mentally aligned with as you. Our Wyld Hunts have different purposes, but with the same goal – end the threat of the elder dragons in order to cleanse our world. This is something we should do together.”

It is a very kind and fascinating gesture, one that Veil almost wants to embrace immediately, but she also hesitates. She decides to redirect her eyes towards Wynnet.

“But…what about the Priory?”

Wynnet smirks at her.

“Tsk, no need to worry. I’ve already spoken to Gixx and he thinks this is a fine idea.”

Doern snorts amusedly.

“Yeah, of course he does. He’ll have one of his own at the top.”

“You’ll always be one of us, Veilidh, but this whole fight is bigger than the Priory. Trahearne needs you and if you’re willing to take on this responsibility, then we’ll allow it.”

Feeling it is somewhat suitable, Trahearne decides to use a gesture that some of the other races tend to employ, particularly humans, and offers his hand. Veil watches it briefly, feeling a sensation in the back of her mind that wants to accept without question, but sadly, it is also surrounded by doubt.

“I…I can’t. I’m not worthy of this. I’m just a Magister, no one special.”

The others don’t immediately protest this notion, but mostly because they don’t have any direct answers for her. If she turns it down, then that’s her choice. It is up to Sieran to convince her and the younger sister puts a hand on her shoulder.

“Don’t be ridiculous. What did I tell you when we were here last time? This is what you’re meant to do, Veilidh. You are not just a scholar and an engineer, but a leader, someone with the passion and strength to take us through these harsh times. Your Wyld Hunt has constantly pointed towards this, you know. Don’t ignore your potential now.

Tyria needs you; we all do.”

Veil watches her sister as she speaks, feeling not just the support through the words, but also the emotions beneath the surface, in their joint connection to the Dream. It is like Sieran’s warmth flows through her and into Veil, trying to make her understand what she’s capable of. Despite a severe reluctance, Veil emits a heavy sigh and finally wraps her fingers around the hand.

“…seems like I don’t have a choice. I accept.”

Trahearne smiles and eagerly shakes her hand.

“I knew you would. We will do great things together, Commander.”

Chapter End Notes
Yup, FINALLY, Veilidh gets to take her place. Took a while, I know.
There are two chapters left of this story and both of them will have Veilidh/Caithe.
Path of swallowed hunts

Chapter Notes

This chapter plays out some time after the Battle of Fort Trinity, but before the Temple of the Forgotten God mission.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Fort Trinity. That’s what they decided to call it, the joint fortress belonging to the Pact, placed in the outskirts of Orr’s ruins. It seemed fitting somehow, that the united headquarters of the Priory, Vigil and Whispers in their front against Zhaitan would signify what they intend to do. So far, it has been rather useful as well. Despite certain difficult opposition, they have remained firm, showing the elder dragon that they will not budge now. Trinity is here to stay.

Right now, Pact Commander Veilidh is standing somewhere in the center of the complex, trying to provide all the directions she can muster for the people around her. Priory scholars want her opinion on their latest findings, Whispers agents give her intel about movements from both the Pact and the dragon, while Vigil soldiers not only offer news regarding their strategies, but also want her assessment of their tactical positions.

It’s strange to her, to be someone in charge of so many different people, from such a variety of origins. That they look to her for leadership can sometimes be overwhelming, but she does her best. Having been among those who commanded the efforts at Claw Island has obviously helped her reputation.

It’s not like she’s entirely unused to this position either, as she has been a Magister for quite some time. It’s when people expect her to be able to offer sound advice regarding military strategy or intelligence gathering, that she falters. She’s a scholar and an engineer, an intellectual, which hasn’t prepared her for every scenario.

Eventually, she’s given a bit of space, as the rest of the people receive their assignments and leave to go finish them. That doesn’t necessarily mean that Veil is left completely alone, especially when she hears a voice from behind. Luckily, this one is both familiar and relished.

“They really admire you, don’t they?”

Veil blinks confusedly at first, before she turns around and displays a bright smile when she sees who she’s addressing.

“And here I thought you were busy elsewhere, trying to put Destiny’s Edge back together.”

Caithe is leaning against a wall nearby, practically hidden in the shadows, with her arms folded. She offers an amused smile and shrugs.

“I was, and I am, but it’s not always so clear-cut. While I was sitting around, wondering what I can do for them, a sensation suddenly hit me – I remembered how easy it is to miss you.”

She tries her best to hide it, but Veil feels rather delighted when Caithe admits it. Despite having been together for so very long, it’s always nice to hear how she’s appreciated. They are often separated, forced to go into different destinations, which makes reunion extra sweet almost every time.

Veil slowly approaches, keeping her arms behind her back.

“Sounds like the mysterious and unbeatable Caithe has a weakness. I wonder what would happen if this gets out.”
Caithe rolls her eyes and when Veil is within range, she grabs the collar of the burgundy coat that her lover has been wearing for so long. Well, this isn’t the first version – probably the second or third by now – but the engineer always comes back to the same design. The rogue whispers, as she holds her girlfriend close.
“You don’t honestly believe this is a secret, do you?”

“Prove it.”

There’s a brief giggle from Caithe, before she wraps an arm around the back of Veil’s neck, pulls her close and eagerly seizes the lips of the other woman. Instinctively, she strokes a hand through the dark blue leaves at the top.
The embrace is comforting and fulfilling, sending waves of pleasure and vigor through Veil’s body. She leans into it even further, pushing Caithe against the wall, while she leaves her own hands at the rogue’s hips and caresses them gently.

How long has it been since they last saw each other now? Weeks? A few months? This last year has been rather hectic in general, as Veil has had to tackle difficulties at home, within the Priory and against the elder dragons with the Pact.
During the process, Caithe could only be briefly involved, as she had other concerns. Seeing not only Veil succeed in the Priory, but also witnessing Daeynwe’s adventures with the Blood Bond guild, reignited her desire to see Destiny’s Edge be restored. Veil has just had the occasional chance to help out, but most of all, she’s ready to support her girlfriend emotionally, whenever Caithe needs it.

After the kiss finally drifts apart, very slowly, Veil feels rejuvenated. Holding Caithe like this is almost akin to bathing in sunlight.
As they stand in the shadows still, Caithe’s eyes virtually appears to glow somewhat and there’s a hint of amusement in them.
“So…Commander, hmm?”

Veil blinks confusedly at first, before she remembers that Caithe was not present during her promotion, nor during any of the missions afterwards. The engineer snorts and shrugs.
“Seems like it, yeah. Didn’t have much choice, really.”

Caithe smiles and tilts her head, while she caresses Veil’s cheek.
“I find it charming. Kind of suits you, actually.”

Veil arches an eyebrow skeptically.
“You think so?”

“Definitely. You’re at least 30% more attractive now.”

Of course, it was meant to mock her. Why wouldn’t it be?
Veil starts to laugh and shakes her head.
“…stop teasing me.”

Caithe moves her hand and playfully pokes Veil’s nose.
“Never. Now that you’re in charge, I have no reason to stop. Someone has to make sure the honorable Commander doesn’t get arrogant.”

“Pff. I’d never do that! In fact, I constantly question myself, just in case I do something wrong.”

As she receives a moment to survey their surroundings, Caithe takes it. She slowly lets her eyes sweep the fortress, the troops, the various defenses placed in every corner.
“And this is the Pact, then. I must say that I was shocked when I heard about it. I’ve stumbled into the Orders too and they were certainly fascinating, but I never thought anyone could unify them.”

“Nor did I, to be honest. I don’t think any of us did. The events at Claw Island – not only the victory, but the prior defeat – changed everyone’s perspectives. It’s like they’ve all come to realize why we’re out here, why we’re fighting against these entities at all.”

She switches position somewhat, placing herself along the wall too. Simultaneously, she wraps her arms around Caithe’s waist, leaning against her.

“I’m not afraid to admit that it was inspiring to see everyone work together in that battle; not only to achieve one goal, but actually succeeded with it as well.”

She gazes at Caithe shortly after. “I wish you were there to witness it, but I understand you were busy.”

The rogue’s eyes are still viewing the area, nodding as she considers Veil’s words. “It is a shame, but it’s not over. I hope to be at your side when you have to face future dangers.” Eventually, her attention returns to her girlfriend. “I’ve received the occasional reports of events around here. I heard it wasn’t easy.”

Veil sighs and lowers her eyes. “Not really, no. You might even say that the last few weeks have been…gruesome. We’ve had difficult missions, setbacks and countless undead assaults. Not everyone survived.”

A bit of sorrow washes over Caithe and she strokes Veil’s cheek once more. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright. I mean…it’s not, but I’ll take some time to grieve later. Right now, I have to focus on winning, so that their sacrifices were not in vain.

I believe that Zhaitan is starting to understand how dangerous a unified Tyrian alliance truly is, but with that comes a lot of hardships. I…don’t know how much our losses will increase because of this. It kind of scares me.”

Caithe watches Veil thoughtfully, sensing this emotion from her, as if it shapes itself into an aura around her. Caithe decides to move closer, leaning her head against Veil’s, to be her comfort. “You shouldn’t worry, dear. I believe in you and I know you can succeed. You just have to stay strong.”

Veil exhales and shuts her eyes. “I know, but…”

“No, don’t think like that. Consider instead what you’ve succeeded with thus far. Did you not save Sieran several weeks back? Did you not defeat the dragon that tried to destroy Claw Island? You even have this fortress now, a first foothold against Orr.

All of this proved that, while we will have to face tough decisions and scenarios, we can persevere. You have to believe this.”

It’s silent as Veil ponders this fact, something she can’t deny. “It’s true, we were lucky, but that wasn’t just because of me. Blood Bond helped me save Sieran, but I have no idea where they are now.”

“Sure, you had help, but you do now too. You have the Pact, right? You are a Commander now, Veilidh, a leader. You shouldn’t underestimate what that means.”

Veil sometimes forgets how important Caithe’s opinion is, how her words and presence can help soothe worries that the engineer otherwise would get overwhelmed by. This is a nice reminder.
She gazes into Caithe’s eyes again and inclines her head.  
“You’re right.”

She receives another smile from Caithe, who is glad to hear that her words help.  
“Is Sieran here right now? I’d like to see her.”

“Oh, no, sorry. She’s currently in the Priory headquarters back in the Shiverpeaks, but she’ll likely arrive later. Asura gates have been put up between each Order’s headquarters, but most are being recalibrated after a recent Risen attack.”

“Ah, well, that’s a shame. I suppose I’ll have to set up a meeting later on.”

“Probably, yeah.”
Veil snorts once more.
“I’ve missed you both, you know. I really wish either of you were here for some of our latest missions.
I mean, technically, isn’t that what you’re supposed to do anyway? Our Wyld Hunts are still the same, aren’t they? And yet I’m the only one showing up, you damn slacker.”

There’s still quite a bit of humor in Veil’s voice, which makes Caithe chuckle. She leans closer and pecks Veil’s cheek.
“I know and I’m sorry, darling. I wish I could help you more, but Destiny’s Edge still needs me. I can stay for a day or two, but then I really need to leave through the asura gate to Lion’s Arch.”

“Tsk, fine.”

Shortly after, Caithe’s eyes are drawn to the landscape again, but not to the fort. Instead, she concentrates on the area beyond it, towards the water and the foggy remnants of Orr. The rogue feels a vague sensation worming itself into her mind, forcing her to take a deep breath.
“Do you feel it as well?”, she whispers.

“What?”

“The…call. The urge to fight.”
Veil watches her lover for a moment and then follows the gaze out towards the sea.
“Constantly, yeah. It’s in the back of my mind all the time.”

They both recognize their unified goal, now more than ever, what the term ‘Wyld Hunt’ actually means. Caithe takes one of Veil’s hands and clutches it.
“When the time is right, Veilidh, I promise I shall be there. I won’t abandon you to finish this alone.”

Thankfully, she receives a warm smile from Veil in return.
“I know. I never suspected anything else. I can’t do this without you.”

“Well, that’s…debatable. You have Trahearne, right? If my brother is of any use, of course. I heard they made him the leader of this whole thing?”

“Indeed, they did”, they both hear another voice saying.

The duo swiftly turns to view a third sylvari coming to join them. Trahearne walks around in his usual attire, of intermingling leaves and barks in green, black, red and brown colors. His arms are folded and behind him is the gleaming shape of a sylvari blade. Caithe offers a mischievous smile and tilts her head curiously.
“Hello there, brother. Good to see you again. Is that Caladbolg behind you?”
“It is. Mother entrusted it to me recently, to achieve my own Wyld Hunt. But never mind that. You are not disturbing my second-in-command, are you?”

“Who, me? I would never dream of it.”

Trahearne shakes his head skeptically.
“And yet somehow, I feel quite a bit of doubt.”

Veil snorts.
“You’re not wrong, because she’s lying. Teasing and disturbing me is what she wants most of all.”

Caithe gasps.
“Don’t tell on me!”

Not being able to stop themselves, both Trahearne and Veil laugh. Shortly after, the Marshal approaches the other sylvari of Dusk and puts a hand on her shoulder.
“You haven’t been able to see it yet, Caithe, but Veilidh has been a splendid Commander. I couldn’t ask for a better second.”

Veil raises her free hand and places it on top of his.
“And I couldn’t ask for a better leader.”

“Somehow, I doubt that.”

Seeing his skeptical reaction, she shifts the location of her hand, poking his side in an attempt to tickle him instead.
“Hey, stop that. You shouldn’t question yourself so much, Trahearne. You have also proven yourself and everyone believes in you. The Pact wouldn’t work without you.”

Caithe smiles and crosses her arms.
“That’s what he has always been like. He’s too accustomed to solitude, to working alone. If he stopped faltering, my brother would see how skilled he truly is.”

Trahearne sighs and raises a hand to scratch his neck.
“Sometimes, I’m not sure whether you know me best of all, or if you’re simply mocking me.”

“That sounds plausible.
Anyhow, I’m glad you’re here and merely wished to greet you before you left. In the future, I hope to see you on the battlefield. For now, I suppose I should leave you both alone. Veilidh could use some way to relax, after all the fighting we have endured. I’m sure you can provide a solution, Caithe.”

In response, Veil’s face begins to glow very shyly.
“W-what? I uh…I don’t know what you mean.”

Caithe smirks and quickly slips an arm around Veil’s body, while nuzzling her neck.
“Oh, we all know what he means. And I think that sounds like an excellent idea. I believe you’re mine for the next few hours.”
Caithe and Destiny's Edge aren't involved in most of the fighting in Orr until the end, since they're still trying to find out if they can get back together, but I figured Caithe would still try to visit Veilidh when she can.
There's a chapter on Sunday as well.
Victory. That word, the very concept, had seemed to be so far away for such a long time. There were so many difficulties, so many obstacles that had stood in the way of achieving it, that many had believed it had become unattainable. Through losses of troops, equipment, camps, even entire outposts, they had struggled and hoped for the best, but the prospect of winning kept being out of their reach. Surrender almost seemed preferable.

Veilidh was one of those who had refused to believe in failure, that the elder dragon was so invincible in comparison. She kept pushing her friends and allies, telling them that one day, they would stand above the fallen might of the creature and know that they had secured the future. She doesn’t quite know where she got that strength from, as the fighting seemed endless. Along the way, they faced numerous attacks from every angle, ambushes, backstabs, several unfortunate scenarios and inadequate strategies. Veil felt both responsible and like a victim simultaneously.

And then, it sort of just happened. They finally managed to break into the heart of Orr, chased down their only chance of striking at their enemy once and for all, and took it. Not only did the Pact free the land itself from corruption and a bleak existence through Traheerne’s magic, which should have cleansed it forever, they also went straight for Zhaitan itself, facing it far away from where they had assumed the final showdown would occur.

For Veil, it was unforgettable. To stand there at the battlefield up in the sky, among a fleet of airships, while facing legions of dragons and to be the one that finally gunned down the mightiest of all foes that anyone has ever faced was…indescribable. Afterwards, Veil almost demanded that they fly down to the surface, so that she could check the corpse directly, but there was no time for that. Everyone wanted to head back to base and get some rest.

It’s not like the final stretch was better than what came before it. Not only did the fleet sustain a lot of damage from Zhaitan and its minions, but valuable personnel, equipment and resources were all expended in order to defeat it. But at least they succeeded. That was the important aspect of this whole ordeal. They won, they killed an elder dragon, accomplishing a nigh impossible task. There is now some breathing room for the first time in…well, probably centuries.

When Veil considers it, she realizes that this victory not only freed Orr’s remnants, but much of the surrounding lands too. Southern Kryta, Maguuma and the areas south of the Shiverpeaks no longer need to fear the undead at the same level. The path to Elona might open up, the tengu could choose to unseal the gates to their land and, hell, perhaps even Cantha might be reachable eventually, unless the ocean dragon gets in their way.

And after that, who knows? If they can take down one elder dragon, why not the rest? Who says that any of the monsters are now unkillable?

For now, all of that feels so distant, though. Veil’s head is spinning with the opportunities, being unsure where she should go or what she should do. There’s so much at stake and yet she also
wants to relax. When they got back to Fort Trinity, festivities were already underway. During the journey on the airship, she had been busy examining their aircrafts, crews and reports regarding the battle, to make sure that Zhaitan was really dead. She forgot what might happen when they reached civilization again.

In some ways, this celebration is partially in her honor, as much as it is for them and their victory. She was kind of overwhelmed that they arranged something like this, even if it should have been obvious. People are naturally eager to show their relief. Lots of people also wanted to talk to her, congratulate her for what she accomplished and how spectacular her leadership had been. She mostly stumbled through it, as she wasn’t sure what exactly to tell them. ‘It was all just a blur to me’ didn’t seem like an appropriate response.

After speaking to some of her closest companions, like Gixx, Sieran, Wynnet, Destiny’s Edge and members of the other Orders that she had worked with, she decided to just walk off on her own. Earlier, she had located Trahearne in his own corner and while she helped push him into the spotlight, she soon came to realize that he had a point. Some solitude is actually fairly desirable at this time.

This is why she can now be found sitting far up, on top of a roof, overlooking the celebrations rather than being a part of them. It gives her a good view to see how much fun everyone is having. From this angle, she can watch how Trahearne, Sieran, Eir, Logan, Zoja, Rytlock, all of the members of the Blood Bond guild and several others, are all talking, laughing and celebrating. She kinda wants to be there too, to revel in their presence and yet…she can’t. She’s drawn away, feeling drained by it all. She wants the comfort of the noise, but in the background.

“The hero of the day sneaking off to the shadows, huh? How typical. You and Trahearne are more alike than you realize.”

Veil blinks confusedly, but she recognizes the voice before she spots the source. Caithe is standing close to her position, bent over a piece of metal, with a hand under her chin. Her pale blue eyes shimmer somewhat in the moonlight.

Veil smiles and snorts, pulling her legs closer to her own chest.

“I thought it was you Nighters who did that.”

“Not everyone is the same, dear. You like to be alone too.”

“Clearly.”

Caithe studies Veil’s seated position and her calm expression, not wanting to disturb it and yet also wishing for it to be in her grasp.

“May I stay?”

Veil shrugs casually.

“Sure, I don’t mind. When it comes to you, there’s no one else I’d rather have at my side.”

The rogue now smiles as well and then jumps over the obstacle, closing the distance between them. She slides down on the roof, wraps her arms around Veil’s waist and leans against her shoulder. Simultaneously, Veil lifts a hand and runs it through Caithe’s hair.

“How are you, dear? You must have had it tough. You’ve gone through so much.”

A heavy sigh is emitted from the engineer’s mouth as she pulls Caithe even closer, gently letting their heads rest against each other. She feels the physical connection between them starting to affect them both, that blatant electrifying sensation, as if their essences are connected. Even if sylvari can often detect one another, it is different with Caithe. No other sylvari, not even
Daeynwe, gives her this feeling.

“IT has been rough, yeah. I… I can’t stop thinking about all the people we’ve lost, those who couldn’t be here with us. And then there’s all the destruction, all the logistical problems that have arisen and all the things we have to do in the future. This effort has made it clear that defeating an elder dragon is not something you can take lightly.”

Caithe nods slowly, grabs one of Veil’s hands and intertwines their fingers, squeezing them enough to display that she is here for her beloved.

“I know how hard it is. I have gone through similar dilemmas. The first few years for our people, bickering with Faolain, losing Riannoc, Wynne, Snaff, Glint…and lots of others over the years.”

Veil shuts her eyes, her shoulders slumping somewhat.

“It’s enough to make you wonder if it will ever get better.”

It doesn’t take long for Caithe to realize that she sort of failed to express what she wanted to convey. She raises her hand and caresses Veil’s cheek instead.

“But you helped me through a lot of that, Veilidh. You made me realize what I must do to continue and succeed. If there’s something you need or if you just want someone to talk to…I’m here, just as you were for me.”

The compassion is both heard in the words and felt through the air between them. A small smile returns to Veil’s lips and she gazes at the other woman. Tilting her head into an appropriate angle, she nudges their noses together, letting them brush slowly and gently at first, before she locks their lips in a tender kiss afterwards.

“I know”, she whispers. “You’re the best.”

“Second best.”

Wanting even more of the inner warmth that Caithe can offer, Veil rests against her shoulder now and the rogue holds both arms around Veil, underneath the coat. She wants her fingers against the hide of her lover.

“It’s not all gloom and doom, though, right? Think of all that you have achieved. You are one of the most brilliant scholars, engineers, fighters and military leaders in Tyria now. Or what about all the titles you have attained? Valiant, Magister, Pact Commander, Champion of Orr, Dragonslayer.” She stops herself briefly, to emit a giggle. “You’re starting to sound a lot like one of those Krytan nobles. Maybe you should hire a herald.”

Veil smirks and nuzzles into Caithe’s neck.

“Tsk. Don’t mock me.”

“But it’s so easy.”

With her amusement growing, Veil decides that she’s not going to let this remain unchallenged. Her hands slip down across Caithe’s body.

“Is that so?”

She suddenly starts to push her fingers into a few specific spots, which makes Caithe gasp at first, before she begins to laugh, as Veil tickles her.

“Hey! Stop that!”

“Why don’t you make me, huh?”

Caithe falls down to the surface of the roof as she tries to squirm and fight Veil’s prodding grasp, hoping to evade it, but the engineer keeps pulling her back in. Eventually, Caithe grabs onto her wrists and tears them away. She holds onto them while she
stares into Veil’s eyes, with the engineer still smirking.
“I think that’s enough.”

“Mm, for now.”

Veil pushes her body forward, sliding down on top of her girlfriend and makes their lips clash once more. Caithe could try to fight it if she prefers, but she welcomes the embrace instead, even wrapping her legs around Veil’s body to hold her closer. If someone were to look up in this direction and focus their gaze, it’s possible to see the two sylvari, even if the darkness might obscure their positions somewhat.

Once the kiss subsides, Veil rests against Caithe’s chest, allowing the moment to take over, as a gentle breeze blows across them, practically caressing them.
“I guess this is the end of our Wyld Hunts”, the rogue suddenly remarks quietly.

Veil is silent at first, pondering the statement and the meaning behind it, but she somehow senses that she doesn’t come to the same conclusion.
“I wonder if it really is. Do you feel any different?”

“A little, yes. The itch that I felt for so long, which became part of my normal life, is now just… gone. Our accomplishment was momentous, and I feel as if the world has regained some freedom.”

“Maybe, but I’m not sure this is the end. Even if I sensed relief when it happened, there’s still… a call in me, as if something else tells me to keep going.”

“Hmm. Guess you’re right.”

Turning her head to the side, Veil peers down at the people below, across the edge of the roof. She doesn’t care if anyone spots them up here, really, as she’s just glad to be with Caithe once more.
When she scans all of the joyful individuals, something almost feels… missing.
“Is it weird to say that I kind of wish Faolain was here?”

Caithe had been stroking her hand up and down along Veil’s back, but it now stops and hesitates.
“Why would you want that?”

“I know what she has done and that we don’t agree on… well, a lot of things. But, at the same time, there are elements in life that we share, and she deserves to celebrate our freedom too.”

The years have obviously shown them more aspects of Faolain and it’s clear that there is some kind of connection between the two sylvari of Dusk, but Caithe still doubts that it might change her old lover in any way. Their encounter in Twilight Arbor proved that much.
“She doesn’t care about this. She only wishes to attain her goal of killing the Pale Tree.”

“I don’t know. There are other things that are important to her. I’ve seen it.”

“If you wish to believe that, go ahead.”

Veil hears the brusque dismissal in Caithe’s voice, the slight irritation. She has to shake this thought off and instead slide upwards, to let their eyes meet once more.
“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to sour the mood.”

Caithe exhales through her nose.
“It’s not your fault. I shouldn’t have gotten grumpy either.”
She lifts her hand, slowly stroking a few fingers over Veil’s cheek.
“What you have accomplished here-“

“What we have accomplished, you mean. Not just me. I was never alone, none of us were.”

Veil’s continued diminishment of her own importance makes Caithe chuckle.
“Fine. What we did meant a lot to this world, for all of us. It has given us a new chance, to hope for a brighter future. We shouldn’t squander that by worrying about other things right now. Let’s try to enjoy this moment, this wondrous occasion, while we can. Right now, all we need to care about is us, no one else.”

“I…guess that is a fair point, yeah.”

Caithe smiles and playfully pokes Veil’s nose.
“Glad to hear you agree. So, what do you want to do? There are lots of people we could go down and chat with around here, as I’m sure they wish to see you. There are also a bunch of different drinks and meals being prepared, which we can enjoy while they’re fresh. I think there are even some people playing games somewhere. That time in Lion’s Arch, during the festival, I chose all of our activities. It’s your turn now.”

Veil starts looking somewhat confused.
“…what? That time in-… Oh, wait. With Daeynwe? That was years ago now.”

“Yes, but still. It’s your choice.”

It seems like a bit of a silly division to Veil, but if that’s what Caithe wants, she won’t oppose it. Looking down at all the individuals running around and having fun does give Veil some peace and there’s definitely curiosity worming itself into her mind, as she wonders what they’re doing. In the past, she might have worried for her younger sister, that her little Petal would get into trouble, but Dae has more than proven that she can handle her own life together with Sovica. There’s also Sieran, of course, who Veil would like to spend more time with. She still hasn’t forgotten the fact that she almost lost her sister and her second oldest friend only a few months ago, but the concern has slowly abated. The Magister can have fun without her.

Eventually, she drifts back towards Caithe and shrugs.
“Forget them.”

Caithe arches her brow.
“What?”

“I don’t want to be with them right now.”

“Hmm. I really think you should take a few days to relax, though.”

“And I want to do that as well, but I don’t need anyone else for it.”

Caithe still looks skeptical, but she did say that Veil would get to choose.
“Alright then. What do you want?”

Veil quickly shuts the distance between their faces once more, enough so that their noses bump into each other and the lights of the early night are reflected in both of their eyes. Excitement is swiftly finding its way onto Veil’s expression.
“You.”

Like they have done a few times already tonight, and during the last several days, their bodies become interlocked in a loving and absorbing embrace. Veil’s hands locate those of her lover and
entwine their fingers in tight and yearning grasps. Caithe’s legs snakes around Veil’s waist, feet running up and down the engineer’s back and legs, as their entities grind and thrust into each other. Their bodies and minds are becoming connected, through an initial physical link, but one that grows beyond that. Eventually, they roll out of view from the rest and their game intensifies, as clothes are removed. They will switch positions several times during the night and their hands will roam, as their minds traverse other realms. When they are together, there is nothing else.

“I am always yours.”

Chapter End Notes

And that was it! The story of Veilidh and her connection to Caithe. It turned out a lot longer than I initially anticipated.

I did have another, more ambiguous and perhaps even less joyful ending planned before, but this seemed more appropriate. As this isn't the last story I'm ever going to write with Veilidh and Caithe, I will save other ideas for the future.

Thanks to anyone that has read, given kudos and/or commented on this fic. I hope you enjoyed it!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!