

## Three Nights in the Underworld

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/12538596) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/12538596>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Mature</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Graphic Depictions Of Violence</a>
Category:	<a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">Dragon Age: Inquisition</a> , <a href="#">Dragon Age - All Media Types</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Anders/Female Hawke</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Female Hawke</a> , <a href="#">Nightmare (Dragon Age)</a> , <a href="#">Anders (Dragon Age)</a> , <a href="#">Justice (Dragon Age)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Mage Hawke (Dragon Age)</a> , <a href="#">Red Hawke</a> , <a href="#">Canon-Typical Violence</a> , <a href="#">Reality Bending</a> , <a href="#">Somniari Hawke</a> , <a href="#">Dreamers (Dragon Age)</a> , <a href="#">Solas cameo</a> , <a href="#">Flemeth cameo</a> , <a href="#">The Surveyor - Freeform</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2017-10-28 Completed: 2017-11-11 Words: 21,587 Chapters: 3/3

# Three Nights in the Underworld

by [Mikkeneko](#)

## Summary

Hawke stayed behind in the Fade after Adamant to protect the world, even though she knew she might be going to her death. Against all odds she survived, only to find herself trapped on the wrong side of the Veil. Will she be able to escape before the Fade starts changing her -- and she starts changing it?

# Dusk

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hawke took charge. It was what she did, what she had always done. She still remembered what her father had told her, time and time again: *"Listen well, Ina. In any time of crisis the best thing you can do is the right thing, the second-best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing at all."*

Since then there had been a hundred crises, a thousand moments where a split-second's decision made the difference between life and death -- her own, and those she loved. So she took charge. Blight rot it but *someone* had to, and too many others were content to stand around dithering while the world caved in around them. She didn't crave power -- who in the Maker's name would *want* the hassle of being in command all the time? -- but *someone* had to do something, and so often no one else did.

It didn't always work out like she'd wanted. She couldn't always save everyone; all too often, she couldn't save anyone. But then again sometimes she could, and so she kept trying. So long as the outcome was no worse than if she did nothing at all then she was satisfied.

She'd stood on the searing hillside, seething with impatience while the Herald of Andraste and the bastard Prince of Ferelden dithered. While a nightmare the size of Sundermount tore up the Fade behind them in its thrashing, while the flicker of the portal ahead that was their only escape back into the waking world guttered ahead of them. While the would-be leaders of Thedas blubbered about responsibility and obligation and the little doe-eyed elf girl that the princeling had left behind and while the Wardens were slowly being driven mad by the Nightmare's song and while Corypheus was left unopposed and while the *world* hung in the balance.

And Hawke took charge.

"Go!" she'd shouted, drawing her wicked bladed staff from her back and dropping into a charging stance. "Go *now!*"

She hadn't given them time to argue; she'd gone down the hill into the pit and prayed to the Maker and Andraste only that the Inquisitor would gather her wits together and move her stubby little dwarven legs towards safety. She'd make this sacrifice but by Maferath's teeth, they had better not waste it.

There was no time for second thoughts, for regrets, not when all her attention had to be bent towards clearing a path, towards diverting the Nightmare's attention until the others had gone. She skidded down the slope; a slash of the staff before her sent a roaring cone of force from its tip. She slammed into the stone at the bottom of the hill and sent a blast of invisible force power straight upwards into the monster's jaws. It shrieked in rage -- and pain.

Pain. She could *hurt* it.

She grinned savagely then and sent out another blow, and another, blasting the thing back every time it moved. Slammed a cage of stone down on its legs when it tried to surge past her. Fortified herself to a fortress of stone when it tried to shove her out of the way. And although she never looked back, she knew the moment that the others made it safely out of the Fade and the rift closed forever, because the Nightmare's scream of foiled fury convulsed the sky.

She knew when she had done it, because the monster turned all its thwarted hatred on *her* instead.

A leg she hadn't seen slammed into her from behind, sending her flying. She hit a stone formation that shattered under her weight, shards and splinters stabbing through her jerkin into the flesh beneath. Instinct screamed at her and she rolled, barely clearing the way before a monstrous foot pounded on the spot she had just been, pulverizing the stone rubble to dust.

*Now* would be the time for regrets. But there was no time, still, because now the full attention of the monster was on her and there was no time to do anything but block and shield, dodge and stagger. The demon loomed high over her head; its bulk filled the sky. Its presence filled the Fade around her, ground and sky and monster all. Its massive bulk heaved over too many legs -- far more than any mortal spider -- and countless eyes glinted with malevolence as it bore down on her.

The thing moved in a blur and Hawke barely dodged in time as the hideous head lunged down at her; mandibles as big as the anchors on Isabela's ship clacked and snapped inches from her shoulder. She stabbed upwards with her blade, the sharp metal barely scraping against the carapace. A shriek of unholy laughter, and the air around her was filled with a stinging rain of poison. Her eyes burned, her skin curdled at the lightest contact, and she bolted for the clear air, choking on the miasma as she went. Her eyes watering, she saw another leg sweeping to throw her like a ragdoll again; this time she parried the blow, just barely.

This wasn't a fight she could win. It wasn't even a fight she could survive. But she kept on fighting, all the same.

*Mages are stronger in the Fade.* She remembered her Father telling her that, in a sunny room long ago, on the other side of the universe. His big hands, dark hair dusting the backs of them, carefully whittling a charm for the head of his staff. *Remember that, Ina. The demons would rather you forget, because if you remember that you are stronger than they, you wouldn't have reason to fear them.*

*Mages are stronger in the Fade.* Anders had told her that, too. In the enclosed gloom of his clinic, his hands working the mortar and pestle, her attention captured by a streak of elfroot sap along the top ridge of knuckles. She'd wanted to capture those hands, raise that smudge to her lips, taste it with her tongue. He'd smiled wryly, brushed a lock of hair aside, and went back to grinding. *Though the Templars would rather we forgot, because if we remembered, we wouldn't be afraid enough for their taste.*

It must have been something that they taught mages in the Circle. None of the mages from the Outside -- Merrill, Bethany, herself -- had ever told her that. But for all she hated the Circle and all it stood for, there were things that they knew that no one else knew. Apostates like her, free, but kept ignorant for it.

*Mages are stronger in the Fade.* How much stronger, she wondered. How much stronger, Nightmare, if I'm *not afraid of you*?

How much stronger? Her first of stone slammed a little harder, launched a little farther. The blast of cyclonic force from the tip of her staff spread wider, bit deeper. She should have run through her mana long ago, but how could she? This was the Fade, the font of all magic; how could she ever run out?

She should have tired. She *was* tired, exhausted, ground to paste against the stone with the fatigue of all the force channeling through her. But she called on her magic to strengthen her, stabilize her, and she found her feet and she lifted her arm for one more blow.

It was no good. For every stone-fisted shove, the demon just came back stronger. For every limb she blasted with shrapnel, two more grew back in its place. Her columns of force left holes in its carapace, in its abdomen, that it did not even bother to grow back; the chunks of flesh might as well be lifeless clay for all the damage seemed to affect it. And it kept on coming, unfolding more and more of itself from some otherworldly lair.

*Mages are stronger in the Fade.* But not strong enough.

**"You cannot win!"** the Nightmare howled. **"This is my realm! You are nothing, you are but a toy! I will make of you a meal that will keep you in screaming agony for the next thousand years, I will make you watch as I break out of this prison and over your world in a flood!"**

Its voice reverberated down from the sky and up from the stones. It was *part* of the sky, *part* of the stones, in ways she could barely comprehend; it was part of its domain, creature and demesne one in some strange circular fashion. She could almost see the threads that connected them, running from one part to another, as though the great beast were just a puppet plied by some yet greater unseen hand.

"This isn't --" Hawke said through gritted, bloodied teeth -- had she bit her lips? Or was this crimson spray called from her grated throat, her battered lungs? -- "convincing me to fight any less hard."

A blast of cruel, vast laughter. **"Is this effort supposed to impress me?"** the Nightmare roared. **"You are a gnat, a flea against me! All your best strength is nothing, as all your efforts ever have been! When have you ever known triumph, Hawke? Even your victories proved hollow in the end, as you destroy everything you clumsily seek to protect!"**

"At least," Hawke wheezed, and moved her arms that felt like lead for one more cast. It was strange, her arms felt so heavy, yet the mana that coursed through them was hot and quick, almost frenzied. "I *tried*."

She'd tried. Then, now, she'd done everything she could. It was that conviction that moved her, that drove her to keep fighting even when logic and reason and the agony of exhaustion called her to let go. Cruel claws drove towards her from before and behind, and she battered them back. A vast pit of mandibles drove towards her from above, and she blasted it with more power than she'd ever known. Shades threw themselves at her, frenzied, from every side; they disintegrated almost as soon as they crossed into her aura.

*What's happening to me?*

**"Do you think your flimsy Veil can stop me?"** the Nightmare thundered, far, far overhead, and far below. **"I will break it! I will take your world! I cannot be stopped! The Elder One will open the way for me. I will revenge these insults on all you ever loved, your defenseless family, your pathetic friends! I will eat their minds with madness, as I already have the Wardens!"**

"Fucking demon freak!" Hawke gritted her teeth, the profanities dripping from her lips mixed with blood. "I'm going to pull your asshole out your mouth!"

Hawke had hated before, more times than she could count. The bullies in Boarsford that had snatched her mother's little dog and drowned it in the ford. The Templars that had forced them to flee that town, and the next, and the next. The malicious teenage girls in Hillshire that had tricked fourteen-year-old Carver into pouring out his heart in a love letter and then stomped it in the midden. The middle-aged merchant in Balden who'd made to molest fifteen-year-old Bethany as she was walking home from church services, his harriadan of a wife who'd blamed *her* when she'd chased him off. The Templars again, and again, and again. Loghain. Meeran. Bartrand. Alrik. Meredith.

But never before had she hated so hotly, a blood-drenched fury that seemed fit to float her out of her own body on a roaring tide of rage. After all this *thing* had done -- to the Wardens, to her baby brother, to her lover, worming into their heads and twisting their own thoughts and senses against them. To the rest of them, Clarel and Stroud and all the rest, taking their selfless sacrifice and perverting it into something vile and corrupted. Now it sought to take her world -- the world that Anders was trying to make safe for her, and people like her, like her sister, like the children she might someday have had. A world where people like them could be free, and safe, and happy together. Now it threatened *her* family -- Fenris and Merrill, Varric and Isabela, Aveline and Carver and --

Anders.

*Anders, my love...*

Mages are stronger in the Fade, he'd told her, the sparse light from the window behind him catching in his hair and making him glow. Stronger than you could ever believe.

One mage could upturn a mountain, if the circumstances were right. One mage could level a building the size of a cathedral. One mage could, at the right time and right place, bring down an institution that spanned nations. What was a demon, in the face of that?

Power flowed through her, more than she'd ever felt before -- so much it almost overwhelmed her capacity to feel it. She could see them now, the threads that bound everything together -- the demon, the sky, the shades, the magic, *all* of it -- and she reached out --

The demon screamed as her upraised hand sent a wave of energy before it, visible-invisible current that shredded the very *air* in its wake. Her stone-wrapped fist disappeared into that black maw... yet instead of biting down, the monster struggled and scrabbled to get *away*. To no avail. Hawke pushed and pushed until she felt it, buzzing and sparking and hot as a film of wire in a blacksmith's forge -- but it did not burn her. She closed her hand upon it, and *pulled*.

The Nightmare lurched, the demon staggering as though under a blow ten times as mighty; even the green clouds of the searing sky trembled with the force of it. She yanked again, and the cord that she pulled towards herself seemed to fold the giant spider up along its length, dragging stone and demon and sky like a fish on a hook. More threads wound up along the one she had captured, the weave running into a snarl, tangling and enmeshing the demon within it.

**"No!"** the Nightmare screeched, legs and mandibles and a hundred other unsavory things flailing at her with the force of its desperation. **"You cannot -- how can this be?!"**

She grinned, a fierce exultation, and pulled further. The monster screamed, and there was no thought left in it for attacking -- it flopped and thrashed with the frenetic desperation of some ugly, multi-legged thing dragged out of the tidepool shallows to wither and die on the dry stone expanse of the shore.

Gathering the last of its monstrous strength, it pulled back -- and for a moment Hawke almost lost her grip. Her arms were numb, her muscles weak with the exertion, as the last of her strength threatened to fail her.

*No*. She didn't have to let it go. Never since she had begun her study of Force magic in earnest had Hawke lost at arm-wrestling, and she wasn't going to lose now. She drew mana to her again -- it flowed into her endlessly, inexhaustibly, from every thread and wire that surrounded her -- and pulled on the line with all the pressure of the abyss behind it.

It screamed, screamed until her ears went deaf and she could hear nothing but a throbbing, shuddering silence. The flailing limbs tore up the barren, rocky ground as though it were no more than butcher-paper, revealing a jarring emptiness behind. The sky ran down into the demon's convulsing form like water running out of a basin, when the plug was pulled. She kept on going, grim and stubborn, more determined than ever to see it through. Who knew from how small a speck the demon could regrow itself?

The glowing rock, the stinking water, the infected sky... it all followed the demon into nothingness, winding away out the hole she'd made in the world. The demon and the demesne were one, indeed. Destroy one and you would kill the other; indeed, you could not truly kill either except by destroying both.

At last there was nothing -- truly nothing. The thread she pulled through her hand was a blank white cord, empty of meaning. The landscape around her was dark and empty -- formless --

the dim nothingness through which she wandered in dreams. Faint-glowing threads spooled through the darkness around her, but none of them pulsed with the malevolence of the demon's energy, not any more.

Hawke slumped to the empty ground, spent.

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Time passed in a dim gray cloud. In any other place, Hawke would have judged that she passed out -- but in the Fade, was it truly possible to sleep? Either way consciousness faded out for a time, then crept back in like the fog off an incoming tide.

There was not much to see. The hundred little dream-fragments that had made up the Nightmare's realm had vanished with it -- destroyed, or just scattered elsewhere in the Fade, she couldn't say. In their absence, there was nothing -- an empty expanse of uneven rocky ground, a colorless sky with drifting streaks of luminescent green. Hawke gripped her staff and used it to haul herself wearily to her feet. She wasn't sure what came next, but she couldn't stay here. Not unless she planned to lay down and wait for death to take her, and she hadn't defied the Nightmare just to waste her life on that.

She stumbled the first few steps, but gradually her legs steadied under her. Sometime during her blank unconsciousness her wounds had closed, so she was no longer spurting blood with every step, although her arm ached as though it had taken a lightning bolt, and something shifted unnervingly within her torso as she moved.

As she walked, her thoughts began to move at a normal pace again. She had to get out of the Fade. Well, and so -- that shouldn't be too hard, should it? It was leaking like a sieve these days, riddled with cracks and Rifts that the Inquisitor was kept so busy putting out. All she had to do was find one, and get through it.

Hawke began looking out for the tell-tale green spark and flash as she walked, and it wasn't too long before she saw it -- out of sight at first beyond a ridge of black stone, a flash of green lightning accompanied by a familiar crackling sound. She grinned, feeling her lip split and bleed with the force of her exultation. *Yes!*

A few more minutes hiking brought her within range of the rift. It looked just like the others she'd seen, wandering Thedas with Anders in the days after the Conclave explosion but before heading to Skyhold to deal with the problem of the wardens. She circled it warily, trying to figure out the best angle of approach.

Well, it couldn't hurt to try. Hawke stepped forward, reaching her hand out. She didn't have a special green mark like the Inquisitor did, but... maybe it would react to any mage. She called magic to her hand, a tiny flicker of gravitational pull, and the rift responded, one of the



sheets of flame bending towards her and creating a tiny gap. Could it really be that simple...?

It was. She called more magic, pulling harder on the fabric of the Rift; it parted, and she stepped through.

She stepped out into darkness. Her boots scraped on wet grit over stone, and she smelled the dank rot of a cave a moment later. Hawke had been in a thousand caves since leaving Ferelden, it felt like; she knew the surroundings all too well. Glancing back she saw the Rift still hanging in the air in the cave, sputtering softly; she turned her back on it resolutely and began to walk.

This cave seemed familiar. It reminded her of the ones at Sundermount -- could it be...? It made sense, the more she thought about it; the veil at Sundermount had always been dangerously thin, much to her misfortune at one time or another. Made sense that the Rifts would pop open most often where the Veil was already weak. But if this really was Sundermount, then the entrance should be... there. Just ahead. She nearly broke into a run, only the seizing stiffness of her legs restraining her eagerness.

The sky above Sundermount was gray, rumbling with thunder just as it had been so many times before. The clouds sat in heavy ranks above the horizon, lines of gray against gray in endless layers leading on into infinite depths. Hawke took a deep breath, savoring the so-familiar scent of ozone and sea salt, and then turned her gaze down the mountain. The trails and slopes of the mountain rolled out before her like a map, and there at the bottom of them, standing like a toy model on the horizon, was Kirkwall.

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A few hours easy hike -- it was always easier to get down Sundermount than climb back up it -- brought her to the Wounded Coast, and then to Kirkwall. The landward gates -- still painted with the same streaks of corrosion that they always had been before -- opened wide to admit her, and standing there in the entranceway, grinning his familiar easy grin, was Varric.

"Hawke!" he exclaimed, and hurried forward to embrace her. She leaned into it gratefully, feeling the pain and fatigue of her wounds melting away in the familiarity of his presence. "Thank the Maker, it's so good to see you. The Herald and all the rest said you must be dead, but I *knew* they couldn't keep you down."

"You know me too well," Hawke said with a fond smile. Then urgency overtook her relief. "The Nightmare is dead -- are the Wardens free? Safe? What about Corypheus? And the Rifts..."

"It's fine, Hawke. Cadash and the others have got everything under control," Varric assured her as he led her into the familiar mazelike streets. "Just like that spooky Divine spirit

predicted, once the demon was gotten rid of the Wardens were all freed of its influence. They're back at their post with no harm done."

So that was all right, then. Hawke let her shoulders slump with relief. "And Carver?" she asked. "Anders? Have you heard from them? Are they all right?" It had half-killed her, to leave Anders behind; but bringing him into contact with Corypheus was out of the question for a dozen different reasons, and at least she'd been able to leave him safe with Carver.

Belatedly she remembered that there was still some bad blood between Varric and Anders, but he took the question as easily as though the quarrel had never happened. "They're both fine too," he said easily. "Never better. Junior's back at the Hanged Man, just waiting for you. Blondie too."

"Anders is *here*?" Hawke started, surprised. "How? Sebastian and half the population of Kirkwall were out for his blood!"

"Nah, nah, that all got sorted," Varric said with a careless wave of his hand. "Things have settled down a lot in Kirkwall since you left. The old Chantry stones have been torn down, and they're rebuilding them as a public garden. People in Kirkwall remember Anders for the good he did them all along, not the harm he was forced to do at the last. It's all water under the bridge now, nobody's holding grudges."

Hawke frowned. In her experience, Free Marches in general and Kirkwallers in particular *excelled* at keeping grudges. Still -- Varric wouldn't lie to her. Not to her.

She followed him through the streets and indeed, the city looked as healthy as she'd ever seen it. The rocks that made up the walls and streets fit in tight, even patterns, stone seams running along the quarry walls and crisscrossed by the tight, narrow streets. Banners fluttered brightly, doorstops gleamed, all without even their usual cover of grime and trash. The fire scars and fallen rubble that had choked the streets in her last desperate flight from the city had all been repaired, and Lowtowners greeted their Champion with cheerful hails as she passed.

They stopped in front of the Hanged Man. "This time of day, the whole gang should be here," Varric told her, and then flung open the door. "Everyone, look alive!" he shouted as he entered the room. "Hawke's back!"

"*Ina!*" called a familiar voice, and Hawke whipped her head around to search for the source of it. That was Anders' voice, calling her name, but from where...? He sounded faint and faraway; even as she looked about, trying to pinpoint the direction, it faded into echoes bouncing between the stone walls. "*Ina, Inana, inanananaa!*"

"Hawke!" another voice called out from closer to hand, and she saw Varric waving her forward. "In here!"

Hawke stepped into the familiar tavern, and a wave of nostalgia rolled over her from every floorboard and ceiling joist. The wooden beams marched in straight ranks across the ceiling, from flickering firelight off into shadows, cobwebs stretching to interlace them together. It

was all there, the braziers and fireplaces, the benches and tables, the suspicious stains on the floor by the stairs and the dents and chips on the plateware.

A chorus of cheerful voices rose up to greet her, and Hawke rocked back, stunned, at the crowd of familiar faces. Everyone was there -- Aveline and Donnic sitting close together at a table for two. Isabela at the bar, tankard in hand. Fenris and Merrill shared a bench near the fireplace, faces wreathed in welcoming smiles. And there was Anders, every line of his face so heartbreakingly memorized, a sheepish smile on his face as he gave her a deferential little wave.

"Anders!" She went to him immediately, feet carrying her across the distance before her mind thought to move them, and he stood up from his bench to catch her in a fervent embrace.

"Hawke!" he called out joyfully, and nothing else mattered. The rest of the world faded out for a moment and she knew nothing but the kiss: sweet passion, aching worry, and a taste that was unique to -- ozone and elfroot and salt.

"You're all right," she exclaimed, when she finally had to break the kiss, pushing him back a step with her hands on his shoulders so she could look at him.

"Of course I'm all right! You're the one we've all been worried about," he exclaimed, clutching her arms just a little too tight, remembered fear and anguish breaking through his smile. She hugged him again, trying to reassure him with her body, and felt him begin to relax.

"Don't hog her all to yourself, mage," Fenris chided from his bench. "We've all missed her. Come, Hawke, sit and tell us of your travels."

That sounded like a plan to her. "Were you calling me, outside?" Hawke asked, as he led her to the empty space that had been reserved at the table. "Just now."

"No?" Anders said, sounding slightly puzzled.

"But I thought I heard your voice," Hawke said. She frowned, turning to look at him searchingly. "How did you get back to Kirkwall, anyway? I left you with Carver."

"And where else were we supposed to go *but* Kirkwall?" a familiar voice demanded; she looked across the table to see Carver there, her baby brother's face round and shining with health. He made an exaggerated grimace, but she could tell it was just for effect; he was happy to see her, too. "As soon as we stopped hearing the Calling, we came here, knowing that you'd go to Kirkwall first thing and meet us here."

Her brother slid a bowl across the table to her, pale lumps swimming in a savory broth: potato stew, her favorite. It brought back memories of Kirkwall, of Lothering before that, of *home*, her mother's old standby on nights that were too fraught to cook anything more complex.

"Good thinking," Hawke said, though she wasn't entirely sure it was. "Us Hawkes have to stick together."

"Isn't that the truth," Varric chuckled as he plunked a battered tankard of ale down in front of her. It was just like she remembered it -- vile at first, but good after a few seconds, and just a hint of an acrid aftertaste that made you wonder if it had been a good idea. "And here you are, all three back together."

"Three?" Hawke said.

"Of course," Carver said, speaking around a mouthful of food like always. "Didn't think we'd leave Bethany behind, did you?"

"What?"

"And here she is now," Varric said, beaming benevolently at someone over Hawke's left shoulder. "Just in time, Sunshine. Hey Hawke, look who's here. It's Bethany!"

Hawke turned around, and froze.

It *was* Bethany. As she'd been the last day Hawke had seen her, staff strapped to her back, skirt of her robe rucked up around her thighs for running. "Hello, sister," Bethany said, and smiled her sunbeam smile.

Hawke stared.

"What a story!" Varric exclaimed as he served up a plate of food. "Turns out Bethany was alive all along. She survived the encounter with the ogre, but so badly injured that it took her a year to recuperate from her injuries -- and even then she lost her memory. There she was, living a life on a farm in Ferelden until Carver and Blondie happened to run across her while they were laying low, and of course he recognized his own sister. Once she got her memory back, of course she accompanied those two on their return to Kirkwall --"

"Come on, Ina, drink up," Bethany scolded her with a fond smile. "It's your victory celebration, after all!"

"But don't eat too much," Carver added hypocritically, even as he shoved another forkful in his mouth. He swallowed. "Sorry. Warden appetite, you know."

"Of course not, we're going to have dinner with Mother up at the estate right after this, and Orana will be heartbroken if you don't have an appetite," Bethany said, giving her twin's shoulder a playful shove.

"Love?" Anders asked, voice hesitant. His fingers twined around her own, frozen and unmoving in his grip. "Ina, my love? What's wrong?"

"I'm still in the Fade," Hawke said.

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~tbc...

## Chapter End Notes

This fic idea has been rattling around in my head for a while, and I finally got enough of a structure to put it down on paper.

Ina Hawke is not any of my canon worldstate Hawkes; she was created specifically for this story. I hope you like her anyway. I don't do a lot of F!Handers, so this is a bit of new territory for me, but as I worked with the story idea it became more and more clear to me that the main character should be female. I'm drawing indirectly on a number of myths that deal with goddesses -- and it always seems to be goddesses -- who go down into the Land of the Dead and emerge with new powers and knowledge. That's sort of the idea behind Three Nights in the Underworld.

# Midnight

## Chapter Summary

Hawke gets an explanation, which she accepts, and some advice, which she ignores.

## Chapter Notes

Warning for some fairly intense violence in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She shoved back from the bench and loosed off a mind blast, powerful enough to shatter the fake-furniture around her and stun any demons who were within arms reach of her.

The wave of force passed right through the bodies of her family and friends, who stood there blinking innocently at her as though nothing at all were amiss.

"Show yourself, demon!" Hawke yelled, staff in hand as she turned at bay, searching for any flicker of demonic energy. "I know you're out there!"

Silence. No voice answered her. The scene of the Hanged Man's taproom still stood around her, all motion stilled and sound muffled now as though the scene were composed of wax figures. Hawke reached out to shove at Carver's shoulder, but her hand passed right through him.

The walls of the fake Hanged Man had become transparent, revealing only darkness beyond; past the edge of the scene, grey mist and coruscating green light wound around the endless arrays of white threads that stretched off into the distance.

"I killed the Nightmare!" Hawke shouted, pacing around the edges of the scene as she searched for some sign, some flicker that would reveal her tormenter. "Do you think I'm afraid of you, little demon! Come out and face me!"

Still nothing. She cast a wave of force centered on herself, blasting out in all directions, fanning out like the spokes of a wheel. Nothing. *Where was the demon?*

A voice from behind her. A clearing of the throat. "I would not wish too hard to see demons, Champion, lest your wish be granted."

Hawke whirled around, astonishment briefly overtaking rage. "Who... Solas?!"

It *was* him, the elven apostate mage who'd served at the Inquisitor's side. He hadn't come with them in the final assault at Adamant, staying back to fight with the body of troops instead, but she'd seen enough of him at Skyhold to be able to recognize him. What was he *doing* here? It made no sense for a demon to take on his face, as he wasn't familiar enough to Hawke to have any pull over her emotions. Certainly, he was the last person she'd expect to show up in any vision crafted to appeal to her nostalgia. But if he wasn't a vision... "Is this your doing?"

Solas shook his head. He looked solid enough, light and shadow shifting off the folds of his grey and tan leathers as he shifted his stance. "Not mine, Champion," he said. "Yours."

"What?" Hawke said. Impatience began to crowd out surprise, and with it the creeping edge of anger. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for the source of the turbulence in the Dreaming," Solas answered. He glanced around, his keen eyes taking in all the details of the Kirkwall-vision. She got the feeling whatever he saw meant a lot more to him than it did to her. "I did not expect to find you at the center of it -- though I am of course glad to see you survived your encounter with the Nightmare demon," he added offhandedly. "*It* had become an abomination that could not be allowed free reign in the mortal realm nor the Fade."

Hawke scowled. "I mashed it into paste," she declared. "And I'll do the same to the demon that's keeping me here, once I *find them!*"

Solas cleared his throat again. "An admirable martial spirit," he said, "but I fear you are mistaken."

Hawke huffed. This was typical enough of the man as she remembered him, all precise diction and maddening indirectness. "What do you mean?"

"There are no demons here." He shook his head. "The creature creating this illusion is, in fact, *you*."

"*What?*" Hawke looked around, disbelieving. The slopes of Sundermount, the streets of Kirkwall, the Hanged Man, all just how she remembered it... all *exactly* as she remembered it, which surely should not have been possible. "How?"

Solas folded his hands behind him, standing like a lecturer before an audience. "Did you wonder how I came to find you here, Champion?"

Hawke frowned. This had the feel of a trick question. "This is the Fade. I guess I assumed you were asleep."

"You assumed correct." A fleeting smile. "But an ordinary dreamer, even a mage, cannot so easily control where in the Fade they travel, or how. I am one of those who can, in dreams, manipulate the fabric of the Fade itself. I am --"

"-- a *Somniari*!" The memory burst upon her suddenly, of Feynriel, of the distorted Gallows they had visited in his dream. *I can see them now*, the boy had said, as the demon torments fell from his eyes and his vision had cleared. *The threads, the way the Dreaming weaves itself... I can see how to do this. To touch, to shape*. His mother had been elven. Was it, perhaps, some old elven magic?

A flash of annoyance flitted over Solas' face at the Tevene word. "A Tevinter corruption of the concept, but yes," he said. "We Dreamers are a rare breed, with only a few occurring in each century, and most of those not surviving the awakening -- so to speak -- of their power."

"You got that right," Hawke said. "Counting you, I've only ever met two."

Solas nodded. "And now... three."

Hawke's thoughts temporarily ground to a halt. "What?" she said finally.

"You are a Dreamer, Champion." Solas sounded almost amused, damn him -- though there was an edge in his voice that might almost have been wonder. "I do not know how you got this far in your life without ever coming into your power, but it seems that this trial by fire has awoken it inside you. Can you not feel how the Fade responds to you, like clay ready for the shaping? Do you not sense the conduit between your own magic and the deepest wells of the Fade, ready to channel into any casting of your choosing?"

Hawke stared into the green fog, stunned by the depth of the revelation. Very little could frighten her -- less that she'd be willing to admit -- but this left her shaken. She groped for an alternative, some other path that would lead her back from that endless green well. "Every mage can do that, to some extent..." she said, her voice weak. "Everyone says that mages are stronger in the Fade..."

Solas shook his head. "Not to this extent. Trust me, Champion, it is unmistakable to any familiar with the power.

"Look around you and see the threads that bind the warp and weft of the Dreaming -- see how they respond to your call." He stepped forward and raised his hand, and the white threads wound themselves obediently around his hand. He closed it into a fist, glowing with power and potential. "You are a Dreamer, as am I. Your survival this far is all the proof you should need -- no mere mage would have been able to conquer the Nightmare."

"Well..." Hawke balked for a long moment, resisting the enormity of the revelation, before she gave in with poor grace. "Well great, I guess. *Somniari* Hawke. One more title to put on the pile of them." It came out as a scoff. "Now, how do I get *out* of here!?"

"Hm." Solas paused for an unnervingly long moment. "Tricky."



She stared at him in disbelief. "What, all this reality-warping power and I can't just wish myself out of the Fade?"

"Unfortunately, no; a Dreamer's power lies only within the Dreaming itself," Solas said. He raised a hand to his chin, one finger tapping lightly against his lips. His gaze was unfocused, deep with thought.

"I just need a rift, right?" Hawke insisted. "That's how we got in, that's how the others got out. Holes in the Veil are a dime a dozen nowadays. Damn thing's practically as ragged as cheesecloth."

Solas' eyes glinted. "Would that it were that simple," he said. "The Rifts in the Fade admit only spirits, and even that not without a great distortion of personality and purpose. You are here bodily, and would not be able to pass through a Rift without an anchor -- which you do not have."

"Well, how then?" Hawke demanded. Something unpleasantly like panic was beginning to take root in her chest, a feeling like *trapped* and *drowning* and *no way out*. "I need to get home!"

The elf raised a placating hand. "We should proceed with all due caution," he said. "There is a not inconceivable risk that you could bring something unpleasant back from the Fade with you, if we go about this carelessly. Such a thing has happened before... as we all well know. I must research the best, the safest way to bring you back across."

Hawke huffed. "Well, how long is this going to take?" she demanded. "I've got no intention of starving here!"

Solas fell silent for a moment. When he spoke again, it sounded like he was choosing his words very carefully. "You need not fear that," he said. "As a Dreamer, of course, your mind can create anything you wish it to -- any food or drink that you imagine, will simply appear. You need never be hungry or thirsty in the Fade."

Well, that was convenient. Hawke had been ignoring her deprivation with the practice of a long campaigner, but she also knew that the longer she went without eating, the weaker she'd become. "Fine," she said. "And then what? What should I do? Where should I go?"

"Stay *put*, Champion. There are worse things in the Fade than demons," Solas stressed to her. "I will seek the best way to solve this riddle, and return to you. In the meantime --" he flicked a hand to take in the half-dissolved scene of Kirkwall -- "you might as well practice."

He strode off into the green fog, the Fade curving around him as he went.

---

Hawke rankled at being told what to do, at being ordered to stay like a dog or a child sent to their room. And yet, once Solas was gone, there was not much point to stubbornly refusing to obey him. His last words at least struck a chord in Hawke: power you could not control was as much your enemy as any foe, human or demon. That was something all mages learned early -- at least, the ones that survived to tell about it. She set about testing the boundaries of her new skill.

There was no faster way to empty out your mind, Hawke thought several frustrating hours later, than to tell it 'anything.' *Anything*, Solas had said, and what the Blight was she supposed to do about that? The harder she wracked her mind for ideas of things to conjure, the more she came up blank.

She'd created a chair to start with. Then a table, and some food and drink, because she was thirsty and hungry and couldn't afford to get any weaker. It wasn't *quite* as simple as just thinking a thing; she had to move the shimmering, half-visible threads of Fade, and they would slide along their axis until whatever she was concentrating on took form. Sometimes she had to walk quite a ways to make the change happen, and it was frustrating trying to collect the fragments all in one place. At length, she'd gotten everything together in one place, and had herself a nice lunch. Dinner. Breakfast?

Then she'd sat and tried to figure out what else to do.

For lack of inspiration, she'd tried a few more household objects. Lamp, desk, bed. Then creatures: dog, cat, bird. They fluttered or pranced around in a simple loop of motion, but she could tell there was no life to them.

Creating whole places took more effort, preoccupied her for longer. If she concentrated hard enough, pushing with her hands as she walked, she could 'paint' the scenery into becoming whatever scene filled her mind. She spent longer mastering this, creating one familiar location after another: Skyhold. The Wounded Coast. The Hanged Man. The camp outside Gwaren where Carver and Anders waited...

She broke it off before the man himself could fully form, crouched by the edge of the fire and reaching to take off a kettle. He stayed motionless, as empty as the animals had been, no breath or life or spark or *soul* to him. She didn't want half-real imitations, Maker take it all. She wanted her lover back, Anders, the real thing. And she wasn't getting any closer to him sitting here, playing with doodles.

Solas had said to stay here. *Stay*, he'd said, while he researched her problem and gathered help. The sensible thing to do would be to stay put, so that rescue could find her all the sooner.

She stared at the vague shape by the fire, blond hair over a suggestion of feathers, until her eyes burned.

Well, so what? Solas was the Inquisitor's trusted companion, but not hers. How much could she really trust him to care about her welfare, and not the Inquisition's? Who knew what their priorities really were? Hawke didn't think she'd made an enemy of the dwarven woman, didn't think the Herald had any reason to want her dead... but she'd also been in the position

before of having a dozen different people clamoring on you for help, for your time and effort and blood, and she knew how smaller, less important-seeming things could fall by the wayside. How long would it be before the Inquisitor got back around to her? Days, weeks, a month?

Hawke had no intention of being anyone's side-project.

If the Inquisitor could get her out, then that meant getting out was possible. And that meant that she could do it herself, not needing anyone's rescue but her own. Dangers in the Fade? She'd killed a blighted -- *literally* -- Nightmare demon. What else in the Fade could possibly be suicidal enough to pick a fight with *her*?

She left the forest encampment half-formed behind her and strode off into the fog.

---

It felt better to be moving. Better to be taking control of her own direction, moving her limbs and body under her own power. It was easier to shape the Fade as she moved, too, so she could practice *and* get closer to escaping at the same time.

Assuming she was getting closer to escape, not further away with every step.

It was so hard to *tell*, blight it... tell anything. Direction, distance, time of day. The scenery of the Fade was always confusing, disorienting, but her new powers -- what Solas claimed were her powers -- showed her a deeper double layer behind it all that made her head swim. Black ground, floating rocks, misty green clouds overhead... but behind it were the threads that ran through everything, stitched and layered over themselves a hundred times. If she looked closely at any given patch of them they looked like the crisscrossing beams of a shadowed warehouse, or a tight grid of city streets seen from above, or the angled branches of a forest of pines, each limb branching further into twigs and needles in endless iteration.

She could see it. She could touch it, if she wanted. She could direct it, control it. But she couldn't make her show her which way to go.

The problem was that the Fade was *too* obliging. She gave up searching for Rifts after the first hour. If she looked for them, she found them all right -- half a dozen of them scattered over the barren plain. But just like the first one they were only illusions, the Fade shaping itself to her expectations and not true portals. They didn't *go* anywhere.

How could she find what she needed, when the Fade twisted to show her what she *wanted*? She cursed, striking the ground with the butt of her staff. Black sand puffed up in a glittering spray of particles, each one a rainbow glinting visions of a world of its own.

*Ina, Ina,* the wind seemed to carry the voice to her. *Where are you, love? Where are you?*

"Anders?" Hawke said aloud, and looked around. She stood still, listening intently, but the faint voice did not repeat itself. Damn it, she knew what she had heard! "Anders!"

The threads nearest to her hand began to twist, shimmering, until they took on the form of a man -- blond hair, ragged feathers at his shoulders... Hawke strode forward, cursing redoubled, and swiped the apparition out of her path with her staff. "*Blight* this place!"

She came to a stop and stood there, chest heaving as she caught her breath. The Fade didn't change so much when she stood still, and she tried to collect herself.

From here, the Fade all looked the same. But that couldn't be. *Couldn't* be. There had to be edges of it somewhere, natural shifts and eddies in the fabric of the world that ran into exits. Just like a mountain stream would run to a river, and the river ran eventually to the sea; once you'd found the stream it was only a matter of time.

She just had to find the place where the Fade looked *different*, and head towards it. And when she reached her destination, she'd find --

Well, she'd find something different, at least.

---

She spent a long time walking through the darkness. How long, she wasn't sure. Every now and again she thought she heard the echo of a familiar voice -- calling, sobbing -- but every time she turned towards it, it was gone again.

Travel through the Fade was at once easier and harder than in the real world. The visual chaos that came from looking at the warp and weft of the Fade made her eyes hurt to look at for too long, made her head swim and her stomach churn unpleasantly. And yet she also had greater control over her own path than she could possibly find in the real world. She forged the road ahead of her everywhere she went with only the force of her will. When she came to the gaps in between different fragments of the fade, it was an effortless task to construct stairways and bridges and stepping stones to lead to the next island.

Straining her eyes and her attention, Hawke searched endlessly for some hint of *variation* in the chaotic landscape of the Fade. For an edge, a boundary, *something*. When she finally caught one out of the corner of her eye, she plowed a furrow in the shifting dunes of the landscape towards it.

For the first time, she faced resistance. The Fade... didn't *want* to go over to whatever that was. It fought her every step, trying to turn away in every other direction. But after hours of fruitless slogging, Hawke *welcomed* resistance. She'd always faced resistance and she'd always faced it down; it seemed no less than a sign from on high that she was going the right direction.

The different... *something* loomed up before her, black stone mass limned in red light, even as the green tendrils of Fade writhed and recoiled from its touch. She'd seen any number of spirits -- or demons -- on her way here, weaving through the interstices of the fade like spiders on a web, yet there were none around her now. Did that mean she was approaching a border?

In the end Hawke could force her Fade-built bridge no further. Determined to continue no matter the obstacle, she built it up as far as it would go and shifted the grip on the staff in her hand. Backing up, she centered herself, let out a long, deep breath --

-- ran full tilt towards the cringing edge of her bridge, planting the staff at the very lip, and threw herself across the gap.

She hit the ground on the other side and fell. It didn't yield to her like the rest of the Fade did. She rolled, instinct of long practice taking over her movements, and came to her feet with the staff still in her hand. Clawing wild black curls out of her face Hawke looked up and around, every sense wide-open and alert, attentive to every danger.

This place was... strange. Even for the Fade. Hawke frowned, grounded the butt of her staff in the black sand underfoot. The shifting kaleidoscopic chaos of potential that filled the sky and ground in the rest of the fade was missing, here. The ground stretched away in every direction, barren and black. Here and there a few stumps sported withered trees, so blackened and bowed along the ground as to hardly be distinguishable from the ground itself.

It looked... like a gulley down in the Wounded Coast after a fire had run through it, dirt and trees and weeds and luckless animals all flash-seared into a single layer of lumpy charcoal. Nothing moved, nothing drifted, nothing shifted in the air. And everything glowed with that subtle, eerie red light.

What could light a fire in the Fade?

"Hey!" Hawke shouted, her voice echoing around the empty land. "Anyone here? Spirits, demons, anyone?"

She felt a little foolish, the more so as she waited three heartbeats, four, and nothing happened. Her pulse thumped through her palm against the staff in her hand and she turned around, boots scraping through black gravel, searching the horizon for some hint of movement.

*"Who speaks?"*

The voice seemed to come out of the stones -- not like the Nightmare's had, the voice that was sky and earth all at once, but more like someone was speaking from a point below the ground. Hawke whirled back, staff held crosswise in her grasp. "Show yourself, demon!" she shouted.

*"Demon?"* Now the mystery voice sounded incredulous - outraged, even. *"I, a demon? Insolent peasant. Dost thou not know upon whose soil thy unworthy feet tread?"*

A little further away from Hawke, the black grit began to shiver and shift. A mound began to rise up from the lumpy terrain, sand spilling rapidly to each side as it rose. Hawke backed up a step as it heaved itself upwards, breath quickening as she brought the staff to a defensive position. She defeated the Nightmare, she reminded herself. She defeated Fear itself. What other demon of the Fade could threaten her?

The mound heaved upwards, the ground melting away from either side of it as the shape revealed itself. Not a spider this time, not any demon the likes of which she'd ever seen -- instead it was almost a dais on which sat a grand, ponderous throne. And seated on the throne --

It was a man. It couldn't be anything else. It had two legs, two arms, a body, a head all where they should be. The head was topped by a vast, impossible crown, a tangle of gleaming gold and jagged crystals fused together into a disarrayed kludge of wealth. Under the crown sat two eyes on an even keel, a nose, a mouth, a chin, a neck with none of the demonic accessories Hawke had grown inured to seeing.

It couldn't be anything but a man -- but it *wasn't* a man, on some fundamental, visceral level. It was *too* perfect -- skin smoother than marble and yet horribly animated, each shift and movement rippling over the muscle and bone like putty. Without pores, without hairs, without even the slightest imperfection, it was some sculptors' dream of an idealized statue brought terribly to life.

It shifted its weight and stood, pushing up from the throne as it went, and everything about it was perfectly human and yet *wrong*, the chest and shoulders just a bit too wide, each muscle standing out in perfectly impossible definition against the frame. The muscles didn't *move* when it moved, sliding in rigid order like metal plates with every change of pose.

"*Why have you come here?*" the thing demanded, and perfectly white teeth flashed at her as it turned its head, neither lips nor jaw moving in time with its words. The head turned in her direction but bright blue eyes stared straight ahead, fixed in their sockets instead of shifting to track her. "*Mortal, do you know by whose august presence you are graced? You stand now in the hall of Hyphandius, Somnia Rex Aeternal, the Immortal King of Dreams!*"

Hawke kept a wary distance, holding her staff out before her. "What are you?" she asked, moving slowly sideways to try to examine it from all angles. "Are you some kind of demon?" She hadn't seen any demons or spirits on the approach to this place... maybe the presence of a stronger demon had kept them away.

"*Insolent pig,*" the figure spat. "*No demon am I, Hyphandius, but the pinnacle of human perfection.*" It rose to its feet in a smooth, mechanical motion, and flowed into a pose. "*Perfection of body, perfection of mind. Of purest blood, of highest education, of grandest achievement and purpose. Behold the perfect man!*"

*Perfect?* Hawke looked him up and down, incredulous. The overall effect was more nightmarish than attractive, but all right, she could sort of see how someone could aim for 'perfect' and land on this. It was more like a stylized painter's creation, or a sculptor who couldn't be bothered by the finer details, but... Maybe it really was a human, or had been,

once. Something that had undergone a kind of reverse decay, obsessively reshaping its body according to some abstract ideal without realizing the effects it was having.

Whatever he had done to himself, it wasn't her problem. What mattered was that he was from the mortal world, which meant he must know a way to get back. "Okay, but if you're human, what are you doing in the Fade? Did you come through one of the holes caused by the Breach?" Somehow, she doubted that. The method of speech, the dress... all of it seemed too ancient to have arrived within the past year.

The statue-thing struck a pose, one hand laid on its chest as the other reached up into the sky, as though reaching for some unseen sun. The eyes gazed off into an unfathomable distance as the mouth recited: "In the dawning of our great empire, at the grand coliseum of Marnas Pell, the scholars of the Progenium set about realizing their vast ambition. A project so grand it had never before been dared, to map and chart the vagaries of the Fade itself. I, Hyphandius, was chosen among all men to lead as Surveyor."

It looked more than ever like a statue, an icon of a man more than a man itself, and she found herself wondering how much time he had spent practicing these poses. "Three thousand casks of lyrium, a battle fleet's of gold, a thousand men for ten years - no cost was too great," it boasted. "The shifting fields of the Fade proved treacherous, but the cunning of Man proved greater; the blood of ten thousand slaves we spent, to fix the ground of the Fade to twist and evade us no more."

"Blood!" Hawke took a step back, startled despite herself, and took a quick glance around. "This place was made with blood?!"

The last piece fell into place and she could see it now, the burned and withered materia of the Fade itself corrupted by the touch of mortal blood. When she'd fought her way through the demon's lair with the Inquisitor's party she'd seen similar spatters as they shed their own blood against the fearlings: liquid drops that smoked where they landed and then turned an ugly red-black color. But there'd been no time then to speculate as to what the cause could be, and certainly no concern to spare at what harm they might be doing to the den of Nightmare.

Blood magic, she remembered, distanced mages from the Fade because it rooted them to the real world. Templar abilities didn't work to stop blood spells because, on some twisted level, they were already accomplishing the same thing: reinforcing the density of reality, pushing away the Fade. To bring such a heavy piece of the material world *into* the Fade itself was a corruption, a degradation of the very essence of the dream-world itself.

But to transform so *much* of the Fade -- acres and acres... She tried to figure out how much blood that would have been, in buckets and gallons and people, and her mind ground upon the rocks of the awful figure that answered.

"Their capabilities soon proved insufficient to their ambition," the Surveyor said. His voice accomplished the disdain his flat expression did not show. "When at last the lyrium ran dry the project collapsed, and the quisling fools abandoned the beachhead they had managed to create. But I, Hyphandius, was not one of those cowardly fools. I, Hyphandius, alone of all the progenium saw the potential that a superior man could achieve: dominion and godhood, the fulfillment of destiny! I, Hyphandius --"

"Yeah yeah I get it," Hawke said, unable to keep from rolling her eyes with impatience. "You Hyphandius, I Hawke." She had little doubt that he could stand here and preach about his own perfection and superiority for another ten years, but there was only one thing that she wanted to know from him. "How do I get *out* of the Fade?"

"Brazen dog!" His pontificating expanded quickly into temper. "You seek to make demands? What standing have you? You stand now at the feet of the Emperor of Dreams! Bow and cower, and plead by the mercy of Andoral that I, Hyphandius, do not punish --"

Hawke interrupted him. "You can't, can you?"

The creature -- the Surveyor -- drew itself up to its full height, seeming to swell upwards with outrage at being interrupted. "WHAT?" he roared.

"You're stuck here," Hawke said disgustedly. She gestured around to the empty barren landscape, the close and closed horizon. "You didn't mean to stay behind when the rest of the magisters pulled out of this project. All that rot about destiny and supremacy and godhood is just lies you tell yourself to feel better about being trapped on this burnt-out piece of rock that doesn't even have proper magic --"

She'd been watching him, his stiff jerky movements and the increasingly agitated swivel of the head -- his body language couldn't be called *human* any more, but it was comprehensible in its own way. Even as she spoke she kept an eye on those clenching, unclenching fists, so she was ready when he charged at her, an enraged roar escaping his throat.

She'd been ready, but holy Andraste he was *fast*; even standing poised on a hair she barely managed to dodge out of the way of the first charge. She spun on her toes and turned to face him, rolling the staff over her shoulder from left to right and back into her right hand again. She clenched her hands around it and channeled her mana through it, and a gout of flame burst from the tip to envelop the Surveyor in a cone of fire.

To her shock, the spell sputtered out almost as soon as she'd cast it; the flames washed over his back and shoulders, but splashed off the shiny skin as though repelled by a barrier. *Was* there a barrier? She hadn't sensed one, but -- he was a mage too, of course, had to be in order to be here at all. She fell back a few steps and readied a counterspell, the anti-magic tingling faintly in her palm as she waited for just the right moment to interrupt his casting.

But he didn't cast. He came at her again in a bull rush, head lowered with those staring blue eyes and those meaty, ham-heavy fists swinging. She dodged the second blow as well but then he was on her, up close and personal in melee range and with no more opportunity to fall back and cast again. She ducked and weaved, and then found herself off-balance and wrong-footed as the fist swung around again. No footing to dodge this one; instead she got her arm up in the proper blocking position, and braced her forearm to soak the blow.

A moment later the sky and ground pinwheeled around her; stunned, she felt the dim sensation of flying through the air followed by a crushing impact against stone. Her armor scraped and clattered as she slid down a few feet to a messy heap on the ground, and barely roused herself to roll and climb shakily to her feet. Her shoulder and ribs were on fire, and her left arm was numb. What the *fuck*...?



The Surveyor was on the other side of the clearing, striding towards her with a cold implacability. The world began to turn right side up again as she realized what had happened: he'd punched right through her block, crumbling her defenses like paper, and sent her flying thirty feet on top of it. How the *blight* had he packed that much force into a single-handed blow? Not even the Arishok had knocked her around that casually, and he'd been twice her height and three times her mass!

"As pathetic as could be expected from a peasant and a woman," the Surveyor said, contempt thick in his voice. "You will be reminded of your place."

Despite her shaken nerves, the taste of blood on her teeth and the dangerous numbness of her arm, she laughed. "Better men than you have tried, doll," she said with a sneer.

Another furious cry and he waded in, swinging his fists like clubs. This time she retreated before his advance, unwilling to get trapped in melee range again. She put all her speed to use, concentrating on staying at range while managing to fire off a spell here and there at her pursuer. It reminded her inescapably of her duel with the Arishok -- but this time, she didn't have Anders standing in the wings, there to interpose his healing magic between her and a mortal wound.

To her dismay, all of her spells seemed as weak and ineffective as the first one. He'd done *something* to his skin, in that unnatural patina, that allowed him to shrug off waves of force and crushing grips that had staggered the Nightmare. Even her fists of stone broke and crumbled on his glistening shoulder as though formed of a child's clay. Something about her magic wasn't working in this place, her mana weak and faltering --no, it wasn't her mana, it felt like the magic just wasn't all *there*. Like the entire place was muffled under the grip of a Templar's silence.

Fine. She could work with that. She'd never let herself be fully reliant on spellcasting as a means of defense, not when she'd grown up knowing she might have to defend herself against fully armored Templars with no access to magic at all. He might be strong, but he was unarmed and unarmored, and she was faster. She could *work* with that.

She changed her footing, going from a steady retreat to a staggered, alternating pattern of steps that wove back and forth. As she'd hoped he hesitated, seeming not to know what to make of her movements. His arms dropped slightly in his confusion and *there*, Hawke saw the opening and took it --

In a moment she reversed the tables and charged in, the tip of her staff leading the way like a lance. He didn't stay stupefied for long, turning to try to meet her head on. She kept going, using her momentum and keeping her aim focused on the very outer edge of his space -- aiming high, and inwards, and *there*.

Her weapon made contact, caught, dug in, and then ripped free. The Surveyor howled in pain -- she'd heard a lot of demon's howls over the past few years, including the Nightmare, but this one might be the worst, if only for how simply human it was.

She kept going, but had lost enough speed that he was able to catch a glancing blow against her breastplate as he turned, and even that light contact was enough to send her skidding back

on her heels, ribs screaming and tasting blood and bile at the back of her throat from it.

He stood rigid, his hands wavering with disbelief; Hawke bared her teeth in a bloody smile, breath heaving. Slowly he raised his hand to his face, feeling disbelievingly at the edge of the bloody ruin where his eye had been. Blood oozed from the wound, far more slowly than it ought, but he *did* bleed. Despite the beating she'd taken, Hawke felt a thrill of hope; fast and strong as he was, she *could* hurt him. He *could* be beaten.

Then he lowered his hand, blood staining the tips of his fingers, and leveled a fulminating glare at her. "If a peon has destroyed the eye of a superior man," he said with a snarl, "then let his own eye be put out."

A sudden burning pain attacked Hawke's face; a scream escaped her lips as her hands flew up to claw at it. Her clutching hands felt nothing, no weapon or acid or attacking creature, only a sudden heat that burned against her fingers as the vision in her left eye went to turbulence, then blackness, then nothing at all. The scream escalated to a shriek; blood poured through her fingers as her skin broke open, and the shape under her hands was suddenly gaping and empty.

The Surveyor laughed. She looked up at him, her vision blurred and -- and suddenly struck down, clamped to half its range and breadth, but she could see *him* well enough, saw the way the wound she'd made on his face sealed up and disappeared. The blue eye *regrew* even as she watched, the mangled flesh slowly reforming into its mimicry of perfection, and the thing *smiled* as it walked towards her slowly, implacably. "So shall it be," he intoned.

She scrambled backwards on all fours, arms and legs shaking -- cold and trembling with the shock of the wound but no less from *fear*. How? There was no magic that could do that! *How* was she supposed to fight him, to kill him, when he could steal back any wounds she left on him and inflict them on *her* instead?

She couldn't, she realized, and her heart dropped cold in her chest. She couldn't win this fight.

New determination filled her and Hawke got to her feet again, legs shaking only a little underneath her. She circled him warily, keeping a close eye on his movements. "Is that all you've got?" she sneered. "I've known guttersnipes down under the Docks that put up a better fight. So much for the superior man --"

He charged again. Predictable. If she wasn't so terrified, she'd have laughed at him. Instead she waited with her knuckles clenched white on her weapon as he drew nearer -- then, once he was committed, she lunged low and sideways and thrust the staff between his knees. There was a snapping noise as he fouled, the wooden material cracking under the pressure, but he went down, howling curses in Tevene as he did so.

She took off running, away from the barren plain with its deadly throne and back to the lumpy twisted ridges of rocks that made up the boundary. The splintered end of her staff was still clutched in her hand -- useless for casting, but maybe she could use it as a piton or something. Panting, ribs throbbing in protest, she skidded to a stop at the lip of the black rock and let out a cry of frustration.

There was a gap. She could see the rest of the Fade beyond the border, glowing the familiar soft green instead of the malevolent, lurid red. She could see it, suffusing ground and air, but she could not *reach* it. A chasm separated them, a cleft of empty nothingness.

She began trying to shape the ground into a rising path, to summon a bridge out of the air, as she had earlier in her travels. But something was wrong -- it wasn't *working* here. The threads she'd seen and shaped all throughout the Fade ever since fighting the Nightmare were absent -- withered and blackened and dead among the other cluttered detritus on the ground. A scraping sound on the stone behind her warned her that her window was rapidly closing. *Come on, damn you!* She redoubled her efforts, but even channeling the full force of her mana into the desperate prayer barely managed to rattle a few pebbles by the edge of the cliff.

Then there was no more time and she whirled around to find him nearly on her, blank impassive face atop an enraged, gaping mouth, fist raised over his head to descend on her in an arc. She ducked and twisted sideways and the blow barely clipped her on the shoulder, sending her stumbling dizzily back. Her stance jolted as her heel landed on empty air, and she scrambled forward for solid ground.

The Surveyor caught her mid-step, one hand gaining a solid grip on the straps crisscrossing her chest. He lifted her off the ground with impossible ease, hoisting her over his head, and his open right hand punched upwards into her stomach.

A noise left Hawke's mouth that was not quite a scream, not quite a gurgle. For a moment she flashed back horrible, inescapably to the fateful fight with the Arishok, the burning-horrible-*wrongness* of that foreign metal body lodged *inside* of her stomach. Her hands scrabbled at his wrist and her legs kicked, finding no purchase.

The Surveyor laughed. His hand closed and twisted, and Hawke did scream this time, a hoarse breathy scream as he slowly dragged his fist back. His wrist was streaked with her blood, dark red scraps trailing from the closed fingers but also *something* else, something that writhed and twisted frantically within his grip like a living thing. A thread of light, which pulsed a bright and familiar blue -- *Anders'* blue?

"A token from your lover?" the Surveyor said, voice cruel and mocking. "A powerful mage and one who holds you in high regard indeed, to have invested part of his spirit in you! I, Hyphandius, find this a worthy tribute indeed."

He dropped her, and she barely felt the impact on the ground around the agony in her stomach. The old wound had ripped open again, just like it had on that very day -- the day Anders had revealed himself as a mage in front of most of Hightown's nobles and the Knight-Commander to save her life. *The day they both did.*

The Surveyor lifted his gore-streaked fist to his face, and with no visible change of expression on his face, began to *eat* it. Hawke shuddered in horror, her flesh jerking with little shocky waves, and rolled over onto her front. She found her elbows beneath her and against all expectations -- acting purely on survival instinct -- she crawled.

Hawke found herself in a little gully of sorts, and dragged herself down it on her belly. Hot blood dripped down her stomach, and she knew she must be leaving a trail as clear as a slug - but that couldn't be helped. She just had to hope it would be invisible against the rest of the blood in this place. All she could do right now was stay low, and hope that the rugged terrain kept her out of sight.

She had to get off this rock.

It wasn't a matter any more of finding a safe path, or the best place to jump from. She had to get *out* of here, get far enough away that he would no longer pursue her, however desperate the route. She raised her head and took a shaky, blurred survey of the ground around her. Her ears still worked at least, and she could hear the Surveyor stomping around the arena, ranting endlessly to himself while he searched for her. Somewhere in the last ditch she'd gotten turned around -- which way was out?

Water ran downhill. Rivers ran to the sea. She could only hope that applied here as well. She picked the direction that seemed to be *down*, hoped it was also *out*, and kept on crawling. She still had the broken-off stub of her staff in her hand, and it hindered her movements, but she couldn't make her fingers unclench enough to let it go.

The missing eye hurt, a sort of gray fuzzy ache. The broken arm hurt, a twinging agony. The stomach wound hurt in a frightening, rushing sort of way. She hurt, hurt so much. Andraste help her, she wished Anders were here! And at the same time, she was fervently, desperately glad he was *not*. The way the Surveyor had gloated over Anders' magic -- the way he had *consumed* it so casually, as though this were an everyday occurrence. If Anders were here now -- if Justice were here, within his reach...

She thought she understood, now, why the spirits and demons avoided this place as though it were Blighted. The only question was -- was his gruesome hunger limited to spirits only, or could he do the same to human souls as well?

There! Her heart leapt and stuttered; rocks rolled away from her as she dragged herself forward, then disappeared across a line. The edge, she'd reached the edge. And now -- and now...

Now, she had to admit, she didn't have a plan past this part.

"Wretched worm!" An unwelcome voice boomed from behind her and Hawke started, flung herself to the side -- too late.

Pain flared up along the side of her head, and she yelped as her neck bent painfully backwards. He'd come up on her blind side and seized her by the hair, dragging her back away from the edge. "None may escape from the gaze of Hyphandius, King of Dreams!" he proclaimed. "Didst thou think thou could depart from this place without my leave?"

"Let go of me, you freak!" Hawke shouted, and for a blurred, fraught moment the two of them struggled. She tried briefly to tip him over the edge, but his feet were planted on the tainted ground like pillars, and her own legs kicked and scraped along the ledge with no

purchase. Had to get *away*. She stomped on his foot with all her might, and felt a slight crunch as something *gave*, but the pain that flared up in her own heel bent her over double.

He laughed, chillingly. "Have you learned nothing?" he demanded, twisting her arm to drag her higher. "Fool! Even if you could injure me, I will simply take what I am owed from your body in return!"

She looked up at him, his inhumanly perfect face silhouetted against the blackness above. The perfect figure of Man, distilled into a perfectly iconic body.

"Try taking *this*," she snarled, and jammed the splintered end of the staff up between his legs with all her might. There was a *crunch*. "Prick!"

His mouth opened. The expression remained unchanged, but the noise that escaped his mouth then was an anguished howl. He stepped backwards, then staggered, body folding over neatly at the middle. He lost his grip on her hair, more anguished noises escaping him, and Hawke didn't wait around any longer. She backed up to the edge of the cliff until her back was against free air, and rolled off.

Falling.

There was hardly room in her mind for fear, past the pain. Was there a bottom to this pit? She wasn't even sure. There was only the fall.

Bleeding. She was bleeding, badly, and drops of her blood spun off into the void around her and turned to blacker, dead patches. She felt a little sorry about it, watching them fall, but she couldn't help that now.

The world around her went a darker grey, for a time. Green tendrils of ether began to collect around her again, their touch a comforting whisper after the diseased barrenness of the dead Fade. White cords appeared in her vision, flickering in and out so quickly she couldn't catch hold of them.

This couldn't last forever. Sooner or later she'd hit the ground, a branch, something. She had to...

Through the fog she reached out to the glowing strands, tangled them in her hands as she fell. Anything she could imagine. Anything.

Anything...

The rush of air past her face stirred a memory, a distant recollection of terror and exhilaration, the rush of giddiness knowing that she had, *they* had survived the impossible. In her daze she twisted the cords around her fingers, dreaming, remembering.

There was a jolt, a jarring impact, and the stomach-dropping sensation of falling eased. Her cheek rested against something stiff, something that dug into the skin of her cheek when she moved her head. Some kind of platform, rough and warm below her fingers... and moving to a rhythm like a blacksmith's bellows.

Hawke opened her eyes.

The grey and green sky of the Fade spread out around her, dark ground far below or drifting off to either side. The rough surface below her hands were scales, the dark purple color of a pomegranate. She was flying through the sky of the Fade on the back and wings of a dragon.

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~tbc...

## Chapter End Notes

The story of how the Surveyor came to be was developed from an offhand passage in a codex about how Tevinter once tried to 'map' the Fade using the blood of thousands of slaves. I liked the idea and thought it was a shame that we never learned anything more from that.

I realized after I wrote it that the Surveyor ripping 'a soul' out of a female Hawke's stomach could have a different, more disturbing implication (but I liked the choreography too much to change it.) Just to clarify: Hawke was *\*not\** pregnant, she was not carrying Anders' baby. That sequence was meant to echo the Arishok's grab-n-stab move during the Act II duel, nothing more. Anders poured so much of his magic into trying to heal her that it left behind an impression of his love for her. That was what the Surveyor consumed.

# Dawn

## Chapter Summary

Hawke finds home again, then thinks better of it. More advice, which this time she takes seriously.

She landed in the ruins of a broken-down tower surrounded by a sea of mist. Her creation was not, strictly speaking, a dragon -- where the head should be was only a faint uncertain suggestion of horns, and the body and legs where they should have extended under the back faded off into shadows. Only the back and wings, tail and neck were fully and solidly formed, and once she landed, the entire construct dissolved with a seeming sigh into fluttering ashes.

Green moss and grass grew up between the fallen grey stones of the tower, and she had to pick her way among them -- holding one hand across her stomach the whole time -- before she reached a level patch of floor. It was a good likeness of a tower, though here and there bits of its unreal origin still betrayed themselves: the stairs circling up the inside of the tower floated with no visible support, and the sky glimpsed out the fallen-in roof was the familiar vivid green.

Whatever it had been once, it was no place she recognized; it didn't come from her memories. Some other spirit or dreamer must have made it, though there was no sign of any inhabitants now. The spirits of the Fade were still keeping their distance from her, it seemed, and right now she could only be grateful. She didn't think she could have beaten a single fearling in her current state.

Once inside she was able to lean against the solid-feeling stone and catch her breath, summon water that she consumed in shaky gulps, and examine her wounds. Sometime during the hazy flight the most dangerous bleeding had stopped: she could move her left arm again, though it remained numb, and blood no longer gushed from the gaping wound in her abdomen. It hadn't had the good grace to heal itself, though; the edges of the wound flapped open as she moved, revealing an unpleasant dark red cavern beyond.

It took some time to figure out how to treat it. Channeling healing magic on the wound had no visible effect. Summoning water to clean the wound didn't seem to do much apart from make her head swim from nausea and her jaw ache from clenching her teeth in agony. She could create needles and thread, if she wanted, but she quickly realized she had no idea how suturing was actually accomplished. She could sew cloth, but it quickly became apparent that sewing wounds was something entirely different. Anders would have known...

In the end, the best thing she could think of to do was to bandage it tightly enough to hold all the pieces in place. Nothing about the wound was natural, nothing about her current situation was natural, but she hadn't fallen over dead yet; the important thing was to keep moving, to be mobile enough to get where she needed to go. With luck, medical attention would be waiting for her there.

The sound of a step from outside the tower jerked her into high alert status, and she scrambled to her feet while she scrabbled in her boot for the small dagger she'd always carried as a back-up to her staff.

Her heart leapt into double-time as the booted footsteps drew closer, because she *knew* the sound of that footstep, would know it in the dark. But Anders couldn't be here, *couldn't* be here; so either she had inadvertently created him once again in her longing daydreams, or some demon had finally dared to take on a familiar disguise and venture close...

If it was another aspiration, well, there would be no problem. But if it was a demon, sensing her weakness and coming in for a bite -- her hand tightened on the dagger's hilt -- then they'd find she wasn't so weak as all that.

She came around the tower wall, the dagger in her left hand as she prepared to cast with her right. But the figure standing on the stone path outside, familiar boots not quite making contact with the fog-slick stones, was not Anders -- quite.

He had the height, the familiar tail of hair, the reddish stubble that could never quite grow into a beard. But his features were set in a stern frown that Anders himself never wore, his eyes were pools of blue fire, and he wore the armor and shield of a warrior.

Hawke fell back a step. "*Justice?!"* she demanded, incredulous. It couldn't be some construction of hers; she never would have wished to see him here. It *could* be another spirit or demon, taking Justice's form, and yet... if a spirit, why not *this* spirit?

Justice inclined his head in agreement. "Yes," he said, and the voice was just as she remembered it from their last meeting in the Fade. The intonation harsh and deep, a bass rumble that she sometimes heard underlying Anders' voice when he was at his most passionate. Anders was sometimes Justice, but this -- this was not Anders.

She shook her head, not so much in denial as in disbelief. "How are you here?" she said.

"Anders sleeps, so I am returned to my home for a little time," Justice answered. He looked around the ruined tower, the old stains of decay that ran between the cracks in the broken walls. "I have been searching for you."

"Anders!" Urgency pushed Hawke to step forward again, grabbing Justice's shoulder. It felt solid enough under her hand, though the vambrace felt flimsy and fragile -- more like stiff cloth than true plate armor. "Is he well? Is he *safe*?"

"He is as safe as we ever are in this world -- still at liberty, still with the strength to defend himself," Justice answered. He did not seem bothered by Hawke's manhandling. "But I would



not say he is well. He learned of your fate at Adamant some weeks ago, and since then he has been tormented by grief."

The answer struck a deep pain in Hawke's chest, although there was a part of her -- only a small, smothered part -- that was relieved to hear that he still thought of her. Then she did a double take. "Wait -- *weeks?!?*" she exclaimed.

Justice nodded. "It has been over two weeks since we received the news from Varric."

"But I've only been in here two days!" Hawke suddenly felt filled with doubt. "I think..."

"Time in the Fade does not pass the same way as in the mortal world," Justice said, his hollow voice echoing around the ruined tower. "And that is why I have little time to speak with you. Anders gets little enough sleep as it is, caught between insomnia and nightmares. Under my guidance he has traveled to the Blackmarsh, to the place where the Veil is thin, that I might more easily enter the Fade in search of you."

Anger flared in Hawke, pushing back some of the shock and fear at Justice's casual revelation of the passage of time. This was why she hadn't wanted to leave Anders alone -- one of many reasons she hated to leave Anders alone. As much as the two halves of him had come to a tentative peace by the end of their life in Kirkwall, Anders and Justice still weren't entirely... stable. When Justice felt strongly about something -- and everything Justice felt was strong -- it had an inevitable tendency to bleed over into all Anders' thoughts, until he could no longer even tell where his own will left off and Justice's will began. "You can't just puppeteer him like this, dammit!" she snarled.

Justice tilted his head to the side slightly, his eyes blank fire and his face emotionless. "Would you reproach me for this? Truly?" he challenged her. "He wishes to find you, as much as you wish to be found. Since I cannot speak to him clearly, I must guide him as I can."

It was a bitter taste in her mouth, but Hawke nodded. "Well, you've found me," she said. "Now what? I doubt I can get out the same way you got in -- I'm not a spirit."

"No." Justice shook his head. "But there may be another way. Listen. He has been calling for you in his dreams ever since the night you were lost. Follow his voice, and..."

His voice abruptly dropped into nothingness. The spirit himself disappeared, replaced by a blue flicker that sank suddenly down into the stones like a fountain that had just been shut off. Hawke started, looking around, but the ruin was just as it was before. "Justice?" she called, and took a step forward, staring into the deep spaces of the Fade beyond the stones. "Justice!"

Nothing. She took another step out, tightening the makeshift bandages around her waist, carefully sliding the dagger back into its sheath. Blight, if she wished too hard to see Justice again, she *would* see him! She tried to force her mind clean of the picture of Justice -- of Anders at all -- to want nothing and wish nothing and just *listen...*

There! On the breeze, a sobbing sigh. "*Ina, Ina,*" came the faint and faraway voice. "*Ina, my love, where are you? Where are you?*"

"I *knew* it!" she cried. It was Anders, it *was* Anders she'd been hearing, no trick of the Fade of her imagination (the two growing closer to being one every day she spent in this damn place.) It was Anders, searching for her in dreams, and if he were close enough that Justice could find her in one night...

*Follow his voice*, Justice had said, and *blight me* if Ina wasn't going to do just that.

She ran out of the ruined tower eagerly, turning this way and that to try to catch the voice. *Ina*, Anders' voice echoed weirdly among the stones. *Love, love, where are you?*

"I'm here!" she cried out passionately, taking a step in the direction the voice seemed to be coming from. "I'm here! Can you hear me?"

The voice paused a moment, but when it picked up again he didn't seem to have heard. *Ina, please, I need you*, Anders' voice called. *Come to me, love, come back to me.*

"I'm coming!" The voice seemed to be... blast and blight, she wasn't sure where. "Keep talking, Anders! I'm coming!"

It seemed to be -- *that* way, across the ghostly river at the base of the hill on which the ruined tower stood. She set off running, one hand wrapped around the bandages to hold them steady, although excitement and hope rode too high in her blood to modulate her pace.

*Ina, Ina...*

"I'm coming!" She hit the bank of the river and commanded a bridge to form over it, striding across the blank stones with her gaze fixed on the far side. She stumbled off the final step and paused, panting for breath, looking around. This was where the voice had come from, but where was he?

*Ina!* Anders' voice echoed through the Fade, now off to one side, among the weirdly attenuated shadows of the trees. *Where are you, love?*

"Here!" The voice had come from the trees; that was where she needed to go. She set off running again, this time into the woods. Thin branches whipped across her face, and the trees crowded too close; she forced the threads that formed them apart with a thought, and a lane opened between the beeches in a straight line away. She set off through the now clear path, but an uneasy feeling was beginning to build in her chest, crawling up the back of her throat. "Anders?"

*Love, love, come back to me*, Anders' voice echoed in the wind, the last words breaking into a sob. It was coming from *behind* her now, off to the side, and Ina turned frantically to try to force the trees apart in that direction. "I'm here! Fuck! Can't you hear me? Where are you?"

*Where are you? Where are you?* Her own words echoed away into the distance, melding with the sound of Anders' weeping. It was tailing off now, the sound of it dying away, as though the speaker was moving off. Beyond her hearing, beyond her reach. "*Anders!*" she screamed into the fog.

Echoes from ahead, off to one side, now the other. She chased them frantically, the panic growing as the echoes became fainter and fainter. They were nowhere, they were nowhere, and then they were gone, and Ina collapsed on her face in the whispering woods and sobbed.

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Her eye grew back. Once back in the Fade, with the green mist curling around her like a cat winding against her boots, the pain in her temple gradually dampened and over the hours of another endless night and day, slow uncertain sight returned to half her world. When she put her fingers up gingerly to explore it she felt a strange spark against her fingers, but the eye was there.

At first she was confused. She wasn't entirely sure why this had happened -- she had never been very good at healing, and this level of restoration was extremely advanced spirit healing. Even Anders would have been unable to restore sight in an eye that was entirely *gone*. It was not so much a matter of healing, then, but of her Somniari powers reshaping reality: she had two eyes because she expected two eyes, because such was how she always imagined herself, and the Fade responded to her unconscious wish. Then she was grateful.

Then she thought about the Surveyor, what he had made himself over hundreds of years of self-shaping, and she was terrified.

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Ina Hawke stood at the gate, drifts of spring grass curling about the top of her boots. Beyond the gate, a short lane wound its way around the curve of a hillside to the doorstep.

The house was familiar, even though she had never seen it before. It had a lot in common with their family's house at Boarsford; even though they'd only spent two years there, it had stuck vividly in her mind throughout all her adolescence.

During that time of her life she'd spent a lot of time vividly dreaming up her imaginary perfect house: with *two* floors, *twenty* windows, a bedroom of *her own* and a bathroom large enough to go swimming in, gardens to grow sunflowers and a barn to hold all the horses and dogs she'd someday have. Funny to think that what her child-self had dreamed of as wild extravagant luxury had in the end produced a house that her adult self could still call modest, having seen the manors of Orlais and the edifices of Kirkwall.

The walls were white, painted plaster strapped with dark-stained boards. Bright flowers spilled from window-boxes, and the shutters were thrown wide to take in the yellow sunbeams that hung visibly in the air. A shallow sloping roof of rich brown tile would shrug off rain in summer, snow in winter. The barn stood a little ways off to the side, with its own broad dirt path leading to the road, and she knew without knowing that it housed not only a horse but a half-dozen animals who were all in the process of recovering.

Anders could work in that barn, in that house in the long whitewashed room opening onto a garden that grew both sunflowers and healing herbs. He could be there right now, preparing those herbs for sale at the local marketplace, broad hands working the mortar with a streak of sap on his knuckles and that terribly attentive look he got when he concentrated. He could be happy, doing what his heart had always called him to do: to heal and help, to love and be accepted. That master bedroom on the second floor, the wide windows opening onto a view of the garden, could be theirs to share.

And the smaller bedrooms across the hall could be...

Childish voices decorated the peaceful scene, the sound of giggling and talking in sweet, high tones. As though entranced Ina followed the voices around the corner of the house to the garden, where a pair of small figures knelt in the grass, absorbed with their mysterious games.

"Calen," Ina whispered, staring at the short wispy blond hair of the boy, wielding a small trowel. The second child sat a little upslope from him, her calico skirt fluttering in the wind. "And...Dana."

Those were the names she had picked, as a child herself back at the house in Bearsford, when she had made grand and childish plans for an adult life of her own. Calen for a boy, short for Calenhad, after the great hero of Ferelden whose history she was just then learning. And *Dana* for a girl, because her mother had chided her that *Dane* was no fit name for a little girl. Ina had retorted that anyone would be proud to be named after a hero, *so there*, but she had silently revised her would-be daughter's name all the same.

They had been only names, then, picked out in anticipation of a future that she had no idea then would never come for her. The year after that she had begun to show signs of her magic; three months later they'd left the Bearsford house behind. Slowly she'd begun to understand that she could never have her own house, her own garden, never have a horse of her own, not with the way their family was constantly forced to move to avoid the Templars. But through it all she had still held onto the secret dream of finding her own mate, her own children: after all, her father had. Why not her too?

Twenty years, two countries, and a war's worth of fire behind her had answered the question of *why not*. But here, at the end of the road, perhaps she could have -- if not what she wanted, then at least the next best thing.

She took a step forward.

"And what," an acerbic voice said sharply from behind her, "do you think you're doing?"

Hawke turned around, startled, to face the source of the voice. Whatever she had expected to see standing in her dream-garden, it wasn't this: Flemeth, the old dragon-woman who had seen them safely to the sea in the wake of the Blight and extracted her price from them in promises. *Asha'bellanar*, Merrill had called to her and bowed, something she'd never done for any Viscount or Knight-Commander.

"It's you!" she exclaimed. A bit of doubt crept in. "But... is it really you?"

The old lady frowned, the wrinkles deepening around her mouth and eyes. Under the elaborate headdress, the tall curving fixtures of hair that unnervingly resembled horns, and I that majestic dress, her age made her look anything but weak. "Do you think that your imagination would have chosen to conjure me, child?" Flemeth demanded.

"No," Hawke admitted. In truth, even if she'd tried she didn't think she could manage anything close to the startling, overpowering reality of the witch's presence. There was something of the hidden potential there, at any moment ready to uncover a far more deadly promise of power, that none of her poor creations could have captured. "But what are you doing here?"

"Looking for you, of course," Flemeth said, her voice a study in nonchalance. She examined her fingernails -- long, pointed, and black, Hawke couldn't help but notice. "I had a feeling I'd find you here -- I hoped I'd be wrong, of course. But I rarely am."

Astonishment was beginning to give way to fury. Flemeth had been there from the beginning, ever since their old home had dissolved under the sick tide of the Blight. Even then she'd sprinkled them with cryptic words and vague prophecies that only now, in hindsight, led Hawke to think that she'd known far too much of what was yet to come.

"You old bitch, you knew!" Hawke's temper flared. To take her frustration on the series of disasters her life had become out on Flemeth wasn't fair, it wasn't *wise*, but then life had never been fair and Hawke had never been wise. "You should have warned me."

Fortunately Flemeth seemed more amused than offended, raising one still-dark sardonic eyebrow. "Warned you about what?" she said.

"About all this!" The sweep of her arm took in the Fade, the last ten years, her life in general. "About everything! About Corypheus. About Anders. About... me."

Flemeth tsked. "What need have you of warning? You've been doing just fine," she said. While Hawke gaped and stammered at that outrageous statement, she continued blithely. "Here we are, ten years later, and what have you become without my warnings? The blaze of revolution has been lit. The world turns towards its destiny apace. You have stared down the abyss. And the hawk has found her wings -- without any need of me."

Hawke frowned. The old dragon wasn't *wrong* exactly, but even with the benefit of hindsight this seemed a bit flip. "But Corypheus..." she started. If she had known not to go to the Warden prison, if she had never set foot there...

"Had nothing to do with you, child," Flemeth cut her off, voice going oddly gentle. "This was a table that was set long before you were born: nothing you could have chosen would have made things different."

"Then the Nightmare was right," Hawke said, the words leaving a bitter taste in her mouth. "Nothing I did made a difference at all."

Flemeth tsked. "I didn't say that, now did I?" she said. "But the biggest role you have to play is still ahead. For all her fierceness, it is only now that the hawk has found her wings."

"They will need you, in the days to come. There are few enough who can do the things you can do, and not all of them have good intentions." A stern frown creased her face, although her raptor-gold eyes looked off into some middle distance. After a moment they refocused on her, sharp and clear. "The world will need those who can stand against them."

Hawke's shoulders hunched. "The world has had enough of me, I think," she said gruffly. "I'm done."

"The world will never have enough until its end, and you will never be done until your death!" Flemeth corrected her sharply. "Both of which may come sooner than you think, if you persist in this foolish course." A wave of her hands, sharp and black-tipped, took in the dream house and its surrounding gentle meadows.

Hawke frowned, her gaze drawn back to the house that promised rest, peace... love. "I can have something here that I'll never have in the real world... A life. Children, with him. He's a Warden... they can't have children. And even if he could, I've... I've been too damaged. This is the only way I can ever have them."

"Children, you think these little shadows are children?" Flemeth demanded, voice rich with scorn. "Tell me, Champion, if you can: what is your son's third favorite type of animal? What is the strangest color that your daughter has ever thrown up? Yavanna once screamed for over an hour because I closed the lid of a basket she had opened; what is the most trivial thing over which your daughter has thrown a tantrum?"

Hawke found herself at a loss. "I..." she stuttered.

Flemeth cut her off with an impatient wave of her hand. "To raise a child is more than sticky kisses and giggles and first steps. It is pain, and confusion, and rage, and exhaustion, and the knowing that you may pour twenty years of your life into a child that, for good reason or not, may grow to hate you."

"You cannot know what your future holds, Champion. You cannot know. Children may yet come into your life through the most unexpected of ways. You, or your mate, may yet live to see some son or daughter grow up to revere you -- or to despise you. I cannot promise you that. But I *can* promise that if you stay here, you will never know."

"What do you mean?" Hawke asked, confused. "If I really am a dreamer, then what harm could come to me here?" As long as she didn't keep on seeking out the most dangerous parts of the Fade, that is.

"Time passes more slowly in the Fade, but it does pass nonetheless," Flemeth said. "The shadows you weave may fill your belly, but they do nothing to truly nourish your body. If you do not escape soon, you will die."

Hawke stood bolt upright, spine stiffening with shock. She didn't *feel* hungry. And the elf had said -- "But... Solas told me I'd be fine!" she exclaimed. "He said that I could create my own food and drink and it would be enough!"

Flemeth's lips tightened, compressing on some harsher word. Instead she said, "You would not be the first to learn that advice which at first seems fair soon turns to poison. Nor, I suspect, will you be the last."

While Hawke tried to unravel what that meant -- did she mean Solas specifically, or just advice in general? Also what did she mean, *poison*? -- Flemeth went on talking. "But in this I speak true. The world *will* need you, not for what you once were, but for what you now are. It has yet to face its greatest crisis."

Hawke scoffed. "What, the Blight and the Breach popping open don't count?"

Flemeth shook her head, horn-like hairdo swaying like tree branches in the wind. "As terrible as they were to those caught in their path, the rest of the world kept on turning even as they raged," she said. "The greatest challenge to those heroes who opposed them was to be the crier, warning the complacent townspeople out of their beds at the approach of the wolf. When the wolf truly arrives, there will be no more room for complacency. And they will need you."

All the frustration of the last, endless night burst out of her in what sounded humiliatingly like a wail. "But HOW?" she cried. "How do I get back? It's not like I WANT to stay here! How do I get home?"

"You've already been told how."

"*What?!*" Hawke demanded.

Flemeth sighed, sounding as though her patience was being sorely tried. "Your rebel lover calls for you," she said, slowly and clearly. "Let his voice be your guide."

"I! TRIED! THAT!" All the long night -- was there night in the Fade? How much time had passed, in the real world? -- Anders' voice had come and gone, and she'd scoured every inch of the ground trying to find its source. Crafted bridges and roads and mountains, climbed hills and swum rivers and run until her heart nearly burst. "I've been chasing his voice for hours and hours, and I never get any closer! I've tried and tried..." She caught herself just on the verge of a sob, and forced it down with all her remaining willpower.

Despite her obvious impatience, Flemeth's weathered face softened in something that looked like sympathy. "This is your problem, child," she said. "Your need to take control. It is *your will* that is leading you down false paths. If you are to be guided by love, you need to allow yourself to *be* guided. Not rush down the trail ahead and then be surprised when you lose your way.

"Let someone else take charge, for once," she concluded, and her voice grew dry and sharp again. "Try *less hard*."

"I..." Hawke sat stunned for a moment, unable to make sense of the seemingly contradictory instructions. Try *less hard*? How could that get her anywhere, when her best efforts had failed? There was something in Flemeth's advice she was failing to grasp, something frustratingly beyond her reach. "I don't know how to do that."

"Then it's well time for you to learn," Flemeth said, her voice as dry as dust.

She was gone. As quickly and soundlessly as she had come, she was gone. This time, out of the corner of her eye Hawke managed to get a glimpse of something -- fierce and white and purple and horned -- sliding away into the distance in the interstices between the strings. But it was a momentary flicker, too fast for her to reach out or call her back.

Hawke looked around the Fade. The dream-house didn't look as enticing now; it felt thin, paper over hollow wood, a childish fantasy scraped over too much space. Whoever was upstairs in that workroom, it was no Anders.

But the children...

She wavered uncertainly for a moment, then took command of herself with a huff. She stepped closer, looking from one face to another intently, trying to see... something. To come to some understanding.

After a long moment she realized what it was about them that didn't seem right. Their faces were round, even-featured, and bland. The clothes they wore were vague, plain copies of the clothes she vaguely remembered Bethany and Carver wearing at a similar age. There was nothing of Anders in either of them.

A sudden strong emotion surged in her, and as Ina Hawke raised her hands the entire scene melted down around her, like a sugar sculpture under a downpour of water. House, barn, hillside, all swirled into blurred smudges of color that spread in muddy heaps along the ground.

Hawke dropped her head into her hands. She had rejected the notion to stay, to lose herself in dream and fantasy... but that brought her no closer to leaving. What did Flemeth *mean*, that Hawke's problem was her own need to take control? It wasn't like she did it just for fun, or for any lust for power. She took control only when it had to be done, when no one else would. When there were others around who wielded better authority -- like the Inquisitor -- then she was perfectly willing to obey. She did *not* have a problem with control, Blight it.

The thought sat there. And sat there, in a lump, like the last soggy remains of the dream-house that refused to melt away.

Slowly, unwillingly, she turned around and looked at the unwelcome thought full on.

She didn't have a problem with control. She'd followed the Inquisitor's instructions just fine, right up until the end, when she'd *had* to go against her orders, to thwart the Nightmare. She



was perfectly willing to cede authority to those who did it better, like... well, maybe not the Viscount, and certainly not Meredith, and... the Arishok might have done okay, if only they weren't on opposite sides of the war, and... there had been good reasons in each case why she had to take charge.

Like when Anders...

When Anders...

She'd been so angry, when Kirkwall went up. Not because he'd killed the Grand Cleric -- wretched, negligent, incompetent that she was -- but because he'd done it *without consulting her*. Without asking her, without *warning* her, because if she'd known it was coming, she would have... stopped him maybe, helped him maybe, either way, she would have taken the project over from him.

She'd been furious with him, she could admit it now, because she had to be in control. And he'd taken that initiative for himself. *And see how well that turned out, eh? Not a glowing recommendation.*

How well *had* it turned out? What was it Flemeth had said, that all had come along well without her warnings. The mage rebellion had ignited, and persisted, and found a powerful patron in Cadash. The Gallows had been saved, and Meredith annihilated. If she'd had her say in it from the beginning, could she really have done any better? Done it any differently?

*The worst possible thing you can do, is nothing*, her father had told her. In that, she understood Anders' desperate conviction perfectly. He could never, he and Justice between them, have sat by to do nothing.

Instead, he'd forced that role on *her*...

Hawke raised her head with a gasp, hands sliding up along her brow to tangle in her hair. And then she stopped, because she was not where she'd been.

The blurred patch of the Fade where her dream-house had built was gone. No, not gone -- she could catch a glimpse of it in the distance, on another island below hers. It was the same, she was sure of it, but she was no longer in the same place she was.

But how could this be? She hadn't moved. Or... had she? Or had the Fade moved about her, instead?

She stood quite still, hovering on the brink of some elusive understanding. No matter how fast she ran, how far she walked, she couldn't seem to get where she was going. Why was she even trying to *walk* through the Fade at all? The Surveyor had proven, whatever else he had done, that it was folly to try to navigate the dreaming world as though it were the waking one.

In the mortal world, movement was a function of location, of distance, of time, and the relation between them. In the Fade... it wasn't about motion at all. It was about *change*.

Move through the Fade and you changed it; stand still, and nothing changed. Movement was change, and change was movement, and...

And she'd never catch up to Anders by running after him. To be with Anders again, she had to meet him halfway.

---

Distance, motion, speed. Time. One thing she'd learned from her long journeys was that distance and time were interchangeable. No matter how effort you put into increasing your speed, in the end, the only thing that could bring you to your destination was time.

Time later -- how much, how little, she didn't know -- she heard it again. Anders, wherever he was, Anders hadn't given up on her yet.

*Ina, Ina,* the voice echoed throughout the Fade. From everywhere and nowhere, because he wasn't *here*, because he lay on the other side of the Veil from her. On the other side of the world. *Where are you, love? Come to me...*

Hawke took a deep breath and then let it out, let it go, let it all go. A loosening and unlocking that went bone-deep.

She closed her eyes, and took a step towards that voice. Took a step forward into the unknown, not planning a course, not overcoming an obstacle, not through any act of *will* at all, she went to him.

*Ina, my love, where are you? Where are you?*

Where was she? Where was *he*?

What was he, to her? A voice in the night, furry with sleep and heavy with tender affection. A smile so sweet, so delighted, that the sun came out in Darktown the first time she saw it. A patch of scruff, a jaw too sharp-angled for the blunt knife he used to shave with, a hairdo too hurried and distracted to be fashionable. A tear, falling on her face from above, anchoring her against the fading dark as he worked frantically to save her life. A pair of hands, elfroot sap streaked across one knuckle that moved with the confidence and grace to take all the world in his hands and heal what was broken.

A light in the void, one that bowed and flickered against the tempest of evil in Kirkwall but never went out. She had loved him, feared him, raged at him, envied him, aspired to him, and wanted him more than she'd allowed herself to want anything else in her life.

*Love... come to me...*

Two souls in one body, a duality of light and dark, of healing and destruction. Balance and harmony, when quiet; vivid, dynamic energy when roused. He had both in him, the power to destroy and to save, and he stood astride both worlds in one: the sheltered captivity of the Circle and the harsh freedom of the apostate. Waking and dreaming, man and spirit, dark and light.

He called to her, the both the dark and the light: she could see it even in the darkness, could feel the heat of it from the other side of the world. She stepped forward, eyes still shut, seeing only the light of him through the dark.

*...come to me...*

Something brushed over her face, caught and tugged against her skin -- soft and ghostly at first, like cobwebs in the caves off the Wounded Coast. Voices whispered in the spaces around her, behind her, before her -- enticements, threats, promises of deep secrets. She ignored them, and took another step.

Dark and light; darkness roiled around the light, smothering it, choking it down low. He needed her, she could feel it, her steadying presence and her hot determination to stand unflinching when his own will faltered in the horror of what he had done. He needed her as much as she needed him, and she had to go to him.

*...come back to me...*

She was fighting uphill now, each step dragging against a deepening pressure as though wading through a river with a rising current. The cobwebs became cords, became chains, heat sizzling off her skin as they scrabbled for purchase against her. The whispers became screams, drowning out her thoughts, staggering her steps. Against the backdrop of her closed eyes Anders turned to her and smiled. *Hawke!* He called, and nothing else could compare.

Another step. Another.

Did he love her as much as she loved him? Sometimes she wondered if such a thing were possible. Anders loved so much, so many different things, gave so much of himself a way that she couldn't help but be jealous. The mages, the refugees; for freedom, for justice. She'd sometimes wondered, in the quiet of the night, where she fell on the list of priorities,

wondered what he might be willing to sacrifice. Whether she might wake up one day to find him gone, vanished, leaving only a letter of apology or nothing at all.

*...come home...*

There was no hesitation in him now, no second-guessing, no second-best. He called for her and pleaded for her and begged the earth and sky and all the gods there were to give her back to him. His fervor sang in the Fade around her, made every thread and note of it hum and throb with the music of his devotion. All the force of his passion, his will, focused on her, her, and she could do nothing else but answer.

Anders, my love...

Anders...

*...my love...*

She could hardly feel her body now, could hardly feel anything at all. Up and down were lost to her, scrambled as though she had plunged into a deep river and could not find the surface. Waves of sightless, silent force plunged down on her and then broke in sheets, shattering around her limbs. There was no left or right, nothing above her or below, only the sound of his voice beckoning her on.

*...to me...*

I'm here, my love. I'm here.

---

Her next step went into empty air.

"Oh, *blight!*" she heard someone exclaim, but there was no time to marvel over the familiar voice when she was falling down what felt like an entire flight's worth of stony slope. Instinct kicked in and she tried to roll, but her limbs were too stiff and weak.

All of her was too stiff and weak, she discovered when she finally hit bottom with a breath-knocking *thud* and tried to move again. The sense of fullness and repletion that her conjured food and water had given her in the Fade had abruptly vanished, leaving her with a hunger so deep it was nauseating and a thirst so intense it was painful.

*Everything* was painful. Her broken ribs screamed at her, knocked out of alignment by the impact with the stone floor; the bones of her broken arm ground and twisted when she tried to move them; those and a dozen other injuries set up a choir of complaint that was nearly completely drowned out by the agonizing clamor coming up from her stomach. Wound's torn open again, she thought distantly, and wondered if it had ever really closed.

With heroic effort, she pushed herself up on shaking arms and rolled over onto her back. The movement ripped something like cloth, and she could feel blood pumping out of the wound in her stomach at an appalling rate. Her dizzy, shocked relief at having made it out of the fade began to transmute into the fear that she wouldn't survive the transition.

At least she could see the sky again; a real sky, with real moons and stars in them, not the distant eerie luminescence of the Fade. At least she'd seen it one more time...

*"Ina!"*

Then he was there, Anders, appearing in her vision and eclipsing the moon overhead. Backlit against the moon she could barely make out his face, but his voice was frantic with fear. "Maker and Andraste, oh Ina, it's you! You're here, you're alive, *what happened to you?*"

She wanted to tell him everything, about the Nightmare and the Fade and Solas and most of all Justice, but her voice could barely manage a croak. Fortunately for her, Anders didn't waste time waiting for explanations when there was blood on her clothes. His hands -- those *hands*, those hands she'd dreamed about -- were already working, running over her body from shoulder to thigh and leaking blue magic like a waterfall. A strangled exclamation leaked past his teeth when he found the blood on her tunic, and the blue light flared like a lantern catching. Heat and pressure gripped Ina's stomach, the pain abruptly dulling as Anders went to work healing and sealing the wound there. Just like he had done the first time, she thought.

She had time, while he worked, to look at his face and watch him. From the looks of it, he hadn't had a much easier time of it than she had, even if he hadn't run into a superhuman magister-thing from a thousand years ago that ate various body parts. He looked haggard, drawn -- almost as bad as he had right before the Chantry went up, two years ago. Worse than he had when they'd set out on the road, exhausted and grieved but lighter the burden of secrecy and guilt he'd been carrying.

Now he looked like he'd been sleeping in swamps and eating mud stew for dinner. There was no sign or sound of Carver; hadn't she told her baby brother to look after Anders? They'd have words, she vowed, assuming she survived this.

But there was no fear of that, not really. She'd never had reason to fear for her life when Anders was there.

The agony that had consumed her middle was dying down to a dull ache, and Anders paused for the first time to catch his breath. She found strength in her shoulder and arm to raise her hand, swipe groggily through the air until her palm found the line of his jaw. He stilled, holding himself rigidly in place while the pads of her fingers explored the patched stubble. "Anders," she said weakly, wonderingly. "I found you."

"You found *me*?" His voice was high with strain, and he stared down at her in astonishment. "Love, *you're* the one who vanished into the Fade three bloody weeks ago! The Inquisition was convinced you'd died! When we got the letter from Varric... when we heard..."

His voice broke, and he gathered her in his arms, hugging her tight enough to make her ribs creak in protest. She chose not to voice it, for now, as he rocked back and forth on his heels with her in his arms, pressing his face against her hair as though to breathe in her presence with every sense. "Oh, Maker," he said, his voice a raw wound. "Oh, Maker in his mercy, please let this be real. Don't let this be some trick, some demon's dream. Please..."

"Shh." Her lips moved against his throat; she could smell him in return, hot and salty and pungent and real after the muffled deadness of the Fade. Her hand found its way to his shoulder, tightened among the familiar feathers. "It's real. You know. Justice would warn you."

He stilled, clutching her closed for a moment before he relaxed and pulled back. There was a spark of blue in his eyes, a sterner set to his expression for a moment before it eased. "So he would," he said, his voice hushed. "What did he know about this, I wonder? What do you? I didn't know why I had to come here, I don't know..."

"I'll tell you about him," she managed, though each word was an effort. "I'll tell you everything. Later. Long story."

"Ah." He let out a breath, nodding in understanding; then he looked up and around, as though only just now noticing that they were at the bottom of a gulley in the middle of the night. "Knickerweasels. Getting back up this isn't going to be fun."

It wasn't, although for the first time since she'd fallen into the Fade, Hawke got to let someone else do the work for a change. All she really had to do was keep her grip on Anders, her hands linked behind his neck, and try not to hiss too loudly when his jouncing aggravated her bruises.

Finally Anders reached a level, and a few more steps brought them to what must have been his camp. Still no Carver in sight, to her disgruntlement. It seemed to be some kind of ruins -- elven, if she had to guess, comparing it to those atop Sundermount -- and there was something...

She squeezed her eyes shut, but when she opened them it was still there: glimmers of green light on the wall that traced out shapes, too blurred to make out from this distance. There was also a persistent red glow that came from somewhere in Anders' back, a cold spark that played around the headpiece of his staff where it was propped against the wall, and the light from within Anders *himself* that didn't go away, even when he wasn't actively casting anything.

*By the Flames, am I...?* She pushed down panic. She couldn't still be in the Fade, couldn't be -- with all this pain it just wasn't *fair*. The world blurred in her vision, the glows turning to smears --

Seized with a sudden inspiration, she closed her left eye. The strange lights winked out, leaving only a dim night camp under starlight. Opened that eye again. The lights returned. Come to think of it, why did she even *have* a left eye? Her other wounds had re-opened, the magic holding them closed as she left the Fade, why did she still keep that one...?

*Huh.*

"Got to make a fire," Anders was muttering as he rummaged around in his pack. "Got to heat some water. Tea... soup? Elfroot, ginseng... If only I'd known --"

"Carver?" Hawke managed, with some effort. "Where?"

Anders scowled. "Back in Amaranthine somewhere, I expect. Bloody man nags like a Templar. Didn't want me to go. We nearly had a fist fight before I had enough of it and snuck off while he was sleeping." Anders sighed, the peevish expression draining out of his face and leaving him just looking tired. He raked his hand through his hair, leaving it wildly askew in its tie. "I suppose I'm not being fair. I couldn't give him a good explanation for why I had to come out here. *I* didn't even know why. I think... with all that mess with the Calling... he might have got the notion in his head that I was going to mine."

*And did you?* Hawke wondered, but didn't ask. "You were right," she said instead.

"I was, wasn't I?" Anders smirked smugly. "Don't you think I'll ever let him live it down!"

For a moment she felt sorry for Carver, always chasing after the recalcitrant mages in his life. But she was fairly sure that seeing her back from the dead would make up for that.

The world fuzzed a bit around the edges. When she looked up again Anders was leaning over him, his expression tender as he carefully stroked back feral curls from her face. "You must be exhausted," he murmured. "Get some sleep, love."

"You, too," Hawke murmured. "All that healing..."

He hesitated, then sat back on his heels. "...I'll be fine," he said at last. "My sleep hasn't exactly been restful lately, between the darkspawn dreams and... losing you." He let out a ghastly chuckle. "Even now that you're back, I'm almost afraid to see what my dreams will hold."

She paused for a moment, poised on the edge of sleep. She hadn't had time to think yet about what this would mean for her, for the future, for *everything*. Even aside from Flemeth's broad hints that she'd be called on to fight some dream-based menace later on -- her powers, however unexpected, did not seem likely to go away.

Returning to the Fade in dreams was a far different prospect from being there bodily, but... if Feynriel was any indication, she ought to have the same control she'd had before. The ability to visit the dreams of others, far and near, and shape *their* dreams however she liked.

"No," she said, and a smile began to curl at the edges of her lips. "You don't need to fear your dreams. Ever again."

Anders looked confused, but his jaw tightened in that stubborn set. "Even so," he said. "Someone should keep watch. Sleep, love. Let me watch over you. *Please.*"

"All right," she murmured, and let her eyes slip closed.

Ina Hawke took charge. It was what she did, what she had always done. But right here, right now, she thought she could let Anders take charge of her for a while. The world could wait.

---

~the end.



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