

Playing With Friends

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Playing With Friends

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Summary

Inquisitor Jaclyn's first meeting with King Alistair did *not* go well: he yelled at and belittled her. Now, he is coming to Skyhold to meet with her and the rest of the Inquisition, which is causing her stress. Thankfully, she has Cullen to aid her in relieving some of her tension. And who knows? Maybe Alistair will be more accommodating than he once was...

Notes

My first smut! What started out as a cheap one-shot has turned into a lot longer, so bear with me. Chapter 1 is just Cullen/Female Inquisitor, but I promise Alistair will show up soon. As always, thanks for reading, and comments/kudos are always welcome!

The Prelude

“The king of Ferelden is coming *here*?” Jaclyn stared at her ambassador with an equal mix of incredulity and fear in her eyes.

“Yes,” Josephine responded, looking at the various sheets of paper spread out before her on her desk.

“To Skyhold. King Alistair.” Jaclyn pressed.

“Yes,” the ambassador repeated, glancing up at her friend. “Is that a problem?”

“But...why?” Jaclyn asked, avoiding the question.

“I do not presume to know the king’s intentions,” Josephine answered, turning her attention back to the missives on her desk. “He only wrote that he has been following the progress of the Inquisition closely, and that he was on his way here and would like to stay on for a bit, if it didn’t inconvenience us too much. To which I replied of course it wouldn’t. It *won’t* inconvenience us, will it?” She looked at Jaclyn again.

“No, of course not,” the Inquisitor answered, automatically. “I just don’t know why he would *want* to come here. We didn’t exactly part on great terms last time,” she muttered.

“You will just have to ask him yourself. He is due to arrive tomorrow. And he has requested an audience with you as his first task.”

“*Me*?”

“Yes. I daresay the King of Ferelden would desire an audience with the Inquisitor, wouldn’t he? Now please, I hate to be rude, but there is much to do before his arrival...” Josephine trailed off, already turning back to the papers littering her desk.

“Oh, yes, of course,” Jaclyn responded. “I shall leave you to your work.”

As the Inquisitor left Josephine’s office, her mind drifted to her last encounter with King Alistair. It had been quite a few months ago, when she was still just the Herald of Andraste. She wasn’t lying to Josephine; the meeting *hadn’t* gone well. Grand Enchanter Fiona had given away a piece of Ferelden, of King Alistair’s kingdom, to a Tevinter mage, of all people. And Jaclyn had to go in and clean up the mess. She succeeded in escaping from the bleak future Alexius trapped her in, gaining a lead on Corypheus’ next move in the process. She was also able to enlist the help of the mages to close the breach in the sky once and for all.

Truth be told, her trip to Redcliffe hadn’t been too terrible. Until the King of Ferelden showed up...she could remember it like it was yesterday:

"I'd take that offer if I were you. One way or another, you're leaving my kingdom." Jaclyn winced at the venom dripping from King Alistair's voice. She knew two things at that time: the first, that she was glad she offered Grand Enchanter Fiona and her mages a place to go after having been kicked out of Ferelden, and the second, that she was happy she wasn't on the receiving end of King Alistair's malice. She glanced sidelong at Dorian, the Tevinter mage who had helped her stop the plot against Ferelden's mages. He nodded once, then moved over to speak with the Grand Enchanter, subtly trying to bring her out of the king's line of fire.

Jaclyn cleared her throat. "Your Majesty –"

"What?" King Alistair turned to her, rage barely contained on his face.

She faltered, unsure of what to say to try and curb that intense hatred. She really hadn't faced such anger before. She cleared her throat. "Forgive the intrusion, Your Majesty, but I just wanted to introduce myself. Jaclyn Trevelyan," she said, extending her hand out in greeting.

The king stared at it, stony-faced and unmoving.

"Don't be an idiot, Jackie, kings don't shake hands," she admonished herself, closing her open hand into a fist and dropping it to her side.

"Well," Jaclyn continued, awkwardly. "Sorry to leave you with such a mess. But seeing as you want these mages out of here as soon as possible, we should probably begin our journey back to Haven immediately. You know, big hole in the sky to try to close and all that..." she trailed off, noticing her attempt at levity failing to hit its mark.

"See that you do. I don't want these mages here a moment longer than they need to be." He turned on his heel and began to walk back the way he came.

After a few steps, however, he stopped. He didn't turn back around, but instead said over his shoulder, so softly Jaclyn could barely hear, "It was a pleasure to meet you, Jaclyn Trevelyan." King Alistair then faced front again and continued his retreat from the room.

She wilted, a rush of air coming out of her. "I wish I could say the pleasure was all mine," she muttered, before turning to join Dorian and Grand Enchanter Fiona to begin preparations to leave Redcliffe.

Jaclyn was abruptly brought out of her reverie when she ran headfirst into a solid wall. "Oof," she exhaled at the pain of it.

"Inquisitor, excuse me, I didn't see you there," Commander Cullen said, grabbing onto her so she didn't fall backward.

"Commander?" she asked, bewildered.

"Yes, Inquisitor. Are you quite all right? You walked right into me. I do apologize, I was caught up in a report, and I should have been watching where I was going –"

“No, no, it was my fault. I was distracted,” Jaclyn waved off Cullen’s apology.

“Distracted? About anything in particular?”

She sighed, rubbing her hand along the back of her neck. “Yes, about something in particular.”

“Do you need to talk about it?” Cullen asked, concern etched on his face.

“If you don’t mind?”

“Not at all. Just give me a few minutes to finish up here, and I’ll meet you in your quarters.”

Jaclyn smiled up at him. “Thank you.”

A few minutes later, Cullen arrived in the Inquisitor’s quarters, but he didn’t spot her in the sitting room downstairs. “Inquisitor?” he called.

“Up here!” came her voice from her bedchamber. He walked up the stairs and grinned when he saw what was laid out on the bed: the Inquisitor, naked except for a translucent red silk robe.

“Ah,” he stated, beginning to remove his armour. “So. Not much talking needed then.”

“I *do* need to talk,” Jaclyn said, wriggling on the bed. “I just need to talk with my body, not my mouth. Though I do hope mouths will be involved a little,” she giggled, flopping back on the pillows.

Cullen stared at her as the movement shifted the robe open further, almost exposing her bare breasts to him.

“I don’t know how you make silly so sexy,” he murmured.

“It’s a gift,” she replied.

“Don’t I know it,” he said, finally removing his last piece of armour. “You’re a gift to me that I get to open every day.”

Jaclyn’s eyes fluttered shut as butterflies filled her stomach. “How can somebody so strong be so sweet?”

“Shall I show you?” Cullen whispered in her ear. His hot breath on her ear made her shiver.

“You got here fast,” she said, opening her eyes to find him hovering over her on the bed, completely naked, his cock already half hard.

“I had a good incentive to go quickly,” he replied. “I see you naked everyday, but everyday it is a surprise to me how good you look.”

“Stop it, you’re going to make me blush,” Jaclyn said, turning her head to the side so Cullen could have easier access to that sensitive spot behind her ear.

He took the hint immediately and started gently sucking and nibbling at the place he knew would make her squirm. “I hope to do more than make you blush, my love,” he said. Then he bit down, hard.

Her reaction was just what he’d hoped: she screamed his name, tensed up, and then relaxed, fully opening herself to him.

“Bastard,” she muttered, as he began working his way down her body, first with light touches of his fingers, then following his hands with his mouth. “That’s going to leave a mark.”

“Your hair will cover it,” he replied, running his fingers through her long, silky curls, as if to emphasize his point.

“Doesn’t change the fact that you’re still a bastard,” she said, darkly.

“Oh?” Cullen sat up, a wicked gleam in his eye. Jaclyn knew that look, and shifted, trying to rub her body against him in excited anticipation.

“If I’m such a bastard, maybe I shouldn’t be here,” Cullen said, a serious look suddenly on his face. He made to get up off of her.

Jaclyn’s hand shot out and grabbed Cullen’s wrist, and her legs wrapped around his own in a vice-like grip. “Don’t you dare,” she hissed.

“What?” he asked, innocence and mischievousness vying for equal attention on his face, as he slowly moved back over her body. “Is there something I can do for you, my lady?”

“Fuck me,” she said, immediately, releasing her legs’ hold on his and spreading them wide.

“Tsk, ts, that’s not very lady-like,” Cullen admonished. “Are you *sure* you’re Bann Trevelyan’s daughter? I’m not sure he would be very pleased to see you like this.” Cullen began slowly removing the flimsy silk robe that pretended to obscure her breasts from his view.

He unwrapped her with care, like he was opening a present on his name day. He studied her when her full breasts finally came into view, whistling with low appreciation at

the sight in front of him.

Jaclyn giggled again, sighing in a mixture of contentment and frustration. “You act like you’ve never seen them before.”

He began palming her breasts, squeezing them, pulling them, massaging them between his large hands. “I learned early on to take the time to appreciate the little things in life. You never know when it’s going to be the last time you get to do something.”

Her heart contracted at the sweet, yet sad, sentiment. She studied Cullen, who in turn was studying her breasts, marveling, it seemed, at how perfectly they fit into his rough and callused hands. He pinched and pulled at her nipples, eyes widening as they grew even harder in response to his ministrations.

“Maker, I love how your body reacts. I love how it fits so perfectly in mine.” He brought his head down to her own, kissing her with a fiery passion that confirmed just how much he did, indeed, love her. Their tongues danced together, lips moving against one another, as Cullen continued to fondle her breasts.

The sensation was overwhelming, and soon Jaclyn was moving underneath him, trying to get pressure where she needed it most.

Cullen broke the kiss, continuing to place small kisses along her jawline, working his way down her throat.

“Impatient, are we, love?” he murmured against her skin.

“Yes,” she breathed, as his lips headed lower, and he started kissing the tops of her rounded breasts. He buried his face in her ample cleavage, and let out a sound of pure happiness.

He looked up soon after, his mouth quirking into a small grin. “You shouldn’t have told me that...” he trailed off as he took one of her hard nipples into his mouth, sucking gently. He swirled his tongue around the pink tip, then captured the peak between his teeth, biting down and pulling, hard. Jaclyn cried out as the pain immediately turned to pleasure, with Cullen running the flat side of his tongue over the peak, soothing it. He suckled her nipple again, returning to the gentle kisses he started with.

He then proceeded to do the same thing to her other breast. She arched her back in response, her body betraying her impatience by giving Cullen easier access to her chest. He took the hint, and spent the next few minutes switching back and forth between her heavy breasts; each time he bit just a little bit harder, and a little bit longer, before he would soothe her with his tongue.

Soon, Jaclyn couldn’t take it anymore. “Cullen!” she cried out, desperately.

“What?” he asked, running his palms lightly over her overly sensitive nipples; the sensation was so good, it made her shiver.

“Please,” she whimpered. She writhed and twisted on the bed, trying in vain to get some friction between her legs.

“Please what?” Cullen asked.

“Fill me,” she begged.

A wide smile split her Commander’s face, and he ran his hands along the soft skin of her sides, coming to rest on her hips. He massaged her thighs, coaxing them open even further, and his eyes widened slightly as he noticed the wetness oozing from her center.

Almost reverently, he dipped one callused finger into her, discovering for himself just how wet he had made her. “All because of me?” he asked, wonderingly.

The feeling of his finger near her most sensitive spot made all words leave her. She could only manage a nod.

Cullen groaned, and lifted his body to line up over hers. They really did fit each other perfectly. He leaned down and captured her mouth with his. As he did so, he thrust into her sopping center, sheathing himself fully in the first push, easily sliding in due to how wet she was. He made sure the angle was just right, so his cock brushed against her bundle of nerves as he entered her. The action had the response he was hoping for: she cried out, her walls clenching around him as her orgasm washed over her. His kisses caught her screams of pleasure as wave after wave of release rolled over her, mirrored in the action of her inner walls.

He stilled inside of her until the orgasm came to an end, kissing her the whole time. When she had finally quieted, she broke the kiss, trying to catch her breath.

“Maker, you’re amazing,” she spoke into his neck.

“Am I amazing, or is it just my cock you speak of?” Cullen used some of his incredible control to flick his cock inside her, brushing his tip against the perfect spot on her walls.

Jaclyn giggled, then groaned in pleasure as his cock hit that spot again. “Both,” she murmured, bringing her hands up to capture his face. She locked eyes with him. “I love you for you, you know that,” she said.

Cullen nodded his understanding, then began a tortuously slow thrust inside of her.

“But your cock is great, too.” She moaned, closing her eyes as his thrusts slowly began to rebuild her pleasure.

“Your cunt’s not so bad, either,” Cullen said, still maintaining his slow and steady pace.

“Just ‘not so bad’?” she asked, opening her eyes to look at his face. It was extremely close to hers, and she took the time to appreciate the finer details of her lover’s appearance. She adored everything about him: his straight nose, his chiseled jawline, his beautiful amber

eyes...Jaclyn knew she could get lost in those eyes like she could get lost in the Fade. She brought her hands up and ran them through his soft, golden hair, gently scratching her nails against the back of his head, where it met his neck, while simultaneously contracting her inner walls. His cock twitched inside her at the new sensation as he moaned in appreciation.

Cullen leaned down to kiss her again as he began to ever-so-slightly pick up the pace of his thrusts. "Okay, okay, your cunt is perfect. Absolutely perfect, just like the rest of you," he moaned his last word as Jaclyn tightened her walls even more in response to his words. A tingling sensation that had nothing to do with what was happening physically began to spread out along her limbs. She loved this man so much, and wanted to show him just how much he meant to her.

A grin slowly spread its way across her face as an idea came to her.

"Cullen," she whispered, urgently.

He halted his thrusting and looked down at her, concern evident on his face. "What? Is everything alright?"

Jaclyn closed her eyes as that tingling sensation grew stronger. She really couldn't love this man any more than she already did. "Everything's perfect, love. But I was thinking...would you want to try...you know," she trailed off, unsure of how to bring up the subject.

Cullen tilted his head to the side, confusion now on his features. "I'm not sure I know what you're asking me, love."

She blushed, a deep crimson color creeping up her pale skin. "Don't be mad, but I sort of overheard you in the tavern the other night, talking to Dorian and Bull."

"What..." he trailed off, confusion turning to realization as he recalled the specific conversation he had that would have any bearing on his current situation. "You heard that? Maker's breath, I'm sorry, love. That conversation was not meant for a lady's ears."

"I thought it sounded interesting," she responded quietly, shyly looking up at him through her blonde lashes.

"You did?"

"Yes, so much so that I approached Dorian about it the other day. He gave me instructions on how to do it. And, you seemed to like hearing about it so much...I seem to recall a quite intense lovemaking session that night," she smiled tentatively.

Cullen's cock moved slightly inside her. It seemed to almost fill her more at the thought of it. "You really would be willing to try that?"

"If it makes you happy, I'd be willing."

"I only want to do what makes *you* happy, love."

She groaned at the response, the words Cullen was saying turning her on even more, strengthening her already considerable resolve to see this through. "Cullen, I love you so much. I want to give this to you. And who knows? Maybe I'll love it, too. Dorian seemed to think that I would." Her smile grew larger as Cullen's cock shifted significantly within her. She knew this idea was arousing him as much as it did her.

"Okay," he said, quietly. "As long as you're sure, Jackie."

"I'm sure," she smiled.

Reluctantly, Cullen pulled out of her, wet sounds accompanying the movement. He closed his eyes and let out a groan as he moved his weight off of her. She scooted backwards on the bed and sat up. Jaclyn was met with Cullen's thick cock, standing straight out from his body, throbbing slightly with each heartbeat, the tip an ugly reddish-purple. It seemed to be straining with how aroused he was. It was also glistening wet with her juices.

Jaclyn licked her lips. Unwilling to let such a delectable treat pass her by, she took his tip into her mouth, licking greedily, trying to suck all of her wetness off of him.

Cullen groaned, closing his eyes and thrusting slightly into her mouth. "Love, wait..." She sucked on the tip a little bit harder, thrilled when she tasted his salty liquid mixed in with her sweet one. "Jackie..." he moaned her name. "As much as I hate myself for saying this, you have to stop, or else what you want to happen isn't going to happen."

She hummed her disappointment, which caused his cock to leak a little more. She looked up into his face, meeting his eyes, which were staring at her, wide with pleasure. Jaclyn then slowly removed her mouth from his cock, sucking gently as she went.

As soon as her mouth left him, Cullen grabbed her face and brought her lips up to meet his in a hungry kiss. He moaned again when he tasted the combination of both of their juices on her lips. "Maker, Jackie, what has gotten into you? You're too much, I don't deserve you."

"It's what *hasn't* gotten into me that I am desperate for," she answered, biting her bottom lip so as not to grin at her bad joke.

Cullen rolled his eyes and kissed her again, while slapping her butt lightly with his hand. "Alright then, you know what to do. Assume the position."

"Yes, sir," she squealed, rolling over. She lifted herself up so she was on her knees, bent over so her weight was supported on her elbows. She lifted her rear up as high as it would go, slightly spreading her legs, and wiggled her butt at him.

He chuckled softly, taking his hands and running them softly up her legs, starting at her ankles. He massaged her lightly as he went, and she hummed her appreciation. He reached the tops of her thighs and rubbed his thumbs at the crease where her legs met her center. "You're still so wet," he murmured.

“It’s all because of you,” she said, tilting her head so she could look over her shoulder at him. She found him staring intently at her center, at the image she presented him.

“You are so absolutely breathtaking, I honestly sometimes can’t believe you’re mine.”

“Well, I am,” she said, dropping her head toward the bed as he gently started rubbing his thumbs along her outer lips and pleasure overtook her.

“Maker,” he sighed, as he bent down and kissed her in her sopping center, dragging his tongue through her wetness, just once. She groaned her appreciation, but wiggled again, trying to bring Cullen’s attention to the other hole she wanted filled.

He dipped one finger inside of her, then ran it up to her tighter hole, rubbing small circles around the entrance, trying to spread her wetness there. As he massaged it, Jaclyn felt herself starting to relax and open up a bit. Cullen moaned softly at the invitation her body was extending, and pushed one finger into her, up to his first knuckle. She gasped, tightening instinctively, but then immediately felt herself return to her relaxed state.

He bent down and placed a soft kiss on one of her butt cheeks. “How does that feel, love?”

“Good. More please,” she said.

He pushed in further, waiting for her body to tighten and then relax again as the intrusion continued. “Still good?” She nodded, so he added a second finger. Doing that hurt, however, and Jaclyn hissed in pain.

Immediately, Cullen stopped his movement. “Hurts?” he asked. She nodded again, this time dropping her head not in pleasure, but in frustration and embarrassment.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“Don’t be sorry, love. Did Dorian not give you anything to help the process? I know he and Bull use a topical potion. They don’t have the same natural responses you do,” he said, again placing a kiss on one of her butt cheeks.

“Oh, he did! He didn’t tell me what it was for though, he only said ‘Just in case.’ I thought it was something for after...” Jaclyn trailed off, realizing her naïveté as she spoke. She laughed softly and jerked her head to the left. “Top drawer.”

Cullen reached over and opened the drawer of the bedside table she had indicated. He located what he was looking for almost instantly. “Perfect,” he said, grabbing the vial of clear liquid. He gently removed his fingers from her hole, then proceeded to remove the bottle’s stopper. “I can’t believe Dorian didn’t tell you to use this,” he continued, as he poured a liberal amount of the potion down her butt crack and then covered his fingers with the liquid.

“The conversation was rather awkward,” Jaclyn admitted, as Cullen began inserting a finger into her tight hole again. “I don’t think he really wanted to talk about it. I think he was just as embarrassed as you were that I had overheard that conversation.” He began working

the potion into her, thrusting with his finger, spreading her hole wider as she got used to the intrusion. He slowly added another finger, hesitating before continuing as he waited for her reaction. "Mm...much better," she said, smiling as the pressure was building pleasure deep within her.

"Dorian, embarrassed?" Cullen asked. "I didn't think the man understood that emotion." He gently added a third finger to the assault on her hole. "Is this alright, love?"

"Oh, yes, it feels wonderful. The potion has helped tremendously. I shall have to scold Dorian for not telling me to use it in the first place."

Cullen chuckled, burying his fingers into her as far as they could go, then spreading them, working her opening to get it as wide as he could. "Of course, you're not going to keep this from him, are you?"

"Do you want me to?"

He considered for a moment, wondering what the implication that he had taken the Inquisitor this way would do for their reputations. He realized he grew excited at the prospect of someone knowing that he had claimed all three of his love's holes.

"No, my love. Feel free to brag about this all you want." She smiled at him over her shoulder, and he knew he needed her, now.

He withdrew his fingers from her and her body instinctively tightened against his retreat, trying to keep him within her. His cock twitched at the feeling. Maker, he wanted to be buried inside her. He took the vial of potion and poured some more on his hand, stroking his cock to coat it completely. He concentrated specifically on the tip, trying to ensure this was as pleasurable an experience as possible. He wanted her so badly, but he also didn't want to do anything to cause her pain.

"Are you ready, love?" he asked, rubbing his tip against her entrance, ensuring the potion was well-distributed.

"Yes," she breathed, already excited at the pressure his tip was exerting. With a soft moan, he pushed into her, his considerable girth stretching her beyond her breaking point. "Oh, Maker," she exclaimed as she felt him enter her.

Cullen stopped his movement, waiting for her breathing to return to normal. When he felt her relax, he inserted himself further, feeling her give away little by little to the intrusion.

Every time she tensed, he stopped, waiting for her body to catch up. The incredibly slow pace was torture for him, but he knew he had to control himself, and he would, if only so she could get some enjoyment out of the occasion. While he was waiting for her body to accommodate his size, his thoughts drifted back to another time he found himself in a situation like this. It was only...what, six months ago? "*Maker, has it only been six months?*" he thought. It felt like he had been intimate with the Inquisitor for a lot longer than that. Not that he was complaining; any time spent with his love naked was a blessing from Andraste herself.

He hadn't known Jackie was a virgin when he began flirting with her. A lady, to be sure, but someone *had* to have taken her before him, hadn't they? She was too brazen with her words, too free with her touches of him to have never had a man before. He almost came like an untrained youth himself when she told him she was untouched. He remembered how pleased he had been that he was able to ensure her first time was special, and with someone who loved her. His Jackie deserved no less.

He chuckled to himself as he remembered how impatient she had been, wanting him to just get it over with. But he had insisted to do it right, knowing the Herald of Andraste needed to be worshipped, if only by his body. And he was glad he did. Her responses, the way her body moved under his, drove both of them wild. When he finally penetrated her, she came almost immediately. There was none of the pain or awkwardness he had heard whispered about amongst his men. Rather, his love had seemed eager to go again as soon as they had finished. He hoped this experience would be the same.

He was brought out of his thoughts by a wanton moan that came from the woman beneath him. He had finally sheathed himself fully inside her, and she was starting to slowly rock herself against him, pushing him out slightly, then pulling him back in. He stared transfixed at where his cock disappeared between her perfect ass cheeks, the erotic sight furthering his lust.

"How do you feel?" he spoke softly.

"Mmm..." she responded, increasing the distance of her thrusts against him. "I feel so *full*. I can't believe you fit back there." She giggled softly, then let out a soft groan as Cullen shifted himself inside her.

"Do you enjoy it?" he asked, reaching around with a hand to dip into her center. He nearly came undone when he felt how wet she was.

"Very much so," she said. "Take me, love. Make me yours."

Cullen groaned in response, and removed his hand from between her legs, bringing both hands up to grip her hips. He withdrew himself almost fully from inside her, leaving only the tip, then pushed in, hard. He hilted himself in one stroke, crying out in pleasure at the tight, hot flesh he was spearing into. "Maker, Jackie, I don't know how long I can keep this up. You feel *beyond* amazing." He punctuated his words by thrusting into her again.

"Truly?" she whispered.

"Maker, yes." He responded by picking up his pace, moving in and out of her as quickly as he could without causing her pain. "Does this feel good for you?"

"Maker, yes," she echoed, dropping her forehead onto the pillows underneath her. "I didn't imagine it could, but this feels *incredible*."

Cullen grunted his approval and started thrusting into her even faster, gripping her hips tighter. He spread his fingers as wide as he could, massaging the flesh of her ass cheeks,

spreading them so he could see his assault against her previously-forbidden hole. The sight, coupled with the feel of him inside her, was overwhelming. He was close, he could tell.

“Jackie...” he ground out, trying to warn her.

“I’m close,” she let out in a rush of air. “Please, just a bit longer –” she bit off her statement as he reached around a hand and brushed it against her bundle of nerves.

A few more strokes of his finger there and she exploded underneath him, screaming her pleasure. Feeling her orgasm from this new perspective was exquisite and caused him to find his own rapid finish. He roared her name and released himself inside her, discharging strand after strand of his spend. Their shudders came in sync, and it took them quite awhile to come down from their respective highs.

Finally, their bodies quieted, and Cullen had to concentrate to keep himself from collapsing on top of her. He realized his hand around her waist was the only thing keeping her up on her hands and knees.

“Are you okay, love?” he asked, placing a kiss on her spine, right between her shoulder blades.

“Mm-hmm,” she managed, her head lolling to one side.

Chuckling, Cullen gingerly removed himself from within her. She let out an involuntary groan as she felt him leave her. “Did that hurt?” he asked, ever the concerned gentleman.

“Not at all,” she replied immediately. “I just miss you.”

“I’m right here, love,” he said, coming down to lay by her side, draping an arm around her back and pulling her in towards him. He planted a kiss on her forehead.

“I meant the other ‘you,’” she answered, smiling languidly as she ran a finger over his still half-hard cock. “*Templar stamina, indeed,*” she thought. She grinned wider as she felt a shudder run through his body. “Up for round two already?”

He groaned softly, closing his eyes. “As much as I would love to, it *is* the middle of the day, and we both have a lot of work to get back to. Don’t you have to prepare for something important, like the arrival of a king?”

She sighed, removing the finger that had been slowly stroking his cock. “Ever my faithful advisor, aren’t you?” She opened her eyes to look at him, bringing her finger to her mouth and sucking on it, to clean off the various liquids that had gathered on it from his cock. “Mm...that tastes different. I like it.”

Cullen licked his lips, his eyes widening slightly at the erotic image in front of him. He bent his head and captured her lips in his in a passionate kiss, pulling her body flush with his, crushing her breasts against his hard chest. She moaned in pleasure.

He broke the kiss after a few minutes, both of them panting with arousal. “I can’t get enough of you, love,” he said against her mouth. She smiled up at him. “We *do* need to get back, but maybe a rather quick bath wouldn’t be too much of a delay. After all, we do need to clean ourselves up.”

Jaclyn immediately bounded up from where she was lying on the bed, holding her hand out for him to take it, a wide smile on her lips. She was nearly bouncing with excitement.

“I said *quick* bath,” he tried to admonish her. She looked pointedly at his already hard cock and winked.

“Certainly, Commander, as quick as we can,” she said, as he took her hand and she led him into the bath.

“*Maker, what am I going to do with her?*” he thought, shaking his head and smiling to himself as he shut the door to the bathing chamber behind him.

The Meeting

Chapter Summary

Alistair comes to Skyhold and meets with the Inquisitor, where he provides context for his visit there. More history of Thedas is discovered, and Cullen takes over in the bedroom.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for your patience! Life happened, and I wasn't feeling in a very smutty mood, but I know you all deserve nothing but the best from me, so I didn't want to publish unless what I could give you was worth it. This one is a bit longer than the last chapter, as there is more *plot* to get through (I love these characters too much to just throw them together without reasoning). Be patient for the Alistair smut, it's coming, I promise! But meanwhile, enjoy some more Cullen/Inquisitor goodness. I hope you all enjoy! As always, comments/kudos are welcome!

The next day dawned clear and bright, perfect for the arrival of His Majesty, King Alistair. Jaclyn was pacing the battlements, nervous energy keeping her from being able to stand quietly. She still had no idea why the king was coming to Skyhold, or why he wanted to meet with her. She hated that he made her so uncomfortable, but, then again, she always felt more at home amongst the servants than the other noble families when she was growing up. There was something about the...formality that was required around the nobility that Jaclyn greatly disliked. There were too many ways to offend, too many chances to ruin a life's work.

She shuddered as memories flooded back to her of her time at the Trevelyan estate. The youngest of five, she was always getting in the way, constantly doing something wrong, and never living up to her "full potential," as her mother seemed to be continually reminding her. She balked at every lesson she was expected to take, loving just her equestrian class, and that was only because her tutor allowed her to learn to ride like a soldier, much to her mother's horror. The freedom being on a horse gave her still brought a smile to her face; she wished she had more chances to run wild these days.

She was brought out of her musings by hands that suddenly slid around her waist, gripping her gently. She jumped, and heard a familiar voice chuckle lowly behind her.

"Sorry, love, didn't mean to scare you," Cullen spoke softly into her ear.

Jaclyn leaned back against his body, reveling in the grounding feeling his presence brought her. “Mm, you shouldn’t have been able to. I guess I’m out of practice,” she murmured back, not taking her eyes off the gates.

“Or I’m getting better,” he replied, sliding his hands further along her waist to rest comfortably on her abdomen.

“Or I’m just distracted,” she countered, finally removing her gaze from her vigil, turning within his embrace to wrap her arms around his own waist. She pulled him in and hugged him tight.

“Distracted?” Cullen’s eyes flicked up to look over her shoulder, glancing quickly at Skyhold’s gates. “Are you still bothered by His Majesty’s impending arrival?”

Jaclyn nodded mutely, too ashamed to put her nervousness into words.

“But you did so well handling Empress Celene,” he answered, a crease forming between his brows. He peered into Jaclyn’s face, attempting to read the truth there that she was so desperately trying to hide.

“She was...different.”

“How so?”

Jaclyn hesitated before answering. She knew why Alistair frightened her. Empress Celene was never truly a threat to the Inquisition. She needed the Inquisitor to protect her, and thus, gave her the respect she deserved. But when Jaclyn tried to assist King Alistair, she did nothing but make a bad situation worse (in his opinion) and was yelled at by him, in front of her new allies. Her power was undermined. Now the Inquisition was rising. There was a chance they could stop Corypheus once and for all. She couldn’t take the chance that a foreign monarch would come marching into her home, her base of operations, and take all that away with one command. The issue was, there was a real possibility that could occur. And that scared her beyond belief.

She took a deep breath, trying to collect her thoughts.

“When I dealt with Celene, I knew the battlefield. I understood the players and could control the outcome. With King Alistair...I have no idea what he wants or why he is here. Our last meeting did not go well. For all I know, he’s come here to demand the Inquisition cede all power to Ferelden. So, yes, I am nervous for his impending arrival.”

Cullen tightened his grip on Jaclyn’s waist, pulling her in for a tight hug. He nuzzled her hair. “You’ll be fine. You have a lot more experience dealing with things now than you did at your first meeting. Plus, this time, you’ll have a secret weapon.” He smiled down at her, the scar on his lip stretching slightly.

“Oh? And what weapon is that?”

“Me,” he said, brushing a ghost of a kiss over her lips. “King Alistair won’t be able to take Skyhold if I have anything to say about it.”

The tension in Jaclyn’s body loosened a little at his words, and she tilted her head up to kiss him fully on the mouth while tightening her hold on him in return. As the kiss continued, her heart started racing, this time due to Cullen’s loving embrace instead of the dread she felt at Alistair’s imminent arrival.

Their kiss was cut short, however, by the call of the guards below, and the sound of the gates beginning to rise.

Immediately, Jaclyn felt herself tense up again, breaking off the kiss and whirling around to watch the entrance of King Alistair’s retinue.

“Shh,” Cullen spoke softly into her ear, raising his hands to gently massage her shoulders. “You’ll be fine, I promise.”

Jaclyn took a deep breath and stood up straighter, glad she had somebody literally protecting her back.

“Thank you,” she murmured, before turning to head into Skyhold’s throne room to wait for the King of Ferelden’s official introduction.

No more than 20 minutes had passed before Skyhold’s herald announced the arrival of King Alistair.

Jaclyn tried not to look too interested as the king walked through the doors and into the throne room. The first thing she noticed, however, was the lack of a soldier guard as he entered. “*Cullen’s doing?*” she wondered. If it was, she reminded herself to thank him quite generously later. Already, the lack of soldiers promised a better meeting than their previous one.

The king strode purposefully, and Jaclyn attempted to keep herself from staring. Fleetinglly, she thought about how glad she was at having secured an alliance with Orlais, allowing Skyhold, and her throne room in particular, luxuries that it had previously severely lacked.

Josephine stepped into place at her side just moments before King Alistair stopped his approach, a respectable distance from the Inquisitor. Josephine cleared her throat.

“Inquisitor, may I present His Royal Majesty, Alistair, King of Ferelden? Your Majesty, may I present Lady Jaclyn Trevelyan, Inquisitor and Herald of Andraste?”

King Alistair bowed slightly, and Jaclyn inclined her head in response. It was very strange to her to be greeting the monarch from a position of power. This went against all of the etiquette lessons her mother ensured she took.

Josephine stepped back, her role completed.

“Inquisitor,” King Alistair said.

“Your Majesty,” Jaclyn responded.

“If I may, Inquisitor, is there a place we may speak, in private?” he asked, not bothering with any more pleasantries.

“Certainly,” she said, rising from her seat on the throne. She gestured to the door toward her private residence. “We can speak in my chambers, if it pleases Your Majesty. I am afraid that would be the only place I could guarantee any lack of intrusion.”

King Alistair nodded slightly, understanding in his body language. “That would do fine,” he said, stepping back to allow her to lead the way.

She descended the throne and began to walk toward the door leading to her chambers, certain His Majesty would follow. She nodded to Josephine, who gave the other woman a small smile of encouragement. Jaclyn smiled back, glad her advisors were on her side.

The Inquisitor instructed the guard posted outside her chambers to not allow any interruptions, and then proceeded to lead King Alistair to her sitting room. She stood quietly, remembering from her lessons that it was impolite to sit before the monarch did, and waited for the king to inform her of his purpose here.

King Alistair walked around the room, taking in the various artwork that adorned the walls, pausing every now and then to peer closer at a particular piece. After what felt like an eternity to Jaclyn, he stopped in front of the fire and turned to her.

“So,” he began, somewhat brusquely. “I suppose you’re wondering why I am here.”

“The thought had crossed my mind, yes, Your Majesty,” Jaclyn answered.

“Please, Alistair,” the king waved a hand haphazardly in the air, as if dismissing his title from the space around him.

“Your Majesty?”

“You are the Inquisitor, are you not?” he asked her.

“I am.”

“And is the Inquisitor the leader of the Inquisition? Do you not hold political and military power under your command?”

“I suppose I do.”

“Then I declare we are on equal footing, diplomatically, and I say we dispense of formalities and titles. It all gets rather boring, doesn’t it?”

Jaclyn let out a small huff, a mix between a sigh and a small chuckle. “It does get boring Your Maj – forgive me, Alistair. Dreadfully so. If I meet one more preening noble in my life, it’ll be one too many.”

Alistair chuckled himself, before sitting down on one of the chairs situated in front of the fire. “Oh, you wouldn’t *believe* some of the ‘problems’ my nobles have brought to my attention. I have a country to run, I don’t have time to solve your personal issues, or to placate your frail ego. Sometimes, I swear, I wish I could just dissolve the nobility. That’d put those bastards in their place.”

Jaclyn was taken aback by the frankness with which the king spoke. He seemed to have noticed what he said, and, to his credit, blushed a little.

“I apologize, my lady, I shouldn’t have spoken so freely.”

“‘My lady’? I thought we were dispensing with titles,” she responded, smiling slightly to let the king know she wasn’t truly cross.

Alistair chuckled again. “True. Some habits are hard to break, however. Please,” he said, gesturing to the empty chair beside him.

Jaclyn sat, wondering briefly at the oddness of being welcomed to sit in her own chambers. She mentally shook off the thought.

When she had sat down, however, Alistair did not begin to speak right away. Rather, he stared into the fire, the silence between them stretching on, somewhat uncomfortably. She cleared her throat, hoping he would get the idea, but it didn’t seem to do anything to rouse the king from his thoughts.

“So,” she began, “what *does* bring you to Skyhold? Are you here to evaluate the Inquisition for yourself?”

Alistair started when she spoke, seeming to forget where he was for the moment. “Apologies, my lady, it’s been a long journey.”

“You are more than welcome to take a repose before we continue any discussions. I daresay I was surprised when my ambassador informed me you wanted to meet immediately upon your arrival. I know the journey from Denerim is not an easy one. I am more than happy to continue our meeting in a few hours’ time, if it suits you better,” Jaclyn said.

“No, I better not, in case...” Alistair trailed off, once again glancing into the fire. He then cleared his throat, before looking up to meet the Inquisitor’s eyes. “I would very much like to see how the Inquisition is getting on; I know you have recently made an alliance with Orlais, and many of my advisors have entreated me to make an alliance of my own with you. As you know, or maybe you don’t, Orlais and Ferelden haven’t enjoyed the best of relations in the past. We almost secured peace between us, once, during the Fifth Blight, but my

foolish predecessor decided against that course of action, and well...here we are. I do not mean to drag your movement into the politics of Thedas, but as you are claiming to be defending us all, I have been told that it is in Ferelden's best interests to be on your good side. And you did keep my uncle's lands from being taken by Tevinter..." Alistair trailed off again, seemingly uncomfortable with this topic of conversation.

"I did what I thought was best for everybody," Jaclyn supplied, hoping to help him along.

"That you did, and I was angry and ungrateful. I am sorry if I appeared unappreciative of your efforts. I know you risked a great deal to secure a part of my kingdom, and I barely acknowledged it. I just..." Alistair trailed off again, and this time Jaclyn kept quiet, knowing the monarch wasn't used to speaking to someone in such a manner, and that she shouldn't push him.

He let out a great sigh, closing his eyes as he ran a hand through his hair. For the first time, Jaclyn noticed how truly exhausted he looked. Perhaps there was more on his mind than the complicated relationships between the different nations of Thedas. A king would be used to navigating those waters; this stress seemed to be coming from elsewhere.

"I felt betrayed by the mages in Redcliffe, and that feeling isn't a good one for me," he said, with his eyes still closed. "It brings up bad memories, that have absolutely nothing to do with you." Alistair opened his eyes then and looked at Jaclyn once more. Meeting them, she almost started when she noticed sorrow and...was that worry, swirling in his dark brown eyes? "And for that, I am sorry. You did not deserve to be treated in such a way, especially not after saving my uncle's lands."

"It was nothing," she replied, waving it away with a toss of her hand.

"It wasn't nothing, and I deserve to be reprimanded by you, but I appreciate the gesture." He smiled slightly.

"I have no wish to reprimand the King of Ferelden," Jaclyn stated.

Alistair let out a small laugh at that. "Well, I'm glad. I haven't been punished by anybody since I became king, so I really wouldn't even know where to begin." He cleared his throat as he shifted somewhat uncomfortably in his chair. After a few moments of silence, he cleared his throat again. "May I speak freely, Inquisitor?"

"Yes, of course. And it's Jaclyn."

"Jaclyn." Alistair said it slowly, as if trying out how it felt in his mouth. "That is a pretty name, you know." Jaclyn couldn't help it; she blushed slightly at the compliment. She loved Cullen, but it was nice to be appreciated by another good-looking man.

"Thank you," she answered. "I don't hate it, but most of my friends call me Jackie."

Alistair raised his eyebrow slightly at the implication, and Jaclyn blushed even harder. "*Did you just call the King of Ferelden your friend?*" Jaclyn thought to herself. She rushed to

correct herself. “Not that *we’re* friends, Your Majesty, I wouldn’t presume – ”

He cut her off with a chuckle. “It’s of no matter, Jaclyn. I knew you meant no offense. Please, no formalities, remember?” He smiled at her again.

She let out a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. “Thank you for your understanding,” she muttered. “And yes,” she added, remembering what had led to this conversation, “you may speak freely.”

Alistair smiled broadly at that, and Jaclyn found herself admiring how good his face looked when he smiled sincerely. She had a feeling he didn’t do too much of that in Ferelden. Unbidden, she thought she would like to make him smile more.

Jaclyn mentally shook herself, unsure where these thoughts were coming from. She was in love with Cullen; there was nothing that could take that love away from her. But King Alistair *was* impressive looking...

She realized with a start that Alistair was looking at her expectantly, waiting for an answer to a question she did not hear. She racked her brain, trying to remember what he had been talking about while her mind was preoccupied with the wrong things. Ah, yes, her trip to Orlais. He was talking about gaining another advisor while there...

“Oh, you mean Empress Celene’s mage advisor?” she asked.

“Yes. I will admit I have had some correspondence with your spymaster. Please, do not be mad at Leliana,” he added quickly, upon seeing Jaclyn raise an eyebrow suspiciously. “We are old friends, and believe me when I say Leli hasn’t been sharing Inquisition secrets. We just talk about the good old days.” He smiled somewhat ruefully as he said that. “In fact,” he chuckled a little now, “I daresay Leli has spent more time trying to get Ferelden’s secrets out of *me* than I have even *discussing* the Inquisition with her. Which is not often at all,” he rushed to assure her.

“You knew Leliana?”

“Yes,” he answered. “We traveled in Ferelden together, during the Fifth Blight. We were both companions - ”

“Of the Hero of Ferelden, that’s right!” Jaclyn exclaimed, interrupting him. She blushed a bit at her excited outburst. “Forgive me for interrupting; I just can’t believe I didn’t put two and two together sooner. Or why Leliana didn’t remind me,” she added, somewhat bitterly.

“Again, don’t blame Leliana. My relationship with the Nightingale has been somewhat strained ever since she joined the Divine’s service. She...changed, since the time of the Fifth Blight. Well, we all did,” he said, quietly. “And, truth be told, I didn’t want my relationship with her to be widely known. For the King of Ferelden to have a close relationship with the Divine’s Left Hand...well, the implications wouldn’t do either of us well, politically. So our relationship is one best kept in the shadows, where Leli can control almost everything.”

Alistair stopped speaking for a moment, while Jaclyn absorbed this new information. She mentally chastised herself for not realizing the relationship between Leliana and Alistair sooner. The Hero of Ferelden's companions were quite well known throughout Thedas, even in the Free Marches. It was their actions, after all, that prevented the Fifth Blight from spreading throughout the world.

Jaclyn remembered back to her lessons, her tutors adamant she should know the Hero and his companions, should they ever decide to grace the noble courts of Ostwick. There was the Hero himself, of course, and Alistair, at the time only a Grey Warden. Then there were the assassins in his company, Leliana and...Zevran, the elf. He also had a companion named Oghren, a dwarven warrior, and Sten, a Qunari many often forgot about. He was also accompanied by two mages, Wynne, from Kinloch Hold, and...and...

She let out an audible gasp when she realized why the king had asked about her new advisor. "The Lady Morrigan," she whispered.

Alistair looked up at that, his face blanching slightly when he realized Jaclyn had made the connection.

"You traveled with Lady Morrigan all those years ago. And now she's here. At Skyhold."

Alistair's face remained pale, his mouth forming a thin line, but he nodded curtly all the same, acknowledging that Jaclyn's conclusion was correct.

"Is there something I should know about her?" she asked. Alistair remained silent, seemingly lost in thought yet again. "Alistair, please," Jaclyn continued. "If the Inquisition is at risk because of Morrigan's presence -"

"It isn't," he assured her.

"Then why -"

"It's of a more...personal nature. And a delicate one, at that. Delicate enough that I wouldn't risk putting it down on paper. And personal enough that I would only trust the Inquisitor with the information." Alistair stopped speaking to allow the implications of what he said to sink in.

"Whatever is said here will be kept between only us," she said, nodding to both acknowledge the sincerity of her words and to encourage the king to keep speaking. "You have my word as Inquisitor."

"Thank you," he said. A small relief seemed to cross his face, briefly. "I assume you know something about the Fifth Blight, having made the connection between Morrigan and myself."

Jaclyn nodded. "I studied it at the behest of my tutors. They insisted I knew the names of all the important people in Thedas who potentially could call upon us at Ostwick. Couldn't take the chance of embarrassing the family, could I?"

It was Alistair's turn to nod in understanding. "Makes sense, in case the Hero and his companions ever came to call. Did your tutors tell you anything else of the Fifth Blight?"

"Not really. I know the general concept of blights, of course. But I have four older siblings; even though I was old enough to know more, everybody refused to tell me, thinking they were 'protecting me' from the harsh realities," Jaclyn said, somewhat annoyed.

Alistair nodded at that as well. "Not that I know what it's like to have that many siblings, but I can understand wanting to protect someone from knowing the ins and outs of what happened." He shuddered slightly. "I never want to see a blight again. But here we are." He laughed, resentfully. "All that, and for what?"

Jaclyn looked at the king closely. "All what for what?"

He looked at her, sympathy now added to the mix of emotions swirling in his eyes. "How much do you know about how blights are ended?"

"Nothing, really."

"Hmm. I expected as much. And your knowledge of the Grey Wardens?"

"They protect us from the blights. Dedicated warriors, to whom we owe our lives. 'In peace, vigilance, in war, victory -'"

"'In death, sacrifice,'" Alistair finished the motto along with her. "How true that motto is."

Jaclyn tilted her head to the side, trying to figure out the meaning behind his words.

Alistair seemed to be considering something for a moment. "Jaclyn, if I tell you something, you must promise me that you will take it to the grave."

"Of course."

"I'm serious. I can't believe I'm trusting you with this, but I don't see how I have any other choice...if this gets out, the future of the Grey Wardens is in grave danger. As such, the future of Thedas would be in jeopardy. Do you understand the seriousness of what I'm saying, of what I'm about to tell you?"

She nodded solemnly. "Yes. I will not utter what you tell me to a soul, nor will I write it down so it could be intercepted."

He waited a few more moments, staring into her eyes, as if he was trying to read her true intent in them. Whatever he saw there seemed to satisfy him, however, as he began to speak again.

"There is a great secret amongst the Grey Wardens, one we do not tell anybody, not even our recruits, until the time has come for them to become full Wardens."

"Full Wardens?"

“Yes. There is a ritual all Grey Wardens must go through, to receive the powers we have, such as being able to sense an impending blight, or the location of darkspawn nearby.”

“I always wondered where those powers came from,” Jaclyn mused.

“Yes, well, they do not come from a great place. As part of the Joining ritual, and this is the greatest secret that must not *ever* leave this room, Wardens drink darkspawn blood.”

Alistair looked to Jaclyn at this, but she was too shocked to say anything, so he continued. “It is this blood that runs through our veins, that allows us to sense the things we do. And it is this blood that allows us to end a blight.”

“I have so many questions...” Jaclyn began after a few minutes of silence. “But I know they are not for me to understand. I suppose the only important one I need to ask is, how? How does having this blood help you kill an archdemon?”

“Another secret that must be kept from Wardens,” he began again. “It was kept from me for the longest time. At first, I was angry, but as time has passed, I think I have begun to understand the need for secrecy. I do not claim to know why, or how, it works. Those secrets were lost with the destruction of our order. I’m sure I could find the answer with other Wardens if I chose to, but, truth be told, I really have no interest in figuring it out. I just know it works, and that’s all that matters to me.” Alistair took a breath, then continued. “When a Warden kills an archdemon, something happens, some magic takes place, and the archdemon is slain. The secret is that the Warden is slain with it. It is something about the taint that is already in our blood that allows the archdemon to be truly killed. But there is no way for the Warden who makes the killing blow to survive.”

“The Hero of Ferelden...” Jaclyn breathed.

Alistair swallowed, and when he spoke, his voice was thick with emotion. “He died, to save us all. It was a sacrifice we all knew had to be made. I knew he was planning on taking the killing blow himself. I tried to talk him out of it, but he had this foolish notion that I was supposed to be a king or something. And I tried to convince *him* that I had no desire to be king. My place was with the Wardens, by his side, forever. And the bastard,” Jaclyn noted the word was spoken with more affection than vitriol, “told me that, when the time came, he would let me do it. Let me join my father and brother in the arms of Andraste. But he betrayed me. When it came down to it, he pushed me out of the way, and sacrificed himself, as I always secretly knew he would.”

Tears glistened in his eyes, and Alistair quickly turned away. “Forgive me, I thought I had made peace with this long ago. But with Morrigan showing up...”

“I am sorry,” Jaclyn said, softly.

They sat together quietly for a few moments, Jaclyn allowing him to compose himself. Impressively, she noted no tears actually fell from the king’s eyes. But when he spoke again, his voice was rough, as if he was trying to hold everything back.

"I am sorry, Jaclyn," he began. "I know you have much more pressing concerns at the moment. But when I heard Morrigan was here...I have to know. Does she have a child with her?"

Too surprised to think her answer through, Jaclyn responded. "Yes."

"Is he beautiful?"

Jaclyn considered for a moment before answering, "Yes. He is well mannered, and intelligent, and interested in everything, it seems. He is a wonderful child, from what I could gather. To be honest, I haven't spent much time with him."

"And his name?"

"Kieran."

At this, Alistair closed his eyes, and two tears finally escaped, sliding silently down his face.

"Alistair?" Jaclyn spoke, tentatively, not sure what she should do.

"Forgive me. There is one last piece of the puzzle, then you will understand. The night before our final battle with the archdemon, Morrigan took Aedan – the Hero – to bed, to perform a ritual. He laid with her to produce a child. This child was supposed to have the taint. It was supposed to keep the Grey Warden who slayed that particular archdemon alive. None of us was supposed to die during that battle, not if Morrigan and Aedan performed the ritual. That was the only reason he went through with it, to protect me. And it was the only reason I let - "

He cut himself off before he could say more, but Jaclyn already understood.

"You loved him," she said, quietly.

"Yes."

"And he loved you?"

Two more tears slid down the king's cheeks. "Yes."

"And Kieran?"

"Was Aedan's middle name. I can't believe Morrigan named their child after him. I thought she disliked him, I truly did. But Aedan was...impressive. One couldn't help but fall in love with him. He was charismatic, charming, brash and resourceful. Not unlike yourself, if I'm to believe the stories." Alistair gave her a smile through his tears. "I was just lucky enough to have him love me back. We all suffered when he died. Our little adventuring party split and went their separate ways. I thought Morrigan was avoiding our region entirely. When her ritual didn't work, when Aedan died...well, it seems it *did* work, just not in the way she had intended. Or maybe it was never meant to save the Warden's life, and she just

said that to get Aedan to sleep with her.” He let out a mirthless chuckle. “Now that I think about it, that does sound like something she would do.”

“What do you need from me?” Jaclyn asked. “Why tell me any of this? Not to sound rude, and I am grateful to have a greater insight into what I could potentially be facing with Corypheus, but why come to me?”

“I need you to intercede on my behalf. With Morrigan,” he added, when Jaclyn looked perplexed. “When Aedan died, we had...words. It took me forever to track her down. She left before the final battle. I said things that I don’t necessarily regret, but it will not have endeared me to her. But I need to see him. Kieran. If there is anything of Aedan left in him...” He sighed, and Jaclyn could tell how much he was hurting. “I need to know. It is killing me, not knowing. Please.”

She nodded. “Of course I’ll assist. I can’t say I have much sway with Morrigan, though. We only met a few weeks ago. She offered to help, but...” She met Alistair’s eyes, and saw the anguish in them. She thought to Cullen, and how she would feel if he died, and what she would do if there were a piece of him somewhere in the world that she didn’t know about. She repressed a shudder, not wanting to think about that potential future. “I will do what I can. The stories are true; I can be very persuasive when I put my mind to it.” She smiled.

Alistair wiped his cheeks roughly with the back of his hand. “Thank you,” he said. He then stood up, Jaclyn following suit. “I have taken up too much of your time. I will meet with your advisors to discuss a possible agreement between the Inquisition and Ferelden. I think perhaps tomorrow? For now, rest is in order,” he continued, as he headed toward the door.

“Of course, tomorrow will be fine. I would say to just ask the nearest person to show you to your rooms, but if I know my ambassador, she’s still in the throne room, waiting to escort you personally. If so, give her my regards.”

“Certainly.”

Jaclyn was about to open the door for the king to exit when he swept her up in a tight hug. Shocked, she stood still for a moment, before hugging him back.

“Forgive me for the impertinence,” he said into her neck. “But it’s been awhile since I’ve been able to discuss Aedan with anybody who understands. And I can tell that you do. Whoever he is, he is a lucky man,” he whispered in her ear. He then kissed her on the cheek, before opening the door himself and sweeping out of her chambers.

Jaclyn stood rooted to the spot, hand upon her cheek where the king had kissed her. She shook her head, convinced she was never going to understand that man fully.

She was just about to head out of her chambers when her doorway was filled with the full figure of her commander.

“Cullen! What are you doing here?”

“Making sure you are okay. I know how nervous you were before the king’s arrival, and you two were in here for quite some time.”

“Were you waiting outside my door for me?”

“Of course.”

“Why?”

“Because I was your secret weapon. I wanted to be in position in case you needed me,” he answered.

Jaclyn threw herself into his arms, hugging him, pulling him against her so she was pressed fully against his body. “Cullen, you are wonderful. I love you.”

He returned the embrace, nuzzling the side of her neck, breathing in her scent. “I love you, too.”

“I need you.”

“Now?”

“Yes.” She broke from his arms, and reached around his body, ensuring the door to her chambers was shut and locked, to keep out any potential intruders. Cullen raised an eyebrow at her.

“Don’t you have a welcome dinner to prepare for?”

“The king was too tired from his travels, so we postponed until tomorrow night. That means I have the whole night free.” Jaclyn bit her lip and looked up at Cullen through her lashes. Cullen. Her beautiful, fierce commander. Her partner and advisor in everything she did. She thought back to what Alistair had told her, and knew she would be devastated beyond consoling if she were to ever lose him. She didn’t know how the king continued living after losing the love of his life. Tears sprung to her eyes.

Of course, Cullen saw them immediately. “Jackie, are you sure you’re all right?” he asked, bringing his hand up to cup her cheek. “What’s wrong?”

She shook her head, not wanting to discuss what had transpired between her and Alistair just yet. She knew she had to think of something to say, but she also knew she wouldn’t betray the king’s confidence, even to her lover. She would think of something to tell him soon, but now, she needed to not think at all.

“Nothing’s wrong,” she answered. “We’ll talk about it later,” she added, when concern was still written all over Cullen’s face. “But right now, I need you, *Commander*.” She placed an emphasis on the last word to signal just what type of lover she needed at the moment.

Cullen picked up on the hint, and instantly, desire clouded his amber eyes. “Are you certain?” he asked, always needing to make sure before he took over. Just another thing she

loved about him.

“Yes. I need this,” she said, breathless with anticipation.

Before she could do anything else, Cullen’s forearm came up and slammed into her neck, pushing her back against the wall. She grunted, in both pain and arousal.

“You need this?” he whispered to her.

“Yes,” she responded, as loud as she could with Cullen’s arm slightly cutting off her air supply.

“Tell me,” he demanded. When she didn’t answer, he pressed further into her neck, restricting her breathing even more. “Tell me why you need this,” Cullen almost growled the order.

“It’s too much,” she managed to get out. “I’m responsible for so much; and His Majesty...I cannot say now, but His Majesty will require even more from me soon. And I need, just for a moment, to not be the one everybody looks up to. I need someone to take over, to tell me what to do. And...I need that person to be you, Commander.”

Cullen stayed in his position, not speaking, not moving, for what felt like hours to Jaclyn.

“Please,” she whispered finally. “Please, show me your strength. Show me your power. Take me.”

He grunted, finally moving. So fast she barely registered it, Cullen removed his arm from her neck, only to replace it with his hand, securing its position right under her jaw, perfect for squeezing just the right amount. He grabbed her wrists with his other hand and pinned them against the wall, above her head. Finally, he shoved one of his thick, muscled thighs between her own, spreading her legs slightly. She moaned at his movements, excitement already beginning to build within her.

He leaned his head down, stopping his mouth just a hair’s breadth away from her own. She licked her lips in anticipation, which elicited a devious chuckle from her lover.

“Oh, you think I’m going to kiss you?” he asked. She nodded, hoping that by showing deference to him by not speaking he would reward her.

Cullen moved his hand up from her neck to grip her cheeks. He lowered his mouth and kissed her, hard, but just for a moment. When he broke the kiss, Jaclyn let out an involuntary moan.

He kissed her again, and again, each time just for a brief second, never enough to give her the connection she craved and desperately needed. And each time he kissed her, his grip on her face tightened, just a little.

After a few minutes of this, Jaclyn was writhing with want. She couldn’t take it anymore; she needed him to touch her. She was riding the thigh that was between her legs,

wetness creating a damp spot on her leggings. Every time Cullen broke the brief kiss between them, her moans increased. "Please," she finally managed to get out between assaults on her mouth.

"Please? Do you think begging will get you anything?" he asked, moving his hand back down to her throat. He began gradually squeezing, while pressing up against her body. He leaned his head down and roughly kissed her, shoving his tongue into her mouth, then capturing her bottom lip between his teeth, pulling hard at it. She gasped as the sensations went straight to her core.

"Stay," he instructed her. "If you move even an inch, I will not be pleased." He then ripped his hands from her body and removed his thigh from between her legs. She whimpered at the lack of him, but did not move, per his instruction. Cullen's hands were a blur to her as he worked the various buckles and fasteners holding his armour together. Soon, all of it was removed, laid neatly on the chairs near the fire where she and Alistair had sat just minutes before.

Only in his undershirt and breeches, he returned to her. He paused his approach a few steps away, looking her up and down, a predatory gleam in his eye. He nodded slightly, and Jaclyn knew he saw she had obeyed his order perfectly.

He closed the distance between them, pressing himself fully against her, allowing her to feel his stiff erection through his thin pants. He bent down to kiss her, rubbing his length along her abdomen. She groaned at the feeling, both glad it was there and wishing it was placed slightly lower on her body.

After much too short a time, Cullen stepped back from her again.

"Strip," he commanded her. "Slowly. I want to savor this."

She shuddered at the utter control his voice had over her. This was the Cullen of the battlefield, the man who had worked his way up the ranks of the Templars to become Knight-Commander, the man who had enough self-discipline and self-control to be ridding himself of his lyrium addiction. She loved her sweet Cullen, the man who cared for and worried over her. But she also loved this Cullen, the one who knew what he wanted and was capable of getting it.

With hands that were slightly shaking, she began undoing the buttons on her shirt.

"Look at me," he demanded.

Jaclyn gazed upwards, meeting his eyes, starting a bit at the intense desire she found in them. She bit her lip as she moved to undo the next button down. As she did so, Cullen started slowly stroking himself through his pants. She wanted to see his cock so badly, to see how her body turned him on, but knew she couldn't ask. Not tonight.

When she finished unbuttoning her shirt and had removed it from her shoulders, Cullen strode over to her, quickly pushing her back up against the wall. He grabbed her breastband and tore it in two, removing the last barrier between him and her naked chest. He

lunged for her breasts, grabbing them in his hands and massaged them roughly. He pinched her nipples between his forefinger and thumb, testing how far he could pull them. Jaclyn closed her eyes at this sensation, overcome with arousal and need for something, *anything* between her legs.

She started squirming against the wall. In response, Cullen placed his hands on her shoulders and pushed her down, so she was kneeling in front of him.

“Find my cock,” he told her. Eagerly, she undid the laces on his breeches. Before they were even all the way undone, his stiff length came bouncing out, finally free of its constraints. It bobbed in front of her, and Jaclyn wanted nothing more than to taste it. She glanced up at him, her eyes pleading with the unasked question.

He nodded, once, and said, “You may. But only with your mouth. No hands.”

Jaclyn closed her eyes briefly in frustration, but wet her lips to prepare nonetheless. She licked the head, pleased to already taste some precum there. She then took her tongue and ran it along the head, encircling it, concentrating mostly on the ridge found on the underside. Finally, she sucked his head into her mouth, running the flat side of her tongue against his slit, reveling in the taste of him. She loved sucking cock, and it was a treat for her that Cullen was letting her do this on a night like tonight.

After suckling his cockhead for a few moments, she proceeded to take him into her mouth as far as she could. He was very large; she had never been able to take him fully. But she gave a valiant effort, sucking most of him down her throat. Cullen thrust into her a few times, one of his hands finding its way to her neck. He squeezed lightly as he pushed into her, letting out a soft groan as his hand could feel the bulge his cock made, stretching her skin. He ran his hands over the ridges his cock made in her neck, grasping his cockhead through her body. He grasped her throat a bit tighter, thrusting harder into her.

The combination of his cock and his hand limiting her air supply almost made Jaclyn pass out, but she also felt the wetness dripping from inside her. Just in time, however, Cullen removed his hand and his cock from her throat. Before she had a chance to recover her breath, he grabbed her by her chin and pulled her up to standing. As soon as she stood, his thumbs hooked into her leggings and smalls. He quickly dragged them off her, taking her boots with them.

He then pushed her back against the wall, grabbing her tightly on the backs of her thighs, right where her legs met her round bottom. He hoisted her up, spreading her legs as wide as they could go, and shoved into her sopping center, sheathing himself fully. Jaclyn groaned at the sensation, head tilting back against the wall, eyes closed.

“No. Watch me,” he growled out, squeezing her thighs. He didn’t begin moving until her eyes locked with his. When their gazes met, he began a relentless assault, moving faster than she would have thought possible in this position. He sawed in and out of her; the intensity of his movements matched the intensity she found in his eyes. There was a veritable storm in them: a mixture of desire, need, love, and a slight hardness that Jaclyn knew came from his commanding presence. She shuddered as his eyes stared into hers and he began moving faster.

She wanted to touch him, to kiss him, but knew that was off the table at the moment. She bit her lip to keep from tasting his mouth, and he pushed into her even harder. The wall was rough against her back, Cullen's hands firm, holding up her thighs.

She was still staring at him.

His thrusts got quicker.

Suddenly, and without warning, her orgasm broke around her. She closed her eyes as the pleasure crashed over her.

"Jackie, at me."

Struggling, she opened her eyes again, finding Cullen's amber eyes boring into her, dark with lust and emotion. He was still pushing into her at an incredible pace, dragging out her orgasm for as long as he could. She shook with pleasure, her inner walls pulsating over and over again, clenching his cock tight within her.

She moaned as she began slowly coming down from her high, the thrusts still intense, but the pulses of pleasure coming further apart. Only when her orgasm finally subsided did Cullen begin to slow his movements, kissing her roughly as he did so. He shoved his tongue into her mouth, tasting her fully for the first time that night. She moaned again, wrapping her legs around his waist. As she did that, he stopped moving inside her completely. She froze, thinking she did something wrong. But Cullen broke the kiss and looked at her, light dancing in his eyes.

Without a word, and without changing the way they were intertwined with each other, Cullen took a step back, shifting his grip on her a bit, so his hands were fully supporting her bottom. This move pushed him a little deeper inside her, and she clenched her walls at the sensation. He chuckled lightly.

"Wrap your arms around my neck," he ordered, "and then lean back." Jaclyn did as was instructed, the new position pushing her down even further on his cock, her breasts bared openly to him. "Hold on," he said, then bent down to take one of her nipples into his mouth. She gasped in pleasure, instinctively tightening her hold on his body everywhere they were joined.

He began sucking one of her breasts, pulling her nipple with his teeth, laving it with his tongue, covering the surrounding supple skin with his lips. As he turned his attention to her other breast, he began walking, making his way to the stairs that led to her bedroom.

"What – " she began.

"Hush," he ordered, lifting his head from the attention he was giving her nipple for only a moment, to look at her fully in the face. He then returned to kissing her breast.

As he began to walk up the stairs, his cock moved within her, bouncing slightly along with his body's motion. That, coupled with the devotion he was showing her chest, had another orgasm building inside her. For a moment, she wondered at how quickly Cullen had

brought her to this point again, but then he bit down severely on one of her nipples, while simultaneously thrusting his cock inside her, ensuring he brushed against the bundle of nerves at the apex of her thighs.

Another orgasm exploded around her; this time, however, Cullen removed himself fully from within her as he threw her down onto her bed. She cried out, both in surprise at her flight through the air and at the dismay she felt as her orgasm continued without any further stimulation. Her inner walls contracted, grasping for something that wasn't there. It was equal parts painful and pleasurable, and she both hated and loved Cullen for giving her that experience.

He climbed over her body on the bed, kissing her intently as her orgasm found its end. When she had finally quieted, he grabbed her waist and flipped her over so she was lying on her stomach. He then gripped her hips and dragged them backwards, lifting her rear high into the air. He massaged her ample ass cheeks, spreading them wide to look at her wet core.

He hummed in mock displeasure as he studied her glistening entrance. He ran one finger along the length of her, scooping up some of her juices onto his finger. He then reached around and placed the wet finger at the entrance to Jaclyn's mouth.

"Open," he instructed her. She did as she was told, opening her mouth wide to receive Cullen's finger. "Now suck your mess off of me." Again, she obeyed. "I can't believe you are enjoying this so much. What a wicked girl you are." Her tongue ran along his finger, sucking it deep into her mouth. "Imagine if all the world knew how depraved their beloved Inquisitor, their blessed Herald of Andraste, really was. Would they still worship you? Still venerate you, or listen to your commands? I doubt it," he said, pulling his finger from her mouth. She whimpered slightly, both at the feeling of loss she felt when he removed his finger, and also at the arousal building in her at his words.

"Did that taste good?" he whispered into her ear. She nodded. "Hmm...guess I have to try for myself."

He lowered his body so his mouth was even with her center. He hovered right over her skin, breathing in her scent. "You are so wet," he murmured. As he reached out with his tongue to run along her slit, he took one of his hands and slapped her bottom, hard.

Jaclyn yelped in surprise, unprepared for the spanking he just gave her. He had never done this before. Cullen paused his movements for a moment, waiting to see if she would tell him to stop. When she didn't, he kept going. Every time he tasted her, he would slap one of her ass cheeks. The harder the slap, the longer a taste he took.

Having just orgasmed twice in fairly quick succession, Jaclyn assumed it would take her a while to reach her next one. But with the added stimulation of Cullen's spanks, she felt her arousal quickly build up inside her. She was shocked by this, but the sensation of his mouth on her most sensitive parts, coupled with the sharp pain of his hand on her bottom, provided such a dichotomy that she was soon gushing again.

Cullen lapped it all up, pleased with the response he was eliciting from her. When he shoved his tongue inside her, he took to spanking her a few times in quick succession. She

quivered with pleasure, and he knew she was close again. Smirking into her, he removed his tongue from its assault, and brought his teeth down onto her bundle of nerves, biting her slightly. At the same time, both of his hands slapped her on the ass. The overstimulation of everything was too much, and a third orgasm broke within her.

As soon as her pleasure started, Cullen removed his mouth from her center, lifting himself up so he could shove into her again. He thrust into her slowly, and the change in sensation made her orgasm draw out for much longer than it should have. Her whole body was shaking with her gratification, and he had to grip her hips tightly to keep her from collapsing.

When her quaking finally subsided, he continued pounding into her, picking up the pace. She was limp in his arms, so he wrapped his hands around her stomach and lifted her up so her body was flush against his. Jaclyn moaned at the change in the depth of his penetration. Cullen chuckled as he moved one of his hands up to caress her breasts, the other drifting downward to start playing with the bundle of nerves between her legs. As his hand found its destination, she shook violently.

“Are you going to cum for me again?” he whispered in her ear.

“I can’t,” she managed to get out through her heaving breaths.

“Oh, you can’t?” he murmured, continuing to pump in and out of her. “You don’t tell me what you can and cannot do, understand?” As he spoke, he removed his hands from around her body and pushed her forward, back onto her hands. He gripped her hip, hard, with one of his hands, while the other came around and grabbed her chin, squeezing lightly.

“Open,” he commanded. She did as she was told, opening her mouth up wide. He shoved his thumb deep into her mouth. “Suck.”

Immediately, Jaclyn responded, sucking on Cullen’s thumb with vigor. She swirled her tongue around the wide tip, then paid special attention to his knuckles. His thumb was scarred from years of battle, and she ran her tongue up and down the slightly raised marks.

“You are going to cum for me again,” he stated.

She groaned, unable to speak with his thumb in her mouth. He began thrusting in her in earnest, going even faster. Her whole body was moving with his efforts.

He removed his thumb from her with a popping noise.

“Cum for me,” he commanded.

“I don’t think I can,” she whimpered.

He took his hands and spread her ass cheeks, so both her holes were exposed to him. He then took the thumb she had been sucking on and ran it up her crack, circling her tighter hole.

Without warning, he inserted his thumb into her second hole, pushing it in all the way, until the whole digit was swallowed into her body. She gasped at the unexpected intrusion, then groaned in pleasure as Cullen began thrusting his thumb into her, matching his cock's movement below.

He got into a rhythm, pushing in his cock as his thumb pulled out, and then inserting his thumb, as his cock was withdrawing.

Jaclyn had never felt so full.

Cullen continued his assault on both of her holes for a few minutes, changing the speed of his thrusts every so often, so she never quite got used to the feeling he was giving her.

"Maker bless his Templar stamina," she thought, as, after a while, she felt another orgasm build up inside her. This one was coming from deep within her. Being stimulated in both holes was creating a feeling that she wasn't used to, and Jaclyn had no idea what would happen when everything finally crashed down around her. She did know she shouldn't have felt this wound up after having orgasmed three times previously. *"What is he doing to me?"* she wondered.

Her moans got louder as she was getting closer to her release. Cullen never faltered, increasing the speed of his pumping as she became more vocal. When he could tell she was close again, he commanded her once more.

"Cum for me, Jackie."

The combination of the attention he was giving her body, and the commanding tone his words held, not to mention his use of her name, had Jaclyn cresting over into yet another orgasm. The pleasure he elicited from her was so much; she couldn't help but cry out, his name and declarations of love spilling from her lips. This time, Cullen let himself go, and he came with her, spilling strand after strand of hot spend into her. The feeling of his orgasm caused hers to continue longer than it should, and, when they finally came down from their highs, Jaclyn was spent and exhausted. She collapsed into Cullen's waiting arms.

Gently, he extracted himself from her body, removing his thumb from her tighter hole, and his cock slid out of her wetness with an obscene slurping sound. When he had removed himself, liquid started running down her legs, a mixture of both of their cum. He bent down and licked some of it off of her inner thigh.

"Mm..." he said, smacking his lips in satisfaction. "We taste exquisite. You really should have some for yourself." He took one of his fingers and wiped up some of their juices from her inner thigh and presented it to her.

"Open," he said.

Still in the mindset of their lovemaking session, Jaclyn obeyed immediately; opening her mouth wide to take in whatever object Cullen was giving her. He inserted his finger into

her mouth, and her lips instantly closed around it, her tongue licking his finger clean. She moaned at the taste of both of them mixed together. Nothing in the world had a better flavor.

When Cullen was satisfied his finger had been cleaned sufficiently, he pulled it out of her mouth, her resistance at letting him go eliciting a small chuckle from him. He turned her around in his arms and kissed her passionately, pulling her close to him so he could feel her body pressed against his everywhere it could.

While they were kissing, Cullen gently lowered the both of them down so they were lying on the bed. As soon as they reached a horizontal position, he broke the kiss.

“Did that satisfy you, love?” he asked.

She nodded, too tired and satiated to say anything else. She snuggled closely into his chest, nuzzling the fine blonde hair present there.

“Good,” he said, placing a swift kiss on the top of her head. “Now, get some sleep.”

She hummed her approval of his plan, before settling in his arms.

As she began to drift off to sleep, a pang of sadness hit her as her thoughts returned to Alistair and the Hero of Ferelden. How often had the king been in the same position as her, wrapped in the embrace of his lover, needing him to take away the pain and sadness they faced daily? And what did the king do these days, for distraction, now that his lover was no longer walking the earth?

She needed to do something for Alistair, aside from talking to Morrigan for him. She needed to set him up, to give him some time where he could get away from his daily stresses and just...relax for a bit. Her thoughts turned then to Dorian. Maybe her mage friend would consent to having a bit of playtime with the king? She didn't know Alistair's opinions on mages, or Tevinters for that matter. And now that she thought about it, he didn't react too well to the Tevinter Magister that tried to take over Redcliffe. So maybe Dorian *wasn't* the best idea. Besides, she didn't know what Bull would think of her asking his lover to sleep with someone else for an evening.

She thought some more. Wait...didn't Cullen know Alistair back in Ferelden? Wasn't Cullen stationed at Kinloch Hold, and didn't the Hero and his party travel there to enlist the help of the mages to end the Blight?

Before succumbing to the Fade, she made a note to ask Cullen about his relationship with the king. If there was something, anything, her commander knew that could assist the monarch, she needed to know. Hopefully, the two of them would come up with something to ease the burdens the king had.

Satisfied with her plan, she snuggled deeper into her lover's arms, welcoming sleep's embrace.

The Discovery

Chapter Summary

Cullen is directed by Jaclyn to get to know the King of Ferelden better, and the two have more in common than they might think...

Chapter Notes

Hi hello! First of all, let me start off by apologizing for the *dreadful* length of time that it's taken me to update this fic. It was always sitting in the back of my mind, so I haven't abandoned it (hurrah! I hope lol) and I do want to see it through at least a few more chapters. My OT3 will get a happy ending damn it lol.

That being said, years have passed since I've last updated this, and my style of writing has definitely changed. In the interest of moving forward, I'm going to leave these first two chapters as is (warts and all) so please forgive me if there's an abrupt style change moving forward (I also wrote the beginning of this chapter in 2018 and finished it...a few weeks ago. Welp). This change in style also revolves around the indents, a formatting issue I no longer care to deal with on AO3, so...sorry! But it is what it is.

Finally, I'm so sorry this chapter isn't exactly what the other two chapters have been re: smut. But I felt like this establishment of Alistair and Cullen's relationship was really necessary to make their eventual coupling make sense in character, so here we are. A sort of in-between scene for the smut.

All in all, I'm so incredibly sorry it took me so long to update. I appreciate those of you who are still with me for this journey, and those new readers, welcome! Hopefully the next chapter will be updated in less than 2 years (it will be!).

Enjoy!

Jaclyn woke the next morning feeling rested and satiated. A smile played upon her lips as she stretched and turned over to face the man who caused her happiness. She gazed at his sleeping face, taking in the little details that she often missed when they were both busy at work. She especially loved how relaxed he looked at times like these, no pressures or stress weighing him down. The lines around his mouth had softened and his brow smoothed, no longer creased from worry. He was attractive always, but seeing him like this - vulnerable in a way no one else got to witness - made her heart swell.

“You going to keep staring at me or are you going to say something?” he murmured, his eyes still closed.

She giggled at that, wondering at his almost preternatural ability to detect when she was awake.

“Good morning,” she said, turning her back to him and scooting herself into his arms. They automatically tightened around her as he drew her closer to him. He buried his face into her hair and took a deep breath.

“It is indeed,” he said, nuzzling her softly. “How are you feeling this morning?”

“Much better, thank you.”

“Good,” he said, kissing the top of her head. “Glad to be of assistance.”

She stretched again, arching her back against him. She giggled when she felt his hard cock poke her.

“Seems like someone could be of even *more* assistance this morning, hmm?” she asked.

“I sleep with a beautiful woman in my bed. I can only resist so much,” he answered.

“Are you calling me a temptress?” she teased, turning over so he could see her face and know she wasn’t truly cross with him.

“Maybe I am,” he said, mischief glinting in his beautiful amber eyes.

“Mm, such a shame,” she answered playfully. “Maybe I should remove myself from your gaze then. Wouldn’t want to cause you any undue stress you know.” Jaclyn made to move off the bed, but a hand shot out and grabbed her arm, stopping her. Cullen pulled her so she laid with her back flat on the mattress and rolled over, covering her body with his own.

He brought his mouth close to hers. “I wasn’t complaining,” he murmured, before kissing her languidly. She relaxed into the embrace, content with taking the time to just experience him, no urgency or schedule weighing them down.

She opened her mouth to welcome his tongue as she spread her legs and tilted her hips to show her lover what she wanted.

Cullen pulled back from her. “You sure?” he asked, searching her eyes. “Just because I have need of you doesn’t mean you have to give yourself to me.”

Jaclyn smiled and pressed a kiss to the commander’s neck. “I’m not being wholly altruistic,” she said, a glint in her eyes.

Cullen raised an eyebrow as he reached down to feel between her legs. “Maker’s breath,” he murmured, desire clouding his eyes as he felt her. “I haven’t even done anything.”

"I sleep with a beautiful man in my bed, I can only resist so much," Jaclyn echoed, attempting to hide the grin that wanted to split her face.

He rolled his eyes good-naturedly as he kissed her again, deep and slow, running one hand through the hair at her forehead and the other down the length of her torso, caressing her curves.

"Touché," he said against her lips when his hand reached her hip. He ghosted his fingertips over the crease of her thigh, grazing them against her core. She moaned a little at his teasing, and he chuckled, breaking off their embrace.

"Impatient my love?" he asked.

"For you? Always," she responded, arching her back as she felt him take himself in hand and run his tip against her entrance.

"Good," he murmured with a smirk as he pushed into her.

She sighed as she felt him fill her, and an almost indescribable feeling rushed through her as he moved inside her - one of safety, comfort, and home.

"Are you okay, love?" Cullen asked as she brushed her hair in the looking glass later that morning. He came up behind her and placed his hands on her shoulders, meeting her gaze in the reflective surface.

Jaclyn smiled. "I'm fine," she said, giving him a soft smile.

"Are you sure?" He gripped her shoulders and a small worried crease formed between his brows. He always did know when she was hiding something.

She sighed, placing the brush down on the vanity. She knew what she had to ask, but wasn't entirely sure how the commander would react. They hadn't ever really talked about his time in the Ferelden Circle, not really. He told her enough that who he was in Kirkwall made some semblance of sense, but they hadn't ever gone into details about his first assignment. And even then, what she knew of his time with Meredith was only enough to understand Hawke's frank assessment of her commander - her warning that Cullen might not be able to be trusted.

That had worried her, Hawke's details about the Inquisition commander's past. It took a lot of convincing from both Cassandra and Varric to assure Jaclyn that Cullen had nothing but the best interests of Thedas in mind, and that his views on mages had changed.

Her companions' words, along with her own observations of Cullen's desire to rid himself of his lyrium addiction, allowed her to open herself up enough to see him for who he truly was - a kind, caring man with a tragic past that colored his experiences far too deeply. But he was working through it, and the last thing she wanted to do was set him down that path again.

But for the king of Ferelden, for the good of Thedas, she had to. She held no allegiance to Ferelden, but as the Inquisitor, she worried about the whole continent. And a weak monarch - a distracted monarch - would do no one any good.

So she squared her shoulders and turned to face her love, who was gazing at her with such open concern it almost made her heart break.

"It's about Alistair - the king," she quickly corrected herself.

Cullen took a seat on the chaise next to her vanity but didn't say anything, letting her speak.

"I told you last night I would tell you why I needed you the way I did. I...it has to do with something the king divulged to me. And I think, that is, I believe it would be best -" she cut herself off, taking a deep breath.

He covered her hands with his, and she was shocked by their warmth; she hadn't realized how cold she was.

"Whatever it is you need to tell me, it will be alright. Nothing you say will upset me."

"But, that's the thing," Jaclyn began. "I *can't* tell you. At least, I can't tell you the reason why. The king swore me to secrecy. And I know you're my lover and my advisor, so I should be able to tell you anything, but I can't, I just *can't*. I cannot betray Alistair's trust like that." She paused, waiting for him to get angry with her, to demand to be told what was so important.

But to her surprise - although it really shouldn't have been - Cullen just smiled. "I am not cross with you for not betraying the king's trust. Although as your advisor I would be grateful to know any information that would be important to the Inquisition, I also trust you. I trust you know what you're doing and that you have nothing but the best intentions for the Inquisition. You wouldn't be Inquisitor if it were not so. The truth is - you are so much smarter and wiser than you give yourself credit for. Whatever you and Alistair have going on between you two, it's not for me to know. As long as you're safe, that's all that matters to me."

Jaclyn blushed, though she wasn't sure if the heat blooming across her cheeks was due to his kind words or the image of the king her mind conjured when Cullen talked about something going on between her and Alistair. She knew her commander hadn't meant it in that way, but she couldn't help thinking about the monarch's kind and handsome face.

She shook her head. That line of thinking wasn't going to help her. She had to focus on the man in front of her and what she needed him to do.

Jaclyn sat up a bit straighter. "Can you talk to him for me?" she asked.

"Who?"

"The king. Can you spend some time with him? I think...well, I know it's not the same, and it's kind of weird to say, but I think the king is lonely. And I think he would benefit from

spending time with someone who knew him from before he was king, who wouldn't fawn over him because of his title. And I know you didn't know him *well*, but considering you *did* know him, I think it might benefit him to speak to you."

Cullen sat quietly for a few moments. Jaclyn bit her lip, her stomach clenching with nerves as she knew what was most likely going through his head. He didn't remove his hands from hers though, which she took as a good sign.

After an excruciating couple of minutes, where her lover stayed silent and still, he finally spoke.

"Why me?"

"Hmm?" Jaclyn asked, unsure of his meaning.

"Why me? Leliana and Morrigan traveled with him during the Fifth Blight. They'd know him much better than me, which would make them more ideal to speak with him."

"From what I gathered, he and Morrigan do not have a relationship; in fact, if I read between the lines properly, the last time they saw each other they got into an argument. No, Morrigan wouldn't do at all. As for Leliana, I'm sure she would be fine, but I don't think that's the *right* kind of companionship for him."

Cullen looked at her, his brows now contracted in confusion. "Whatever do you mean?" Jaclyn just gave him a look, trying to convey without words what she needed her commander to do.

"Oh, is it because Leliana prefers the company of women? Because I don't think that's the case. I think she actually -"

"Not Leliana's preference," Jaclyn said, cutting him off before he revealed things about her spymaster she wasn't sure Leliana would want her to know. "Alistair's."

"What?" Cullen asked, the crease in his brow deepening as he struggled to understand. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, it's not Leliana's preference I'm worried about."

It took him far too long, Jaclyn thought, to put the pieces together. "*This is why he's the military commander and not charged with gathering intelligence,*" she thought with a smile.

"Oh," Cullen said, when the information finally dawned on him. "You mean - *Alistair*? He - he prefers men?"

"I'm not sure if he does or not, but he told me he and the Hero of Ferelden enjoyed a romantic relationship. And I just thought -"

"You want me to flirt with him?" It was Cullen's turn to interrupt, and Jaclyn blushed at the implication. She chanced a look into his eyes but didn't see revulsion or derision at the idea. Instead, she saw...was that a glimmer of interest?

“I mean...if that’s what you think would help him the best. I just think he’s lonely, that’s all. And who better to give him some much-needed attention than the devastatingly handsome commander of the Inquisition?”

Cullen gave her a smirk. “You think I’m devastatingly handsome?”

She moved to sit on his lap, his arms wrapping around her instantly as she pressed her forehead against his and placed a soft kiss on his nose.

“I think if I wasn’t careful, your looks could drive me to distraction,” she answered.

He cupped her face and ran a thumb over her cheekbone. She leaned into the caress, but maintained eye contact, not wanting the thread of the conversation to get lost.

“You sure do know how to treat a guy.” He kissed her softly. Jaclyn was sad when he moved away, but admonished herself to focus. “So you want me to flirt with the king of Ferelden?” he asked again.

“If that’s what you think is best,” she repeated, placing a swift kiss of her own on his scar then hopping off his lap. If she didn’t put some distance between them, they’d never get out of this room today.

She moved back to the full-length looking glass, ensuring her hair was tidy enough and her clothing not too rumpled.

Cullen came up behind her and pressed his front into her back, wrapping his arms around her stomach. He rested his chin on her shoulder as he met her eyes in the glass once again. “I’ll see what I can do,” he said. “You won’t get jealous?” he asked, a small smile playing on his lips, although his eyes were serious.

“Not at all,” Jaclyn said, resting her hands on his forearms. “Whatever you need to do to make him feel better.”

“Why do I have the feeling the Inquisitor pawned something off on me?” he wondered, winking.

“I have my own way of helping him,” she answered promptly. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to go see to that. So you do your part, and I’ll do mine.” She pressed against him firmly before fully extricating herself from his arms and heading toward the door.

“Enjoy your day, my love,” she said as she opened it. As she walked down the stairs toward Skyhold’s main hall, she felt the echo of Cullen’s half-hard cock against her backside. But for the first time, she wondered if she was the only cause of it.

Cullen cleared his throat as he entered the Herald’s Rest that afternoon, straightening his shoulders as he scanned the space for the telltale sign of red hair. He knew the king was here, his guards had told him they had seen the monarch enter and hadn’t spotted him leaving. But the commander couldn’t find him anywhere.

He approached Cabot and the bartender gave him a nod.

“Afternoon, Commander. Looking for a drink?” Although he tried to hide it, Cabot had a touch of incredulity in his voice.

Acknowledging the strangeness of him being in the bar at that hour, Cullen gave the other man a half smile.

“Not at this moment, Cabot. Just a person. Have you seen King Alistair around here? I got reports he had taken up residence somewhere in the Rest.”

The other man grunted. “Aye, he’s around here. ’Bout time someone came and got him. Another half hour, I was gonna set the guards on him meself.”

Cullen just raised his eyebrow. Cabot nodded his head toward the stairs.

“Second floor, table in the back.”

“Thanks,” the commander said, turning toward the stairs.

“Good luck,” Cabot called after him.

Cullen just gave him a wave as he ascended the staircase.

“*Good luck?*” he thought, “*whatever will I need that for?*” And why was Cabot going to call the guards on the king? He was seeking Alistair out as a favor to Jackie, not in an official capacity as head of the Inquisition’s military.

As he climbed the stairs, his thoughts wandered to the conversation he’d had with the Inquisitor that morning. It wasn’t as if he didn’t *want* to speak to the king for her, it’s just that seeing somebody that would remind him of his time at Kinloch Hold wasn’t high on the list of things he wanted to do.

But, he had managed to work closely with Leliana every day, and she was there at that time in his life as well. If he had succeeded in putting his past behind him with her, he could do so with the king.

Besides, Alistair couldn’t be *that* hard to handle, could he? He remembered an affable boy who was outshone by his fellow warden - the Hero - in almost every way. He couldn’t have changed that much.

As he rounded the corner of the second floor landing, however, Cullen was taken aback by the image that came into view.

Alistair was sitting alone, surrounded by so many empty bottles there was hardly room to walk near his table. He was passed out, his head resting on his arm that was splayed across the table, in his hand a goblet of wine, precariously balanced on its edge.

“Your Majesty?” Cullen asked, clearing his throat. The other man’s back was turned toward him, so he couldn’t see the king’s face. Cullen hoped the monarch was alright. At least he

was lying on his side so he wouldn't aspirate should he throw up.

"Your Majesty, it's Commander Cullen, of the Inquisition. I was hoping -"

Before he was able to finish his sentence, however, Alistair sat up, his chair tilting slightly backward due to the force of his movement. The king grabbed the edge of the table to prevent himself from falling over and then righted himself. The move was quite a bit more dexterous than he'd expect from someone who had drunk that much.

"Cullen?" Alistair asked. "Cullen *Rutherford*, from the Ferelden Circle?"

The commander winced just slightly at the call back to his past, but let it slide. "It's me, Your Majesty. I thought I'd check on you, see how you were enjoying your time in Skyhold so far."

"Your tavern is *wonderful*," Alistair said, with only a slight slur to his voice. "I have enjoyed it *immensely*. I daresay I haven't seen much of your lovely fortress except for the brief tour your ambassador gave me this morning, but so far - I like what I see." He met Cullen's eyes at that, and the commander wasn't sure if Alistair was referring to Skyhold or to him.

"But goodness, where are my manners? Please, sit, have a drink. It is a day for old friends and acquaintances, isn't it? We should celebrate!"

"Your Majesty?" Cullen asked, taking the seat opposite.

"Please, call me Alistair. You knew me way back when. I should hardly think it appropriate for you to call me by my infernal title."

Cullen raised an eyebrow at that, but acquiesced to his request. "Indeed. A plethora of old faces for you today?" he asked, signaling to the serving girl that he'd take a tankard of ale.

"Indeed," Alistair echoed. "Some warranted and some not so warranted." He slurred a bit as he drained the contents of his goblet, but his hand was surprisingly steady as he poured himself more from the bottle.

"This is good stuff, by the way. Your ambassador has good taste."

Cullen looked at the label. He didn't know anything about wine, but he recognized the words on the bottle. "Ah that one'd be Leliana's doing, I think," he said.

"Of course it would be," Alistair replied, taking a deep drink.

"Are you...do you not enjoy a positive relationship with our spymaster?" Cullen asked, raising an eyebrow as the girl came over with his tankard.

Instead of answering, the king looked over at Cullen's drink. "Ale? Really, Cullen, I know the Chantry doesn't give us a refined palate, but still. Join me in the wine, won't you?"

The commander demurred. "It's only mid-afternoon. I'm on duty. I shouldn't even be drinking this. But I figured it'd be rude not to enjoy *something* as we caught up."

“You’re like me, Commander. Always on duty. You think a monarch can be drunk in the middle of the day?” He paused for a split second before continuing. “Don’t answer that. I’m sure Celene has her fair share of drunken afternoon exploits. A monarch can technically do whatever they want, which is why they have *advisors*,” he waved his glass in Cullen’s direction, “to take care of things *for* them. Oh,” he said.

His change in demeanor was so sudden, Cullen wondered if the king was going to be sick.

“I see,” Alistair said, that same, more serious tone in his voice.

“Your Majesty? Is everything alright?” Cullen moved to the edge of his chair, ready to jump up and catch the redhead if needed.

“I *told* you, call me Alistair,” he said, that lilting cadence of intoxication now back. “And everything is decidedly *not* alright. I just realized that you are an advisor, which means you *don’t* get any time off. Which means *my* advisors don’t get any time off, which means I’m a bad king. Am I a bad king? Have I failed Ferelden? Have I failed -” he cut himself off at that, clamping his mouth shut and staring into the distance, falling into an impenetrable silence.

Cullen refrained from scrubbing his hand over his face. This was *not* going well. Jackie asked him to speak with the king to take his mind *off* of the Hero, not make him dwell on it. If this was how he boosted up his troops’ morale, he’d be a terrible commander indeed.

Suddenly, it hit him. Although Alistair was a king, a monarch of one of the most powerful nations in Thedas, he was a Grey Warden first. A Templar and a soldier. A man. He should be treated as such.

Cullen motioned to the serving girl. When she arrived, he instructed her to bring another bottle of wine and a goblet. At his words, Alistair arched an eyebrow.

“You’re right. We *don’t* get any time off; but that’s our doing, not the Inquisitor’s - or the monarch’s. I know the Inquisitor would like us all to take some time to ourselves every once and awhile - I think.” He remembered the last time he traveled outside of Skyhold, when he accompanied the Inquisitor to the Winter Palace. Jackie had seemed so thrilled to have him there; that dance they had shared on the balcony - and their romp in bed afterwards - got him through many a lonely night when she was on the road. He was sure she would love it if he could accompany her more often. Alas, his duties were here, and hers were there. But hopefully, when all this nonsense with Corypheus was put behind them, they could find a nice place to settle down and finally relax the way they both deserved.

“Copper for your thoughts,” Alistair said, smiling at him. Cullen started, realizing he must have missed something the king said.

“Apologies, Your Majesty. I got carried away thinking of the last time we saw each other.” Although it was a lie, for some reason Cullen didn’t want to bring up his relationship with Jackie. He had no idea if the king knew they were together or not, but he figured it was Jackie’s place to tell the other man, not his. He didn’t want knowledge of their association to adversely affect either of their working partnerships.

Alistair gave him a sympathetic look. "Nasty business, that was. I'm sorry you got caught up in all of that. And I'm sorry Aedan didn't listen to you. He could be quite stubborn sometimes."

Cullen started shaking his head before the king had finished speaking.

"Nonsense. I wasn't in my right mind. Calling for the Annulment...I know now that was the wrong thing to do. The Hero saw clearly what I could not: that the mages would be an essential part of the fight against the archdemon."

"A lesson I hear you have learned," Alistair said, as the second bottle and goblet appeared.

The commander smiled ruefully. "Indeed I have. That mess in Redcliffe was something wasn't it?"

Alistair had the grace to look abashed. "I am sorry for what I said to your Inquisitor. I was heated, in the moment -"

Cullen waved his hand in the air, dismissing the king's words. "Nevermind that. The Inquisitor understood your position. It couldn't have been easy being betrayed like that." He refilled the king's cup and poured himself a glass, not missing the flinch Alistair made when Cullen said the word "betrayed."

"Yes, well, that's a bit of a sore subject with me, I'm afraid," he said by way of explanation. At Cullen's raised eyebrow, he went on. "Betrayal. The idea that someone could say one thing and do another. The Chantry may have its faults, but the one thing they taught us was honesty above all else. I know many of the brothers and sisters fail to live up to that expectation, but sheer disloyalty and *betrayal*, like Maferath did to Andraste?" He shook his head. "It's just so...*wrong*."

Cullen took a sip of the wine, pleasantly surprised at its light and fruity taste. He'd have to remember to pass on his compliments to Leliana next he saw her. "I understand, truly I do." Alistair met his eyes at that, and the commander was taken aback by how clear they looked. The man was obviously intoxicated - he had to be - judging by the number of empty bottles surrounding him. But to have that steady of a gaze...

His incredulity must have shown on his face, for Alistair offered him a small smile.

"Once a Grey Warden, always a Grey Warden," he said, raising his cup in the air. Cullen mimicked his actions and they drained their goblets.

"Really?" the commander asked, refilling both their glasses. "I didn't know that was a side effect."

"There are a lot of things they don't tell you about being a Grey Warden until you are one," Alistair murmured, a dark look crossing his face. "Takes me bloody forever to feel *anything* from alcohol. Luckily, I'm king, so most of the time I get to drink for free." He smiled and gazed around the Rest. "Though your ambassador didn't say if I was going to be extended the

same courtesy here. And by the looks of the barkeep, I'd say *he* wouldn't allow me to drink my fill for free."

Cullen laughed at that. "No, I daresay Cabot would *not* be extending you that offer. I'm sure Josephine will take care of it though. Courtly etiquette is her most beloved pastime."

"She's a pretty one," Alistair said, hiccupping slightly as he drained his goblet again. Cullen matched him and filled their cups.

"She is," he agreed. "Betrothed to some Antivan lord if I understand it correctly. I'm not sure though. I don't really keep up with all that. Except she and Leliana talk about the wedding *incessantly*. Sometimes being the only male on the small council can be tiring."

Alistair raised his eyebrow, as if recalling the Inquisitor's advisors. "You, Leliana, Josephine, the Inquisitor, and Cassandra Penteghast. Huh. What a cabal of strong women."

"Tell me about it," Cullen murmured, drinking deeply again. Alistair laughed at that.

"Not the easiest of things to manage?" the king asked.

Cullen snorted. "Oh I don't manage anything in the small council. My troops are mine, but at the war table? That's all the Inquisitor's doing. We are only there to guide, but her instincts are spot on. Most of what she wants I'm able to provide, and what I can't, I figure out how to do. All I do is give her the numbers, and then carry out her orders. She's a smart one."

"I could tell that from the moment I met her," Alistair said softly. Cullen looked to the other man then, his gaze far away, as if remembering his first interaction with Jaclyn.

"Don't tell her I told you," Cullen said, drinking from his wine again and emptying the glass, "but she was scared shitless of you the first time she met you."

Alistair's face broke into a grin as he refilled the commander's goblet. "I can't say I blame her. I did come marching into Redcliffe castle with a retinue of 30 soldiers and demanded she leave with her newfound allies immediately. Not the warmest welcome I could have given."

Cullen laughed out loud. "Fair enough. At least you recognize it."

"Oh I recognize it," Alistair said, drinking himself. "It's damn tough being king. I knew it would be, and in some ways, it's better than I imagined. But in others - in times like those where you have to make the hard choices -" he sighed, twirling the goblet's stem between his fingers. "I had hoped I had put all those choices behind me when I hung up my Warden shield," he said. "But it turns out, those were some of the easiest ones I've had to make. Being the only Warden in Ferelden *and* being their king? Too many missives have passed my desk with things I wish I didn't have to think about."

"I understand that completely," Cullen said, taking another sip of his wine. He was shocked to find the cup almost empty. It went down too easily. Before he could reach for the bottle, Alistair poured him a refill. "The Inquisitor might make the calls, but I'm the one who makes the personnel choices. Who goes, who stays...the casualty reports are never easy to read."

Suddenly, Alistair lifted his goblet in the air. "To our fallen soldiers. May they rest eternally by the Maker's side."

"Blessed are the peacekeepers, the champions of the just," Cullen recited.

"Blessed are the righteous, the lights in the shadow," Alistair continued.

Both men drained their cups in one.

"You can take the man out of the Chantry, but you can't take the Chantry out of the man," Alistair chuckled, filling his glass once more.

Cullen joined him, in both the laughter and the refill of wine. "There is something to be said about Templar teachings, isn't there? Even in the drunkest of states, I think I'd be able to recite the chant. Maybe not from start to finish, but certainly Apotheosis and Exaltations."

"I'm sure you could recite it all if pressed," Alistair said, smiling.

"Oh certainly. I can still hear Mother Rosalin's recriminations if I misspoke a verse," Cullen repressed a shudder.

"Mother Dorinda for me. They have their ways, don't they?"

"I've never had a stronger dressing down since I've left the barracks than by Mother Giselle. She's around here somewhere. I shouldn't say steer clear of her, but if you don't want your wrist verbally slapped, I'd avoid entering into any form of conversation with her," Cullen confided.

Alistair just quirked his brow, his mouth following suit. "I shall keep that in mind." He took a sip of his wine. "A dressing down hmm? For the commander of the Inquisition? Whatever had you done?"

Cullen felt his face heat with embarrassment - or was the wine finally getting to him? - as he rubbed the back of his neck with his gloved hand. "It was after the attack on Haven. I thought...well, let's just say none of us were in a very good mood. I should have handled it better, I should have prepared the soldiers for it more...but a bloody dragon? I didn't expect that - I *couldn't* have prepared for it. And sending her out there...thinking she was dead..." he trailed off as emotion closed his throat. He tried to cover it by taking another sip of his wine.

He felt Alistair's hand cover his own. Surprised at the gesture, Cullen's eyes snapped to the king's, but he didn't take his hand away.

"I know what that's like," he murmured.

Remembering what Jackie told him about the king and the Hero's relationship, Cullen realized that the other man truly did understand. His heart contracted with the knowledge that he had gotten his love back, whereas the king had to go on living without his own.

He wasn't sure that would be something he could do. He admired the strength Alistair had.

The two men fell silent as they each slid into their respective memories. Cullen had been beyond consoling when he thought his failures to prepare for Corypheus' arrival led to the death of the Herald. He'd already failed the Maker once, when he let his prejudice against mages cause him to miss Meredith's descent into madness. Those deaths - the deaths of the Circle tower and the citizenry of Kirkwall - were on him. On his darkest of days, when the lyrium withdrawals were getting to him, he even thought the deaths at the Chantry were his failure. He didn't set the bomb, but if he'd have stopped Meredith sooner, if he'd have confronted her like any man of honour should have...

He was broken out of his reverie by the feeling of pressure on his hand. He was shocked to find Alistair still had a grip on his own. The king smiled at him when Cullen met his eyes.

As if the other man could read his thoughts, Alistair spoke. "It's not your fault," he said, somewhat soothingly. Again, Cullen was taken aback by the king's seemingly clear head. "There's no way you could have known what you were up against. Nobody had that intel. The fact that you were able to save as many residents of Haven as you did...that was impressive. News of your feat reached my ears in Denerim. You did what you could."

Cullen shook his head again. "*I* did nothing. It was all the Herald - the Inquisitor. She risked her life and nearly *died* and I...I left her."

"You did what you had to do," Alistair said, quietly. "She wouldn't have had it any other way."

Cullen nodded and squeezed the king's hand to show his gratefulness. "You're right. And this is what we trained for, what our duties entail. We were taught how to make the hard decisions. Still," he said, draining his goblet again, "it doesn't make it easy."

"You're absolutely right," Alistair said. He fell silent again and looked at Cullen with an intense stare, almost as if he was trying to see into the commander's mind.

"It's never easy, but it is the duty expected of us," Cullen added, filling his goblet once more and topping off the king's.

"Duty," Alistair said, staring into his own cup as he swirled its contents. "What a concept. 'For King and Country.'" He laughed mirthlessly. "What about when you *are* king? For country? I suppose. I just wish -" he cut himself off again and looked at the wine accusingly. "Nevermind me. Sometimes wine makes me morose. And when that happens, I know it is time to call it a night. Er, afternoon. I suppose I should prepare myself for dinner. Don't want to show up smelling like...well, like me." He chuckled.

Cullen laughed and drained his own cup, not one to waste good wine. "I believe our ambassador would find that quite agreeable."

"Indeed," Alistair said, standing. Cullen followed suit, swaying just a bit as the wine rushed to his head. His vision swam as he blinked his eyes to refocus them. He must have drunk more than he originally thought...

“After you, Your Majesty,” he said, sweeping his arm out slightly to indicate the way to the stairs.

“How many times,” Alistair said, stepping in front of the other man to block his way forward, “must I tell you to call me ‘Alistair.’”

Cullen’s throat dried up as he felt the heat radiating off the other man, his body within touching distance of his own. They were almost of equal height, Cullen just an inch or two taller than the king. He’d never noticed, really, just how tall the monarch was. Well, in all honesty, he’d never been this close to him before.

“Forgive me,” Cullen murmured, eyes dropping to the other man’s lips. Why did they seem so enticing to him? He didn’t have any reason to find them compelling, and yet...

His tongue darted out to wet his own subconsciously, and he could have sworn he heard the other man’s breathing hitch, ever so slightly.

“You are forgiven, Commander,” Alistair said. But he didn’t move out of the way. Instead, it seemed that he leaned just a bit closer, almost imperceptibly.

Cullen took a deep breath in, trying to clear his head. It was muddled by the wine, the heat of the tavern, and - Maker help him - the overwhelming presence of the man before him. What was going on?

Alistair cleared his throat and took a step back, as if suddenly remembering where he was. Cullen found he was missing his presence almost immediately.

“Well,” the king said, somewhat bracingly. “Let us be off then.”

Cullen smiled slightly as he followed the other man down the stairs, ensuring he kept his distance. He didn’t know why he was feeling the way he was, but he knew it became more intense the closer he got to the king.

When they reached the first floor, Alistair headed straight out the door, into the cool mountain air, paying no mind to the rest of the patrons and seemingly not caring if Cullen followed or not. Well, that answered that question then. He must have been imagining the whole thing. It was the only thing that made sense, really. The wine must have truly gotten to him to think the King of Ferelden would want anything to do with *him* after all.

The commander took a moment to head to the bar, where Cabot was busying himself wiping out glasses.

“Commander,” the dwarf nodded his greetings. “No trouble then?”

“Nothing I couldn’t handle,” he responded, attempting a disarming smile. He wasn’t sure if it worked. “In the future, should that situation arise again, please come straight to me. No need getting any other members of the guard involved. Is that understood?”

“Explicitly,” Cabot answered. “I hope to the Stone I won’t have need of you.”

“Agreed,” Cullen said, dropping a few gold pieces on the bartop. “I know Josephine takes care of the stock, but to help with the cleanup,” he explained.

“Much obliged, Commander. I hope I don’t see you around soon, no offense.”

Cullen laughed at that. “None taken. I hope you don’t see me either.”

Cullen was surprised to find Alistair waiting just outside the door to The Herald’s Rest. His conversation with Cabot had taken a few minutes; he didn’t expect the king to wait around.

“Your - Alistair?” he asked, correcting himself quickly. “I thought you would have been halfway to your chambers by now.”

The redhead looked to the commander and he could have sworn there was a small blush on the man’s cheeks.

“Well,” he started, clearing his throat again. “I was planning to, until I realized I had no idea where my chambers were. Forgive me, I don’t usually get this turned around, but...”

Cullen put a reassuring hand on the other man’s upper arm. “Nonsense. Skyhold is a large place. I had to commission maps of it when we first arrived to hand out to everybody so they wouldn’t get lost. It’s completely understandable. Do you want me to escort you?”

“If you would be so kind,” the king answered. “I’m terribly sorry to put you out like this, but...”

“It’s not an imposition, I promise. It’s on the way to my own chambers, in fact.”

Alistair looked decidedly relieved at that, a wide smile splitting his face in two. “Thank you, Commander, you’re too kind.”

“Cullen, please,” he answered immediately as they began walking in the direction of Skyhold’s main building. “You knew me when; you most definitely have the right to call me by my given name and not my title.”

“To be fair, I didn’t really know you...” Alistair said, falling into step beside him. “We only met a few times, and even then, I was a bit preoccupied.”

“I’ll say,” Cullen said, shooting his companion a sidelong glance. “There was a lot to keep track of. You all collected quite the formidable army. But I don’t think I can understand the pressure you were under, being one of the only two Grey Wardens left in Ferelden.”

“It was all Aedan,” Alistair said immediately. “*Aedan* collected the formidable army. The rest of us, we were just along for the ride...” The king trailed off as they entered the massive stone structure that held Skyhold’s throne.

“So the main hall, yes?” Cullen said, hoping to get the other man’s mind off that terrible year. “Six doors; my chambers can be accessed off this first door to the right; Josephine can often be found past the second door on the left. I’d avoid the third door on the right, as that might

cause you to come back with no eyebrows. You know the third door on the left goes to the Inquisitor's private quarters, and this door here -" Cullen paused outside the first door on the left, "goes to the gardens. Which is the quickest way to get to your chambers. There are a few other pathways to get there, but we can save that for another day."

Cullen held open the door for the king to walk through.

"Thank you, Cullen. I shall see you tonight at dinner then," Alistair responded.

"We aren't parting ways just yet, I haven't brought you to your chambers." The commander raised an eyebrow at the king's dismissal.

"Nonsense, you said so yourself, your rooms are through that door there, and mine are through here. Asking you to bring me any further would just cause you inconvenience. Which I wouldn't want to do."

"It is no inconvenience, Alistair. I told you I would escort you to your rooms, and I am nothing if not a man of my word," Cullen stated.

The king looked at the commander for a long moment, seemingly weighing something on his mind. For his part, the commander just stood there placidly, used to the scrutiny of superiors.

"I'm afraid I'm more intoxicated than I first thought," Alistair said quietly.

"All the more reason for me to accompany you," Cullen responded. "If you are so inclined. I do not want to have you do something you don't want to do."

Alistair cocked his head at that, his eyes roving over Cullen, starting at the top of his head and running down the length of his body, then moving back up again, finally coming to a rest at his face.

"I would not object to your accompanying me, Cullen. Please, lead the way."

Cullen smiled and walked into Skyhold's gardens, pointing out the various other doors in the courtyard, like the one that led to Skyhold's chapel and the one that protected the soldiers from the elements during their break. They headed to the staircase that led to the ramparts, and to the tower that housed Alistair's chambers for the duration of his visit.

They nodded to the guards who were stationed at their posts around the ramparts, both Inquisition and Ferelden, as they made their way to the tower.

"I think I can find my way from here," Alistair said, the tower door a few feet in front of them.

"I told you I would escort you to your rooms," Cullen repeated, quietly. He felt more than heard the other man shift slightly beside him. "And we're not quite there yet. Don't make me a liar, Alistair."

"I wouldn't dream of it," the king replied.

The two men closed the distance to the king's temporary chambers, and Cullen went to open the door -

- when he felt a sharp pain collide against the side of his head. Hissing, he pressed a hand to his forehead, wincing as he felt it throb slightly. He was also aware of Alistair in a similar position - hand pressed to forehead, face grimaced in what he could only assume was also pain.

"Cullen, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean-" Alistair began, but Cullen cut him off.

"No, don't apologize, Your Majesty, my fault. Are you injured?" he asked, wondering if he should call over one of the guards to assess the king's head. It wouldn't do to have the king of Ferelden keel over from a head injury he received at the Inquisition's stronghold.

"I'm quite alright," Alistair said, pressing against his head slightly before dropping his hand and looking at Cullen's own forehead. "Are you?" The king's brow creased in concern as he reached up and removed Cullen's hand, with a more gentle touch than the commander would have thought possible.

"I should be fine," he said, holding back an exhale of pain as the king pressed his thumb to the sore spot on his forehead.

"You should be," Alistair agreed, "though I'm afraid you might have a bit of a bump there in a few hours' time. Curse this hard head of mine," he quipped, a lopsided smile gracing his face.

And Cullen didn't know why, but his eyes landed on the other man's lips, on the slanted curve they made. Alistair's hand was still pressed to his forehead, and Cullen's breath hitched as he realized just how close the two of them were. Unconsciously, he wet his lips, and he felt Alistair move just that imperceptibly closer.

His eyes flicked to the king's, and Cullen almost started at the intense look of what could only be described as desire that flooded the king's gaze.

And before Cullen could even process what was going on, the small distance between them closed, and Alistair pressed his lips against his own.

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