

Redeem Me

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Redeem Me

by [peacelightvictory](#).

Summary

Eseld Trevelyan must join the Chantry as a sister, but what occurs at the Temple of Sacred Ashes changes the direction of her life forever. She agrees to go along with the fledgling Inquisition for reasons wholly her own.

Notes

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

Prodigal Daughter

She should have known better. Really, she should have. Eseld mentally kicked herself and swore in her thoughts over her own stupidity. She would love to swear up a storm out loud, but her life and the group's chances at success counted that she remain silent at this exact moment. So instead, she hovered in the rafters with one of her dual daggers clutched between her teeth as she held her breath.

Eseld glared down at the guards that had come to relieve the others much too soon. The rotation had changed too soon! It was only dumb luck that she hadn't been caught climbing out of the barrel she'd hidden in when the servants brought in the supplies. Even better luck that she'd heard them outside the door and had time to jump on top of some boxes and swing up into the rafters she now clung to. What she wouldn't have given for elf-like hearing. Perhaps she would have known something was amiss sooner. Piother's information was either incorrect, or the fool dwarf had completely made everything up because he'd been too busy partaking of the drinks - and women - of the local tavern. If Stoldo didn't wring Piother's neck for this, Eseld certainly would. Or she could trim the dwarf's beard - or shave all his chest hair. Maybe all his hair should get burnt off in a freak potions accident. Leave him as bald as the day he was born. With his large ears sticking out like a nug's.

Time for planning Piother's comeuppance would have to wait. The mercenary group was counting on her to pick some locks. The guards weren't necessarily part of their hit, and Eseld was always loath to kill people who weren't deserving of a quick swipe of her blades. She would just have to find another way to unlock the cellar.

Eseld adjusted her grip on the rafters and braced herself with her legs more, all her weight would have to rest on one arm and her legs while she sought her backup plan. Lucky for Piother, she had packed some of her knock-out potions. Carefully, she felt for the right glass vial. She thanked the Maker she had thought to use the etched vials. Made it easier to pick out the right one by touch. She smirked around her blade as she brought the pink liquid up to eye-level. A particularly potent potion if she did say so herself. If there was any time to be bold in deed as her family motto said, now was one of those moments!

She looked down to ensure that the new guards were clustered relatively close to each other. The liquid would turn gaseous, but worked better at the eye of the proverbial storm. Eseld took a couple deep breaths as quietly as she could then let the glass bomb slip from her fingers. The distant sound of glass shattering on stone floor alerted the guards, but it was too late for them to investigate the source of the sound as the room began to fill with a fuschia cloud. The guards coughed and swore. The cloud made quick work of disorienting them first. No one made it to the door. A few stumbling steps before they were all on their knees then slumping or clattering to the floor. Some even snored as they succumbed to the sleeping gases.

Eseld waited for the cloud to dissipate then waited some more until her lungs began to burn and her ears felt like they might pop. Quietly still, she let loose the held air and took several cautious breathes in through her mouth. There was still a faint taste of spindleeed in the air,

but not enough to knock her out as well. At best, she'd have a slight headache. At worst, she'd pass out and drool on the floor only to be found by either the changing guard or Stoldo would send Piother in after her to find out what was taking so long. Eseld didn't want the dwarf to rib her for falling to her own potions. Again.

Satisfied that she would be safe from her own handiwork, Eseld dropped noiselessly to the floor. She crouched there like a cat, looking over the slumbering guards to be sure they weren't faking their condition. Had that happen before. Eseld sighed through her nose and rose to her full height. She rushed to the cellar door, her lock-picking tools already in her hands, produced from hidden pockets in her sleeves. Eseld made quick work of the locks and swung the door open. Poking her head into the darkness, she hissed, "Get your arses up here! Our time has been halved!"

Some cursing answered her from the dark depths below. Stoldo, a dark-skinned human, reached the top of the cellar steps first. He brushed off a stalk of pickled elfroot as he scowled at the guards lying asleep around the room. Piother and the others were no doubt somewhere behind him in the dark or still getting out of their own barrels of pickled herbs and vegetables.

"What happened?" Stoldo growled.

"Ask Piother," Eseld jabbed a finger in the dwarf's direction as he came into view. "The guard changed too soon."

The dwarf's bushy eyebrows dipped down perplexed as he lifted his hands to placate the two humans. "I swear I checked the rotation for a week! And the roster in the guards' quarters only this morning to be sure!"

Their leader mused about this for a moment. "You should have just slit their throats, Eseld."

She shrugged. "Someone would have heard. This was faster and quieter."

An elf - newly joined and a bit of a prick - spoke up next. "You just wanted to test your potions, shem."

Eseld smirked. "And look at that! It worked better than expected." Sarcasm aside, she looked seriously at Stoldo. "Only I can't guarantee how long the effects will last. And if Piother's information on the rotation is as piss-poor as I suspect -"

"Hey!" The dwarf objected.

"- then we may yet be discovered," she finished. "A guard or even a servant could just walk in here and find this lot out cold. If we want to grab Caius Nabor and get that ransom work done, we have to move fast."

Stoldo gave her a look that said he knew that much, but he didn't say anything to her. They all knew that they'd wasted too much time as it was just staking out the manor and estate. Their client wanted Caius and soon. They couldn't back out now that they started. There was no telling how squirrely Caius would become. With a few quick words to the others, Stoldo

set the plan in motion. With a quick glare at Piother and Eseld, he said, "Piother, go to the exit point and make sure nothing's changed. Eseld, you stay here and if they wake up. Kill them. If anyone shows up before I send Neldis for you, kill them too."

She didn't protest. Wanted to, sure, but didn't. She nodded instead and wished them all luck. Lifting a prayer up even though she doubted the Maker would condone their actions. As Piother passed her by, she gave him a glare that promised her retribution later. Whatever smug look he had before vanished and he ducked his head and hurried out of the room. The new elf - Neldis - whispered that he'd be back soon. Eseld nodded in response, but stepped back a step from the apostate. Honestly, why had Stoldo even agreed to taking on the mage?

Once everyone had gone, Eseld crouched behind some boxes next to the cellar door. Best to stay out of sight if she needed to jump someone coming in, and she could more easily keep an eye on the sleeping guards from this point. She wondered absentmindedly if there were any valuables worth raiding. Maybe she could go down to the basement and grab some herbs for her own uses. Could never have enough spindlegweed it seemed.

The minutes dragged by like hours and any shift or sleepy moan of the guards made Eseld jump. Her hands going instantly to her blades' pommels. Her heart beating in her throat. Only for everything to settle again to quiet breathing. She hated waiting. She wanted to be doing. She should have been with Stoldo. Neldis was too inexperienced. Too untried. This would be his first job with them. She cursed Piother under her breath, now that she didn't have to worry as much about someone hearing.

A knock on the store room door made her head whip toward the sound, her blades out within a second. Neldis poked his knife-eared head into the room, a finger instantly to his lips. Eseld nodded, but didn't sheath her swords. They had made quick work then. She wanted to ask how it went. Did Caius give them any trouble? But questions could wait. No telling how close servants were - awake or sleeping. Not to mention when the next guard change would happen.

Neldis led her through the darkened corridors. Eseld's gaze darted to and fro for any sign of danger. She wondered why Neldis seemed to walk at complete ease as if they were guests and not mercs sneaking in and out with a man to be held for ransom. Perhaps it was an elf thing? Or a mage thing? Was he able to sense any nearby danger?

"Neldis," she whispered, "are you sure this is the way? Piother's map showed the exit was left of that room."

"Change of plans," he responded lowly. "This way." He took another turn that deviated further from where Piother was supposed to be waiting for them.

Eseld wanted to question the elf, but she'd been sitting in a store room for Maker knew how long. Again, she was going to knock some sense into that dwarf. She wouldn't be so out of the loop if it hadn't been for Piother's phoney information! She would have been with Stoldo the whole time and known when the job went south - or further south. They were practically in Fereldan with the way this job was going!

Neldis opened a door without even checking and strolled on in. Eseld followed suit. Confused and wary, but still trusting. Until she saw who was in the room.

“Oh for the love of the Maker!” She shouted. “Myghal, what are you doing here?” Eseld looked away from the man she had addressed and over to Stoldo who was now accepting a purse of money from Neldis. The smug look had returned to Piother’s face. “There never was a job to grab Caius.”

“No,” Stoldo admitted without so much of a moment of hesitation. “My apologies, Lady Trevelyan.” He did sound apologetic, she’d give him that.

“I was the job,” Eseld stated sadly. Again. She would be torn from her new family. Again. She then looked to the man still standing silently by the desk of the study she’d been led to. “What does Father want now, Myghal?”

The man shrugged. “I’m just here to retrieve you, dear sister. Father will tell you himself no doubt.”

“So, so,” Eseld muttered as she turned her ire to Neldis. “So Father hires apostates now?”

Neldis sneered right back at the young woman. “I’m hardly an apostate. I’m with a Circle in the Free Marches.”

“What Circle allows a mage to go hunting down a nobleman’s wayward daughter?” Eseld snapped.

“Eseld,” Myghal cautioned. “Enough. We have a long journey ahead of us. Best we be going. I’ll need to thank Caius for the use of his manor.” He nodded to Stoldo and Piother. “Pleasure doing business with you. I trust you will alert Bann Travelyan should my sister make her way back to your - base of operation.”

Stoldo shrugged. “Only if the pay is this good. Maybe better. Don’t see why it should matter what a grown woman does with her time.”

Eseld offered a smile to her friend. At least he hadn’t outright said he’d hand her over to her family if she ran again. His way of letting her know she was welcome back. Maybe she would, but now that her family knew of this mercenary group, chances were she wouldn’t. Eseld knew she would have to start over all over again.

Neldis led her away, the threat of using his magic to subdue her all too real. Unsaid, but understood. Eseld was certain her brother was off speaking niceties to the Lord Nabor. Her friends would most likely be escorted away by some other guards. Hopefully they wouldn’t be in trouble for her new potion she’d used on the guards in the cellars.

Once they had exited the foyer of the manor, Eseld noted the carriage with her family’s crest. The snow-white Free Marches Ranger was rising out of the ocean, its golden mane flowing out behind it as if blown by a gust of wind coming over the Amaranthine Ocean.

The all too familiar scenario played through. A footman opened the door to the carriage and before Eseld could climb into the confines, the servant coughed pointedly and held out his arms for her dual blades. Grumbling under her breath several choice words in various languages that she had learned from her tutors as well as her friends from the mercenary troupe, Eseld handed over her Highland Dirks. They were nothing fancy, but she rarely opted for fancy daggers so no one suspected she was noble born.

Neldis slid into the carriage seat across from her, making Eseld stiffen. Whoever this knife-eared mage thought he was, he thought himself important enough to journey with nobility. Her eyes narrowed to green slits before she slumped in her seat, arms crossed in front of her chest like a petulant child. At least no one had divested her of her throwing knives. Too small to be seen, almost needle-like threaded through her clothes. If the mage tried to pull anything she would at least get a knife to his throat before he could cast a spell.

“There, all settled?” Myghal interrupted Eseld’s suspicious thoughts by stepping into the carriage.

“Yes, ser,” Neldis responded with a nod.

“Excellent! We can be off then,” Myghal declared as the door shut behind him. He settled into the space next to Eseld, not keen to be anywhere near the mage either if Eseld read her brother’s body-language correctly. Her brother pounded a fist on the roof of the carriage, signalling to the driver that the passengers were ready. With a lurch the vehicle rolled into action.

Myghal turned then to give Eseld an appraising look, a frown darkening his olive complexion. “Oh, Eseld, stop pouting.”

“I don’t see why I should,” she retorted irritably. “I was perfectly happy with Stoldo and the others, thank you very much. I wasn’t even arrested this time! I didn’t do anything to disgrace the family name.” Eseld’s voice dipped into a low register in an attempt to imitate their father. At one point in time, her impression would have brought a laugh to Myghal’s face. Not today apparently. His frown deepened and he seemed to take on their father’s notorious scowl.

“This is nothing to laugh about, Eseld! Running around with - brigands - that’s no way a lady should conduct herself!”

Eseld rolled her eyes heavenward and muttered a prayer for patience. “Since when have I ever conducted myself like a proper lady of the noble house of Trevelyan? You know what the other illustrious families of Ostwick say and think about me.” She shrugged and looked out the window. “I just decided a long time ago to make good of the talk surrounding my person. Train like a rogue, why not live like one too? It’s much more fun than playing the Game.”

Myghal sighed, but Eseld refused to turn her gaze back to him. “You would have been better off proving them wrong, dear sister.”

“Where’s the fun in that?” Eseld muttered, then a little louder she said, “Tell me, when did you start sounding like Father?”

“Oh, grow up, Eseld!” Myghal snapped back. The pair lapsed into silence. Out of the corner of her eye she noted that the elf had been watching the exchange like it were a sporting match. No doubt Myghal had noticed as well that they had an audience and chose not to continue the sparring match. Such a bad habit of the nobility. Ignoring the elf and his large ears that caught every word and could easily report it to someone who may want to know something about the Trevelyan family. He may be hired by the Trevelyan’s bann right now, but he most likely had no loyalty to the house.

She returned her attention to the scenery they were passing. What did she care what the knife-ear heard or divulged to a dowager hoping for some gossip? Eseld let her forehead rest against the glass of the window and sighed, fogging up the glass in the process. She wondered when she and Myghal had drifted apart. They had been close as children, but sometime after Myghal had become a young man, and left Eseld behind in childhood, things had shifted. He grew an aversion to childish games or even simple sibling affection. While Eseld and Myghal grew apart, he grew closer to their older sister while Eseld grew closer to their other brother - once a nuisance to them in his desire to tag along with every activity.

While Eseld dreaded the return home, she would at least get to reconnect to the youngest Trevelyan. “How is Piran?” She asked, hoping to break some of the tension between them.

“He is well,” Myghal answered tersely. “Preparing for his basic training with the Templars.”

“So he is going through with it, is he?” Eseld queried, some pride in her voice for her little brother. “I’m glad.”

Myghal made a noise in his throat that was either agreement or noncommittal. They lapsed back into silence and so it remained for the remainder of their journey back to Ostwick.



The travelers arrived on the Trevelyan family estate at the early gray hours of morning. As the carriage began to slow Eseld jerked awake at the familiar turns and bumps of the road coming up to the manor’s carriage porch. She looked up at the impressive building with pursed lips. She dreaded going into the place she once knew as home. Now it was little more than a cage. A very large, ornate cage.

The coach rolled to a stop and within a second the footman had hopped down from his place next to the coachman and opened the door for the occupants to exit. The butler - he appeared new because Eseld didn’t recognize him - had stepped out of the vestibule and stood at attention, waiting for them to step out. Myghal exited first and waited just outside the carriage for Eseld and Neldis to descend as well. He exchanged pleasantries with the butler as Eseld stepped down and looked around. An elf stableboy already stood holding the reins of the horses. Beyond him in the stable courtyard there were other servants bustling about.

“It is a pleasure to finally have you home, Lady Trevelyan,” the butler stuffily brought her back to the present.

She looked at him and nodded. "Thank you. I'm afraid I don't know your name?"

The butler bowed. "Girart Bullion, m'lady."

"Bullion," Myghal interrupted the introductions, "is my father in his office?"

"Yes, serrah," Bullion replied. "He saw your carriage coming and is expecting you." He turned then to the elf mage silently waiting behind the siblings. "I have instructions to see that you are comfortable. You are invited to stay the night. You will be supplied with whatever you may need for your trip back to the Circle tomorrow."

"I thank you," Neldis responded. Eseld turned to note the bitter disappointment in the elf's countenance. Had he expected more? It was no secret that the Trevelyan family supported the Chantry - more specifically the Chantry's stance on the place of a mage. In the Circle. Serving mankind with their magic.

Neldis next addressed Myghal before allowing Bullion to lead him away. "Please give my regards to the bann, and my thanks for his hospitality."

Myghal nodded before waving Eseld over to follow him into the vestibule. Eseld was relieved that she would not be lead like a naughty child through the entire house on a walk of shame. In the past, she would have been traipsed through the main hall and gallery to the library and her father's office just off the library. Perhaps now her father realized that his wayward child didn't so much care whether the eyes of the servants and any visiting nobility saw her in her disgrace. Because she honestly didn't care if they did see. Or perhaps he was so embarrassed of her latest escapades and her grand escape the night of a ball - her birthday no less. So mad at his daughter that he'd rather usher her into the lesser used bachelor's wing and the more secluded office that looked over the stables. Meeting her as if she were a stranger instead of his daughter.

Eseld lifted her head and set her jaw into a stubborn jut. Her shoulders squared so she would appear confident and unaffected by the snub. For she was certain that was what this particular meeting place was. Even in the comfort of their own home, it seemed that her parents could not stop playing the Game.

Myghal knocked on the oak door and waited for a masculine voice from within to bid them enter. Instead, the door swung open to reveal a woman in her late forties, early fifties. Eseld instantly felt a sinking feeling in her stomach. Their mother. While her father may be a bit more lenient and might give a reprimand, the matriarch of the Trevelyan family would no doubt insist on a punishment or a more barbed lecture and talking-down.

The two children entered to see Bann Trevelyan sitting at his desk, leaning back in his chair. The father had one hand resting against his lips, his hazel eyes looking between his two middle children silently. The door shut behind them before their mother silently, and without giving either child so much as a glance, glided over to a chair and perched in it. Only once she was seated did she let her cold, green eyes rest on Eseld.

Eseld swallowed. Her throat felt suddenly dry. "I trust you are in good health, Father." Address her father first. Gauge just how upset her parents were.

“Your father has been suffering from another bout of gout in his legs,” their mother supplied before the bann could mumble a reply around his hand. Eseld winced at her mother’s tone and at the news. If her father was having another flair up, then he’d be short tempered. Her mother even shorter tempered on a good day was most likely already simmering and ready to boil over. Perhaps disappearing the night of her own birthday ball was a poor decision - knowing her mother’s tendency to take offense at even a perceived small slight and hold grudges for extended periods of time.

“I am sorry to hear that,” Eseld answered as sincerely as she could sound. “Have my politices not been sufficient?”

“We have been trusting your father’s physician to treat the infection.” The information comes clipped. Matter-of-fact. But stings worse than a giant spider bite.

Eseld nods as she blinks rapidly. “He is a skilled healer. I am sure you will be feeling much better soon, Father.” Giving a weak smile to her mother, she asks, “Have you been well?”

“Tolerable.” The question is dismissed. “I’ve been busy assisting your grandmother.”

Another internal wince. If anything made Eseld’s mother even more irritable, it was her own mother. Eseld’s grandmother was known to be difficult and an attention seeker. Her health was one of her favorite topics. If she was not being assisted with every little task, her grandmother whined like a little child, making everyone’s lives miserable. For if Grandmother was miserable, then everyone must be.

“Myghal,” Bann Trevelyan finally spoke up, “would you please leave us to speak to your sister.” It wasn’t a request so much as a demand. Myghal bowed before leaving the office. Eseld was alone to face her parents’ ire. She was always alone. At one point in time, her sister would have come to her aid. But now as the heir, she had to stay in the good graces of the temperamental pair that sired her. So Eseld had been on her own for some time now to weather the onslaught.

“Eseld,” the bann began, “I am most disappointed in you.”

“Nothing new there, Father,” Eseld quipped with a roll of her shoulder.

“Eseld!” Her mother snapped waspishly. “Manners!”

Bann Trevelyan lifted a hand to soothe his wife, but it did little good. “I am disappointed,” he continued, “because of how you left us without so much as a warning. Let alone a request. You hurt your mother deeply. She went through a great deal to celebrate your twenty-third birthday.”

“If I had requested to leave and live my life as a rogue with some mercenary group, would you have really let me, Father?” Eseld questioned with a scoff, crossing her arms defiantly in front of her chest.

Bann Trevelyan took on a hurt and angered expression, his hand lowering from his mouth as he stood from his seat. “How could even question me like that? How dare you! You must not

know me if you would even suggest that we would not allow you to leave. You are not a prisoner here.”

It was one of her parents’ favorite tactics to guilt their daughter. Take offense and behave as if she had said something truly horrible to them. Eseld inhaled and let the breath out in a loud sigh. She knew her parents hated when she did that. Ever since she was a child they would reprimand her for every little sigh. She noted with a margin of delight the narrowing of her parents’ eyes.

“At any rate,” her mother continued for them both, “you must realize that living such a life is not sustainable. What kind of future is that?”

“What do you mean not sustainable?” Eseld countered. “I have earned quite a lot of money for myself and saved it. I could buy my own land and manor in a few years if I kept up the work I’m doing now.”

Her mother shook her head and clicked her tongue. “Honestly, Eseld! Who would take you if you continued this line of work? You have no future! You would be disgraced among the nobility.”

“Then I shall never marry!” Eseld argued.

“Enough, Eseld,” the bann ordered as he came around the desk to stand before his daughter. “Your mother and I have discussed things, and we think it’s time you joined the Chantry. Arrangements have been made -”

“The Chantry?” she all but shouted, her arms falling to her sides in disbelief. “What as a Templar like Piran?”

Her mother gasped. “You? You as a Templar? I won’t hear of it! No! You’ll join as a sister, just as many of your aunts and cousins before you have done.”

Eseld’s face contorted into a combination of disgust and confusion. “But - but I wouldn’t be any good at it!”

“You’ve been raised as a devout follower of the Maker and Andraste,” her father interjected. “You know many of the Chants of Light. With a little more training and discipline you could easily rise in the ranks to Mother or Revered Mother - someday.”

“I would be better as a Templar. I’d be happier as a Templar!” Eseld argued, her voice cracking. She knew they weren’t listening. Would never listen to what she truly wanted. “If I must join then let me go with Piran!”

“You will find happiness on your path following Andraste,” her mother said with a tone of finality. “Your Aunt Cristina arrived shortly before Myghal left to retrieve you and has been staying with us ever since. It’s already been settled that she will escort you to Orlais where you will begin your training and eventually take your vows.”

Bann Trevelyan added, "Do not attempt to leave again, Eseld. We have already hired a guard to patrol the grounds. You will most likely be leaving within the week." Striding to the door, he called to a servant. "Take Lady Eseld to her rooms." Looking to his daughter once more, he dismissed her. "We will see you at dinner."

Defeated, Eseld exited her father's office and followed the servant through the passages and corridors leading past the indoor winter garden and through the main hall to the staircase hall. They ascended the stone steps to the second floor. Eseld's room was the first room off the staircase hall. On either side of her bedroom door stood two armored men - no doubt the extra guard her father had mentioned. Upon entering her room, she looked around to see that nothing had changed. The walls were still papered in gold flowers, her canopy bed dressed in marigold yellow that accented the walls, and the Warden blue couches and recliners added a pop of color to the room.

Before she could relax or even poke through her potions cabinet, one of her guards entered and requested Eseld turn over her weapons. She tried to make a big show of the fact that her daggers had already been taken from her, but the guard just gave her a knowing look. With a long-suffering sigh, Eseld picked the needle-like daggers from their hiding places and handed them over. Upon a suggestion - or threat - that her maid could continue the search, Eseld grudgingly handed over the last of her hidden weapons - and her lock picking tools on further insistence from her jailor.

Her servant bustled about the room after the guard left; lighting the fireplace to keep the mid-autumn chill at bay and setting out a dress suitable for dinner. Eseld was promised a bath would be drawn closer to dinner time and assistance with her hair - what was left of it that was. The maid bowed out of the room and Eseld was finally left in peace.

Eseld flopped onto the mattress of her bed and stared up at the ceiling. With a sigh, she closed her eyes and tried to sleep. If there was one good thing about being home, she could sleep on something soft and not on a cot or tavern tick-mattress.

A knock on her door woke her with a start. Searching about for a clock, Eseld discovered she'd only been asleep for thirty minutes. "Come in?" She beckoned groggily.

"Welcome back, big-little sister!" A teasing voice greeted her.

Eseld let off rubbing the sleep from her eyes and sat up to look at the grinning young man. "Piran!" She jumped from the bed and hurried to give her youngest brother a hug. She poked him in the side and challenged, "Big-little sister, eh?"

"What else should I call you?" Her brother laughed. "I tower over my older sister. So while you may be my 'big' sister, you're still so little!"

"Oh very funny," Eseld grouched. "Don't think I can't still hand you your arse on a platter!"

They separated laughing. Piran gave her an appraising look before focusing on her head and giving the braid she had tucked behind her ear a tug. "What have you done to your hair?"

Eseld rubbed the side of her scalp that she had given herself an undercut and smiled ruefully. “Well I may have scorched my hair while mixing some ingredients for a fire bomb. I couldn’t just leave it. The potion was too sticky to wash out and everything smelled terrible. So I chopped and shaved it.” With a shrug she glanced at herself in the mirror and her half a head of honey brown hair. The braid had been the only salvageable bit of hair on her left side of her head.

“What is Merryn going to say?” Piran chuckled.

“I’m surprised Mother didn’t say something first,” Eseld stated flippantly before collapsing onto one of the sofas. “I’m guessing she was much too upset about everything else to even consider my hair!”

Piran sighed as he too sat on the couch, pushing his sister’s leg enough to make room for himself. “You know Mother. She most likely took note and will bring it up again later. She may try to convince you to just shave your whole head and be done with it. Say it has to do with some pious nonsense before you’re shipped off to Val Royeaux.”

“I don’t suppose you could convince them to let me join as a Templar?” Eseld asked quietly, her shoulders slumping.

Sympathetic emerald eyes met her own. “I’ve tried, Eseld, but they won’t listen. They believe this is the best choice for you.”

“Best choice for me? Or the best choice for the family name and legacy?” She questioned bitterly.

They sat in silence not addressing the question to which they already knew the answer. With a tentative smile, Piran asked, “So, what were you doing this time?”

“I was part of the Silent Hunters.” Eseld smiled fondly. “Good batch of merces. Fun jobs.”

“Maybe you’ll get to tell me about them sometime,” Piran suggested as he glanced at the clock standing on the fireplace mantel. “If I’m not mistaken, Merryn was planning on coming to help you prepare for dinner tonight.”

Eseld rolled her eyes. “Wonderful. No doubt I’ll be hearing all about how I look like a vagabond for a good hour or more.”

“Worse than a vagabond, Eseld.” A feminine voice interrupted from the doorway. The siblings turned to see a woman that looked very much like Eseld except for her hair being a shade darker and her figure more buxom. Her hands were fisted on her hips and her face was pinched in disapproval. “What have you done to your hair!”

“I shall take my leave,” Piran announced to no one in particular. “Sisters, I will see you at dinner.” He sauntered out of the room like a man certain of his escape from certain death. At least that was how Eseld viewed it. She would have to repay him for leaving her to the mercy of their sister.

Merryn gave an exasperated sigh. “Well whatever you’ve done it can’t be helped. Maybe if I wash it and coax some curls into what’s left it won’t look so bad.” She clapped her hands and directed servants from the hallway to start drawing up a bath in the washroom adjacent to the bedroom. Eseld followed her sister’s instructions much like the servants. Unhearing and mechanical. Undress, step into the hot bath, let the servants do the scrubbing she was sure to miss a spot, step out quickly now, let the servants take care of the undergarments, sit at the vanity while the evening dress is given any last touch ups -

If Merryn said anything else during the whole time it was either a scolding or scandalous tidbit from the last party she had attended. Maybe even a lament over Eseld’s hair and the latest tattoo marking her face just around her left eye.

“How are you going to give the appearance of a respectable Chantry sister with your face forever marred with that thing!” Merryn moaned as she tried to hide the offending pigment with another dab of makeup.

“I’m sure I will attract more young people to hear the benedictions if I look a little wicked,” Eseld snarked with a smirk.

Merryn clucked her tongue and shook her head. “Listen to you! Oh, I do hope you learn to hold your tongue when you finish taking your vows.” Stepping back to view her handiwork, she nodded and waved her sister to stand while waving for the waiting maids with the other hand. Pale blue with black accents. The colors of the Trevelyan family. Most likely the last time she would be wearing this before she donned the white, red, and gold of one who served in the Chantry.

Eseld lifted her arms over her head and felt the silken fabric slide over her skin. She felt an unwelcome lump in her throat begin to form and threatened her eyes with some nasty drops of some potion or another if they dared rebel against her in front of her sister of all people! Steeling herself against the gaze of Merryn and the servants, Eseld hardened herself as her head emerged from the fabric. No one would be the wiser.

The laces were done up in the back as heeled shoes were slipped onto her feet. Merryn debated with herself over the need for jewelry before settling on some simple silver and blue earrings.

Eseld, now efficiently dressed up like a favored child’s doll, stood ready for inspection. Merryn hummed and sighed. “It will have to do. Luckily the hats the sisters’ wear don’t allow for anyone to see your hair. Come on then! Mother and Father will be waiting for us in the breakfast room.”

“Not the banquet hall?” Eseld queried as she fell into step behind her sister.

“It will just be the family and Aunt Cristina,” Merryn informed with a wave of her hand as they descended the spiralling stone stairs. “And Piran’s commanding officer as well. Hardly enough people to fill the banquet table.”

It went unsaid, but Eseld also gathered that Merryn meant that their guests were hardly important enough for the grandeur of the banquet hall. She rolled her eyes and ignored once

more anything her sister had to say and merely made the noncommittal noises one does when trying to appear to be listening.

They walked through the large main hall and past the winter garden toward the corridor off the salon. No doubt everyone would be waiting there before entering the breakfast room.

Sure enough, everyone was there. Bann Trevelyan and his wife, Merryn's husband Jowan, Myghal and his fiancé Blejan, Piran, Aunt Cristina, and the man who Eseld could only suppose was Piran's commanding officer. A quick introduction was made between Eseld and the man - a Ser Cosme - before everyone adjourned to the breakfast room and took their seats. Eseld noted she had been seated next to Aunt Cristina and her mother on the end of the table farthest from Piran and Ser Cosme. No doubt to curtail any possible attempts at convincing the Templar to take up on her behalf.

Again, Eseld ignored much of the conversation around her. Especially anything her aunt had to say about where Eseld would be going for her training. She pushed her food around on her plate with her fork and nibbled on small bits from time to time.

"Oh, Ser Cosme! Did you receive orders to attend the conclave at the Temple of Sacred Ashes?" Aunt Cristina's question broke through Eseld's haze and she looked up.

Cosme shook his head. "No, I will not be attending. I'm to take my charge directly to Val Royeaux. Will you be going?"

Puffing up like a self-important bird, Aunt Cristina crowed, "Oh yes! I received word only today that I must come at once to oversee and lend my voice to the proceedings!"

Eseld rolled her eyes at the notion. Her aunt wasn't nearly as significant as she made herself out to be, to be sure. Still, curious over what was to happen at the Temple, Eseld asked, "What is this conclave?"

Her aunt smiled widely now to have an audience to share her news. "Why it is a Peace Conclave! Organized by Divine Justinia herself to end the war between the mages and the Templars." She nodded sagely. "And rightfully so! No doubt the divine will send those mages right back to their Circles where they belong!"

"Perhaps," Cosme agreed slowly, "but after all that has happened - especially in Kirkwall - I do not think it will be so easily done."

"Oh tosh!" Aunt Cristina scoffed as she waved a utensil in the air dismissively, "no one can stand against the word of the divine! Who would dare?"

"Will you be taking Eseld with you to the conclave?" Bann Trevelyan inquired mildly as he took a sip of his wine. "Or will she be going on ahead of you to Val Royeaux?" Asked so evenly, one might not suspect anything was amiss. Eseld glanced to her father and knew he was perhaps a little concerned at the possibility of his daughter slipping free and running off somewhere in Orlais or Fereldan. The idea was appealing.

Aunt Cristina frowned in thought. "Yes, I had wondered about that. While it would be important for Eseld to start her training right away, it could also be beneficial not only for her training but also for the family's interests to view the conclave." Looking meaningfully at the bann, the sister said, "After all, whatever is decided for the rebel mages could very-well impact those loyal to the Chantry - especially any related to us."

"A representative from the family to report back to us of the proceedings," the bann mulled the thought over aloud. "And as Eseld is already on her way, it would make more sense than sending Merryn or Myghal."

"Then it's settled!" Aunt Cristina declared. "Eseld comes with me! Maker, what a relief. I was worried to make us postpone another year and having her stay here. Of course, she could go with Ser Cosme and Piran, but then that would be putting them out of their way, and I would never dream of putting anyone out -" and on she went with her drivel.

Eseld fell into her own thoughts. True, it would be interesting to know the goings on of the conclave. Fascinating still to see Divine Justinia. Even if just a glimpse. If Aunt Cristina was as busy as she thought she would be, then maybe, just maybe, Eseld could slip away. Or if not, perhaps she could sign up with a Templar without anyone knowing or being the wiser. Surely her aunt couldn't keep an eye on the young Trevelyan the whole time.

And Then Nothing

Chapter Notes

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

Eseld woke feeling sore all over. She grimaced as she tried to sit upright, her head pounding as if she had a particularly rough night in the drinks - but - that couldn't be right. A hiss of pain passed her lips when she put weight on her left hand and looked down at it. Had she cut it? It felt like something had cut deep into her skin, but it burned like an Antivan Fire grenade.

Green sparks snaked around her fingertips and encircled her palm. What? How?

Wide-eyed, she took in her surroundings. Eseld couldn't remember where she was or how she got here. She had been at the Conclave and now - a rocky terrain covered in mist. It seemed like the swirling mist was - whispering.

A flash of pure, white light caught her attention. Eseld lifted her painful hand to her eyes to shield against the glare, she saw a woman's form burning like a pillar of light at the top of a flight of stairs. The woman was reaching out a hand and beckoning Eseld to come. Eseld stood and began trudging toward the unknown woman. Anywhere was better than here. Wherever here was.

She limped along toward the stairs. Her arm with the strange, green wound was pressed to her abdomen with her fingers curled into her palm in an attempt to ease the pain. It helped only a little. Eseld tried not to wonder what it was, because she was frightened at the possibilities. She'd never heard of an adult manifesting any abilities with magic - but if this thing on her hand was somehow the beginnings of that - then Eseld held no doubts that her family would most certainly send her to a Circle. Chantry position awaiting her or not.

The thought of being locked in a Circle Tower terrified her almost more than being a lay sister for the Chantry bored her.

Eseld wasn't even half-way up the stairs when she heard something behind her. A high-pitched screeching that made the hair at the back of her neck stand up. She turned to look, even though the woman at the top of the stairs beckoned more urgently for the young woman.

Spiders. Large spiders were skittering up the stairs after Eseld. Her throat closed up around a horrified scream. She reached for her belt for one of her potions or grenades - forgetting that all her equipment had been confiscated. Eseld didn't even have her hidden hairpin knives to help her now. With no way to defend herself or slow the creatures, she spun on her heels and ran up the stairs.

Eseld took some of the steps two at a time, stumbling on the slick surface and trying to catch herself with her right hand and not her throbbing left. The stairs became too steep for her to continue on in the manner. She had to scramble up on all fours. Eseld tried to remain calm. Tried to think of this as an excursion up a mountain, but the chittering of the giant spiders and

the clicking of mandibles and their feet on the stone behind her unnerved her. Eseld would slip and try to make up the lost distance by leaping up a bit. She grit her teeth against the pain in her hand as the gash was torn anew by sharp edges on the steps and rocks around her. Her breathing became a hyperventilated wheeze as she tried to ignore her pursuers.

Eseld lost her footing and looked down to find a place for her next foothold. She screamed at the many black eyes of the spider that was mere feet below her. With a burst of adrenaline, Eseld scrambled faster up the cliffside. Her face was wet with sweat and tears. The combination of all that blurred her vision, but she focused on the shining woman above her. The woman was reaching out a hand to help Eseld.

Eseld stretched as far as her arm would go, begging in her mind because her breathing and sobs were too labored to allow her voice any room in her throat. Begging mentally for help and crying out to the Maker to spare her from - spiders!

Her hand began to glow hot and green. Eseld's eyes screwed shut as another scream was wrenched past her lips. Behind her eyelids she could still see pale green light as energy like nothing she'd ever experienced exploded from her left hand.

And then -

Eseld was on her hands and knees on a ground covered in pebbles and something like black and gray sand. The smell of something burning assailed her nose. She swayed on all fours. Unable to look around to see if the spiders were still after her, or see if the shining lady was still there, Eseld keeled to her right before the sweet envelopment of darkness reduced her world to nothing.



Everything seemed strange. She woke, at least she thought she did, several times. Eseld felt drenched but she was so hot. But she was shaking uncontrollably. Her hand felt like it had witherstalk spines jabbed into it. Eseld would scream from horrible visions or nightmares of the spiders.

What was wrong with her?

She'd hear voices. Angry voices. One seemed soothing in a low, male register. He tried to calm Eseld as well as the angry voices. Along with the soothing male was the feel of something cool trying to pull the nettle-like feeling from her hand. A healing potion was routinely pressed to her lips along with a broth. A skin holding water would quench her thirst and dry cracked lips and a hoarse throat that ached from her fever-induced screams.

And then she woke and was able to discern more than a dark blur.

Eseld squinted into the gloom at a stone ceiling above her head. Her head still ached, but she turned to look around and figure out what was going on. To her right, a stone wall with chains hanging from iron brackets. She inhaled sharply and turned hastily to the left, ignoring the throbbing behind her eyes. It took her a moment to blink against the torch light, but Eseld's heart sunk as she recognized not a wall, but iron bars.

She was in a prison cell.

Eseld attempted to sit up. She was shaking like a newborn foal and probably as graceful as she rolled onto her left shoulder and propped herself up. Her left hand protested painfully, but at least it was not as bad as she vaguely recalled. She stared down at it with numb curiosity before it flared brightly. Eseld winced, but it was a sting compared to the burning from before.

Eseld wondered what had possessed her captors to see to her health if she was indeed a prisoner. Eseld tried to think past her still aching head. Was she under arrest? For what? Had she been kidnapped at the Conclave? She just could not remember what had happened.

Eseld knew that she and her Aunt Cristina had arrived at the Temple of Sacred Ashes. There had been groups of mages and templars approaching in what looked like a procession that went miles back. Aunt Cristina had gone to meet up with her superiors - Eseld had come along. They all conversed over Eseld's joining and training. She'd been shown to a dorm room of sorts where other sisters would be staying during the Conclave. Eseld had gone exploring. In search of a templar recruiter - but - after that was a blank. After that was the strange rocky place with the giant *creatures* - she shuddered - and the shining woman.

"You're awake," a gruff voice interrupted Eseld's musings. She looked up at the soldier. Ferelden. His lack of an accent gave him away.

"Yes," Eseld croaked in reply. She swallowed roughly in an attempt to clear the dust from her throat. "Yes, I'm awake. Please, where am I? What are my charges if I am a prisoner? I - I haven't done anything wrong! Where is my aunt? She will vouch for me!"

The guard scowled at her. "I better alert the Seeker." He turned without answering any of Eseld's questions and marched out of the prison. Eseld got on her knees and reached for the water skin that had been left within reach of her bedding while she took in the other guards. The soldiers would not look at her, but the air of tension and animosity was so high that Eseld began to worry what her perceived crime could have been.

After quenching her thirst, Eseld settled cross-legged and tried to wrack her brain for answers. She hoped that Aunt Cristina would be allowed to visit. She hoped that this was all some misunderstanding.

Her father was going to kill her if whatever this was prevented her from entering either the Chantry or the Templar order. If the bann didn't - her mother surely would.

The soldier from before returned. "She's to be bound and shackled before the Seeker arrives," he informed his compatriots. He glanced briefly in Eseld's direction when her hand sparked to life again, casting her cell in an emerald hue. "We're to use the lyrium infused bar restraints for her hands. Commander Cullen provided one."

The soldiers all approached Eseld's cell warily. She didn't put up a fight. If there was one thing she had learned from her time as a rogue working with mercenaries, the more you cooperate with law enforcement, the faster you can clear up any problem from a job gone wrong. Of course - she hadn't been on a job.

The iron bar and manacles on her wrists was so heavy that she stumbled as she was lead by swordpoint to the center of the prison. Eseld was told to kneel on the stone floor. She was surely going to have bruises later. Eseld settled back on her heels and tried to rest the weight of the contraption on her wrists on her lap. She looked worriedly at the four guards surrounding her with weapons drawn.

Then, they waited.

As the time dragged on, the pain in her left hand worsened. With each flash and spark, her hand ached. Eseld flinched, but so did her guards. They'd shift on their feet, anticipating and stressing for the worst. The fact that they seemed just as unsure of her magical wound worried Eseld even more.

Eseld turned her hand, palm up to look at the green slit in her hand. A jolt of what looked like lightning magic snapped to life across her skin, causing her to gasp and jerk back from her appendage. The door to the jail screeched open on rusty hinges at that moment and in strode two women.

The four guards sheathed their swords as the woman taking the lead circled behind Eseld. The rogue tried to listen to the footfalls of the one behind her. Heavy armor made it easier to track. The second woman was dressed in a purple hood with scout chain mail. Her red hair was cut short, to her chin. Her face was hard in a way that made her look like she was examining a frustrating puzzle.

The one in scout armor looked like she was about to speak first, but the one behind her bent down close to Eseld's ear - the one not covered by hair as she was missing that section of hair - and demanded, "Tell me why we shouldn't kill you now." A Nevarran.

"The Conclave is destroyed," the Nevarran woman continued as she circled around to Eseld's line of vision. "Everyone is *dead*. Except for *you*."

Eseld reeled back at that revelation. When had that happened? How long had she been unconscious? Everyone! Even - even her aunt? All her cousins? Distant relatives that had been forced into service as either a Chantry servant or a Templar? What of the mages related to the Trevelyans? All of them?

She frowned next at the accusatory tone in the Nevarran's voice. "You think *I* did this?" Eseld sneered. "I may be good with potions and grenades, but I'm no Anders!"

The woman jerked at Eseld's wrist as her hand flared green. "Explain *this*," she demanded before shoving it back into Eseld's lap.

After the initial pain from the flare up and the rough handling, Eseld stammered, "I can't." She kicked herself mentally for the fear that laced her own response. But she was out of her depths with magic.

Both women were circling her now. "What do you mean you can't?!" The Nevarran pressed angrily.

“I don’t know what that is!” Eseld insisted. “Or how it got there!”

“You’re lying!” The woman lunged at Eseld and gripped onto the lapels of the young rogue’s shirt.

The other woman rushed in and pulled the Nevarran off. Her Orlesian accent cutting through the tension. “We *need* her, Cassandra!”

Cassandra, the Nevarran, continued to glare at Eseld while the Orlesian rogue turned to look calmly and somewhat impassively at their prisoner. Eseld lifted her chin in defiance. “What now? What do you want from me?”

“We want to know what happened,” the rogue explained. “Do you remember what happened? How this began?”

Eseld looked down and scrunched her brows in concentration. She explained arriving with her aunt - being left in the dorms. Then waking in the strange place with only the mist and the rocks around her. How she’d run from the *things* chasing her. “And then there was - a woman?” She looked up at the pair, hoping this was making sense - sounded sane.

“A woman?” The unnamed woman queried, sounding intrigued.

“She reached out to me,” Eseld continued. “She was trying to help me escape what was chasing me. I couldn’t reach. And then -” she fell silent because she wasn’t entirely sure what to say happened next.

Cassandra and the unnamed rogue stepped away, but did not take their eyes off Eseld. Cassandra ordered the woman - Leliana - to go. “I will take her to the Rift,” Cassandra added as she looked down at the chained woman on the floor. Leliana left with a nod.

Eseld found herself being released from her cumbersome restraints by Cassandra and ropes replacing them. “What? What did happen?”

Cassandra paused and looked at the ground for a long moment before slowly answering, “It - will be easier to show you.” She hoisted Eseld to her feet before turning and walking out of the prison cell. The guards remained at the ready until the two women had exited and made their way down the stone corridor and up a flight of stairs to a hall. There were some lay sisters and brothers huddled around in the hall whispering and reciting the Chant. Some stopped and stared at Eseld with horror, anger, or sadness. It made her feel worse than any of the times her mother had singled her out for a tongue lashing in front of party guests.

Tall, wooden doors swung open to reveal a little village and a makeshift camp spread out around the fortress they were now leaving. Eseld cringed from the light, her eyes only adjusted to the gloom of the prison and weak candlelight of the fortress’ hall. Then her attention rose upward to the sky where gray clouds swirled ominously with green lightning sparking in the center of the eye of the formation.

“We call it the Breach,” Cassandra spoke. Eseld looked at the back of the woman’s head, her own shock going unnoticed as the stoic woman continued to glare at the sky. Cassandra went

on to explain what it was - a rift between their world and that of the demons. That there were more like it, but the one hovering over them was the largest so far. "All caused by the explosion at the Conclave," she informed Eseld.

"An explosion can do that?" Eseld questioned as she thought back on her own experiments and research for her potions.

"This one did," Cassandra confirmed. "Unless we act, the Breach will grow until it swallows the world."

Just then the Breach shot green fire from its core. Eseld's hand jolted at the same time, and she cried out in pain as her hand jerked upward while she fell to her knees. She fought to clench her fist around the glowing electricity in her palm and curled in over her arm as it struggled against her own will.

Cassandra hastily knelt before Eseld. "Each time the Breach expands, your mark spreads," she explained worriedly. "We've had someone monitoring it since we found you. Your mark has gotten deeper and wider - and it is killing you."

Eseld looked up, her eyes wide with fear and shock.

"It may be the key to stopping this," Cassandra hastened, "but there isn't much time."

"How can this help?" Eseld spat back. "For all we know, it caused this!"

"Or it may close the Breach," Cassandra countered. "We will find out soon enough. It is our only chance, however, and yours."

"You think by closing the Breach - I could stop this thing from killing me?" Eseld asked skeptically.

"Again, there is only one way of finding out," Cassandra explained.

"You still think I did this?" Eseld demanded irritably as she lifted her bound limbs. "To myself?"

"Not intentionally. Something - clearly - went wrong." Eseld scowled at Cassandra's answer. Why did the woman still think that Eseld actually planned any of this? Intentional or otherwise?

"And if I'm not responsible?" The young woman demanded.

"Someone is," Cassandra stated. "And you are our only suspect. You wish to prove your innocence?" She gestured to the sky and then to Eseld's hand. "This is the only way."

Eseld frowned and looked away. Mumbling more to herself, she asked, "Doesn't look like I have much of a choice."

Cassandra's answering frown did not endere the woman much more to Eseld, and it was evident that the feeling was mutual. The pair stood, Cassandra more gracefully than Eseld's

stumbling attempt. To the taller woman's credit, she reached out a steadying hand before they started walking again.

Cassandra's hand remained on Eseld's shoulder in a half guiding, half protective gesture. As they passed the various people in the village, Cassandra revealed that many already deemed Eseld guilty. She began spouting the purpose of the Conclave before Eseld snapped, "I know what it was for! I was there on my way to join the Chantry as a lay sister!"

Cassandra blinked in surprise. "I - see. So you understand why it was so important. The chance for peace between the templars and the mages."

"Can't Divine Justinia hold another Conclave?" Eseld questioned, "After all this is done?"

Again, Cassandra leveled a look of surprise, mixed with sorrow, at Eseld. "No. Divine Justinia is dead."

Eseld stumbled at those words, but tried to keep moving on the snow covered path. The Divine was dead too? Cassandra continued talking, oblivious to her prisoner's stunned silence. The leaders of both factions were dead. Everything was in shambles. "We lash out like the sky, but we must think beyond ourselves," Cassandra sounded pained. She motioned to the gate that swung open, ushering Eseld through. "As she did," she added softly. Once through the gate, they paused. Cassandra unsheathed a dagger and cut Eseld's binds. "There will be a trial," she offered in way of comfort. "I can promise no more."

They proceeded across the bridge and through the second gate. There they found wagons aflame along the path. Soldier ran toward them and away from whatever lie ahead. They warned the pair of demons on the path ahead, but hurried on their way to deliver their messages to those back at the fortress. Cassandra kept their pace at a run, ever moving closer to the Breach.

But every once in a while their progress was halted whenever Eseld's hand shocked her whole arm, bringing her to her knees with a cry of surprised pain. Cassandra would hoist Eseld to her feet a grim face meeting Eseld's pain scrunched brows. The attacks to her hand and nervous system were becoming closer together and more frequent. Cassandra gave the rogue a soldierly pat on the shoulder before turning and pressing onward to the next set of doors and bridge.

Cassandra slowed her pace only for a moment to speak to a scout while Eseld wandered to the center of the bridge, her gaze turned upward at the thing in the sky that was causing all her problems. Ahead of her she saw a green fireball fall from the sky and send a spray of snow into the air. She heard a high pitched whistling and looked above her head to see another ball of brimstone hurtling right at the bridge beneath her feet.

"Get down!" Cassandra shouted and Eseld felt herself being tackled from behind right as the bridge exploded into rubble from the impact. Soldiers went flying as well as the boxes of wagons holding provisions and supplies. A splinter grazed Eseld's cheek as she tried to shield her head from stones raining down around her. Her ears were ringing but she could also hear the moans of the injured.

She and Cassandra tumbled apart and rolled down a pile of rubble to the frozen riverbed below. When they stopped, Eseld pushed herself up and looked around. To her horror there was an arm sticking out from a pile of rocks just beside her. She wasn't squeamish - she had been a mercenary - but the job had usually been people who deserved to die. An innocent, however, - she hated to see collateral damage.

Eseld turned away with a grimace but another whistling from above caught her attention. A boulder of green fire crashed into the bank across from them but plowed through the dirt and snow before crashing into the icy water. Cassandra and Eseld stood warily, testing the firmness beneath them. No telling whether the new green hole some feet away from them had compromised the ice they stood on.

Green spikes like stalagmites shot from the green fissure in the river as a demon rose from the water with a shriek. Eseld backed up a step, reaching instinctively for a dagger sheath, but finding none available. Cassandra ran ahead, a shield at the ready and a sword drawn.

"Stay behind me," she barked in order as she charged with a roar of her own. Eseld kept backing away, but she noted a dark bubbling mass fast approaching her from beneath the ice. Panicked, she cast her gaze about for a way to defend herself. One of the wooden boxes nearby held weapons, and she quickly dug through the straw for something she could use, all while keeping an eye on the thing traveling under the ice toward her.

A bow she knew how to use, but was only passable with one. A broad sword? Too bulky. A mage's staff - not likely. Even with the strange magic emanating from her hand. With a breathy laugh of triumph, Eseld pulled two dagger's from the confines and tested the grips. Highland dirks, rather common, but would have to do for now.

Not a moment too soon either, as the green spikes shot from the water with another demon following in its wake. Eseld charged with her dirks, jumping in close to slash before throwing a smoke bomb down that she had found along with the weapons. The demon was momentarily distracted enough for her to creep around behind it and stab both blades to the hilt into the monstrosity. It crumpled with a shriek.

Eseld turned to dispatch the demon's partner in the same manner, ducking the wildly flailing claws. With both her targets down with her own arm bloodied from a strike, she ran towards Cassandra who was momentarily struggling against her own assailants.

With a quick flick of her wrist, she doused her blades in a poison before nicking one of the demons while Cassandra doubled her efforts against the other demon pressing against her shield. Eseld jumped back, now that she had the poisoned creature's attention and smirked as she watched the thing stumble and sway in its movements. It tried to lash out, but the fast acting poison gave Eseld time to keep her distance and plan a jump attack that ended with a headless demon exploding into dust.

She turned to see if Cassandra needed any more back up, but the other woman was already pulling her blade from the demon, blood spurting everywhere. Eseld scanned the area for any more threats before approaching. When she looked to Cassandra again, she had the point of a sword in her face.

“Drop your weapon!” Cassandra ordered, “Now!”

Apparently Cassandra was the threat. Or vice versa. Eseld scowled, as she lowered herself to put the dirks on the ice. “All right, all right!”

The Seeker sighed. “Wait.” She sheathed her sword and took Eseld’s elbow to lift her from her crouched position. “I cannot protect you,” Cassandra admitted, “and I cannot expect you to be defenseless. Come, we must keep moving.”

As they continued they faced the occasional skirmish with a demon. Eseld became acquainted with beasts she’d only read about in her studies. Shades. Wraiths. Stuff of nightmares that she had thought could only be loosed on a Circle by a foolish mage. But here they were. Plummeting from the skies!

Cassandra called to Eseld as they ran. “Up ahead! They’re fighting!”

“Who?” Eseld asked as she sprinted to keep up as well as see who needed their aid. Before she could lift her dirks to help whoever was fending off the demons, the monster’s were dispatched by a mage elf and dwarf with a crossbow. Eseld slowed to a halt, breathing heavily from her run and the fighting she’d been doing not too long before.

Her eyes rose to the green, glowing mass hovering and sparking in the air above them, her hand was angrily reacting in kind. Eseld winced and tried to back away. This wasn’t the Breach. What was this? The elf mage hastily walked up to her and snatched her left hand from her side. “Quickly! Before more come through!” He lifted her hand, now empty as she had switched the blade to her right hand with the dirks mate, and aimed it at the energy crackling above them.

Eseld winced and tried to snatch her hand away as the glowing mass seemed to suck something from her hand and body in a painful, hot sensation, but the knife-ear held her hand steady and did not release her until the thing winked out with a thunderous crack. Her hand shot back with the recoil and Eseld cradled her now throbbing hand to her chest, an accusatory glare leveled at the mage.

“What did you do?” She demanded, trying not to gasp from the body-wracking shakes that had taken hold of her.

The bald elf relaxed and met her disapproving glare with an air of cool indifference. “I did nothing. The credit is yours.”

Baffled, she looked down at her hand. “I closed that thing? How?”

The mage rambled on about magic and the properties the mark on her hand may possess - the connection between the Breach in the sky and the mark on her hand - the theory he had about the one being able to effect the other. He seemed all too smug about being correct. Eseld didn’t understand half of what he said, but nodded anyway. Warily she stepped back from him as Cassandra approached, intrigued by whatever the mage was saying.

“You mean it could close the Breach itself?” She asked with hope coloring her voice.

“Possibly,” he replied cautiously. Looking once more to Eseld, he said, “It would seem that you hold the key to our salvation.” She didn’t try to hide the skepticism from her face - or the mistrust. To his credit, the knife-ear did not seem too perturbed or offended by her reaction.

“Good to know!” The dwarf interrupted as he adjusted his gloves. With a wry smile, he looked up at the trio and said, “And here I thought we’d be ass deep in demons forever.” Eseld smirked back at him. She liked him already - and it wasn’t just because she could tell he was a rogue.

As he approached he introduced himself as Varric Tethras. The name seemed familiar, but Eseld couldn’t quite place it. Cassandra only scowled at the dwarf, so he wasn’t exactly on friendly terms with the Seeker it seemed.

“Nice crossbow,” Eseld offered appreciatively. “Can’t say I’ve seen anything quite like it in my time traveling with rogues and mercenaries.”

Varric beamed with pride as he glanced over his shoulder at the stock. The pair chuckled over the fact he’d named the crossbow, but Eseld couldn’t fault him for that. She’d done the same to a pair of particularly nice daggers when she was younger.

“Well I welcome her assistance,” Eseld added with a nod of her head.

“Yeah, she’ll be great company in the valley ahead,” Varric agreed as he pointed in the direction they had to go.

“Absolutely not!” Cassandra interjected. She gave a long-suffering sigh. “Your assistance has been appreciated, Varric, but -”

“Have you been in the valley lately, Seeker?” the dwarf interrupted, spreading his arms wide.

While the pair bickered, the mage stepped toward Eseld. “My name is Solas,” he offered politely, “if there are to be introductions.”

Eseld eyed him and nodded. “Eseld Trevelyan.”

“I am pleased to see that you still live,” Solas gave a small smile, his eyes crinkling at the edges.

Cassandra had stalked off, apparently giving up on her squabble, which freed Varric for this new line of conversation. “He means, ‘I kept that mark from killing you while you slept.’”

Eseld vaguely remembered the low voice that spoke quietly over her - in an unfamiliar tongue - distant and distorted like she had been submerged under water. Now that she looked at Solas and thought back over what she had heard him say so far - he did sound like that voice. “Thank you for that,” she said, but her opinion of him was still wary at best. “You seem to know a great deal about this mark.”

His answering smile was maddeningly smug - or pleased that she took notice - who knew with mages.

“Solas is an apostate,” Cassandra state bluntly. “He’s well versed in such matters.”

Solas’ smile vanished, and Eseld felt herself take another step away from him. Varric was beside her now, and he looked up at her as if he was assessing her. She ignored him.

“Technically speaking,” Solas said, “all mages are apostates now, Cassandra.” He returned his attention to Eseld and explained how he traveled frequently studying the Fade. His knowledge of such things had brought him to the location of the Breach - to offer his aid.

“Convenient,” Eseld stated shortly. “An expert on the Fade arrives as a tear between the Fade and our world appears in the sky.”

He inclined his head to her. “Just as convenient that you were recovered from the wreckage bearing a mark that responds and reacts to the Breach above where you were found.” Solas turned to Cassandra, effectively dismissing Eseld and her answering frown. “Cassandra, you should know that the magic here is unlike any I have ever seen. Your prisoner is no mage.” He glanced sideways at Eseld knowingly. Did the knife-ear know she distrusted him because of that? That she distrusted all mages? She didn’t want to admit it, but she was relieved to hear that she wasn’t turning into one! But she was not so relieved that Solas seemed to have discerned her fears.

Cassandra took Solas’ words for truth, but did not allow anyone to dwell on the revelation too long. She urged everyone onward. As the Seeker and apostate hurried over the rubble, Varric chuckled from beside Eseld. “Well,” he said, gaining Eseld’s attention, “Bianca’s excited.”

Eseld felt her lips quirk into an answering smile. “Glad one of us is.”

The four companions pushed forward, attacking wraiths and shades as they went. Eseld insisted on gathering elfroot as they went. The green healing potions she’d been given earlier from Cassandra’s pack had to stretch between all of them, and, if those ran out, at least Eseld could whip together a temporary elfroot compress to place against open wounds until a proper healer could attend to the injured party member.

She even rooted through some of the burning buildings and supply wagons for equipment that could be shared between them all. A helmet here, a better piece of armor there. Sure it slowed them down, to Cassandra’s eternal annoyance, but Eseld knew from working with smaller and poorer mercenary companies that you took what gear you could find. Cassandra might even thank the young rogue later.

Eventually they reached the forward camp that Cassandra had been urging them toward. It was as Varric said, things were in disarray. There were wounded being tended to by Circle mages and lay sisters and brothers. Shouts from further ahead. The brimstone falling from the sky had left the earth scorched and snow melted. Trees looked like shattered matchsticks sticking up from the ground. Rubble was everywhere.

“There’s Leliana!” Cassandra said as she hastened toward the woman from Eseld’s earlier interrogation. With Leliana was a Chantry brother, hunched over a table with a crude map stretched out on its surface. As the group approached, the Chantry brother looked up. Eseld

wondered if he always looked like he'd taken a bite from a lemon or if it was just today that he looked perturbed.

"You made it!" Leliana stated as she came from around the side of the table. She turned to the Chantry brother. "Chancellor Roderick, this is -"

"I *know* who she is," he interrupted. Eseld decided that he must always be this way. He turned to address Cassandra. "As grand chancellor of the Chantry, I hereby order you to take this criminal," he said as he jabbed a finger in Eseld's direction, "to Val Royeaux to face execution."

Yes, definitely someone who must have eaten a lemon every day of his life since birth.

"Order *me*?!" Cassandra questioned and demanded in disgust. The Seeker, Leliana, and the chancellor all fell into arguing over who had jurisdiction where and over whom. Eseld felt like she would have whiplash if she tried to follow along.

"Justinia is dead!" Roderick shouted over Cassandra and Leliana. The two women stiffened at his words and they both looked ready to deck the chancellor. He looked to Leliana as he said, "We must elect her replacement and obey *her* orders on the matter."

Eseld folded her arms over her chest and scowled between the three. "You all realize that I'm standing right here. I can hear everything you're saying." They looked to her then, Roderick looked apoplectic while Leliana only mildly amused. Cassandra - she still looked like she wanted to punch someone. Eseld scoffed at them all. "So no one is actually in charge here?"

Roderick turned almost a shade of purple that could rival a spindleweed. "You *killed* everyone who was in charge!"

Cassandra stepped between the chancellor and Eseld, drawing his attention, and he seemed to wilt. "Call a retreat Seeker. Our position here is hopeless."

"We can stop this before it's too late," Cassandra asserted. Once more the trio fell into discussion, this time about the possibility of getting to the temple. Through the mountain pass or directly across the battlefield. Quick or safe?

Before anything could be agreed upon, another fireball came hurtling to earth, and Eseld gripped her wrist in pain as her hand flared in sparking agony yet again. She didn't miss the look of fear on Roderick's face as he stepped back - even with the table and Cassandra between them.

Cassandra had turned to look at Eseld during the episode and waited until the sparks died down before asking, "How do *you* think we should proceed?"

With a short laugh and scrunched brows, Eseld said, "Now you're asking me what *I* think? You all still think I caused this!"

"You have the mark," Solas interjected as if that explained why Eseld's opinion of how soon she perished mattered.

“And you are the one we must keep alive,” Cassandra added.

“Alive long enough to have me hanged in Val Royeaux,” Eseld snapped back. In a hushed hiss, she said, “So much for your promises to a trial, Seeker.”

Cassandra looked away before meeting Eseld’s gaze again. “I will not allow them to kill you without your case being heard. But right now - we need to deal with the Breach. Since we cannot decide on our own.”

Eseld wanted to believe Cassandra’s words. She seemed genuine and convicted of what she had promised earlier and promising again just now, but, after today, Eseld didn’t know what to think or who to believe.

“So, so, so,” Eseld mumbled as she looked from the silent mountain then toward the sounds of battle ahead. Every bone in her rogue-trained body told her to take the mountain pass. Circumvent the battle. Pass by unseen. Fewer enemies. Have someone else draw the attention away from them so they would be less likely ambushed or delayed. But it was longer - so there were chances for delay. No word from the forward scouts - they might have already been ambushed.

“I say we charge,” Eseld answered finally. “Better to get this done quickly. We have no way of knowing how long the Breach will take before things get much, much worse.” She glanced down at her hand and remembered what Cassandra said. It was killing her, this mark. From the center of her palm and the gash there, she could see her once blue veins had started turning a sickly green. Eseld couldn’t be certain, but the burning and throbbing was up to her elbow now. If it was like a venom or a poison, then it was trying to make its way to her heart. And once that happened -

To Cassandra, she said, “I won’t survive long enough for your *trial*.” Eseld felt no remorse over spitting out the word like it was an insult. “Whatever happens, happens now,” she declared.

“Very well,” Cassandra agreed. “Hurry and resupply our health potions over there,” she said as she pointed to a wagon. “Leliana, bring everyone we have left in the valley. *Everyone*,” she emphasized as the red-headed woman hurried off to a wagon holding cages of ravens.

After gathering what they needed, the four marched. The climb up the snow covered mountain was slow at first, but not as slow as it surely would have been to climb the mountain pass. As they approached the front lines, the louder the shouts and clashes only heard in a skirmish. Eseld rounded a makeshift wall from rubble and logs sharpened and cobbled together, she saw soldier waving each other on. A rift was open before them with demons swarming about.

“Hurry!” Eseld shouted to her companions, “They need help!” She felt the effects of Solas’ barrier melt over her like a blanket. Cassandra charged in behind with a battlecry. Varric was already shooting a volley at a wraith, tossing some exploding traps in front of him should any demon stray too close.

Eseld spun on her heels and with crossing motion sliced the spine of a wraith that towered over a soldier sprawled on her back. She didn't stop to see if the soldier rose to take arms again, she was too busy jumping and slashing at her next target. With a space cleared of demons, Eseld lifted her hand to the rift and focused her attention on it. The low pitched noise started and grew higher until with a snap and thunderclap did the rift shut with a flash. The kick back of her arm wasn't as much of a surprise this time, so Eseld managed to not stagger when her arm pushed back, but she still felt drained down to her bones.

Whatever these rifts were doing when she held up her hand, it felt like her life was being torn from her. Eseld hoped she didn't die before they got to the Breach. But if just these small rifts left her shaking like this, then she held no doubts that the large Breach in the sky would kill her.

"You are becoming quite proficient with that," Solas complimented.

"Let's hope it works on the big one," Varric added as he looked up at the sky.

Eseld huffed. "Well, if it doesn't I'll be open to suggestions."

"We could always shoot a grenade into it," the dwarf suggested helpfully. "Ya know, I'm sure if we mix something together - big enough explosion -"

She smiled back at him then, glad to think of something else besides her impending death. He must have figured out her penchant for potion bombs. "Give me enough ingredients and I could probably whip something up."

"Lady Cassandra!" A man called to the Seeker, gaining everyone's attention. Eseld looked at the approaching soldier in his armor and fur lined coat. He seemed - serious. He nodded to Cassandra, relief in his voice. "You managed to close the rift. Well done."

"Do not congratulate me, Commander," Cassandra sighed as she looked to Eseld. "This is the prisoner's doing."

"I have a *name*," Eseld muttered to herself. Varric chuckled beside her.

"I hope they're right about you," the commander stated. "We've lost a lot of people getting you here."

She frowned at him. As if she asked for this. Any of it. "I can't promise anything," Eseld answered, "but I'll try my best."

"That's all we can ask," the commander agreed before turning his attention back to Cassandra.

"Pleasant guy," Eseld groused under her breath, again, Varric overheard.

"Who, Curly? Yeah, he's quite the personality." Varric looked at Solas warningly. "Just don't stick around for any mage diatribe." The elf huffed and shrugged, unperturbed.

Cassandra brought the group back to attention. "We must move quickly! Give us time, Commander."

He glanced at Eseld briefly then back to Cassandra. "Maker watch over you. For all our sakes." The commander turned and hurried after his soldiers, helping one stand from where she was sprawled on the ground. Possibly the one that Eseld had saved from a demon. Eseld wasn't sure, but she thought that she saw the commander look back. He made eye contact with the rogue and nodded his head. As if thanking or acknowledging what she had done for one of his own.

But she couldn't be sure.

They pressed on until they came to a drop off. She dropped down and looked around in horror at the cowering figures that had been petrified into smouldering statues in an instant of flames. No more plants. No water in the fountains. Just the smell of burning flesh, hair, and clothing.

Eseld wanted to retch.

Somewhere in all of this was her aunt.

She was glad Piran had gone on to Val Royeaux.

The group continued on in silence. Dodging the flaming statues that were curled into the fetal position, crouched and covering their heads, lifting hands to the sky in pleading supplication, lifting hands to shield them from their doom, or arching back from the blast - mouths always open in painful, horrified screams silenced forever.

Eseld rounded a corner to see a green, crystalline mass floating in the air. Light and vapors emitted from its center. Cracks formed in the crystals with a sound of shattering glass, but they healed again with a sizzle like electricity humming through the air so the crystal was constantly morphing and shifting like it couldn't settle on any form. The light and gases coming from it floated heavenward to the crack in the sky as if it was feeding it.

Varric commented on how the Breach was so high above them, but Eseld was still morbidly marveling at the green crystals.

"You're here!" Leliana's shout from behind caused Eseld to turn in surprise. "Thank the Maker," she breathed with a sigh of relief. Looking to Cassandra, she informed, "We found my scouting party not too long ago - what's left of it." She shook her head. "There are rifts up in the mountain passes. Demons ambushed them in the mines and - not everyone was able to make it out."

"I'm sorry, Leliana," Cassandra apologized solemnly. Looking over her shoulder at their objective, she became serious again. "Leliana, have your men take up positions around the Temple." The red-head nodded and hurried off to dispatch her orders. The Seeker looked then to Eseld. "This is your chance to end this. Are you ready?"

Eseld quirked an eyebrow. "How do you propose I get up there? I doubt I can reach it from here, much less close it."

"No," Solas agreed as he stared at the crystals with a puckered expression, studying it as closely as he could from their distance. "I theorize that this rift is the first one - it is the key. We seal it," he said looking to Cassandra, "then perhaps we can seal the Breach."

"What of the other rifts?" Cassandra asked.

"Impossible to know for certain," Solas supplied as he held a hand to his chin in thought.

"Then let's find a way down," she said. "No point in wondering about the 'what if's right now." Cassandra looked over the modge-podge crew she had amassed - whether by choice or coercion. "And - be careful," she ordered them all.

They made their way along the wall they on which they stood. Curiously, Eseld noticed the red, glowing stones jutting up from the ground. Varric swore and said something to Cassandra in a harsh whisper about red lyrium. Neither seemed to know where it had come from, but they did let on that they knew what it was. In a much louder voice, full of foreboding, he warned everyone around not to touch it - let alone stand too close to it if they could help it.

Eseld dropped down once she found a clear place to the courtyard below the rift. The closer she got to it, the more her hand thrummed and shook from the energy swirling below the surface. She held it up to grimace at it, but jumped in shock as a voice echoed in the air.

Someone! Help me!

Eseld's own voice answered.

What's going on here?

The green fire and sparks continued like a small storm on her palm and in her veins. Cassandra hurried to Eseld's side. "That was - your voice! The Most Holly called out to you, but -" The Seeker looked shaken, her face awashed with pain and confusion.

Eseld's hand calmed as a pulse shot from the crystals, the air whooshed out like a wave, pushing everyone back a step. Above them, like a play performed for only them, they saw a black, smokey figure with glowing red eyes. Something clutched in a claw-like hand. Before him was Divine Justinia, her arms outspread as if she were restrained by white, glowing snakes. So surreal, was the moment Eseld's doppelganger ran out of the mists. *What's going on here?* She demanded, looking to the Divine.

Run while you can! Warn them! The Divine's panicked voice echoed off the shattered stone walls.

We have an intruder. The black figure rumbled angrily as he fixed his gaze on the rogue. *Kill her.* A talon pointed at Eseld's mirrored image. *Now!*

Then a white flash blinded everyone watching, and the figures were gone.

Eseld sought her memories for what she had just witnessed. But - nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing! Why couldn't she remember?!

"You were there!" Cassandra accused angrily, her hand gripping roughly on Eseld's upper arm. Surely leaving a bruise. "Who attacked?" She demanded with a shake of Eseld's arm. "And the Divine? Is she -" Cassandra choked off her own question, clenching her teeth. She shut her eyes momentarily before glaring at the younger woman. "Was this vision true? What are we seeing?"

Eseld jerked her aching arm from Cassandra's hold. "I don't remember!" she shouted back, placing a comforting hand over the place the Seeker had abused. "I don't know what happened!" The pair stared angrily at each other until Solas spoke, giving his explanation. Cassandra and Eseld pulled apart, each giving the other a sideways glance warning the other not to say or do anything. Focus. They needed to focus on the rift and the Breach.

Solas was still speaking about the rift and what needed doing. Reopen the rift in order to reseal it - but correctly this time. He warned them all that by reopening it, would perhaps result in attracting some unwanted attention from the denizens of the Fade.

Cassandra called to the soldiers stationed all around the courtyard to stand ready for whatever might come through. Leliana and Varric ordered archers to key locations above it all while Cassandra ordered the soldiers to others, all had to prepare themselves. Solas stood back with his staff gripped firmly in one hand, ready to cast a guarding spell over the core group. Cassandra looked to Leliana, who nodded that she and hers were ready. Cassandra turned to Eseld and nodded in kind. Whenever Eseld was ready.

Eseld drew one dirk from its scabbard on her back. Hesitantly, she lifted her left hand. Shifted her stance. Lifted her hand higher until her palm faced the rift. Instantly, the green energy from her hand connected to the rift and she felt the pull. Eseld staggered a bit as she was dragged toward the rift, but she dug the heels of her boots into the dirt and concentrated with gritted teeth on keeping herself upright.

Without warning, her hand was released. Eseld cried out in shock as something hot whizzed overhead. She heard whatever it was strike stone behind her. Turning, she watched in wide-eyed dread at the glowing green light form into a horned, scaled beast several feet tall. It sparked with blue lightning and roared as it landed on clawed feet.

The creature straightened to its full height, making a rumbling sound that sounded like a laugh. A malevolent cackle as it bared its pointed teeth in a wicked grin. Many eyes narrowing in glee at the careless victims surrounding it.

"Pride demon!" Cassandra shouted warningly. Lifting her sword in the air, she ordered, "Now!" Archers released a volley, but the pride demon swatted the arrows in the air like they were nothing but pesky flies. He roared at them all. Then everyone leapt into action.

Eseld ran into the fray, trying to cut the demon's feet out from underneath him, but he only laughed again and began swiping and stamping at any soldiers caught too close underneath him. Eseld rolled out of range after her dirks bounced off of the bone-scale hide. She was going to be of no use here!

“More demons are coming from the rift!” Leliana shouted over the din of shouts and roars. Eseld turned at that. Wraiths and shades. Those she could handle. She ran to cut them down and keep the demons distracted while the others tried to find a weak point on the pride demon. The air sizzled with electricity. Varric called a warning as the pride demon lashed out with a whip made from actual lightning. Many were stunned and burned with a single swipe. Solas healed some while others were dragged out of the fray to some safety.

Eseld tried throwing a potion bomb at the feet of the pride demon, but it had little effect.

“Eseld!” Solas shouted. “Disrupt the rift! The pulse will stagger him! Drop his guard!”

Looking up at the rift, Eseld shifted her grip on her dirk in her left hand and lifted her palm once more. She felt sweat drip down her back as, once again, she felt herself pulled toward the rift. With a sound of shattering glass, the crystals all broke. The rift remained, but it was now a swirling, green cloud of smoke. The pride demon roared out in pain and fell to its knees, winded.

“Its guard is down!” Cassandra shouted, “Everyone, hit it hard!”

Eseld broke a poison vial on her blades and didn’t waste time trying to catch her breath. Her adrenaline propelled her forward and she, along with Cassandra and everyone else, hacked and slashed at every inch of the pride demon they could reach. It rumbled angrily and staggered to its feet, but now that Eseld knew what she could do to help the battle, she dodged the other demons and left them to Leliana or the foot soldiers so she could find a good position where she could disrupt the rift again. She noted with some satisfaction that the poison she’d inflicted on the demon was starting to have effect. It staggered on its feet and roared in pain as more and more hits were struck on already deep carved cuts.

“One more time, Trevelyan!” Leliana shouted once more.

So she did. Once more she stretched out her hand to the rift and sent a pulse out with a jerk of her arm. Cassandra landed the killing blow that sent the demon crashing down before it dissipated into ash. Eseld already had her arm up again to the rift as the Seeker shouted, “Do it!”

Eseld felt herself sliding on her feet across the dirt. Her heart was hammering, and now she saw blood droplets starting to float intermingled with the green light from her hand toward the rift. Pain. Pain like a broken limb and fire and ice and tingling and so many sensations that Eseld couldn’t even define shot up and down her arm. Her vision blurred from tears and became hazy with gray and black edging in on her. But she grit her teeth. Her head pounded with whispers and singing and humming, but also felt like something was screaming at her as well.

She was going to die. She was going to die!

Eseld screwed her eyes shut as her teeth ground together to prevent the scream welling up in her throat from escaping. No. No! Not like this. Not like this! She would not die with this rift wringing every ounce of her from her body! If she was going to die, then it would be on her terms.

Glaring now at the rift as she skidded closer to it, she thought - or perhaps she shouted - if it wanted to drain her, then she would give everything until it couldn't hold anymore! Until it exploded!

Eseld stiffened and locked her legs until she found purchase again. With a step backwards, she gained some ground. She jerked her arm back, then pushed forward with her left arm, as if she was pushing against a heavy obstacle. The green light from her hand changed. It was hot, but not burning her. It's color no longer sickly green, but bright and shining.

The rift grew, but it almost looked like it was struggling against the size. Shuddering and snapping. Tendrils stretched far and wide and thin. Then it shot skyward, this ball of energy, fire, and electricity. More white than green. Higher, higher until a white light caused everyone to cover their eyes.

Eseld felt numb. Her left arm fell to her side and her vision after the white light turned dark. She felt herself falling. She heard rather than felt her body hit the rocky earth with a thud and crunch. And then - nothing.

Chapter End Notes

I tried to find a good balance between in-game dialogue and original dialogue. I'm hoping I met that goal, but critiques are welcome! I promise that I won't use all in-game dialogue and that I'm not just rewriting the game here.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter! Hopefully Chapter 3 will be coming soon. :)

A Deal to Strike

Chapter Notes

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

She inhaled deeply and turned her head. Burning wood - she loved that smell. Reminded her of a warm fireplace and a mug of beer while sitting in a tavern with good friends. Eseld opened her eyes, a smile on her lips and she pulled the covers up to her chin. Wait -

Her smile faded as she looked about the cabin she was in. Unfamiliar. The sound of the door opening garnered her attention. A female elf walked in carrying a box and hadn't seen Eseld yet, but, when she did, she dropped the box. The glass contents rattling as they hit the floor.

Eseld sat up quickly, unsure of what was going on.

"I didn't know you were awake! I swear!" The elf apologized as she began wringing her hands in distress.

Eseld didn't understand the elf's fear. Was she a servant? She waved her right hand to asway the elf's concerns, but it only caused the elf woman to wince. "Don't worry about it," Eseld assured her. "Where am I? I - I don't remember anything after -"

She was cut off by the elf collapsing to her knees and bowing so her forehead touched the ground. "I *beg* your forgiveness and your blessing! I am but a humble servant."

This was - bizarre.

Eseld kicked the Orlesian blankets from her legs and swung her feet over the edge until they touched the floor. Looking down at herself - what was she wearing?

"You are back in Haven, my lady," the elf explained. She looked up momentarily before ducking her head down. "They say you saved us! The Breach stopped growing just like the mark on your hand."

Eseld quickly looked down at her left hand and at the bandage there. Without a thought to whether it was still healing or not, she picked at the knot holding the cloth to her hand and unraveled it. The gash had healed to a scar, the veins were mostly blue under her skin, only a few were green. The skin around the scar was also discolored and seemed to glow if she looked too hard. But - it didn't hurt anymore. How long had she been unconscious?

"It's all anybody's talked about!" The elf. Eseld had forgotten she was still here. "Everyone was talking about it for the past three days!"

Well that answers that question. Wait - what? "Everyone's been talking? About me? They're - they're pleased?"

"The Breach is still in the sky, but that's what they say!" She rose to her feet then and began backing toward the door. She was wringing her hands again. "I'm certain Lady Cassandra

would want to know you've wakened. She said, 'at once!'"

Eseld rose from the bed. "And where is she?"

The elf shuffled back even more at Eseld's movement. "At the chantry with the Lord Chancellor. 'At once,' she said!" The elf turned on her heels and practically ran out the door, slamming the door behind her.

The young woman found herself alone. And utterly confused. She took the time to look around at her surroundings, finding notes on a table across from her bed. Notes written by whoever had been tasked with taking care of her. She wondered briefly if it had been Solas. Was he even still around? He'd said that he may not stay long after the Breach was sealed - but it wasn't gone according to the elf girl. So maybe he was. And Varric. Maybe he was still here too. Although he probably wasn't if he wanted to get away from Seeker Cassandra.

And Eseld was still here. Despite everyone predictions that she should be dead. Which was good - but did that mean she had to join the Chantry now like her parents wished? Well - she could always go to Val Royeaux and find Piran. She didn't have a chaperone anymore. Eseld felt a moment of guilt over her aunt's death. Among the smouldering corpse-statues she had indeed found what could have been her aunt's remains. The beads around the remains' neck had been very similar if not the exact ones of her aunt.

Eseld searched about until she found the beads. They had been laid out on the bedside table, beside the candlestick. Eseld picked them up and found herself kneeling on the rug. She bowed her head and held the beaded necklace to her lips as she began reciting from Transfigurations.

"The Light shall lead her safely through the paths of this world, and into the next. For she who trusts in the Maker, fire is her water. As the moth sees light and goes toward flame, she should see fire and go towards Light. The Veil holds no uncertainty for her, and she will know no fear of death, for the Maker shall be her beacon and her shield, her foundation and her sword."

Her thoughts were for her aunt, but also for all those nameless souls that had perished. And the Divine. Eseld sighed before rising to her feet and putting the beaded necklace around her neck. She tucked it into her high-necked shirt, hidden away from prying eyes. Eseld then located the rest of her gear in the chest at the end of her bed. Gratefully, she dressed and equipped her dirks. This meant she was no longer a prisoner if they trusted her this much with a weapon.

Once dressed, Eseld approached the door to the cabin and opened it, ready to go in search of Cassandra. What she wasn't ready for was the silent crowd lining the pathway from her cabin up to where the Chantry lay. The guards had their fists to their chests in salute. Some of the lay sisters and brothers held their hands together in prayer, their heads bowed. Regular citizens also had their heads bowed in reverence, while others openly gawked. But all was eerily silent save for the wind coming over the mountains.

Eseld passed them by and couldn't help but hear the whispered words of those not standing on the path but set apart from the rest. Hissed words about her and what she had done at the

Temple of Sacred Ashes. Speculation of who and what she was. It was all unnerving.

She hastily entered the Chantry and instantly recognized it as the building she thought had been a fortress and her prison. Eseld passed through the hall to the door opposite of where she'd entered and heard raised voices from within. Predominantly, Cassandra and Chancellor Roderick's voices. She listened in long enough to understand that they were arguing about the Breach and Eseld's role - perhaps even her fate after all of this.

Eseld briefly debated running - but she wasn't so sure that was a wise idea. Let alone a feasible one. Having eavesdropped enough, she barged in, cutting them all off mid-sentence.

Roderick looked at her with an aloof expression. "Chain her! I want her prepared for travel to the capital for trial!" The guards at the door clanked in their armor as they shifted from their alert stance at the door. Eseld looked over her shoulder at them. Well - at least the chancellor had said there would be a trial instead of outright execution this time.

"Disregard that!" Cassandra's voice gave everyone pause. Eseld looked back at the Seeker on the opposite side of the large table in the center of the room. Cassandra flicked a hand at the two guards. "Leave us." The guards did as ordered, shutting the door in their wake.

"You walk a dangerous line, Seeker," Roderick threatened as he paced around the table.

Cassandra turned to the chancellor and spoke evenly, "The Breach is stable, but it is still a threat. I will *not* ignore it!"

Eseld approached the table and asked, "So I'm still a suspect? Even after what we just did?"

"You absolutely are," Roderick answered with a scowl.

"No!" Cassandra contradicted him forcefully. "She is not."

Leliana stepped up next to Cassandra then. "Someone was behind the explosion at the Conclave. Someone Most Holy did not expect. Perhaps they died with the others," she speculated, looking away, then she looked back at Roderick, steal in her voice. "Or, have allies who yet live."

Roderick reeled back at the implication in the woman's words. "You think *I* am a suspect?!"

"You!" Leliana confirmed before adding as a side note, "And many others."

"But *not* the prisoner?" The chancellor questioned disbelievingly.

"I have a name!" Eseld snapped back as she glared at them all. "Suspect or no, I'd appreciate it if everyone started using it!"

Roderick scoffed, Cassandra rolled her eyes, but Leliana smirked approvingly. "Our apologies," the red-headed woman offered.

"If we may continue," Cassandra urged. "Chancellor," she addressed the man, "I heard the Divine call to - Trevelyan for help."

“So her survival, that *thing* on her hand - all a coincidence?” He demanded as he folded his arms over his chest.

“Get in line,” Eseld grouched. “Everyone is asking that question. Myself included.”

“Providence,” Cassandra informed them both shortly. Eseld’s head whipped around to stare in surprise at the Seeker’s conviction. “The Maker sent her in our darkest hour.”

The Chantry prayer beads around her neck suddenly felt much heavier. Eseld noticed only a moment too late that her mouth was agape, and it shut with a click as her teeth snapped together. The Maker had sent her? Chosen her? Did that even make sense? Her? Eseld Trevelyan? The rebellious daughter of a bann in Ostwick?

And yet -

Andraste had been a Tevinter slave before she became a prophet of the Maker.

She looked up at the expectant gazes of the other three people there. The Cantic of Trials readily came to her lips. Eseld recited, “Though all before me is shadow, yet shall the Maker be my guide.”

The corners of Cassandra’s lips turned up approvingly, before she spoke. “We lost everything, then - out of nowhere - you came.” She turned away from them all then and walked to a chest on the opposite wall.

“The Breach remains,” Leliana continued, “and your mark is still our only hope at closing it.”

Eseld looked down at the healed over tissues. “Will it even work now?”

Before either of the other women could answer, Roderick snapped, “This is not for you to decide!”

Cassandra stormed back to the table and slammed a heavy tome onto its surface, making Roderick jump in surprise and back away. The Seeker glared at him, cowing him further. She jabbed a finger to the book’s cover and questioned, “You know what this is, Chancellor?” Cassandra answered her own question before Roderick could even think to open his mouth. “A writ from the Divine granting us the authority to act! As of this moment,” she drew herself to her full height, looking intimidating in her armor and with her stern expression as she said, “I declare the Inquisition reborn.

“We will close the Breach,” Cassandra stated as she advanced on the now wary chancellor, “we will find those responsible, and we will restore order with or without your approval!”

Speechless and scowling, Roderick looked first to Leliana then back to Cassandra before turning wordlessly on his heel and storming out of the room. His reaction seemed to frustrate the Seeker, who lifted a hand and shook her head in disgust before running her hand through her already mussed up hair.

Leliana approached the book as she spoke to no one in particular, “This is the Divine’s directive: rebuild the Inquisition, find those who will stand against the chaos!” She looked

then to Cassandra. “We aren’t ready. We have *no* leader, no numbers. And now? No Chantry support!”

“But we have no choice,” Cassandra replied helplessly. With more conviction, she added, “We must act *now*.” The Seeker turned to Eseld, who had been quietly watching from the sidelines. “With *you* at our side, of course.”

“Me?!” Eseld questioned in surprise. “But -”

“Yes, you,” Cassandra interrupted. “You heard what was said. The Breach remains, and you are still the only one capable of dealing with it.”

Eseld showed her palm to Cassandra and the scar there. “We don’t even know if it still works! We don’t even know - if it does work - will it actually kill me this time?”

“We must all make sacrifices,” the Seeker stated solemnly. “If you know the Chant of Light as well as you’ve proven just moments before, you know this.”

“And we must at least try, Lady Trevelyan,” Leliana added. “We must try. Despite not knowing if we can do something.”

Eseld rubbed the cropped side of her head, running her now scarred hand over the stubble there. It felt strange. This was all strange. She said as much to the two women standing with her in that room.

Cassandra held out her hand to the young woman. “Please, help us fix this before it’s too late.”

They looked into each other’s eyes, both grim. One determined, the other uncertain. Eseld inhaled deeply through her nostrils and sighed noisily. Without a word, but a firm clench of her jaw that she knew only happened when she came to a decision, Eseld stepped forward to clasp hands with Cassandra and shook. A deal was struck then. She’d stay. She’d help. She’d maybe even die.

Maker help her.

Chapter End Notes

Short, but I liked where it ended. I'm on a roll! 2 chapters within a day of each other. New record for me! Okay, original content from here on out with drabbles of in-game moments just so everyone knows the timeline. :)

Usefulness

After that meeting with Cassandra and Leliana, Eseld was dismissed and told to rest and recuperate. There would be plenty of work for her to do later. Eseld tried, but when everyone is speaking in hushed whispers and frequently passing by the cabin that had become her new home - well, rest was hard to come by. And she had never really been one to just laze about anyway, so she set out to find something productive to do until she was called upon by the Seeker or Nightingale, as she learned from Varric was Leliana's official title.

Eseld met the resident alchemist Adan and learned that he had been the one to help her with her recovery. The man was cantankerous, but they got along well enough when discussing potions, grenades, and how to enhance the properties of lyrium. She even offered to help him by recovering notes from an abandoned cabin out in the woods, which he gruffly thanked her for by permitting her to use his hut to make whatever potions she needed. He drew the line at wild experiments though when he learned the reason for her short hair. No amount of her declaring it to be just a, "One time accident!" swayed him.

It was there where Varric found Eseld one day, mixing up some health potions for the requisitions officer. "Ah! The one everyone is calling Herald!" Varric greeted, stepping to her side and hastily tucking his raised hand into his red coat's pocket. Wisely holding back the clap on the back he'd intended no doubt. Potion mixing could be a finicky thing.

"Don't remind me," Eseld grumbled. "Besides, I'd think after being in battle with me, you'd have the decency to call me by name instead of by a title that everyone's graced me with."

"Ah, but where's the fun in that?" Varric questioned good naturedly, handing her a bowl and pestle with already ground elfroot leaves. "So, already hard at work, I see."

She shrugged as she poured the contents into a larger bowl with warm water. "All the eyes on me makes it hard to sleep like Adan ordered me to do." Eseld stirred the contents vigorously until it was frothing. She sprinkled some dawn lotus petals in for extra measure. Adan had been stashing them for later. Eseld smirked when she thought of the poorly crafted lock on the chest. She'd barely had to exert any effort with her picks. He of course wouldn't notice one or two missing blooms.

"I'm sure no one would look for me in the prisons though," Eseld mused. "I already checked down there. With no one to guard, soldiers don't bother to go down there. But - I'd rather not relive that experience I think."

"Few people would," Varric agreed. "So, I have an alternative suggestion!"

"Oh?" Eseld began measuring out the completed potions into glass vials, careful not to spill a drop. Not when the fledgling outfit needed every bit of provisions that could be found or crafted.

"Come with me to the tavern for a while," Varric ordered. "I'll buy you a drink, we sit around. Enjoy a couple of beers, maybe taste the food, swap stories - get you so drunk that

you stagger off to bed and get a good, long rest!”

Adan snorted. “Just so long as she doesn’t injure herself while drunk, dwarf!”

“I’ll even walk her home and tuck her in,” Varric offered with a hand to his heart.

Eseld rolled her eyes. “Adan, you just want your workstation back! Any good doctor would probably say something about the alcohol being bad for my injuries.”

“Well I’m not a real doctor, now am I, Trevelyan?” The alchemist shot back, “And yes! I want my cabin back to myself so perhaps *I* can get some sleep without fear of you blowing everything up!” He rubbed his beard and said, “Some of us want to keep what little hair we have, thank you.”

She wrinkled her nose at him. “I should never have told you about that flaming pitch grenade experiment. You lord it over my head as much as my company’s commander did!”

“Now you see?” Varric jabbed an elbow into her side. She looked down at the grinning dwarf as he said, “Those are the kinds of stories I’d love to hear about! So, come along and let’s swap some mishaps. I bet I could top any you’ve got about blowing something up accidentally.”

Eseld eyed the dwarf’s hair. “I doubt you burned any of your hair off.”

He chuckled and motioned to his unbuttoned shirt. “Maybe not on my head, but my chest hair? Yeah - that’s another matter entirely.”

“Fine, you win!” She acquiesced, corking the last potion. “Any story about burning chest hair is worth leaving behind a messy work station for someone else to clean up.”

Adan waved her off with a frustrated growl. Eseld followed Varric to the Singing Maiden. Varric introduced Eseld to the innkeeper Flissa. Eseld spoke briefly about Denerim and a job she had there once. The mercenary group she had joined then had been tasked to act as bodyguards for a wealthy merchant - but it proved to be a rather dull job. He’d just been overly paranoid.

With tankards in hand a promise of hot plates of food to come soon, Eseld and Varric found a table in a far corner away from the crowds of other soldiers and patrons. “You’ve been to Denerim, then?” Varric asked after the first swig of his drink.

Eseld looked away from the bard standing by the fire, she’d have to write down that song sometime. “Yeah, a couple of times. Not always for a job.”

Varric settled back in his seat and looked at Eseld with an interested tilt to his head. “Thought you were just a rogue. Didn’t peg you as a merc.”

“Well, you’d be wrong,” Eseld answered with a smile.

“So how long have you been a mercenary?” Varric asked.

Eseld frowned in thought and had to actually count back in her head how many years she'd been taking jobs and with whom. "Let's see - since I was sixteen so - seven years?"

The dwarf choked on his next sip and coughed for a moment. "That young?!"

She shrugged and thanked Flissa for the plates of food. "Yes. I decided it was better than what I was doing before." Eseld took a bite from the bread set beside the bowl of drufullo stew.

"Uh-huh," Varric drawled, "and what were you doing before?"

How much should she tell him? How much did people know in general? Eseld hadn't heard from Ostwick yet - hadn't even heard from Val Royeaux. Varric knew she was from Ostwick after correctly guessing based on her accent when they first met. Would he know anything about her family? Flissa had already admitted to once reporting information to Leliana - so whatever Eseld and Varric talked about right now would no doubt be reported back to the Nightingale.

"Being the unwanted and unnecessary younger sibling to a noble family," Eseld sighed with a shrug. "Ah, the sad, sad truth that is my life." She gave an exaggerated pout - the air of one who truly didn't care. Because she didn't. Of course she didn't.

"So you are one of *those* Trevelyans," Varric said with a nod, as if he already knew and was just waiting for her confirmation.

Damn it.

"Worse," Eseld said around a mouthful of meat and potatoes and broth, "I'm Bann Trevelyan's daughter. The black sheep of the family. An embarrassment to the family name and honor. Shipped off to join the Chantry so her life as a mercenary would no longer besmirch the family name." She tried to sound like she was making light of the whole thing. She hoped the dwarf bought it.

Eseld snorted and glared down at the scar on her hand. "And now I'm most likely disinherited because I single-handedly brought ruin to Thedas with the death of the Divine - if the Chantry is to be believed."

Varric eyed her over the rim of his tankard. Alright, maybe he didn't buy her attempt at making light of her status with her family. He set it down softly on the tabletop. "But - they're still family, right? Family stands by you."

"Hardly," Eseld retorted, a short laugh emphasizing the word. "No, appearances are a bit too high on the priority list. Offspring gets a lower place - if written on the list at all."

"But Trevelyans are known for their piety. You don't think they'd see you as the Herald? The chosen one? Sent by the Maker and Andraste herself?" Varric leaned forward to rest his folded arms on the wood, his bowl and plate pushed to the side.

“They’d believe the Chantry first and whatever stance they take,” Eseld answered lowly. “They’ve done so for years.” She stared into her tankard. She hoped - she at least hoped Piran hadn’t heard yet. Maybe Leliana could get a letter to him. Maybe she could explain.

“Geez,” Varric sighed. “Don’t tell me you’re a sad drunk, Herald.”

“Eseld,” she prompted him. “And no, I’m a tired drunk. Pass out. Nothing funny about that.” Eseld shrugged. “Anyway, maybe I should go now. Before I hit my limit.”

Varric laughed. “Two cups is your limit?”

Eseld grinned. “I’m not telling you my limit. That way, you won’t be able to trick me into drinking and doing something embarrassing. Or spilling all my secrets.” She pointed an accusatory finger at him. “You just wanted me to talk about myself.”

He chuckled and lifted his hands in mock surrender. “You’ve got me. Just collecting information in case this whole mess turns into something good enough to write about.” Varric stood with her and they left the warm confines for the tavern.

“You write?” she asked quizzically.

Varric put a hand to his heart. “Oh, Eseld! You wound me! Don’t tell me you’ve never heard of Varric Tethras! The author of *Hard in Hightower* or any of my other great and many works of fiction!”

Eseld laughed at that. “I knew I’d heard your name somewhere! My grandmother and mother read your romance novels!”

Varric groaned. “Those trash? I should have known.”

“If it’s any consolation,” Eseld offered, “I’ll read your other books if I can get my hands on a copy. I was never one for romance stories anyway.”

“You do that, and I’ll sign them for you,” he promised goodnaturedly.

They reached her cabin door, and the young woman turned to look at her escort. “But if you do write about me, I’d better get a cut.”

Varric waved off her joking statement. “Eh, take it up with my publisher. He’ll talk percentages with you.” He paused to look thoughtfully at Eseld.

“So, the real reason I asked you to come out to the tavern tonight,” Varric explained, “Are you - holding up alright?” He hastened to add, “I mean you go from being the most *wanted* criminal in Thedas to joining the armies of the faithful. Most people would have spread that sort of stuff out over more than one day.”

Eseld smiled wryly. “Honestly? I’m just glad I’m still alive. Still standing after all of that.” She looked down at her hand and curled her fingers around the scar in her palm.

"I still can't believe you survived Cassandra," he chuckled. "You're lucky you were out for most of her frothing rage."

"We talking before or after I sealed that rift?" Eseld asking with her own chuckle. "Cause I vaguely remember yelling. A lot of yelling. Can't remember what was said, but I remember the noise."

"A little bit of both," Varric admitted. "She may not mention this to you herself, but she was personally ensuring the chancellor didn't have you dragged away to Val Royeaux while you were unconscious. Calling you a hero and all that."

Eseld smiled at that. "Huh, didn't know she cared."

Varric laughed at that before looking up at the sky and the Breach. In a more somber tone he said, "I still can't believe anyone was in there and lived."

"Why did you stay?" Eseld asked, genuinely curious after all she had learned from Varric. About how he'd been a prisoner too brought in for questioning about Hawke and Varric's knowledge of the woman's whereabouts.

He huffed a bit before looking to the young woman with a wry smile. "I like to think I'm as irresponsible and selfish as the next guy, but this?" He waved to the Breach with a sigh.

"Thousands of people died on that mountain, and yeah - sure - I was almost one of them! And now there's a hole in the sky, even I can't walk away and just leave that to sort itself out."

"I don't think any of this has really sunk in yet," Eseld admitted as she looked over the people still milling about in the waning light. Soldiers coming in from training outside the walls with the commander - they hadn't been formally introduced yet, so she still didn't know his name, other than Varric's nickname for the man. The merchant, who seemed a little too stingy with his supplies for those who needed it and charged too much for those who had the coin, was starting to gather his wares for the evening. Some were stumbling out of the tavern while others were stumbling in. This was what she had inherited in some way. This fledgling outfit that proposed to heal the tear between realms.

Yeah. Hadn't sunk in yet.

"I don't think anyone is really prepared for any of this," Varric agreed. "But - word of friendly advice. You may want to consider running when you get the first opportunity." She looked at him with a lift of her eyebrows. The dwarf hastened to explain, "I've written enough tragedies to recognize where this is going. Heroes are everywhere. I've seen that. But the hole in the sky? That's beyond heroes. We're going to need a miracle."

Eseld tilted her head at that. "You're not a believer?"

Varric shrugged his shoulders. "What I do or don't believe - that's a story for another time. I've taken enough of your time. Here," he gestured to her cabin's door as he said, "I've escorted you home as promised, but I don't think you're so drunk that you need tucking in."

“I think I can manage,” Eseld assured with a chuckle.

“Good to hear,” Varric answered with an answering grin. He turned and started trudging his way back to the tent he’d claimed next to the tavern and called over his shoulder, “Goodnight, Eseld.”

“Hey, Varric?” She waited until he turned to look at her. Eseld smiled - a genuine smile. Most of the ones she gave him tonight and to everyone else? Those had been all for show. Like always. “Maybe next time we can actually swap stories about burnt chest hair.”

Varric’s own lips quirked at the edges, a smile more evident in the glint of his eyes. “Sounds good. But next time, you buy the drinks.”



Eseld woke the next morning and after cleaning herself up a bit, she made her way once more toward Adan’s cabin. She didn’t know if there was any more need for potions - she’d already made so many - but making potions was all she really knew how to do when she wasn’t out fighting. She could go practice with the soldiers, but that didn’t feel quite like where she should be. She could always go out and collect more elfroot. There was plenty of that to be had growing around Haven.

Or she could see if the blacksmiths needed iron. There was lots of that too.

Maybe Flissa could use some meat. Eseld could go hunting. Nugs, fennecs - she could get permission from the farmers to slaughter some rams or a druffalo - Maker, but she was bored.

As Eseld pondered what to do with herself, she spied Solas standing outside staring into the sky with a concentrated dip to his eyebrows. His hand held his chin as he was lost in thought. The rogue looked down at the scar on her hand and wondered - not for the first time - what use would she be to the Inquisition if she couldn’t use the mark anymore? The only person who may know whether she could or not would be the apostate knife-ear.

With a groan and grudging sigh, Eseld approached him.

Solas noticed her quickly enough. “The Chosen of Andraste,” he greeted, “the blessed hero sent to save us all.”

It rankled her.

“I didn’t ask for this,” Eseld retorted shortly, “but someone has to find a way to seal the Breach.”

“Spoken nobly indeed,” he replied with a dip of his head - in respect? Hard to tell. Solas noticed the shift in her expression, and he did frown now. “You think I’m mocking you,” he stated sadly. “This age has made people cynical.” He turned then and began speaking of his journeys into the Fade and all that he saw there. To hear him recount such things with fond wonder made Eseld’s skin crawl.

He turned to look at her once more. "Every great war has its heroes. I'm just curious what kind you'll be."

Eseld crossed her arms over her chest and frowned. "The kind who wins, hopefully."

Solas smirked at her and in a jovial tone said, "That is usually better than losing." He looked again to the sky, his infuriating smirk vanishing again. "I will stay then. At least until the Breach has been closed."

"Was there any question that you wouldn't?" She challenged.

"As I've said before to Lady Cassandra," he explained, "all mages are apostates now, and it would seem that there are reports of skirmishes developing between mages and Templars. My position is not entirely a desirable one. Perhaps it would be safer for me to slip away and continue my studies of the Fade, but what use are studies if not put to some practical use once in a while."

"Speaking of practical use," Eseld drawled hesitantly as she took her hand out from it's hidden confines folded over her chest, "I was wondering - well I'm sure Cassandra and Leliana are wondering as well as the whole reason I've been roped into this Inquisition is because of this - well," with a growling sigh she held out her hand to reveal the scar and asked, "will this still work against the rifts and the Breach? Or - or does the scar tissue render it useless?"

Solas looked to her proffered hand and took it within his own. Eseld tried to ignore everything inside her being screaming at her for letting an apostate mage touch her - who knew what he'd do with his magic at any given moment? But she also had to remind herself that she *had* fought beside him, and he'd done nothing dangerous or untoward anyone thus far.

"I see no reason why the mark should not work," he answered after a moment's inspection. "It still shows signs of activity, albeit not as much with no rifts nearby." Solas looked up at her then. "But if my suspicions are correct, there may yet be a rift in that mountain pass we did not take to the Temple. It would no doubt be prudent of us to mount an expedition to seal this rift so we do not have demons coming close to those who rest here." He released Eseld's hand and nodded toward Haven's gates. "I believe Lady Cassandra spends her free time in the training yard when not conversing with the others about Inquisition business. She may be the one to discuss such and an excursion."

Eseld nodded slowly. "I'll - take that into consideration."

"If I may," Solas requested, "I would like to accompany you and whoever joins you. In case something were to go wrong and assistance is needed to get your mark to react or even to find a way to hold off the demons if the mark is indeed damaged beyond use, I may be of service."

"I'll run it by Cassandra," she repeated before turning and making her way to the training grounds as Solas had indicated.

Best to find out if she could help and needed to stay, or if she needed to take Varric's advice and cut her losses and run.

Eseld found the Seeker right where the elf had said she would be. Hacking away at a practice dummy, and it looked like the dummy was losing. After one particular strike, Cassandra grunted in disgust before noticing the rogue standing back a bit. She turned to look at Eseld, her own face crinkled in consternation or frustration - Eseld wasn't sure.

"I think you need practice dummies made of sturdier stuff," Eseld suggested as she motioned to what looked like a cloth and straw stand-in that had been cut in half beside several others who had similar afflictions - missing limbs, heads, and cut in half at varying angles.

Cassandra's frown smoothed out a bit at the quip and looked back at her targets. "That would be nice." She sighed then and turned away to look out over the frozen pond just below the hill. "Did I do the right thing?" Eseld followed as the older woman continued attacking another dummy. "What I have set in motion," Cassandra grunted, "could destroy everything I have revered my whole life!" She looked to Eseld as she spoke, "One day they may write about me as a traitor, a mad fool!" Cassandra swung at the dummy angrily. "And they may be right."

Eseld shrugged. "Not unless Varric writes it."

Cassandra scoffed. "Spare me from that dwarf's embellishments!"

In seriousness though, Eseld asked, "What does your faith tell you?"

The Seeker drew her weapon back and stood straight. She looked to the snow mixed with mud at her feet and frowned in concentration and thought. "I believe you are innocent," she answered. "I believe there is more going on here than we can see." Cassandra rolled her shoulders to loosen the muscles there as she continued, "And I believe that no one else cares about it!"

She looked behind herself at the walls of Haven then as she mused aloud. "They will stand in the fire and complain that it is hot!" Cassandra returned to a guard stance and faced the practice dummy once more. "But is this the Maker's will?" She queried. With a sigh, she answered, "I can only guess."

"Do you think I'm the Herald of Andraste?" Eseld asked. She wanted to know what this woman thought. This woman who had been close to the Divine and perhaps had greater faith than the young rogue.

"I think you were sent to help us," Cassandra answered without pause. "I *hope* you were. But the Maker's help takes many forms. Sometimes it is difficult to discern who it truly benefits, or how."

Eseld offered her opinion that she considered Cassandra's choices thus far to be necessary - that the Seeker had no choice in the matter, but the woman didn't seem to want to accept that opinion. Cassandra certainly seemed a bit grateful at the sentiment, but she was apparently

not done being hard on herself and her decision. Eseld let the woman vent, for if nothing else, perhaps it would help Cassandra.

Pausing mid-pace, the Seeker turned to look at the rogue with an appraising tilt to her head. "You said you believe you're chosen. Does that mean - you believe in the Maker?"

"Cassandra," Eseld laughed, "I was set to join the Chantry as a lay sister, remember?"

"Yes," the Seeker agreed with a small smile, "but that does not always mean you believe. I am all too aware that noble families force their younger children who are not set to inherit into service in the Chantry"

"I do," Eseld answered in all seriousness.

"That is comforting," Cassandra answered. Shaking her head she said, "I am sorry, I did not mean to unburden my thoughts on you. You sought me out? Was there something you needed?"

Eseld held up her left hand then. "Yes, I've been speaking with Solas about the mark. He said that it should still work, despite the scar having healed over. But if we want to test his theory out, perhaps we should make a trip up to that mountain pass that Leliana lost her scouts in. He suspects a rift may still be open there."

"His suspicions are correct," Cassandra said with a huff. "Leliana's people have been keeping an eye on it as well as dealing with any demons that may wander off the mountain, but we were uncertain how soon you would feel up to a skirmish."

"I'm just as curious as I'm sure you are whether I'll be of any real use," Eseld explained. "I can be ready if you have anyone in mind to go with me. Solas," she added begrudgingly, "requested that I ask you if he could tag along - in case his assistance is required since he knows so much about the Fade and demons."

Cassandra nodded. "His expertise in such matters is appreciated. And a large scouting party will not be necessary. Solas, you, and I can go quickly on foot and take care of this ourselves. I will just need to inform Leliana before we leave. If you are certain you are -"

"Cassandra," Eseld cut the Seeker off, "I have been cooped up in Adan's hut making poltices and healing potions. I'm ready to do just about *anything* else. And I *enjoy* making potions!"

The woman opposite her gave a short chuckle. "I'm sure. If all goes well, then I think it high time I introduced you to the rest of our counsel for the Inquisition, and we discuss your role and what we hope you can do for the Inquisition."

Eseld thought back to Varric's warning, but she shrugged it off. Only if she saw things take a bad turn. Instead, she nodded to Cassandra. "I'll get some last minute supplies and meet you _"

"At the gate," Cassandra supplied. "I'll send word to Solas. Perhaps half an hour at best - an hour at worst if Chancellor Roderick is lurking about to berate me more than he already has."



Half an hour later Eseld was exiting her cabin to meet up with Cassandra and Solas. She was not all together surprised to see Varric standing with the elf and Seeker, and it appeared the dwarf and human were already deep in an argument. The topic of their heated debate more evident as Eseld grew closer to them.

“Absolutely not!” Cassandra all but shouted down at the dwarf. “I put up with your assistance to reach the Breach in the beginning of this mess, and I put up with your continued presence here in Haven, but I will not have you tagging along on official Inquisition business which will no doubt get written into one of your glorified works of fiction!”

“Seeker,” Varric countered, “I don’t think you’re in a position to turn away any help when you haven’t got the numbers to backup your bluster.” She huffed at him, but he was clearly not finished. “And as for your accusations about my intentions to offer my assistance, you cut me to the quick! And wound me deeply,” he declared with a hand to his heart. “Why, I’d like to think my works of fiction were not just glorified, but works of sheer brilliance! To label them as merely ‘glorified’ - that’s a disservice to the written word.”

Cassandra rolled her eyes and grunted in disgust.

“Why not let the Herald decide?” Solas questioned the pair in a calming nature. “It is, after all, her life we are meant to be protecting as we set off on this mission.”

All eyes locked on the young woman who wanted nothing more than to scowl at the knife-ear. As if she needed protecting! Instead, she smiled to them all and lifted her hands in defeat. “Hey, the more the merrier! Besides, Varric still owes me a story about singed chest hair.”

“Fine!” Cassandra barked. “The dwarf may come! But,” she leveled a glare at the smug expression Varric was just letting creep onto his face as she said, “I want no talk about a book or any such trivialities concerning the Inquisition!”

“Why, Seeker,” Varric needled as they exited the gates, “I’d *never* do anything *trivial*! That would go against my very nature!”

And that was how Eseld found herself in a very strange troupe. An apostate, a Seeker, and a dwarf that perhaps should have been a bard instead of - whatever he was. Then there was her, the supposed Herald of Andraste. It was all very surreal. She listened with amusement at Varric and Cassandra’s banter. Solas made no conversation with the group unless a question was directed at him, and even then, he did not expound much unless pressed. Eseld and Varric joked back-and-forth, and she felt like she was once again on a job with a group of mercenaries - the dynamic between her and the dwarf so easy to fall into.

They stopped to make camp only briefly to light a fire and warm themselves. The winter up in these mountains bitterly cold, and cut through their meager sets of armor that had been cobbled together by Harritt and his crew of smiths. He hoped to acquire some better materials soon so he could outfit the small militia that the commander was training.

After a quick bite to eat and not nearly enough time warming hands and bodies, Cassandra called them all to move out. She wanted to reach the mountain before nightfall. Preferably before late afternoon if they could make good time. No doubt they would not make camp again until halfway back to Haven when it was time to make the return trip.

Hopefully it would be a triumphant return.

Thankfully, they reached the ladders and the scouts who had been stationed at the base of the mountain while there was still daylight. One of the scouts cautioned the troupe not to continue up the ladders once dusk fell, the journey up would be too treacherous in the dark - especially with the wind buffeting against the rickety structures. Cassandra took that as a challenge to reach to top, and pushed everyone onward.

Eseld wasn't afraid of heights. Merely the idea of falling from them made her a little dizzy. Especially shaky platforms. So, to distract herself from her task, she asked Varric about amusing anecdotes ranging from failed manuscripts to his attempts to singe his chest hair. Cassandra groaned, but Solas offered suggestions on how to stabilize a grenade or potion to avoid such happenstances again.

They reached the mines and discovered shades and wraiths had indeed taken the place over and lurked there. Eseld instantly went after the wraiths to prevent them from sniping at the others while they took on the shade. When the green apparitions were dispatched, she turned to see if Cassandra needed aid, but Varric had sent one last bolt through the creature and all was silent again.

"Come," Cassandra urged, "there will no doubt be more further in."

Eseld decided that what had been called a mine, was in fact a former Chantry hall or place of prayer and meditation. Perhaps it had once been a mine, but the stone walls and rooms suggested it was no longer such. Abandonment saw the corridors slowly being retaken by decay and ice, so what these halls once may have been was beginning to fade.

As they continued on, they faced more of the same demons, but they had all fallen into an easy rhythm and pattern of attack and defense, moving around each other to shore up weak spots or boosting one another with a potion or well placed hit.

They reached the exit to the mine and discovered frozen corpses lying on the stone steps. Preserved from the snow and cold. Varric sighed at the sight of them. "Guess we found the missing soldiers. Too many demons prevented Nightingale's people from retrieving them I take it."

"Yes," Cassandra replied sadly, "but we will ensure they are returned to Haven once we are finished here. Those who made it back were lucky." She looked on ahead with grim determination. "We must avenge their fallen."

"Until that rift is sealed," Solas interjected, "no one is safe to travel up this way."

"I'm leaving that to Eseld here," Varric declared goodnaturedly.

“Thank you, Varric,” the young rogue replied sardonically. “So good to know you’ve got my back.”

“Well, you do!” He grinned as he pat Bianca.

Cassandra, again, hurried them on down the snowy path. Eseld wanted to protest as the night began to fall and snow came with it from the clouds in the sky, but there was no telling how many more demons would come from the rift. Making camp in the mine that they’d just cleared seemed almost folly - there was no telling how soon the demons would return to reclaim their lost ground.

Not too far down the mountain path, they saw the open rift. Wraiths and shades were milling about in the cold, but soon noticed the approaching band. Eseld knew they’d been spotted once the wraith let out a shriek - a call to action or a call for supper, she wasn’t sure she liked either option.

Again, they jumped right into battle and did away with the offensive creatures. Eseld stood at the ready, waiting for the next wave of demons. When the rift sent tendrils of green energy out, she expected more of the same ilk. What shot from the rift, however, was unlike anything she’d come across so far.

“A terror!” Cassandra shouted in warning. “Be on your guard!”

Varric was already shooting a volley at one while Solas dealt with the second. Cassandra rushed to Varric’s aid, which left the third terror to Eseld. Unsure what these creatures were capable of, she went in close after throwing a smoke bomb. Using her element of surprise, she attacked the lone terror from behind. She jumped and evaded a slash of ghoulishly long arms with claws at the end before ducking down and sliding around to give another slash with both blades in rapid fire succession. Eseld was confident that her target was close to falling when she heard a warning shout from Solas.

Eseld turned to see Solas’ terror had disappeared and a green tear in the ground that was quickly sealing up again. She had no time to question what had happened before she was launched into the air, a pain searing across her back. Eseld landed clumsily on her back in the snow. She hissed in pain as the cold stung her exposed injury. When she looked to where she had been standing a second ago, there were two terrors standing together, now stalking closer to her.

Solas swept his staff in her direction, his barrier magic coating her before he continued a new onslaught with his frost magic. He froze one - the stronger of the two terrors - while Eseld scrambled to her feet and tossed a grenade at the weaker one she had nearly finished off. That terror was disintegrating right as Eseld lifted her hand to attempt to disrupt the rift.

With a scowl of concentration, she glared at the green mass in the air. Please work, she thought as a mantra over and over. A familiar spark and twinge in her palm lit and an electric jolt connected her to the rift. Eseld counted the seconds in her head as she heard the pitched hum in the air rise in tone before - snap! She jerked her arm back and the terrors were frozen in a painful position, bent backwards to the point spines would snap for any mortal.

Cassandra and Solas began their attacks anew while Varric continued his volley after a quick reload. Eseld rushed in to finish off one with Solas before turning to see Cassandra had sent the other demon back to the Fade with a shield bash to its face. Eseld looked to the rift and lifted her hand once more to seal it, confident now that it would work.

It blinked out of existence and everyone was left to stand around gasping for breath as the mountain wind tried to steal it away from them.

“Well,” Solas spoke up, “I believe our concerns have been addressed whether the Herald’s mark was still operational.”

“A relief, I must say,” Cassandra intoned. “Come, we must inform Leliana’s scouts that they may come retrieve their dead.”

“Seeker, we are not going down those ladders tonight,” Varric protested. “For one, the snow. Two, the wind. Three, it’s *night*, and I don’t feel like slipping and falling to my death on this mountain. And four,” he paused to look with concern at Eseld, “I think Eseld’s back is injured.”

Eseld craned her neck so she could glance over her shoulder. Her mid-back felt exposed to the harsh elements and what adrenaline had denied her to notice before was now coming back in stinging, painful waves. Solas approached her, a hand already outstretched. “If I may,” he offered.

She grimaced but nodded. No use protesting. He could heal whatever scratches she had procured from that sneak attack from the terror. Solas placed a cool hand to her skin and ignored her inhaled hiss. “This will take care of most of your injury,” he explained, “but you will still need a bandage to ensure all the bleeding is stopped. It should take no longer than a week to fully heal, but I would suggest no strenuous activity or training until a healer has cleared you.”

“Just when I thought I’d get to start being useful,” Eseld muttered.

“There will be plenty of time for that,” Cassandra informed the younger woman. “No doubt we will need to make preparations before any mission is proposed, and a week is most likely the time needed to send out scouts beforehand.” The Seeker glared at Varric then and sighed, “I suppose - you are correct about our inability to leave the mountain at present. We should find shelter until dawn. Or until the weather has died down at the very least.”

It was suggested they return to the mine and get out of the wind. Solas offered to prepare the dead and bring them in from the elements as well. Cassandra, seeming touched by the offer, declined and said she would do it herself, which left Solas and Varric to light a fire and set out bedrolls. Eseld offered to make everyone a light meal out of what few provisions they had since no one would let her do much else with her injury.

Cassandra volunteered for first watch while Solas declared he would take second, and Varric third. Eseld groused that they not exclude her over such a minor scrape and bruising, but no one would hear of it all the same. The Seeker once more reassured Eseld there would be

plenty more excursions and campsites in the future for the young rogue to assist with. Take the time now to rest up.

As Eseld lay down that night, she listened to the howling winds outside the stone walls. So she could help. That much had been determined or - reestablished. No chance of her taking Varric up on his advice now. But she would keep it in mind should something happen. Right now - she could stay a little longer.

Work Ahead

Chapter Notes

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

A week later, Eseld's injuries were healed. As she was preparing one morning, a warm bath was helping ease the last aches in her tight back muscles, a knock at her door alerted her to company. "Who is it?" She called out as she adjusted her position in the bath so her back was to the door. Eseld didn't think anyone would come into her cabin - not after one unfortunate messenger had blundered in during a bathing session three days ago. That particular soldier had stood gaping like a fish and turning several different shades of red.

Varric had laughingly informed Eseld over supper that the soldier had been run through a very harsh training regime when the commander, whom the dwarf referred to as "Curly", had heard of the incident.

No, now she had someone assigned to stand guard for such personal activities. Not a soldier, but one of the people that Flissa could spare from the tavern.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Lady Herald!" A nervous sounding person answered. "But, Seeker Pentaghast has requested you join her at the Chantry."

"Thank you," Eseld answered as she looked about for the drying cloth that Flissa's tavern girl had provided. "Please inform the Seeker that I will be there presently."

The soldier answered with a hasty, "Yes, ser!" Once the sound of footsteps crunching in the snow had disappeared, Eseld heard another knock on her door. It was the woman standing guard at her door asking if the rogue needed assistance getting dressed.

Eseld rolled her eyes but answered with a polite no thank you. She didn't want to have a servant. Not here. She was less inclined to accept such help when she felt like any other conscript in this outfit. As she dried herself off and slipped into her under garments, Eseld could only frown at the fact that people were treating her differently. Pausing, she glared at the green, discolored scar on her hand. The reason for the whispers that quieted as she approached or passed by. The occasional few who bowed their heads in reverence and began reciting verses from the Chant. Those who stepped back from her warily as if she were an apostate. Everyone referred to her as the Herald of Andraste.

Eseld just wanted to be treated like another soldier. She wanted to bed in a tent like Varric. Wanted to train with the other soldiers. Wanted to share a mug and table with a group of people and listen to the bard sing songs she had heard from her travels or written specifically for their cause.

She wondered if Andraste ever felt like this.

With a tug, she secured one last buckle around her calf where a brace of throwing knives were strapped. Eseld walked to her cabin's door and opened it to find Flissa's assistant still

there. "Can I help you empty the basin?" Eseld asked as she eyed the buckets sitting in the slush by the door.

"Oh! No! You best hurry to the Chantry to see what the Seeker needs. I can handle this, Herald." The woman hastily assured.

"Are you certain? I don't think Seeker Pentaghast will mind if I help out," Eseld questioned as the woman shuffled by with the buckets in hand. But she was waved off with many assurances.

Sighing, she left it at that and made her way to the Chantry. Eseld should have just picked up a bucket and started emptying the basin without asking, but she had been caught trying to do that before and the distress she had caused the last time only made her feel more out of place and frustrated.

Eseld approached the Chantry and saw Cassandra waiting for her at the door. She was just handing off a letter or some missive off to one of Leliana's scouts as Eseld

"Come," Cassandra ordered with a nod of her head and they entered the Chantry.

She wondered what Cassandra needed her for. Was there another rift nearby that needed closing? Or were they finally going to start looking for answers to close the Breach? Would Eseld be sent on a mission? Glancing down at her gloved hand, she wondered not for the first time what had she gotten herself into.

"Does it trouble you?" Cassandra's question broke Eseld from her reverie. She looked up at the other woman and felt sheepish at having been caught glaring at her hand. Varric had come upon her a couple of times in the tavern in a quiet, brooding glare. He said it wasn't healthy.

But she couldn't let others know how unnerved she was by what may have been a gift from Andraste and the Maker. That wouldn't do. If she was a servant and a tool for their bidding, then she needed to appear strong. Right?

Eseld stopped walking and looked to Cassandra with what she hoped was an air of confidence. "It's fine. I can handle it. I've proven that already, I think."

Cassandra nodded at this. "True. You have, and I think what's most important is that your mark is now stable. As is the Breach. You have given us time, and Solas believes a second attempt might succeed." She sounded hopeful at the prospect. "Provided, of course, that the mark has more power. The same level of power that opened the Breach in the first place." Cassandra sighed and looked away to mumble to herself, "That is not easy to come by."

"That sounds dangerous," Eseld stated with a frown. "We barely understand the power of my mark as it is. Magic that no one - except Solas and his theories - seems to know anything about, and we want to pump more power into it?"

"We have a plan," Cassandra assured seriously. "One that we all hope will work."

"We?" Eseld asked with a tilt of her head.

“They are waiting for us,” the Seeker informed with a motion of her hand to the War Room. They continued and when the door opened, Eseld was met by three others - Leliana and the commander being two of them.

“You’ve met Commander Cullen,” Cassandra introduced, “leader of the Inquisition’s forces.”

Eseld looked to the man standing across the table from her. He seemed less serious now than when they’d first met. He even had a hint of a smile on his lips. “It was only for a moment on the field,” he said. “And names weren’t exactly exchanged.”

“No,” Eseld agreed with an answering wry smile. “I’m Eseld Trevelyan. And I believe the name Cullen suits you far better than Varric’s nomenclature.”

Cullen’s quirk of his lips disappeared at this news before he sighed. “Of course he’d be calling me that still. If I catch any of my men calling me that in the taverns -!”

“I doubt they’d dare,” Eseld hastened to say. “Not after that unfortunate fellow interrupted me in my cabin.”

“Ah - yes - um - my apologies about that,” the commander rubbed the back of his neck and - was he blushing? Eseld felt her smile spread wider. Easily embarrassed was he?

“No apologies necessary on your part,” she soothed, hiding her smile before his gaze returned to her. “But thank you just the same for trying to protect my honor. Afraid I’m used to the company of mercenaries who don’t care about boundaries and propriety.”

The other woman in a ruffled gold and blue dress coughed and looked mildly horrified. Leliana looked amused by the exchange.

“A mercenary company?” Cullen quearied, latching onto that bit of history either because he was genuinely surprised, or because he wanted to get past the topic that had discomfited him so. “I wondered where you had received your training. You did well on the battlefield. I must say,” he offered with his smile returning again. “I’m pleased you survived.”

Cassandra cut in to move the introductions along, and motioned to the woman who had seemingly recovered from her shock. “This is Lady Josephine Montilyet, our ambassador and chief diplomat.”

“Yn falch o grwdd â chi,” Lady Josephine said, her Antivan accent heavy, but still understandable.

Eseld’s eyes widened in surprise. “You know Old Ostwick?”

“You just heard the entirety of it I am afraid” she chuckled with a shy dip of her head. With a brief clearing of her throat she said, “I have heard much of you, Lady Trevelyan. It is a pleasure to meet you at last.”

“You’ve heard of me?” Eseld asked as she wondered whether Lady Josephine was referencing what had happened at the Breach or her reputation among the nobility *before* this mess.

“All good, I assure you!” Josephine hastened to add.

So the Breach then. She didn’t know why that relieved her.

Leliana she already knew. With introductions completed the meeting commenced. The group explained their plans for closing the Breach by seeking out either the help of the rebel mages or the Templars. Eseld didn’t say it, but her preference was immediately for the Templars. It would put her mind at ease to see Piran. She knew he had been safely far away from the Temple of Sacred Ashes, but still - after all the upheaval she wanted to be certain.

However, talking about who to would best suit their purpose was a moot point as Josephine pointed out. With the Inquisition - and Eseld specifically - denounced by the Chantry’s remnants, neither group would speak to the Inquisition’s representatives that had sought out the leaders of the two opposing groups.

The politics of it all frustrated Eseld, which she voiced to them all. “Does the Breach not concern them?”

“It does,” Cullen said slowly, “but not as much, perhaps as someone who threatens their own stability - especially now when their influence is on such shaky grounds.”

“They are in disarray,” Josephine agreed. “And that can be just as dangerous.”

“So what do I do?” Eseld asked them all, looking from one person to the next in turn. “Stay hidden so no one’s feathers get too ruffled? Is that how we gain audience with the Templars - or - mages?”

“No,” Leliana said, “there is something you can do.” She approached the table then and pointed to a location on the map. The Hinterlands. Eseld was familiar with the area as she had been on a few jobs around Redcliffe.

The spymaster reported on a Mother Giselle who was willing to speak to Eseld. What she wanted to talk about was unknown, but her assistance could be a benefit when not many Chantry mothers were willing to speak to the Chantry on the Inquisition’s behalf.

As the meeting wrapped up, the others gave Eseld advice on what to do and who to look for while in the Hinterlands. Find recruits, close rifts, that sort of thing. Cassandra assured Eseld that not all of this would be left to her alone to take on, that the counsel here was also set to help in any way they could. The meeting was adjourned with plans made that Eseld would depart for the Hinterlands with Cassandra, Varric, and Solas in two days.



With two days to prepare for their excursion, Eseld visited Harritt at his smithy to sharpen up her dirks, only to be shown how to craft her own should she want something better. Never having been very handy with a forge, she sought some assistance from one of the other fellows in the blacksmith shop. With some left over supplies as well as some ore she’d found around Haven, Eseld crafted a balanced dagger and a recruit’s dirk, satisfied with them both. She even commissioned some better weapons and armor for her companions. As for her own

armor, she decided to try to befriend Seggrit by purchasing some pieces that were better than what she currently had, but he didn't seem all too keen on becoming any friendlier.

She was on her way back to her cabin when Varric waved her over with a look of consternation on his face. "What's the problem?" Eseld asked as she approached.

"Don't know, but some noble came storming by not too long ago with the Nightingale close behind." Varric supplied with a gesture toward the Chantry. "I think they went to see Ruffles. I don't know if you being their will be any help - but couldn't hurt to give some back up, right?"

Eseld quirked an eyebrow at the dwarf and wondered what made him think she'd be of any help when Josephine - she learned of her nickname after meeting up with Varric to tell him over dinner what the meeting had been about - already had Leliana there to help. But she went anyway, with a thanks thrown over her shoulder for the information. A quick glance at the tent that served as Leliana's base of operations informed the young woman that no - Leliana was not in the Chantry with Josephine and whoever Varric had seen a while ago. So she entered the building in search of the ambassador.

And she found Josephine. Soothing an irate marquis. Josephine tried to redirect the marquis' attention by introducing him - once she had spotted Eseld - to the Inquisition's Herald of Andraste, but he was not having any of it. He just started spouting his complaint to Eseld concerning the ownership and purpose of the land on which they had set up their land. His vitriol was curbed when Josephine reprimanded him. He and Eseld could only look at the ambassador with surprise. Eseld had first pegged the Antivan woman as soft spoken and one whose position was for pleasing people - her fiery temper was unexpected.

Josephine tempered her reprimand and called upon the marquis' sensibilities with the memory of the Divine. Both the scolding and mention of Divine Justinia seemed to cow the man as he made allowances for the Inquisition to remain before he made a hasty retreat.

Eseld looked to Josephine, who appeared quite pleased with herself and the situation. Not at all relieved over something that could have proven disastrous. The young woman assumed that the ambassador knew something which Eseld did not. So instead of worrying over the marquis, she smiled wryly as she said, "I'm so pleased that the marquis isn't tossing us out into the cold."

Josephine smiled in reply and dipped her head. "No, but he is unfortunately the first of many dignitaries that we will need to contend with."

Eseld tilted her head at this information. "You expect more people in Haven?"

"Undoubtedly," the ambassador stated. "And each visitor will spread the story of the Inquisition after they depart." Josephine turned to the desk in her room and went to sit comfortably among the stacks of papers that sat neatly in piles. She smiled warmly at Eseld. "An ambassador should ensure that the tale is as complimentary as possible."

Eseld shook her head with a sigh. "Well, I am certainly glad that it's your job and not mine. I've never been a good hostess."

“No?” Josephine queried, “Well, it is of no consequence. Besides, that assures me that I will not be replaced any time soon.” Her tone light and jovial. Eseld liked that she could joke with someone. So far Varric was the only good natured person she’d met. Although Adan’s humor was rather dry.

“I see you have a lot to do,” Eseld said with a nod to Josephine’s desk. “I should leave you to it.”

“Oh!” Josephine interrupted the young woman’s departure with a hasty shuffle of papers. “If you have a moment, Herald!”

Eseld paused and tried to bite back the pained smile. “Eseld will do just fine.”

“Not at all,” the ambassador contradicted. “Your title right now is the Herald of Andraste, and as I said, it is imperative that we have a complimentary tale of our Inquisition. If everyone is telling tales of what happened at the Breach, then I do not wish to thwart the narrative at this time.

“But that is not what I wish to discuss,” Josephine waved her hand to dissipate that thread. “I wish to discuss your parents instead.”

Eseld froze at that admission and felt her own previous jovial mood fade. “So, so.” She swallowed and wondered why her throat felt so dry. “Is there a reason for such a discussion? Have they - contacted you?”

“No, but I would like to dispatch a courier asking the banns of House Trevelyan to align themselves with us.” Josephine was already busy taking notes and looking down at the parchment that she had sought out of the pile. She most likely missed any discomfort on Eseld’s part. The shifting of her weight from one foot to the other. The grimace. The clenching of the scarred hand.

“What are your thoughts?” Josephine asked, still not looking up. “Should we approach your family for their formal support of the Inquisition?”

“Well,” Eseld cautioned, “I’m afraid that with the Trevelyan family - my name may bring up some bad feelings.” Josephine looked up with some surprise, but Eseld hastened to add, “I do not think that *all* my relatives would be against aligning themselves with the Inquisition. It is no secret that the Trevelyan family supports the Chantry. I do have over a dozen cousins in service as sisters, brothers, or as Templars. I’m just - not entirely sure what their thoughts will be when they hear that I’ve been ‘touched by the hand of Andraste.’ They very well may be of the same mindset of those who have denounced us. My immediate family - may follow whatever the Chantry has declared about us and denounce me.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Josephine offered with disappointment evident in her voice. “As you say some of your family may be sympathetic to our cause, I will tread lightly with my dispatches.” She looked down at her notes then with a frown. “Perhaps Leliana’s agents could determine which of your family would be the best to approach first. But at present,” Josephine offered with a sigh, “I shall not press the matter further, but others will.”

Eseld shrugged. "I'm not a stranger to snide remarks or veiled insults. I'm just sorry I couldn't be more helpful."

The ambassador brandished her quill in a dismissive gesture. "Do not trouble yourself, Herald. On another note, I just wanted to ask how are your accommodations? They are surely rough for someone of your birth."

"Hardly!" Eseld laughed as she walked to the side so she could lean a shoulder against the wall. She hooked her foot behind the other as she relaxed. "I'm used to sleeping in a tent on a cot or a bedroll on the ground with a leinto over my head barely keeping me dry! The life of a mercenary is harsh."

"I feel some guilt for having the cabin all to myself though," the young woman admitted. "If the room is needed, I don't mind bunking with some of the soldiers."

"Perish the thought!" Josephine declared with shock. "No! As the Herald you -"

Eseld sighed and lifted a hand. "The narrative - yes, yes. All right, but - just bare in mind that even if you're trying to elevate me in the eyes of others, I think if I were to serve in the trenches - as it were - that image would work just as well."

Josephine hummed in thought over this statement but did not seem convinced. Instead she tilted her head to concentrate on something else. "Yes, I forgot you worked as a mercenary - you mentioned that when we met the other day. In fact -" she dropped off her sentence and began riffling through her papers once again to pull out some other parchment.

"Ah! Here it is," Josephine declared. She skimmed the contents, a new smile coming to her lips. "Yes, people have been fabricating extravagant tales of your heroics."

Eseld smiled cheekily at this. "There wasn't a group around that didn't want my help when a tough assignment came up. If you needed potions, Eseld Trevelyan was at the top of list!"

"Indeed," Josephine said as she glanced again at the paper she held, "Leliana found a letter from the captain of your last company. He had nothing but praise for your skill in battle, but doesn't mention what part you played." Here she looked up at Eseld expectantly.

Eseld felt her cheeks burn at the praise. "Stoldo praised me? I was in charge of potions and grenades - nothing all that glamorous really."

"Yes, your captain went so far as to say he'd have lost entire battles without you," Josephine supplied.

The young woman shook her head, still not believing what she was hearing. "Just like the man not to admit it to my face!"

Josephine set the paper aside and shrugged. "Some people find it difficult to give praise. Or find it in their best interest to withhold it."

For a moment, Eseld couldn't help but think of her own parents concerning that statement.

“At any rate,” Josephine continued, “your captain held you in high regard. Especially after your last engagement!”

Here, Eseld grinned sheepishly and rubbed the side of her head that was still peach fuzz. “A friend of a friend got me a sample of some gaatlock powder. Explosive stuff! I - naturally - tried tweaking it and wanted to use it. It only made sense to use it against the bandits we were fighting. The bandits’ reinforcements discovered just how bad my idea was when they tried to cross the bridge.”

Josephine blinked in surprise. “How - exciting?”

Eseld laughed. “For me, it was.”

“But, to the point,” Josephine said as she picked up the parchment again. “Do you suppose your former captain and his troupe would be of some assistance - should we need it?”

“For the right amount of coin, I don’t see why not,” Eseld agreed. “Wouldn’t hurt to ask Stoldo.”

The ambassador nodded with a sigh. “Excellent. I’ll begin work on this budget right away then. Could be of some use in the near future. Not to be rude, but I think I will need some time to myself now.”

“Of course,” Eseld dipped her head in a bit of a bow before turning and leaving. She only hoped that if Stoldo and the rest were hired on to work for the Inquisition that they would stop by Haven once in a while. It would be so nice to see some familiar faces around the little village.



Later that afternoon and into the evening, Eseld went to a clearing not too far away from the training camp in Haven where she had set up one of the practice dummies that Cassandra hadn’t decapitated. She wanted to test out her new daggers and try out a few techniques that Leliana had taught her when the Nightingale had some free time that day. The training session had been a good time for the spymaster to vent about her frustrations.

Eseld feinted a dodge to the right before ducking an imagined blade. She took out her fake opponent's knees.

She mulled over Leliana’s bitterness. The left hand of the Divine - angry at the Maker. Mourning the Divine. Eseld tried to offer assistance or comfort. The younger woman could not answer Leliana’s theological questions. Eseld had questions, doubts, and concerns of her own. She hadn’t voiced them to anyone. All she could do was recite and pray.

Eseld spun on her toes to take a swipe at the back of the dummy. She did a backflip away and landed in a crouch. Breathing heavily. A strand of hair fell over her right eye. With a puff of air she sent the wisps up, but they only settled over her eye again.

She opted to ignore the wayward hair. In battle, she wouldn't have time to put her coif to rights. With a loud inhalation through her clenched teeth, Eseld pushed off her feet and knees into a sprint. She took a stab at the shoulder and slid in the snow with her blades raised in a defensive block.

Clang!

Metal hit metal.

Eseld came out of her deep concentration with a jolt of wide-eyed surprise. She found herself staring at the amused half-smile of Commander Cullen. "You've left yourself off balance," he commented as he shoved her backwards.

Her arms pinwheeled for a moment so she could regain her balance. Discipline took over as Cullen didn't give her much time to recover before he was bringing his sword down for her to block over her head. The pair sparred, kicking up snow in their wake.

"Too slow!" Cullen shouted.

Eseld spun away. Constantly on the defensive against the man. She tried to feint left.

"Watch your back!" He barked as he swung. She rolled to the side as his sword hit the snow.

Eseld smirked as she noted he had to lift it from where the sword had gotten a bit stuck in a hard patch of snow hidden beneath the soft powder. A rush at his side and she drove her shoulder into his ribs, toppling and surprising him. But Cullen didn't let that throw him off too badly as he wrapped his arms around Eseld. Pinning her blades and arms with one arm and wrapping his metal arm brace into her neck, enough pressure to warn her that he could incapacitate her, but he had the withstraint not to bruise her.

They lay in the snow panting heavily.

"Do you yield?" Cullen asked.

Eseld knew she could easily get out of the hold. A headbutt to his nose. Bring her heel up into his groin. She could even grab one of her throwing knives with her teeth if she could maneuver her head enough out of his hold around her neck.

"I yield," she replied with a laugh. She'd sparred enough for the day. Cullen instantly released her, and she rolled off quickly. Eseld reached a hand down to help him up, which he took with a nod of thanks.

Cullen sheathed his sword in the scabbard at his hip and rested his hands on the pommel.

"You're as good as the reports I saw on Josephine's table suggested," he complimented. "And Leliana will be pleased to know you're a quick learner."

"Thank you," Eseld replied. "Also for the lesson - thanks."

"Well," he said with tilt of his head, "it is probably better to spar with an actual person once in a while. You're more than welcome to practice with any of my men at the encampment."

She looked back toward Haven - it wasn't so far off that she couldn't hear the clash of weapons. But it sounded like fewer people were out and about. Dusk was falling so everyone was probably breaking for the evening mess.

Eseld shook her head slowly. "I appreciate the offer, but I don't know if Josephine would approve."

"Why should she disapprove?" Cullen asked, his eyebrows knitting in confusion.

"Appearances," Eseld sighed as she rubbed the left side of her head. "Maker, I hate having to do things for appearance's sake." She smiled wryly at the Commander. "I joined a mercenary troupe to get away from that sort of thing."

He chuckled and motioned back toward Haven. They started walking as he spoke, "I know it's a little frustrating - being considered some kind of hero that must be above everyone else."

"You have no idea," she groaned as she kicked at a clod of snow.

"No," Cullen agreed with a nod, "but I've met one or two people who probably could attest to it."

Eseld looked to him curiously, but he didn't expand on it. Instead she let them fall into companionable silence. Out of the corner of her eye, she watched him. She couldn't help but smile at the blond hair that looked more like a wave than a curl. Eseld wondered if Varric only nicknamed the commander to annoy the man or if the wave was curly at other times.

Cullen looked to her and noticed her attention. He quirked an eyebrow at her silent perusal but she just smiled in return without explanation. Instead, he was left to start a conversation to break the silence. "I am sorry I was short with you when we first met," Cullen said slowly. "It was - it had been a long day on the battlefield."

"You don't have to apologize," Eseld assured. "I've been called a bear when I'm angry - or hungry."

He chuckled at that. "I wouldn't want to cross you then."

"Probably not," she joined in with her own laugh. Eseld thought then of that day on the battlefield and asked with a start, "The soldier you helped off the field - did she - was she all right after?"

Cullen nodded. "Yes, she's recovered well and has already been sent on ahead to the Hinterlands. I believe she's been singing your praises all over the camp." His lips quirked up once more in that half-smile.

"Glad she's well," Eseld replied, "but I could do without the hero worship."

"I'm sure," he said wryly. "I am glad, however, that you're not letting all this go to your head."

The pair exited the small woods and continued on the dirt road that led back to the camp. Eseld watched a startled nug run off down the road away from them. She shook her head once. "It's strange being the center of attention. I've enjoyed anonymity as a mercenary."

"But you came from nobility," he said with curiosity in his tone. "I'm just curious how that came about."

"I've always been better at sneaking around and fighting than at parties and the Game," she explained. "It's not like I could have done things like tournaments because I'm no good with bows or swords. Sitting silently indoors with needlework bores me. Experimenting with potions that could explode - can't do that in a respectable manor." Eseld shrugged. "I just - never fit in with that life."

She looked to Cullen and asked, "How did you come to be here? I haven't heard of many Templars that have left the order."

"Ah," he replied as he looked out over the frozen lake below the camp. "Cassandra saw my potential after I rallied the Templars in Kirkwall and recruited me to the Inquisition. Originally, it was in a capacity that would hopefully aid Divine Justinia's desire to bring the Templars and Mages together to find a commonality, but - well we've found a bigger problem as you know."

Cullen was approached by a soldier with something that needed signing, but the commander hastily scribbled his name on it before sending away the messenger. "Now that the Chantry has lost control they argue and the Breach remains. We can act while the Chantry cannot. Our followers would be apart of that! There's so much we could -!" He stopped and smiled sheepishly. "My apologies, you probably have heard enough speeches and lectures of our cause and what we could do from Cassandra and Josephine. You don't need to hear another one from me."

Eseld smiled back and teased, "No, but if you have one prepared I'd love to hear it."

He laughed at that and said, "Another time perhaps." Eseld's smile grew. She liked his laugh. Cullen stammered for a moment before he turned to look at the last few recruits who were just finishing up their drills and calling it a night. With a sigh, he said, "There's still a lot of work ahead."

As if on cue, another soldier holding reports approached to call Cullen away. With roll of his eyes, the commander nodded his head to Eseld. "Duty calls. But - if you ever need a sparring partner - you know where to find me."

"I'll take you up on that, Curly," Eseld agreed with a mischievous lilt to her voice. She noted the flash of irritation and amusement cross Cullen's face before he shook his head and followed after the soldier - who had hopefully not heard her. As an afterthought, Eseld called after him, "Commander!" He stopped and looked back at her. She rubbed her shaved side of her head and hoped she sounded sincere, "Thank you."

That quirk of his lip assured her that he was not at all offended and understood the meaning behind her thanks. Cullen nodded once more before he turned and continued on.

Chapter End Notes

Translation:

Yn falch o gwrdd â chi - Pleased to meet you
(Yin falsh oh jew ah she)

*I don't speak Welsh, so my apologies if this is incorrect phonetic pronunciation or incorrect grammar. If anyone knows Welsh, I'd welcome feedback/corrections! I always thought it was cool that Josephine knew Dalish, but I thought she'd be able to exhibit other languages she's learned. I don't know if there is a language spoken in Ostwick that's different from the rest of Fereldan, so I decided to take some creative license with this. I chose Welsh specifically because (in reality) the Trevelyan family is of Welsh/Cornish descent.

Hinterlands

Eseld and her friends arrived in the Hinterlands after a few days of traveling on foot. She was relieved when the early fall snows in the mountains gave way to the more subdued autumnal weather in the Hinterland's valley. At least she wouldn't have to hear Varric's mumbled complaints about a dwarf trudging through waist deep snow (for him). She often wondered how Solas' bare feet hadn't become frostbitten on their journey.

The party met up with one of Leliana's forward teams lead by a Scout Harding. It was instantly apparent to Eseld that Harding was a little wonder struck by the Herald, which was a little unnerving still to say the least, but at least the female dwarf could shrug it off to become serious and deliver what news and information she could about the situation in the Hinterlands. It didn't sound good, unfortunately.

They settled in for the night with a patrol of some of Cullen's soldiers and Leliana's scouts keeping a watchful eye out for rogue Templars and mages who occasionally began their own skirmishes in the woods around the Inquisition forces. Eseld found herself sitting at a campfire by herself, staring into the crackling embers and soaking in the warmth. It wasn't chilly per se. She'd been out in worse weather.

Eseld plucked up a leaf from the ground and twirled it so she could look at the way it had turned a shade of sunset orange. She preferred purple leaves.

"What a day," Varric sighed as he settled with a sigh beside her. She looked to see him lean back against the log that had been pulled over as an impromptu bench for the soldiers when camp had been set up. He returned her gaze with an easy smile. "Glad to be out of the snow!"

"So you've said," Eseld chuckled back, "repeatedly."

"Hey, you try keeping snow from going down your pants!" Varric shot back, eyes twinkling.

She nudged his shoulder with a pointed look at his open shirt. "You could always button up more."

"And deprive all of Ferelden the glory that is my manly physique?" He puffed up his chest. "I couldn't disappoint the ladies now."

"Ugh!" Cassandra's disgusted snort made the rogues snicker quietly. The Seeker was most likely in her tent close by but listening instead of sleeping.

"So what's the plan here, Herald?" Varric questioned. "We going to find this Chantry mother? And then?"

Eseld shrugged as she looked back into the fire. "Not sure yet. Harding said the Inquisition needs horses, so we'll need to find this horsemaster. Besides that - I'm not sure. I've received some reports about rifts nearby, so we should probably look into those." She frowned in

thought. "With all the fighting right now between the Templars and mages, I don't want these people dealing with demons too."

Varric sighed wearily. "I've been doing some checking around too - discreetly. It's a shit hole around here, Eseld. Burnt down or abandoned farms - refugees camping out trying to avoid any fighting or wild animals." Eseld could feel his worried gaze on her, and she tried to avoid its weight. "You sure you want to ask the Templars and mages for help? They're causing half of the problems right now."

If Cassandra wasn't listening before, Eseld was certain she was now. The young woman inhaled deeply and let it out slowly. "According to the others we need help to close the Breach for good. Hopefully we can appeal to the leaders' better senses. Maybe with a goal in mind, the fighting will stop or die down."

"Who are you thinking of asking for help?"

Eseld glanced sideways at the dwarf and shrugged. "I haven't decided yet."

His eyes narrowed and he frowned. "I think you have."

"Doesn't matter if I have or not," she murmured. "Not until I prove myself to them."

"Ah, politics!" Varric declared with a shake of his head. "Gotta love it."

"I'm a rogue," Eseld grouched, "I don't particularly want to love it, but I understand it."

"And use it," Varric agreed. Slapping his legs, he groaned as he stood up from the ground. "I better go polish Bianca. Make sure she's all cleaned up and fine tuned for whatever we end up fighting tomorrow." He looked Eseld up and down appraisingly. "Get some sleep, Herald."

One of her brows arched with amusement. "Since when do you order me?"

He held up his hands in appeasement. "Not an order, a friendly suggestion." Varric turned and started walking away before he paused and turned halfway to look back at her. "And some more friendly advice - whatever you decide, just remember there's always more than one side to a story. There aren't always good guys and bad guys in a war. Just a lot of scared, angry people trying to do what they think is best."

Eseld hoped her face was a mask. Hoped she wasn't betraying any thoughts. She only nodded and said, "Goodnight, Varric."

He didn't seem upset. Neither did he seem all together pleased with her dismissal. But he nodded back at her and continued on to his tent that he was sharing with Solas.

Eseld stood then and made her way to her and Cassandra's tent. The Seeker was on her side, her back to the rogue. They both pretended that Cassandra hadn't been listening in on the conversation. That Cassandra had been asleep. Eseld shed some of her layers and hidden daggers and potions. She stashed one of her smaller knives under her pillow and laid down.

She didn't close her eyes right away as she just tried to silence the many thoughts going in several different directions.

"The dwarf gives good advice sometimes," Cassandra spoke into the darkness. Eseld rolled onto her back to look at the back of the Seeker's head. "But unfortunately, we don't always have the luxury of saving everyone. We have to make decisions not knowing all the information, and live with the consequences." She sighed heavily. "Such is the burden of people in positions like ours."

"I never wanted to *be* in this position," Eseld admitted quietly, bitterly.

Cassandra rolled over then to meet Eseld's eyes. "I know. But you are, whether by design or by chance, you are. If it is any comfort, we will all help you make these decisions with as much information as we can give you beforehand. And we will support whatever decision you make. You are not in this alone."

"Thank you," Eseld replied.

The older woman nodded and rolled over once more. "Sleep now, we have much to do when dawn comes."

Silence stretched between the two, but neither slept yet. Both lost to their own thoughts. Knowing by the sound of the other's breathing that they were both awake. With this knowledge, Cassandra broke the silence once more.

"Have you made a decision?"

Eseld, now on her side and with her back to Cassandra, found it easier now to lie. "No."

Her answer was met with a moment's silence before the Seeker said, "There is still time. Not much, but some. Do not make a hasty decision."

Eseld did not answer. No. She'd already decided. The moment Cullen had spoken of the Templars. Eseld knew who she would seek out. And it had little to do with the Breach.



The next morning Eseld, Cassandra, Solas, and Varric were given a report of Mother Giselle's location in a small village in the middle of the fight between the mages and Templars. Harding conveyed concern over the refugees and farmers there, saying that she'd sent ahead some soldiers to help out, but the fighting was constant and they needed to send reinforcements or an all out attack to secure the area. Soon.

Eseld set out without delay. If there was one thing she knew from her days as a mercenary, she did *not* like innocent people getting caught in the crossfires. No one questioned her as they hurried to the village. There would be time to take care of the rifts and find the horsemaster. These people needed help now.

As they approached, the sound of fighting grew louder. Eseld saw a man running from a skirmish as they descended and her blood began to boil as she spied an errant spell heading in

the farmer's direction. "Solas!" She shouted, hoping he could cast a protection spell on the man soon enough.

The attention of the Templars and mages was instantly torn away from themselves as Eseld and Cassandra charged into the fray. The Inquisition soldier who were already there rallied at the sight of reinforcements and beat back the first wave. Eseld looked to see that the man had indeed been aided away from the fighting - or at least his body had been recovered - she wouldn't know for certain until later. No time to dwell.

Eseld didn't stop or slow down until Cassandra called over that it was done. The village was secure.

People slowly started to emerge from their houses and some caves nearby. Some Inquisition soldiers leading them out with words of encouragement. Chantry sisters and brothers also began hurrying toward whatever bodies of injured, dying, or dead now lay about on the dirt roads. Carrying some off for treatment or kneeling over others to say a final Chant to send them on to the Maker.

Eseld cleaned her weapons but ignored the rest of her attire before she, Cassandra, and Varric began checking over their own people. Solas had already gone to the makeshift triage that had been set up by one farmhouse to lend his aid. Strangely it seemed just a simple smile or clasp of her hand was enough for some of the soldiers. A word of thanks and assurance for others.

She looked to see a banner and notice being erected in the town's center. Eseld approached curiously, followed by the other two. "We're - claiming the town?"

"No," Cassandra stated as the two soldiers who had finished setting up the display saluted and left to attend to their fallen comrades. "We are merely showing our support and warning the rebel forces that we are here to protect the innocent here. We may need to do more of these displays as we move through the Hinterlands. This fighting *must* stop."

"I don't know how much a flag and pretty words are going to help, Seeker," Varric said as he frowned at the sight of an elderly couple leaning heavily on each other shuffle off to where the healers were set up. "These rebels seem intent on fighting. I've seen what happens when Templars and mages fight."

"Then we stop the ringleaders in this area," Eseld declared forcefully. She turned to look at the pair. "They're clearly not part of the larger group. Right? They're angry forces who blame each other for what happened at the Conclave. That much we know from what Harding has recovered. We find their camps and we deal with them."

Cassandra nodded before looking toward the collection of injured. "But first, we must speak with this Chantry mother."

Eseld followed the Seeker's gaze and nodded. "Right. Leliana said Mother Giselle wanted to speak with me - in the meantime, Cassandra, go see the lieutenant set up here and find out if there's anything we need to help out with. Varric? Check on the people. If we're taking this village under the Inquisition's protection, then I plan on helping in whatever way we can."

Varric was already on his way before Eseld had finished speaking. Cassandra lingered an expression of pleased surprise on her face. Eseld shifted uncomfortably. "What?"

"Nothing," the Seeker replied with a half-smile. "I am just - glad that you are taking this seriously."

"It's not too dissimilar to jobs I've had before in a mercenary group," Eseld explained defensively. "Defend a village from bandits, secure the area, help the lord or lady's forces that come in to set up an outpost, and check on the people who paid you."

"Perhaps," Cassandra dipped her head, "but you step into your role - easily. Excuse me, Herald."

Eseld frowned in confusion, not entirely sure what the Seeker was getting at. She rubbed her head, letting the rough stubble prick her hands and try to distract her from Cassandra's behaviour. All right. Mother Giselle.

She approached the medical camp and spotted a woman in robes that denoted her as the most likely candidate as the Chantry mother she sought. Eseld saw the woman kneeling on the ground beside a cot with an injured soldier. His eyes wide with fear and pain as he shook his head and eyed the mage standing behind the mother. Mother Giselle was speaking calmly to him, trying to ease his mind and soul of his fear of the healer.

"Don't! Don't let them touch me, Mother," he begged, his words choked with pain as he besought the woman beside him. "Their magic is -"

"Turned to noble purpose," she interrupted him firmly, yet gently. "Their magic is surely no more evil than your blade."

Eseld crossed her arms and waited, frowning at the exchange she had just heard. She had - never considered magic and mages in such a light. It was strange to hear such words from a Chantry mother of all people.

Her attention was torn from her thoughts as she saw Mother Giselle stand from the ground, offering a comforting pat on the now quiet soldier's shoulder. Before the mother could walk away, Eseld called out, "Mother Giselle?"

Mother Giselle turned at the sound of her name and nodded, "You must be the one they have been calling the Herald of Andraste."

"Eseld Trevelyan," the young woman offered instead of acknowledging her title. Looking at the soldier, who was now being treated by a healer's touch, she said, "What you said to that soldier -" but fell silent, unable to finish as she wasn't sure what exactly to say.

"We do not teach that magic is evil," Mother Giselle explained easily. "We teach that pride is evil and does not corrupt only mages, but I did not ask you to come here simply to debate with me."

“I know,” Eseld said, still frowning in thought. “It’s just - I have not heard that before. Not where I come from or when growing up studying the Chant.”

“Yes,” Mother Giselle replied with a dip of her head. “I have met a few of your relatives in my time.” She smiled, “Let us say they have also debated with me - some quite adamantly on the subject. I am aware that your family, while you may have some in your family tree who are mages, are not fond of magic.”

“Not particularly,” Eseld muttered uncomfortably, hoping Solas wasn’t around to hear this exchange. Wanting to discussion to change, she said, “You wished to speak with me about something?”

The older woman motioned ahead of them, “Come, walk with me.” Eseld listened as Mother Giselle spoke of the Chantry and its denunciation of the Inquisition - and of course its Herald. The woman shook her head with a sigh, lamenting the loss of life as well as the foolishness of the Chantry’s stance.

Eseld felt more confused by this woman who was so different from any Chantry mother she had ever met. “I don’t understand,” she insisted, “do you - are you - why don’t you support the Chantry? Why help us? Why help me?”

Mother Giselle smiled kindly. “My dear girl, it is not a matter of supporting the Chantry. The Chantry is meant to serve and support the people. We are the servants of the Maker and meant to continue Andraste’s message and work here on earth. I have always been what many in the Chantry consider - rebellious.” She chuckled and looked out over the village. “I am not interested - nor have I ever been - in grandstanding or advancement. I only wish to help those who need it most.” She looked back to Eseld then with a tilt of her head, “You are not so different I should think.”

“You barely even know me,” Eseld countered.

“No?” Mother Giselle quearied. “I am not so uninformed of the world that I have not heard of a wayward Trevelyan meant for the Chantry but seeks fulfillment elsewhere.”

Eseld blushed.

“It is because of some of your exploits retold by some of your - distraught - relatives that I thought that perhaps you may be exactly what is needed now,” Mother Giselle explained. “Go to them. Go to those in Val Royeaux and convince the remaining clerics that you are no demon to be feared,” she looked pointedly at Eseld’s hands. Eseld clenched them self-consciously.

Mother Giselle continued, “They have only heard frightful tales of you from relatives who only see a prodigal child and from those who believe you brought about the death of those at the Conclave. Give them something else to believe. Show them the woman who fought for the weak, as Andraste fought for us all. Show them who you truly are.”

“And if I really am just the daughter who ran away from home and her responsibilities?” Eseld asked quietly, her gaze cast to the ground.

“If that truly was who you were,” Mother Giselle asked gently, “would you still be here with the Inquisition?”

Eseld swallowed thickly, thinking of Varric’s advice. Instead she asked, “Will talking to them even work?”

The mother chuckled. “If I thought you were incapable, I wouldn’t suggest it.”

“Will they even listen?” Eseld looked up again, feeling some desperation enter her voice. “Will they even see? I’ve tried -” she sighed wearily. “No one’s ever actually taken the time to see.”

“Let me put it this way,” Mother Giselle offered, “You needn’t convince them all. You just need some of them too - doubt. Their power is a unified voice. Take that from them and you will receive the time you need.”

Eseld nodded. “It’s good of you to do this. Not many in your position would. None that I’ve known.”

“To be fair, I honestly don’t know if you’ve been touched by fate,” Mother Giselle explained with a shrug. “Or sent to help us. But - I *hope*. Hope is what we need now. The people will listen to your rallying call as they will listen to no other. You could build the Inquisition into a force that will deliver us - or destroy us.”

Eseld bit back the words that came to mind. No pressure. This wasn’t what she wanted. It was too much responsibility. She wouldn’t have so much influence, surely. Cassandra, Leliana, Cullen, and Josephine. They were the minds behind all of this. Eseld was merely a tool to them all.

Mother Giselle seemed to sense Eseld’s confliction, and changed the discussion to what she would do. She would go to Haven to assist Leliana, then stay on to help out in whatever way she could. They parted ways soon after, and Eseld could not help but feel some sense of respect for the woman who was much more genuine than many in the Chantry that the young rogue had come across in her life.



Later that evening, after hearing reports from Cassandra, Varric, Solas, and Harding about what could be done in the area, the group - excluding Harding, who had gone back to the main camp and her own scouts - sat around the fire quietly thinking and occasionally discussing what mission they should take on first. After some time Cassandra asked more of what Eseld and Mother Giselle had spoken of that day. Eseld relayed the information to them all - the relevant parts only.

Cassandra hummed in thought. “I will send a raven to Leliana and the others detailing Mother Giselle’s advice. I am sure we can spare some soldiers or Leliana’s scouts to escort Mother Giselle to Haven. In the meantime, we can do what we can here. Perhaps no longer than a week. We should return to Haven to speak with the others and make plans for a trip to Val Royeaux.”

“It is sound advice,” Solas agreed. “And we can always leave instructions for the soldiers here to continue searching for these insurgent Templars and mages.”

Eseld shot him a look but made no comment.

Varric sighed. “I’ve also come across some information from the scouts on some red lyrium in the area. Not sure yet if it’s just corrupted lyrium that’s just come up from the ground because everything going on with the rifts or if it’s stashes being gathered - whose gathering it is unclear and that worries me.”

“We’ll find out,” Eseld assured him. “We don’t need that stuff being used by the rebels if it’s as bad as you said.”

“Oh,” he chuckled humorlessly, “it’s worse.”

“We should rest,” Cassandra said in a tone the more ordered than suggested. “We have much to do tomorrow.”

Eseld groaned as she stretched. “I will be so happy to have some horses at our disposal after we meet with Dennet. I’m used to walking, but this is more than I’m comfortable with!”

Varric rolled his eyes. “Horses. Yay.”

“Not fond of horses, dwarf?” Solas questioned with an amused smirk.

“Hey, you wouldn’t be either if you had to mount something almost triple your size!” Varric shot back goodnaturedly.

“No, I suppose not,” the elf chuckled. “Perhaps a pony then.”

“Very funny,” Varric grumbled, shaking as he tried to hold in a laugh.

Eseld stood and followed after Cassandra to get some sleep. Cullen’s words came to mind as she settled down on her cot. There was so much left to do. It would be impossible to do it all in a week. As she felt sleep creeping up on her and pulling her eyes shut, Eseld determined to follow Mother Giselle’s advice. She needed to do much more before she went to Val Royeaux. Tales of her working with the Inquisition would need to travel back to Orlais. One skirmish or a handful of skirmishes in the Hinterlands wouldn’t be enough.

Josephine would need a lot more to spin them in a good light to the clerics in Val Royeaux. And Cassandra was also right. She shouldn’t rush into anything. As much as she wanted to go to the city and find Piran - she had work to do to convince her naysayers that she was indeed here to help.

She drifted off to sleep, unaware of the exact moment sleep claimed her.

No Rest for the Wicked

Chapter Notes

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

Eseld and her company finished their week in the Hinterlands and began their trip back to Haven with quite a bit to show for their hard work. They had closed several rifts and sent Harding and her scouts out too find any others that may need to be dealt with on any future trips to the area. The rebel factions of Templars and mages had not been completely dealt with but with Inquisition forces offering support to the refugees fewer skirmishes broke out near the innocent people.

They had met with Dennet the horse master and aided his village as much as they could until the watch towers could be completed. Once Eseld had scouted out the best locations for the towers, she sent a letter to Cullen requesting he send some help with completing the work. Dennet had promised that once that work was done he would feel comfortable enough to join the Inquisition and would make his way to Haven. Besides the horse master, they had met a handful of others who had been willing to join the cause after some favors or minimal persuasion.

It was with the knowledge that they had done some good in the area that Eseld found herself cheerfully returning to Haven on her new mount alongside Cassandra, Solas, and Varric - who had indeed been gifted a pony by Dennet much to the dwarf's chagrin. As they passed the first gate into Haven's land, Eseld could only hope for more to do and soon. She wanted to do as much as she possibly could to give the clerics something to think about before she went to Val Royeaux.

The four companions dismounted at the makeshift stable beside the blacksmith's shop before going their separate ways. Cassandra to report to Leliana, Josephine, and Cullen; Varric to get a hot meal and something for his sore muscles; Solas to consult his dreams about the elvhen artifacts they had come across in the Hinterlands. Eseld lingered a moment longer at the stables to personally rub down her horse and make sure the mare was properly fed and bedded down.

Satisfied with the comfort of her steed, Eseld wandered to the training grounds in a moment of curiosity. Cullen wasn't there.

Most likely already speaking with Cassandra in the Chantry building.

She decided it would be best to make her own way to the Chantry as Cassandra had made her wishes known that Eseld join the group when ready. As Eseld made her way to the doors to the village, a corporal came rushing out. He stopped and addressed her worriedly. "Herald, have you seen Commander Cullen?"

"No, I believe he's meeting with Lady Cassandra at the moment," Eseld replied as she tilted her head in concern. "Is something wrong?"

He looked around the training yard - for what, Eseld wasn't sure. Instead, he spied someone and hurried off in relief. "Excuse me, Herald!" Eseld watched in confusion as the corporal approached the Templar, Lysette. Eseld had spoken to the woman briefly, surprised to see her there with the Inquisition. Lysette and several other Templars had joined as they too had been dissatisfied with the Chantry's response to the Breach as well as the leaders' response to the mages and the mistreatment of them.

Eseld hung back to overhear the exchange between the pair. "Serah," the corporal rushed, "there's a dispute between some of the Templars and mages in front of the Chantry! Please, we need help clearing the crowds before something happens!"

Eseld didn't stick around to hear Lysette's response. She hurried into the village and towards what looked like a growing mob of angry, opposing forces. While Lysette may hold sway over the Templars, Eseld doubted another Templar's presence would be of much help.

Where was Leliana? Or any of the others?

As she approached she overheard the accusations being hurled between the factions. The most prevalent being who was to blame for the death of Divine Justinia. Eseld was still too far away when she heard a Templar shout, "Shut your mouth, mage!"

She saw the man reach for his sword as the mage got into a stance for a spell. "No!" Eseld shouted, but was drowned out by the crowds. She wouldn't make it in time!

"Enough!" A firm shout cut through the cacophony and instantly the groups split apart. Cullen stood between the mage and the Templar, holding them apart physically as well as with a glare between the pair.

"Knight Captain!" The Templar began protesting, but was cut off once more by the commander.

"That is not my title!" Cullen barked looking at the mage first before rounding on the Templar to reprimand him for what had almost transpired. Eseld slowed and stood at the outskirts, watching and listening as Cullen diffused the situation as well as solidify the fractured masses with a purpose.

Lysette and the corporal approached as Chancellor Roderick began spewing his vitriol. The stood with Eseld, both relieved that the situation had already been handled. Cullen dismissed the mob and ignored Roderick's demand for answers. He noticed Lysette and Eseld just as they approached him.

"I am sorry, Commander," Lysette offered. "I will speak with my men about their behavior."

Cullen nodded, "I know you will. Thank you, Lysette." She nodded in return and departed after the grumbling discontents. Cullen looked then to the nervous corporal. "Good work looking for someone to diffuse the situation. Dismissed."

"Thank you, ser!" The soldier breathed a sigh of relief and hastily left as well.

"I think the congratulations should be yours, Commander," Eseld said after they were alone. "You did a commendable job diffusing the situation."

"I've had practice dealing with Templars and mages almost coming to blows," he sighed with a shake of his head. "Afraid this won't be the last time either." Cullen watched several of the people who still loitered about with a grim set to his jaw. "We have so much to be focused on with the Breach and the Chantry - the Inquisition does not need this infighting. If we have no common ground, if we're constantly at each others' throats -"

"Then we fall," Eseld finished for him somberly. "Yes, Mother Giselle said something similar about the Chantry."

Cullen turned then to look at her. "This must be a fine welcome back after your trip."

She smirked at his sarcasm. "Yes, I was enjoying the sense of accomplishment before this happened."

"Sorry, for that," he ran a hand through his hair, and Eseld noted that it looked rather mussed from his usual kept look. Had things been going badly this whole week?

"Don't be," Eseld murmured, gaining his attention. She smiled reassuringly. "Besides, if the ranks can't act unified right now, they need to see that we are, right?"

Cullen's lips quirked at the edges. "Yes, of course." He cleared his throat then and motioned back to the Chantry. "I believe we are needed indoors. After you?"

"Such a gentleman," Eseld purred, smirking with delight at the blush that crept up on Cullen's face as he coughed quietly to play off his discomfort. The pair left the bright, blinding winter light for the candle-lit gloom of the indoors and joined the others.

Cassandra looked up, her lips pressed firmly together.

"It's been dealt with," Cullen reassured her with a placating gesture of his hand before taking his place on the other side of the table with Leliana and Josephine.

"We can't let this happen again," Cassandra insisted. "Too much is at stake!"

"You're preaching to the choir, Cassandra," Leliana tempered. "There is only so much we can do to ease the tensions. Everyone is still casting about for someone to blame. It is only natural."

"Once word has spread through the ranks of the Herald's success in the Hinterlands, I am sure the unrest will subside," Josephine assured the room. She turned expectantly to Eseld then, "We were just discussing what Mother Giselle reported to you and the list of clerics she gave to Leliana. We wish for your input on the matter."

Eseld looked at the map with a frown as she only half listened to the objections from Cullen and Leliana. As usual, the others discussed the pros and cons - the necessities and the dangers. When quiet fell in the room, she spoke, as she always did as they always wanted her opinion. Because of what she was or because what she possessed - she was never too certain.

“I agree we should at least try,” Eseld said as she looked up first at Cullen as he was the first in her line of sight. “With Cassandra there - I’ll have someone at my back should things go wrong. I have - family in the Templars. Family that hasn’t all denounced me, I’m sure. They can also come to my aid if necessary - I hope.

“But I don’t think we should go there just yet,” she continued as she looked then to Cassandra, who frowned in response. “There’s more we could do in the Hinterlands as well as these other places,” Eseld noted the new markers in Fereldan with a sweeping gesture. With a look to Josephine, Eseld said, “With more agents, more influence here and abroad - we will have a better standing when we arrive in Val Royeaux.

“And it will give us time,” Eseld pointed out with a look to Leliana, “to keep an ear and an eye on those in Val Royeaux and the Chantry. To be certain we’re not walking right into a trap and to determine whether the clerics Mother Giselle mentioned will indeed be amenable to speaking with us.”

“That is - very sound judgement,” Josephine noted in slow, stunned beats.

Cullen sighed and nodded in agreement. “We do have time that it makes sense to be cautious.”

“With that settled,” Leliana declared, “shall we move on? We have reports that could use some attention.”



It was several hours later that Eseld and the other counselors finally left the meeting room, tired and ready to return to whatever corners of Haven they retreated to when not needed. Eseld decided to grab something to eat and hide in her cabin instead of joining Varric or anyone else. She needed time to just her own thoughts.

A hearty stew, some bread and cheese, and a tankard of mead later, Eseld felt a little more relaxed. A bath would help even more, but she didn’t want to disturb any of the tavern workers so late in the evening. Perhaps tomorrow. She shed her armor and went to check on the new horses and pony.

The smithy was still busy and some soldiers lingered in the training grounds, but other than those people outside of Haven lacked the crowds that daylight brought. Eseld waved to Harritt and entered the corral. The horses whinnied to her, but otherwise continued eating their oats and mash. The pony came to her with some curiosity and snuffed Eseld’s hands and pockets for any hidden treats.

“Some other time, little one,” Eseld laughed as she rubbed the pony’s neck affectionately. She moved on to her own horse and smiled at the black mare. “Hey there, how are you?” She went to grab a brush and started the comforting ritual of brushing down the horse’s coat. Eseld whispered and murmured soothing words of nothings and smiled as the mare’s ears twitched toward the sound of her voice.

“You have a way with horses,” Cullen’s voice interrupted her mid-hum of one of the songs from the tavern.

Eseld turned to look at the commander to see him with his arms folded over the railing of the fence. Relaxed and watching her with an air of curiosity. She smiled and shrugged in response. “It’s a bit of a right of passage to know a thing or two about horses in the Trevelyan family.”

“You grew up around a lot of horses then?” He asked.

“You could say that,” she laughed then. “My father’s stables were never empty, that’s for sure.”

Cullen smiled at that before motioning to the mare she was rubbing down. “She have a name?”

Eseld looked then at the horse’s brown eyes and hummed. “Dennet’s daughter called her Merina. Don’t think I’ll change it. It suits her I think.”

“A bit ironic as she’s never been to the sea before,” Cullen commented.

“No, not yet,” Eseld countered as she stepped away from Merina after a final pat. “But there’s always the Storm Coast, right?” She moved on to Cassandra’s horse.

“And the Free Marches?” Cullen asked tentatively.

Eseld’s hand paused before she began the motions of brushing once more. “Perhaps. We don’t know what will happen after the Breach is sealed.”

“You have no desire to go home?” The commander ducked under the fencing and reached for another brush and moved to Solas’ horse. With the ease of a man who had been around horses before he began assisting Eseld in making the horses feel comfortable.

“No one knows yet if I’ll survive another encounter with the Breach,” Eseld muttered. “I’m trying not to plan farther ahead than where I’ll go next to help the Inquisition.”

He didn’t answer her for a long time. The pair moved about the horses, not wanting to address her morbid admission. It wasn’t something Eseld liked to talk about let alone think about for long stretches of time. She knew so little about magic that she didn’t know what to make of this Mark. Part of her, the religious part of her, wanted to believe that Andraste had not saved her just to have Eseld die, but knowing the Chant and Andraste’s own fate - well - Eseld couldn’t rule out the possibility of her sacrifice to save the world from the Breach.

“You were going to become a Sister,” Cullen interrupted her thoughts. She looked up over Cassandra’s horse and nodded. He hummed in thought. “But,” he continued, “I don’t understand why. You seem very informed and skilled at management. Like Josephine. Your skills seem better suited to working as a steward.”

Eseld chuckled darkly. “It was my parents decision. Not mine.” She patted the horse’s neck before moving to the pony. “If I had my way, I would have continued as I was.”

“And that was?” Cullen pressed.

“Taking a page from Cassandra’s book?” She questioned with a lift of her eyebrow. “You’re asking a lot of questions. I thought Leliana had given a report on my background. I’ve seen it. It was quite thorough.”

“I’m a simple man, my lady,” Cullen replied with an easy shrug. “While I read all the reports that come across my desk, I also like to do my own digging. You said you didn’t fit in the circles you were born in, and became a mercenary. So why, all of a sudden, the interest in becoming a sister?”

She rolled her head to get her neck to pop and crack before walking over to a barrel. Eseld hopped up onto it and sat there with her arms propped on the fence behind her. The wind nipped and made her shiver a bit in her layered clothes. Her eyes roamed over the snow and the frozen lake. “My family - my *parents* never approved of my life choices. I chose to leave and join a mercenary troupe that I heard about at a party. They were camping nearby so it wasn’t difficult to find them. They didn’t know I was a nobleman’s daughter. Just some servant or a farmer’s daughter. They took me on and that was that.” Eseld shook her head as she recalled those early jobs fondly and sadly. “I proved myself several times over, but unfortunately, my growing renown as a good alchemist and mercenary led my father’s men right to me.

“So I was brought home,” Eseld sighed as she looked back to Cullen who had finished with Solas’ horse and now stood listening to her. “Over and over again,” she emphasized. “I would stay for a while, try to get my family to see me and appreciate me as I was. My mother would push me to go to balls to meet nice young lords. Everytime talk about my future cropped up, I’d run away and find a new mercenary troupe in need of an alchemist. My parents would send someone after me. I’d get brought back.

“Then,” she explained, bitterly, “they gave up trying to mold me into the perfect noblewoman. They decided I would be better off in the Chantry.” Eseld’s fingers twitched as she thought about the beads around her neck, but she looked away from Cullen instead, refusing to touch the memento. “It’s not that I don’t respect the Chantry,” she said quietly. “I do. I believe in Andraste and the Maker. I believe that everyone has a place and a means to serve, but I never thought my skills tended toward living in a Chantry reciting the Chant of Light.” Eseld leaned forward to look at her hands. “My talents - I’m a fighter. I know that.”

Cullen’s footsteps crunched on the frozen ground as he came to stand at the fence. He leaned his hip against a board and folded his arms. “So why not become a Templar?”

Eseld smiled wryly at her hands. “I asked my parents. I told them that if they were bent on sending me to the Chantry, let me join the Templars. But they wouldn’t do it. Never explained why. Didn’t fit their idea of a daughter’s place perhaps. Didn’t matter that some of my cousins, both male and female, have joined the Templars.” She looked up at him then, unsure what he was thinking. He just stared back at her. Eseld shrugged again as she looked down at the left hand where the mark was concealed beneath a glove. “I was actually trying to slip away from my aunt who was escorting me to the Temple when this all happened. I was going to find a Templar and secretly join.”

“Well,” Cullen breathed, “you’ve found yourself in a very different situation. Although, you do seem to fit in well just fine.”

“I don’t know about that either,” she countered. Eseld brightened and said, “Afterall, I don’t have a nickname from Varric yet.”

Cullen groaned and turned so he faced out and draped his arms over the fence. “Count yourself lucky. When he does come up with a nickname for you, you will regret wishing for one.”

“Curly isn’t such a bad nickname,” Eseld comforted. “Besides, your hair isn’t so bad.”

He arched an eyebrow at her and tilted his head. “Thanks. I think.”

Eseld shivered again and hopped down from the barrel. “I better turn in. It was a long trip from the Hinterlands.”

“Have you decided yet where you’ll go next?” Cullen asked.

“The Fallow Marshes,” she answered with a frown. “I’m worried about our missing soldiers, and the news about the villagers - that no word has been heard from them -” With a shake of her head, Eseld moved on with her plans. “After that I may go straight to the Storm Coast. Especially with the problem of the Hessarians causing our scouts problems.”

Cullen pushed off the fence and opened the corral’s gate for her. “Don’t try to do too much,” he cautioned. “That’s a lot to take on.”

Eseld grinned widely. “I’ll be as careful as I usually am!”

He eyed her shaved patch of hair on the side of her head and chuckled. “That’s what I’m worried about.” It was Eseld’s turn to blush but she merely laughed at his joke, hoping he thought the flush was due to the biting wind. Cullen nodded to her and said, “Rest well, Herald.” She waved a hand to him in farewell and walked back toward the gates of Haven, wondering at the exchange and what Cullen’s perception of her was now.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry it took me so long to update this! Don't count on a consistent update schedule, sadly. I'll work on this as I have time and motivation.

End Notes

This story will be slowly updated as I have time to write (I'm still going through Eseld's playthrough so we'll see where this goes).

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!