

# Dragon Age: Legacy Posts, Sept 2020 to July 2021

## i. Prologue

Characters arrive and go about their business in Jader, meet the other player-characters, and encounter clues related to their first group quest.

### The City We Became

Posted on 04 Sep 2020 @ 9:18am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#)

**1,391 words; about a 7 minute read**

**Mission:** [Prologue](#)

**Location:** Jader

Kalian perched on the chantry's high peaked roof and surveyed the city of Jader, the two moons in the night sky his only companions.

A light breeze ruffled Kalian's feathers and brought the fishy-salt scent of the harbor across the city. A wide assortment of vessels was anchored there, including merchant ships from all over Thedas that filled the warehouses of the Jader docks with goods destined for here or somewhere else. Narrow-hulled fast schooners moored here usually transported wealthy and noble passengers. At the other end of the quay, Jader's small fleet of fishing boats flocked together like ducks.

The wharf district glowed with lanterns, and bursts of laughter, music, and chatter punctuated the relative night quiet each time a tavern door opened. To the casual observer, it was the only part of the city truly awake at this late hour. But Kalian knew the city was a living thing, alive and aware, welcoming and dangerous, at all times.

Two bored city guards, a man and a woman, patrolled the now-quiet Market district bordering the docks. One of them kicked something that rolled, and the owl mind in the back of Kalian's consciousness registered a tasty mouse scurrying away into an alley behind the bakery, where three figures huddled - likely homeless refugees. Soon after dawn the market would be bustling with activity and they'd move on with a loaf of bread if the baker was feeling generous, but for now the market shops were locked up, the less-permanent stands empty, and Kalian hoped whoever they were they'd find rest for the night.

A group of elves crossed a bridge spanning the river that wound its way through Jader, crossing from the market district and into the walled confines of the alienage. Probably returning home after working their night shifts. The *Vhenadahll* rose up in the center of the alienage, a tall oak tree and symbol of the elves' community. Also home to a number of sleeping songbirds Kalian knew would not welcome an owl into their midst.

The Tanner was on that side of the river, as well as the tattered remains of a shanty town still occupied by straggler refugees from the blight.

On this side of the river were the craft guild houses, with the Grey Warden facility among them. Beyond the businesses, a patchwork of modest homes and alleyways spread out below the chantry.

The chantry occupied a place between the market and commoner districts, and the homes of the nobility. The templar barracks and practice grounds occupied the low-town side of the chantry courtyard. The chantry sisters' dormitory was on the high-town side.

A trio of templars, two women and a man - identifiable by their stride and demeanor if not by their lack of plate armor - emerged from their barracks and struck out toward the docks. Off duty. Kalian resisted the temptation to fly over them and drop a mess on their clean clothes.

Further up the hill on terraced estates, at sufficient distance to escape the stink of the city, mansions overlooked the whole expanse of Jader. From there, Orlesian nobility in their finery and stylish masks could gaze out at the beautiful views of the city and harbor, and see only clever toy boats on a shining blue sea.

The Raven's Roost, the tavern that had belonged to Kalian's family since his father was a boy, was nestled between the chantry and the guild district along the main road that ran from the docks through the city to eventually join the Imperial Highway.

The three templars had just crossed the market when they were accosted by a pair of humans, staggering as though drunk.

Kalian spread his broad wings and glided silently to the roof of the bakery to watch from close enough to hear conversation.

The inebriated pair claimed to be brothers, innocent lost farm boys, who couldn't believe their luck at running into such attractive servants of the Maker. From the templars' suggestive invitations for the pair to return with them to the barracks, it seemed the obvious ruse was a success.

On the other side of the bakery, the templars' noise stirred awake the refugees hidden in the alley and Kalian rotated his facial disk toward them. Three humans, grubby, young, but old enough to be arrested and imprisoned - if a city guard thought there was reason. When it came to elves or refugees, they always did.

In the market, the two brothers abruptly straightened and ran in opposite directions, one toward the chantry, the other toward the bakery. The templars shouted an alarm - they'd been robbed. The two city guards hurried to join them.

The thief was running straight for the alley behind the bakery.

Kalian spread his wings and dropped to the alley floor, then shifted to human. Though expected, the sudden change was like a bag over his head, as his human eyes adjusted to the dim light. Further down the alley, he heard a muffled gasp. "Don't make a sound," he hissed to the shadows.

He took his staff from the strap on his back, briefly touched the fade, and cast a light frost over the damp cobble stones around the alley entrance. Then he stuck out his staff, bracing it at ankle height.

The thief tripped and fell in a scatter of coins. He was on his feet immediately, the half-emptied coin pouch clutched in his hands. But he slipped on the icy cobblestones and went down again as Kalian replaced his staff on his back.

A guard and a templar burst into the alley entrance just as the thief ran to the end and scrambled over the wall, leaving the pouch where he'd dropped it on the warming cobblestones.

Kalian held up his hands in surrender. "Maker's breath! That was impressive. You scared him into dropping the coin purse."

"Don't blaspheme," muttered the templar, a not-unattractive woman with reddish hair. "What are you doing here?"

Kalian flashed them his most convincing innocent-bystander smile and said, "I'm a local business owner. I stepped into the alley to, uh, if you'll excuse the vulgarity, relieve myself. But before I did, well..." He gestured in the direction of the thief's escape.

The templar bent to pick up the coins, while the city guard stared at Kalian.

"Please, allow me to help you," said Kalian. He crouched, hiding his face as he helped gather the shiny coins, and wondered as he did why templars were so well paid.

When they finished, she counted them. "It's all here," she announced. Good thing he didn't keep any. "For your trouble," she said, and pressed three silvers into his palm with a salacious wink.

Apparently she had not learned anything from her run-in with the thief. Weirdest night ever. It occurred to him that a friend among the templars might come in handy, but before he could brandish his charm, the city guard laughed unpleasantly. "Local business owner, my ass. I know who you are. Ben Roatta's useless brother-in-law. Surprised you're not drunk, but not surprised to find you pissing in an alley."

The pretty templar wrinkled her nose and turned away. A few moments later greetings and traded explanations carried across the market as the templar and guard met their companions.

Kalian waited until he was sure they were gone, then slowly walked toward the shadows at the back of the alley. He held his arms out to show he held no weapons, then came to a stop. Softly, he said, "I have no intention of harming you. Are you all right?"

Three young voices argued in hushed Ferelden accents. One wanted to run away, one wanted to trust him, and the last assured the other two she could kill him if necessary. Kalian opened his coin purse and poured the contents - five more silvers, a gold, and six coppers - into his hand with the templar's three silvers. He lay the coins on the ground by his feet. The whispering stopped.

"I get it. You don't know me." He backed away. "Use those coins to find yourselves a safe place to sleep, clean up, and then see about earning enough to stay off the street. No strings attached." Then Kalian shape-shifted into a Boreal owl and launched himself into the air.

## Manners Maketh Man

Posted on 04 Sep 2020 @ 7:01pm by [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#)

**2,275 words; about a 11 minute read**

**Mission:** [Prologue](#)

**Location:** Jader

Manners Maketh Man

Tap Tap Tap.

Cainan rolled his eyes as the burly Ferelden mercenary banged his hand down on the table as he guffawed, the heavy ring around his finger banging against the wood. Punctuated three times just in case you missed its presence in the first two taps. The man was always reminding people about its existence - it had been a gift from the Empress, given to men of a mercenary company who had reinforced a key strategic location during the civil war in the Emerald Graves. It had been a particularly vicious part of the war, and the men who had lived through it had earned a commendation or two, at least in the empresses eyes. That ring marked him as a war hero, and a man of great skill at arms. As did his mouth.

*Constantly.*

The average clientele of the Rose of Orlais were traders, naval-sailor types and the usual middle-class Orlesians that were wealthy enough to own waterfront properties, but not the *good* kinds of waterfront properties, as Cainan himself had. It was, in his opinion, no great accident that the Ferelden was the only soldier in the place; he clearly revelled in the attention, which admittedly had been well-received early on, but by now even the women who were drawn to burly men in full, completely-superfluous-for-a-social-function armour were starting to tire of his wandering hands and vulgarity.

Cainan sat listening at the gaming table; three other players with their cards, silently measuring each player in turn as they collectively ignored the loud, offensive Ferelden.

“You’re bluffing, Monsieur Sauvage,” the elderly player, Monsieur Esprit claimed, suddenly, leaning forward as if he had just seen a bead of sweat on Cainan’s brow. Cainan, on the contrary, was leaning back on his chair in the most relaxed and barely-appropriate-in-company lean, his boot on the table to prop the chair on its back two legs. His dark blue ring velvet and samite coat he had casually draped over the back of his chair, leaving him in his white cotton shirt, the laces of which he had left undone - without the coat, he looked like any sailor, albeit one with a little coin in his pocket.

“Am I?” Cainan drawled, not looking up from his cards. The Ferelden was banging the table again, and Monsieur Esprit winced, looking darkly over at the soldier for a moment. “This would be news to me,” he replied, earnestly.

“You could not have any more Angels,” Monsieur Joubert said, eyes narrowing as he revealed more about his own hand than Cainan’s. He was an older gentleman, but younger than Monsieur Esprit; the sort that would have been a man when Cainan was born. The third opponent, Monsieur Richelieu, was a captain of a trading vessel; Cainan hadn’t expected to see him, the man was an awful gambler, but he had obviously had some successes on the sea recently as his debts were paid and he was back at the table. He was uncharacteristically quiet, however, as he watched Cainan along with the others. He had a greying, oiled moustache, and the shiniest bald head in the tavern.

“I have at least one angel,” Cainan replied, his eyes following her as the barmaid, Camila, returned with the jug of wine. It was a full-bodied Antivan, as was she; Cainan always ordered the same wine from her, even though it wasn’t the best in the house, the symbolism amused him as he put the full-bodied Antivan to his lips. She looked at him with an amused, sultry look as she refilled his glass, leaning over a little further than necessary so he could see down her blouse. She didn’t blush; he liked that. He returned his eyes to her as she stood up, and blew her a soft kiss as she retreated back to the bar.

“Call,” Esprit announced, drawing his attention back to the game. Cainan blinked and laid his cards down, the small pile of money in the middle of the table glinting in the setting sun.

“Three knights singing two songs,” he announced, laying them down - the knights of mercy and ages and the songs to match, with the knight of dawn. It wasn’t the most amazing hand, but it was clearly better than Captain Richelieu’s, who swore as he threw his cards down. Esprit looked sour, as well, and Joubert sniffed, laying his cards face down. He clearly didn’t have the angels on his side, either.

“Take your money,” Joubert sighed, waving at the table. “I’m afraid I am done losing for the evening - adieu, gentlemen,” he said, as he stood and collected his coat. Cainan slowly counted up the coins, sliding them into his coin purse. While the other two opponents looked ready to continue,

Cainan's eyes narrowed as he heard the tapping Ferelden again.

"Always a pleasure, gentlemen," he said, leaning back in his chair, and looking back to the soldier. He was telling yet another tall tale, or perhaps the same one but with more embellishment now he was suitably drunk. The issue Cainan had was not the story, however. The dog's hand slapped Camila's rump as she passed, and there was a sharp intake of breath from Espirit.

"I assume we are done for the evening?" he asked, wearily. Cainan nodded, darkly, as the other two gentlemen knew well what was to come. "Monsieur Sauvage... Captain..." Espirit said as he stood, nodding to them politely in turn.

Captain Richeleiu sighed, staring a moment at the empty space where his coin had resided until it had disappeared into Cainan's pocket. Cainan's gaze was not leaving the Ferelden's hand, that was still grabbing Camila's behind.

"You should reconsider," the captain advised, quietly. "Camila does not need you to intervene with every lout."

*Tap Tap Tap.*

Cainan took out a silver from his pocket, and danced it between his fingers.

"*Monsieur*," Richelieu persisted. "You know Robert will not allow you on the premises if you instigate yet another fight," he tried, once more. He was, of course, correct; Robert, the landlord of the Rose, had been very clear on his stance on Cainan's penchant for escalating disagreements. Cainan paid well, but the lost business from other patrons was racking up.

When Cainan didn't respond, the captain sighed. "Good fortunes, boy," he said, tapping his forehead in farewell; a naval tradition. Cainan nodded in thanks but did not look up; his eyes never left the back of the soldier's head, even though Camila had, with practised ease, already danced away from the brute.

"More ale!" the Ferelden cried, suddenly, and Camila's smile faltered. Cainan could see her from his seat, could see her eyes look to him. She saw the look in his eyes and the coin on his fingers. She was torn, he could tell, between wanting him not to intervene, and wanting the dog to be taught a lesson. She reached for the jug as the uncouth brute said something less than gentlemanly, and gestured to his lap (or groin) suggestively.

She never made it to the table, as the silver coin zipped through the air and smacked into the back of the Ferelden mans' head. The sound of the coin meeting his skull was unmistakable in the room, and there was a sudden hush as the soldier reached behind his head to feel for blood, and stood after inspecting his hand, his chair skittering away as he rose and turned to the side of the room Cainan was sitting on.

Cainan didn't need to say anything to let the brute know who threw the coin; he held the soldier's gaze, challenging him with a look.

"You got a deathwish, sailor?" the Ferelen growled, starting towards him.

"Gentlemen!" Robert cried, running into the room, trying to place himself between them. Cainan remained in his seat, leaning back as he had throughout the game. He already knew how this would go down; how Robert's table would be upended as the brute threw him aside. It was not a surprise therefore when the mercenary pushed him out of the way, coming to loom over Cainan with surprising quickness for a man his size. Robert was helped up by Camila, looking over to the two with a resigned and pained expression on his face. Cainan took that for a tacit form of consent.

"I'm not a sailor," Cainan replied, sipping his wine. He already knew the man was contemplating slapping his glass away, and that it might spill on his shirt if he did so; it was written on the man's scarred and grubby face. He placed it back on the table before the idiot could try, drained of contents. "I am just a gentleman, which you, monsieur, are clearly not."

"You think I care what you are? You're just a dead man," he announced, reaching back to deliver what would have been a skull-splitting punch, had it landed.

But it didn't. Cainan was a lithe man, but not a weak one - and he was quick. His foot left the table and his chair fell forward to land on all four legs as his other foot launched him off the floor, almost bringing him to eye-level with the taller man as Cainan brought his boot down and into his knee, buckling the armoured leg with a crumple of metal, bone and muscle. The man collapsed in a fit of screams as he instinctively scrambled to get back on his feet, immediately regretting it as the bent-the-wrong-way leg collapsed further.

"Au contraire," Cainan hissed, calmly as he retrieved his coat from the back of the chair and took a moment to put it on, smoothing out the wrinkles on his sleeves as he did. The time taken on his appearance mid-fight further enraged the heavily armoured man, and Cainan smiled mockingly at him.

The swearing Ferelden was reaching for his sword, a heavy longsword that was a bit small for the burly man, but still much heavier than Cainan's own rapier, which rested in its scabbard against the heavy wooden pillar that supported the floor above, one of six that littered the large room. He leaned back sharply as the Ferelden's sword swung out in a wild arc, sailing clear over his chest as he bent under the blow, his hand simultaneously in range to retrieve his own sword and, as he straightened after the sword had passed over, bringing it up to meet the second attempt to cut him in two.

As the man swung wildly, Cainan stepped lightly out of range to regain his footing, regretting not taking the man outside for this lesson in manners. The sword smacked into the heavy wooden pillar that supported the floor above, and while the damage was purely cosmetic, he could tell from Robert's eyes that it had sealed Cainan's fate with regards to the Rose as his drinking and gambling

spot in Jader.

*Well, in for a copper,* he thought as the soldier tried to lunge at him again, this time Cainan casually deflecting the blade with his Rapier, still in her scabbard. He slapped it three times, the first deflecting the blade from his person, the second turning the blade to expose the hand holding it, and the third bringing the sheathed sword down on the mercenaries hilt-hand - hard. There was another cry of pain and rage as the bones of the fingers cracked, and the longsword dropped with a clang to the floor.

“You bastard!” The Ferelden spat, and Cainan tutted his poor sportsmanship. He slapped the man in the face with the Rapier, the loud *thwack* echoing in the room and drawing blood from the man’s nose, and another curse from the man’s mouth.

“Language,” Cainan admonished, calmly, bringing the sword to rest and leaning on it as if it were a cane.

“Monsieur Sauvage,” Robert said, harshly. Cainan sighed, as the landlord pointed to the door, through which many of his patrons had now left. Cainan nodded, bowing to the injured soldier, with a flourish.

“Monsieur, the pleasure was mine,” Cainan said, with a small smile, as he looked down at the struggling man. “...*Obviously,*” he added, stepping past him. To his credit, the soldier had seemingly lost interest in trying to eviscerate him and was now sobbingly trying to cradle his hand and knee while restricted by his armour.

As Cainan passed the bar, he bowed his head courteously to Camila, who tried not to smile, but failed. He left with a spring in his step, even if the only time he would see Camila now was if he tried to catch her after work, and while he was interested, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to come across *that* interested.

He’d have to find a new place to gamble, he decided. He had been thrown out of all the waterfront taverns for much the same shenanigans; he wondered if one of the more... rustic establishments might be a good fit for him.

After turning down three alleys he came to the nearest one he knew of - The Raven’s Roost. Even if it wasn’t somewhere for the duration, it would certainly do for the evening; he entered to see how much more interesting he could make the night to come.

## Canticle of Twilight

Posted on 06 Sep 2020 @ 6:51 pm by [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

1,330 words; about a 7 minute read



**Mission:** [Prologue](#)

**Location:** Near Raven's Roost Tavern

Sky sky faded from gold to crimson as the sun descended in its traversing of the firmament. The smell of hearthfire permeated the evening air as villagers made their way home from their day's labor. On a hill above the village a voice carried on the breeze.

"...I cannot see the path.  
Perhaps there is only abyss.  
Trembling, I step forward,  
In darkness enveloped."

Silhouetted in the corona of the setting sun, a figure moved in graceful rhythm with the words of the melodic song. The tall woman moved her arms in wide arcs, circling left then right. A forward thrust, a step back and a flowing arc to the side, her arms thrust outward and her leg extended in a balanced stance parallel to the Horizon.

The woman held the rigid horizontal form until she completed her song and slowly retracted her arms and leg and settled into a calm seated position, her arms laying upon her knees. Her blue eyes opened, catching the last spark of sun as it dropped behind the horizon. She concentrated on her breathing, bringing her heart and her lungs to a reserved calm.

Her prayers remained the same each day. She would sing from the Cantic of Trials as she weighed the grace of the Maker upon her day. She was thankful for all she had, which was very little. This time of wandering was meant to prepare her the Vigil to come. A time of seeking clarity in turmoil, graciousness in poverty, and courage in powerlessness. This was her final venture into the outside world before the vigil.

Andraste had undergone the Exhaulted Marches, never lifting a sword or engaging in combat. That was her husband's task. With modesty and endless compassion, she changed the world to embrace the maker. This, the first scrutiny for the initiate, was embrace the will of the Maker, a challenge Elinowy had never found easy. So little in this world occurred from kindness or through grace of the Maker, it took determination, perseverance and at times force to reshape the world for good. The scrutinies were meant to refine the focus and spirit of the initiate in preparation for the ordeal of the Vigil, so she resigned herself to less efficient means to achieve ends. She surrendered herself to the will of faith.

As darkness spread across the land, Elinowy made her way into the village. The sounds of family spelt out into the emptying streets, sounds of joy, sound of strife, sounds of isolation and loss. She made her way along her eyes moving across the increasing shadows to those on the outside, the marginalized, the poor, the desperate.

A dirty disheveled woman with a small child clinging to her leg leaned out from the shadows.  
"Please Mother, A couple coppers. Anything will help. my daughter and I aint had nothin to eat in two days."

Elinowy looked on the woman with deep compassion. She smiled at the scrawny empty frame of a child. She reached out and brushed the girl's hair out of her face. "What an angel we have hidden under there. May the Maker bless you both. Go to the local Chantry, they will never turn you away. Take heart, the Chant of Light will bring the Maker's blessing upon this earth." she said placing her hand on the child's head.

"Would that he did, Mother; but today we have to fend for ourselves." the old woman said dejectedly.

"Have faith, my sister, together we build a tomorrow of glory." Elinowy responded wishing she could do more. The woman and her child faded away ,into the dark.

Elinowy ventured onward, walking calmly into a short alleyway behind the local tavern. "Hey lady, got any copper?" came a gravelly voice. She looked over at the grizzled figure in the shadows. "I bring you a gift greater than gold." she responded, her hands out to her sides displaying there was nothing to fear. The large rough man looked at her and rolled his eyes. "Oh sorry sister, I couldn't make out the robes in the dark," he said, sliding a short knife back into his sleeve.

"If you require shelter of food the local Chantry will never turn you away." she said kindly.

The big man brushed his hands against his pants and jingled a small sack of coins" No need for your Charity tonight sister. I got more pockets to empty."

"Please, let me help you. Together we can bring the Maker's blessings upon this world." she said in a soulful voice.

"The Maker gave up on me along time ago." he said as he started walking away down the alley.

"Please brother, let me get you a meal." Elinowy called.

The man stopped and turned back. "You got coin sister? I thought y'all didn't carry any." he said quickly closing the gap between them.

I assure you I have none. But together we can bring the Maker's blessings upon this world." she said gently.

"Yeah you said that. Whatcha got in mind sister?" he said suspiciously.

"Please let us see if the Tavern owner is a man of good faith." She said optimistically.

"Fine sister, but I tell ya, the Bartender in there is a bastard. I mean no offense." he said relenting to her request.

The door to the tavern was thick and intricately carved with relief of a large Raven alighting upon a branch. Elinowy opened the door and entered, the large man following. All eyes turned to her as the light hit her scarlet robes. She paid no attention but made her way to the bar against the far wall.

"Tavern keeper, I have a man in need of help and hope you might bless us with your assistance. My brother here is in need of a legitimate trade. He was waiting to rob patrons of yours behind the tavern." she said kindly and earnestly.

"What are you doing sister?!" the big man said pushing himself back to clear the area around him.

"Perhaps you need a bouncer or security? Something that can use his violent tendencies for good instead of evil." she continued.

The tavern keeper lifted his hand and made a gesture for his security men. "Robbing our patrons are you. Can't be having that now." he said as two large men walked toward the big man.

Pulling the knife back out from his sleeve. "Get yourselves back! This woman is setting me up!" he bellowed.

Elinowy's face remained stoic and placid as the big man slashed out with his knife at one of the approaching men. The bouncer dodged and continued to close in. The other lifted a long blackjack and smacked it down on the man's head sending him hard to the floor.

"It's all over folks! Get some drinks as the boys lean up the mess." The tavern keeper called out to the patrons. "Thank you sister for bringing in a blight on this business. Anything I can get for you?"

Elinowy reached down and removed the small coin sack from the unconscious man. She looked back at the tavern keeper and smiled. "A bowl of soup would be lovely if you are offering."

"Sure Sister, I can part with a bowl of soup." the Tavern keeper said generously.

"Thank you kindly brother. Together we bring the Maker's blessings upon the earth. I will return in a moment." she said walking to the door way.

Out in the Dark, Elinowy sought out the woman and her child, dropping the bag of coins at their feet. The woman in amazement scooped up the coins and hurriedly stuffed them beneath her shawl. "Bless you Sister! Thank you so much."

"The Maker provides when we work together." Elinowy assured her. "Go and buy food for your angel, and follow the Chant of Light to bring more blessings." Touching the child's cheek, she turned and walked back into the Tavern and sat down by her bowl of soup.

## The constabulary of Jader

Posted on 07 Sep 2020 @ 7:47pm by [Warrior Martin Josceran](#)

**1,942 words; about a 10 minute read**

**Mission:** [Prologue](#)

**Location:** Guard station, Rose of Orlais

"- and he assaulted me for no reason ! A hero of Orlais !"

The highly agitated Fereldan mercenary had been going on for a solid five minutes and Martin felt his headache build up. He should have been off duty fifteen minutes ago, but then this fellow had seen fit to come in, with a red welt across his face and a thick Fereldan accent lacing his Orlesian. It was a good thing Martin knew a smattering of Fereldan, or he'd have had a hard time following what the man was saying.

"Please calm down, Mr. Weylin." Martin's patience was beginning to run out. "What did you say the man's name was ?"

"The other one called him "Monsieur Sausage," the mercenary growled. "Don't know his first name. Tall guy, long girlish hair, didn't catch a good look at his eyes."

But he had gotten a close look at this "Monsieur Sausage" 's rapier, judging by the darkening, purplish red welt across the mercenary's cheek. It stood out all the more with how livid the man was.

"Alright." Martin jotted down the information. "So you have several witnesses ?"

"The innkeeper of the Rose of Orlais," Weylin said. He was almost literally oozing hatred and malevolence. "And the serving girl, whatever her name is. He was a regular, I'm sure of it. I'm sure the innkeeper knows where he lives !"

"Hmm," Martin said noncommittally. "I wonder though - with you being such an experienced war hero - " his voice trembled with the effort to not sound sarcastic, "how did this man get the upper hand on you ?"

"He got me by surprise," Weylin mumbled. All of a sudden he showed less bluster. "And his friends helped him, at least two - no, three ! I didn't see their faces because they - uh - got me in the back."

Right, and Martin was the Emperor of Orlais. "So, what reparations do you seek ?"

"This man is a public danger," Weylin spat. "He should be locked up. And - fined," he added quickly. "He should give me reparations for the business I'm going to lose while I heal. That's a lot of money, I'm a famous mercenary."

"Huhuh." Martin swallowed back a sigh. He was now officially late to meet Gauvain. A tavern brawl was not exactly worthy of the time he was going to waste on this. "Well, your complaint has been officially registered." He finished jotting down the deposition. "Please sign or put your mark here."

The mercenary did so with his off-hand, Martin noticed ; the other one was badly swollen, possibly broken. It certainly looked all the shades of blue.

"So what are you going to do ? Are you going to arrest him ?" Weylin asked eagerly.

"We will give this complaint all due attention," Martin assured him. Which, as far as he was concerned, meant it was going to be shoved under a pile of more urgent affairs to follow up on, like the recent increase of purse-cutting robberies.

"What about my reparations ?" the Fereldan insisted.

"If the perpetrator is arrested, the matter will be brought in front of a magistrate," Martin said. "They will then decide what reparations, if any, you're entitled to."

Weylin must have realized that making any money out of this incident was unlikely, as his face twisted into an ugly sneer. He stank of alcohol and smoke.

"You tell that magistrate, I'm a hero of Orlais." He waved his hand in front of Martin's face. "The Empress herself gifted me this ring ! She was going to make me a nobleman and a knight, but I was above such thing. I'm in it for the honour, you know. She begged me to stay and help - "

The effort required not to roll his eyes almost gave Martin a twitch. "We'll let you know if the investigation turns up anything," he said blankly, an open invitation for the man to leave.

Weylin finally took the hint and turned away in a racket of armour, limping heavily and muttering darkly about how these "fucking orlesians" always stuck together. As the door swung shut behind him Martin rubbed his face and groaned.

"What rained on that guy's parade ?" Audrey asked. She had been filing reports and coming in and out while Martin took Weylin's deposition, so she had not been able to follow most of the story, but she'd obviously caught enough to be curious - and amused, judging by her dimpled smile. "Did he step in dog shit or what ?"

"Stepped on a "Monsieur Sausage," apparently," Martin groaned. "I'll take a common robbery any day over a tavern brawl."

"Sausage ?" Audrey frowned. "You mean Sauvage ?"

"No, he said Sausage."

"Really ? Because if this is about a tavern brawl, sounds more like good old Sauvage, to me. That guy always gets in trouble. Well, less trouble than he would if his pockets were less deep." Audrey snorted and ran a hand through her short, tousled hair.

Now that she mentioned it, Martin remembered the name being spoken casually in his presence - most often by the guards who worked the evening shift in the port district. And at least twice mentioned in reports about tavern brawls, one of which had already taken place at the Rose. A serial brawler, then. Well, he was going to have to go to the Rose now, take the innkeep's testimony, if only to say he'd been thorough. At least it was on his way to the Thistle of Jader, the inn where he was meeting Gauvain tonight, so with a bit of luck it wouldn't delay him that much longer.

"I'm off, Audrey."

"You should have been off thirty minutes ago," she snorted. "Stop putting in unpaid overtime, you make the rest of us look bad."

"Sorry. Not." Martin gave her a loose salute and grabbed his sword. He'd planned on changing from his uniform but now he was really late, and if he was going to interrogate a witness on the way he might as well look a little bit official.

He brushed hair away from his face as he strode outside. The fresh air of the night was a welcome change from the somewhat stuffy atmosphere of the guard station. It was darker than he thought, the sun having completely disappeared below the horizon. Martin eased into a long stride, the sheath of his sword beating rhythmically against his thigh. He was familiar with the streets of Jader, having spent the last ten years of his life in this city, and he edged into a narrow alley to take a shortcut towards the port, near which most inns were gathered. Many if not most of their patrons were typically sailors or merchants, embarking or disembarking one of the many vessels that stopped at Jader.

The Rose of Orlais was one such ubiquitous tavern, no better or worse than most as far as Martin was concerned. He'd been there a few times, mostly in a professional capacity, though not nearly as much as some of his colleagues in the guard.

The tavern was uncommonly quiet at such an early hour of the night, Martin noticed as he approached. A few committed patrons still sipped at their tankards but there wasn't much else going on. The gaming table was conspicuously empty, despite the cards still in disarray all over it, and it definitely looked a little bit wobbly. A bit further a waitress was scrubbing some spilled ale off the floor with a crestfallen look on her face. As for the innkeep, his sour expression turned downright acerbic when he spotted Martin's uniform.

"What can I do for you, Monsieur ?" he asked, trying - and failing - to sound the least bit welcoming.

"Are you the owner of this place ?"

"Oui, monsieur, indeed. Name's Robert Andrieux. My papers are in order if you wish to see them."

"That won't be necessary." This time, anyway. Many taverns and inns this side of town operated on smuggled wine and beer, and everyone knew it, but that was not the purpose of Martin's visit and they both knew it. "There was a brawl here, earlier tonight, I'm told."

"Oh - nothing serious." Robert didn't really sound convinced by what he was saying. "Just a small disagreement between customers."

"A small disagreement that ended with a man beaten blue?" Martin raised an eyebrow. "A broken hand and a messed-up knee, sounds a bit more serious than a "minor disagreement".

"That lout deserved it." The waitress had got to her feet and was wiping her hands on her apron, her cheeks flushed with anger and her dark eyes full of thunder. "He asked for it. Monsieur Cainan was the only one man enough to shut him up - "

"He caused yet another fight, is what he did," Robert snapped. "Do you have any idea at all how many money we lost tonight?"

"You're not the one getting pawed at - "

"Hem," Martin cleared his throat loudly, and the waitress clamped her mouth shut, still glaring at her boss. "So, this mister... Cainan? He is the one who beat up the Fereldan citizen?"

"The Fereldan... gentleman... may have been a little bit obnoxious," Robert admitted grudgingly. "But he was a paying customer, and telling stories isn't against the law, monsieur."

"And apparently, neither is grabbing my - " the waitress began bitterly.

"Girl!" Robert snapped.

"So, who started the fight?" Martin asked. "The Fereldan, or this Monsieur Sausage?"

"Sausage started it," Robert said immediately. Martin looked to the waitress.

"...I guess he sort of did," she mumbled eventually. "But everyone was tired of the Fereldan braggart."

Martin was beginning to get the picture. A serial brawler, probably keen to start a fight under whatever pretense allowed him to look like the good guy. Not that the Fereldan was much of a hero either. May or may not be worth an arrest, he was still making up his mind on that. Perhaps a warning and a fine would do.

"So, Cainan Sausage is the name. What does he look like?"

The innkeeper's description was fairly close to the one given by the Fereldan mercenary, and detailed enough that Martin thought he might be able to recognize the man on sight. Maybe. On a good day, anyway. He bade the innkeeper farewell and left the inn, deep in thought as to what his next move should be. He was fairly sure he could find this Sausage fellow if he really put his mind to it, but he wasn't sure that it was really worth the effort. Although Weylin had been beaten up pretty badly, he hadn't seemed like the most upright sort of fellow.

"Guardsmen ! Hey, guardsmen !"

Belatedly realizing that he was the one being addressed so cavalierly, Martin looked up. A young man was running towards him, somewhat dishevelled and out of breath. He thought briefly about mentioning that he was not on duty anymore - he knew he should have changed into civilian clothing - but his sense of duty won out.

"Yes, citizen ?"

"A mugger... caught... at the Raven's Roost !"

"A mugger ?"

"Yes, the Chantry mother brought him in, I don't know how she did it ! He'd been mugging patrons in the back alley, she said. Barkeep asked me to get the guard. Promised me an ale for my trouble."

Well, at least that story was outlandish enough to be worth the overtime Martin would be putting in. Since when were Chantry mothers doubling up as vigilantes ? This he had to see. Pushing away the regretful thought of Gauvain waiting for him, Martin nodded and waved at the youngster to lead the way.

## Roosting at Home

Posted on 08 Sep 2020 @ 3:08pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#)

**691 words; about a 3 minute read**

**Mission:** [Prologue](#)

**Location:** The Raven's Roost Tavern

It was a typical evening at the Raven's Roost Tavern. The savory aroma of Cook's stew, the low wood fire in the hearth, and the sweet earthy scent of fermented beverages, welcomed everyone who walked in the door. Kalian and the other server Dilana – a pretty second cousin on his mother's side from the alienage – had to gesture and raise their voices to be heard over the steady background hum of conversation and the occasional burst of laughter as they delivered fresh drinks and food, and collected empty tankards, bowls, and plates.



Unlike the taverns in the wharf district that catered to sailors and strangers passing through, the Raven's Roost was located near the local guild houses and the residential district, so the Raven's patrons tended to be locals, or visitors to Jader with local connections. And lately, some of their patrons had been accosted by a thief after leaving.

Kalian's brother-in-law was busy at the bar with a couple of large warrior type friends of his, who usually worked security for caravans headed to Orzammar and back. They were chatting about how to catch the mugger.

Ben waved him over, and Kalian hurried over, hoping to be included. "Kalian. Ask Tessa where she hid that bottle of Nevarran whiskey." He gestured toward the back then spoke into Kalian's ear. "The good one."

Kalian headed to the rear of the tavern and knocked softly on the door of his father Armin's room, then opened. Inside, Armin sat in his wheeled chair with Kalian's four-year-old niece Iris in his lap, reading to her from Tethras' latest installment of *Hard in Hightown*. His sister occupied the corner chair holding Kalian's baby nephew. She'd stepped away to feed him, but now Gabriel was asleep.

"Ben can't find a certain bottle of whiskey." Kalian yawned hugely. "Nevarran."

Tessa leveled a disapproving frown at him as she got to her feet. "How late were you out last night?"

Kalian looked at their father for backup, but Iris was tugging on his beard. "Read Gan-papa," she demanded. "Maysie's my favorite."

"That depends on what you mean by late," Kailan answered his sister, and even though experience told him his sister was immune, he gave her his most charming and apologetic smile. "Some refugees needed help. And, uh," Kalian cleared his throat. "I'm going to need to borrow a little coin."

Tessa shifted the sleeping baby to one side and shook his coin pouch. "Empty. *Maker's Breath* Kalian." It was a measure of how well she knew her brother that she didn't accuse him of gambling or drinking his money away.

Iris muttered, "*Maker's Breath*," and Armin, who had resumed reading softly, coughed. Tessa glared at Kalian as though he was responsible for his niece's swearing. He probably was *partly* responsible.

"You know Ben and I can't pay you more than anyone else. It's not like you'll go hungry or without a roof to sleep under," said Tessa, and sighed. "The floor in the common room could use a good thorough cleaning tonight after closing. I was going to offer a bit extra to Dilana, but-"

"No." Kalian shook his head. "I want to help Ben do something about that thief that's been stalking our customers. I can catch him."

Armin stopped reading. He and Tessa stared at Kalian. Even Iris went quiet, taking in the serious expressions on all three adult faces.

"And then what, little brother," asked Tessa, calmly but with an edge to her tone. "What if someone sees you? What if a templar sees you?"

Armin shook his head. "She's right. I'm sorry, son."

"People see what they expect to see," said Kalian reasonably, but decided not to argue. It was so frustrating, having skills he couldn't openly use.

Tessa kissed her daughter on the forehead, and headed back into the tavern's common room, still holding the baby. Kalian followed her just in time to see a pretty Chantry sister walk in through the front door with a large, sketchy-looking man.

The entire tavern went quiet, and Kalian heard a customer to his right hiss, "That's him, the one that robbed me."

## A Rogue, a Guardsman, a Mage, and a Chantry Sister, walk into a bar

Posted on 15 Sep 2020 @ 10:29am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**3,581 words; about a 18 minute read**

**Mission:** [Prologue](#)

**Location:** The Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** after 'Canticle of Twilight'

**Tags:** Elinowy, Cainan, Martin, Kalian

Kalian watched open-mouthed from the back of the tavern as Ben's burly friends wasted no time taking down the mugger.

Tessa shoved baby Gabriel into Kalian's arms and set about issuing orders to tie up the thief, send someone to fetch a guard, and generally worked with her husband to return the Raven's Roost tavern to normal.

Some patrons gathered around the bar, offering to buy the two heroes drinks. Two were taking a closer look at the unconscious man on the floor next to the hearth, although Tessa insisted they stay back. Kalian took a tray of empty tankards to the kitchen one-handed and watched the Chantry sister curiously as she re-entered the tavern and sat down next to a bowl of stew that Ben delivered himself.

Kalian approached the Chantry sister's table, still holding his baby nephew. "Good evening, sister."

Elinowy was leaned over her bowl of stew. It was common stew, hearty and flavorful, well pepper full, but she had had much worse. It was quite the blessing from a simple broth soup that she normally expected to receive. Her stomach would be fairly pleased with her tonight. Elinowy considered the fact that she had never gone hungry at the Chantry, even in the worst of times. But her instructions were to take nothing that was not given to her. Beggars can't be choosers. She was quite happy with her unexpected abundance for the evening.

at that point she became aware of the newcomer. Well she had noticed his approach, just hadn't thought he would be stopping at her table. And with a child at that. Ah, another blessing. She found she did this a lot on the road. She never realized so many people were eager for such a humble symbol of the Maker's grace. From her office at the Chantry, they all seemed to be after food, shelter and basic necessities. Now that she had nothing, more people appeared for something so simple. She turned to Kalian her hands already going for the infants forehead.

"What an adorable angel. Treat him with love and kindness and the Maker may provide for you as well." she said the words she had used hundreds of times, but still with a softness of real compassion.

"Thank you for your blessing, sister," said Kalian sincerely. He'd seen the worst of Jader during the blight and appreciated the gesture on Gabriel's behalf even if the Chantry didn't extend blessing on people like him. He was pretty sure he hadn't seen this Chantry sister before, and although curiosity urged him to ask how she had managed to manipulate that mugger into walking right into his just demise, he couldn't think of a polite way to bring it up. "I'm Kalian, and this is my nephew Gabriel. Are you new to Jader, Sister... uh...?" He raised an eyebrow, hoping she'd fill in her name.

Elinowy icy blue eyes looked at the man and she smiled pleasantly. "It is my pleasure to meet you Kalian and Gabriel. I am Sister Elinowy. I am new to Jadar. My Chantry is in Bette Noir far to the West. I am on a spiritual journey that has brought me to your fair city. As you have a small child in a Tavern, am I correct to assume you are the owner or employed here?"

Kalian pretended not to notice the reproachful phrasing of the sister's question, and gazed into little Gabby's face with undisguised adoration. The baby definitely looked like a much younger and cuter version of his father, but with his mother's dark eyes. "The Raven's Roost is a family business. My sister and her husband manage it, and I help wherever I can." He gave her a charming smile, about to compliment Elinowy – the prettiest Chantry sister he'd ever met - but he was interrupted by the arrival of a city guardsman.

Cainan passed through the Raven's Roost door, and was immediately met with the smells and sounds of the place; there was a heady, hoppy scent in the air from the ale, which agreed with him; the unconscious body lying near the door and directly in his way was a ringing endorsement. It was certainly livelier than the Rose, with a commotion clearly having happened recently. The bouncers

looked at him oddly, as he looked from them to the body on the floor, and then gingerly stepped over the lout and walked over to the bar.

In stark contrast to the rough entrance, there was a family man carrying a child talking to a Chantry sister at one of the tables, amusing him greatly. He wondered what the sister had made of the commotion, and as he looked around at the barmaids, he resigned himself to potentially hitting on her later. Religious types were either completely virginal or absolute fiends in the bedroom, and it was always fun finding out; it was like rolling dice on how the night would go - a roll of 1-4 was the standard prudish sister who could not countenance a liaison of any kind; 5 was the sister who would regret it in the morning and a roll of 6 was the jackpot - the sister exterior with a lady of the evening just waiting to emerge.

He sat at the bar and ordered an ale from the barkeep, a woman who was, from the look she gave him, most definitely married. She bore a striking resemblance to the family man - a brother, perhaps? Cainan politely thanked her for the ale and passed the coin over the bar, deciding not to flirt with her; he had just arrived, and the last thing he needed was a fight with the bouncers, her husband and potentially her brother, too. It was a shame; she was the height he liked and her dark skin was a much less common sight in Jader. But there was a fine line between flirting and lechery, and he knew which side of it he chose to sit. She placed the tankard down in front of him with a polite smile, and he took a moment to inhale the aroma. It was gritty, sharp and hoppy, and the clear source of the scent in the air about him. He drank experimentally, then deeper as the taste proved palatable.

Tessa placed a tankard of ale on the bar in front of the nobly dressed gentleman with long, neatly tied back hair, with a practiced proprietor's smile. She cast a concerned glance at her brother, talking to the Chantry sister. How long would it take for a city guard to get there?

The youngster led Martin at a good pace, obviously in a hurry to get his promised reward. They passed a couple of cutthroat-looking alleys, where Martin thought he saw a shadow or two moving, but kept to the bigger street that led to the guildhouses. It wasn't the nicest part of town, nor the worst. The hard-packed earth of the street was strewn with a smattering of cobbled stones to give it a semblance of respectability ; nothing like the fancier district favored by nobles and wealthy merchants, but by far and large better than the dusty alienage streets that became a mudbath anytime it rained a few drops.

"It's there !" The youngster pointed to a heavy wooden sign, painted black, depicting a raven in flight. The door of the tavern, made of heavy oak and intricately carved, was open, allowing light and music to pour out into the dark street.

Raven's Roost. Martin had been there maybe a couple of times in the decade he'd lived in Jader. It

wasn't one of his usual haunts, nor of his closest friends, but the place looked decent enough.

He paused on the doorstep to let his eyes get used to the light. A lot of the patrons stopped their conversations when they saw him, or stared more or less discreetly, obviously eager to find out what was going to happen next. Martin's attention was drawn immediately to the burly man who was tied up next to the hearth, with a bump the size of an egg on his balding head. Whoever had neutralized the fellow had been quite enthusiastic about it.

There was a Chantry sister there too, though what role she could have played here was difficult to fathom. Martin couldn't get a good look at her, with her back partly turned against him and her head bowed over a steaming bowl of stew ; but he could tell she was unusually tall and fit for a woman, let alone a Chantry sister. In fact she looked to be a little bit taller than him.

"Someone called for the guard ?" Martin asked, loudly enough to be heard above the low hum of the patrons' chatter.

Ben and Tessa stepped forward as the proprietors, and Kalian joined them. Tessa took the sleeping baby from her brother and addressed Martin. "Thank you for coming so quickly, ser."

Ben gestured to the man on the floor. "This man has robbed several of our customers over the last few nights. A short time ago, he walked right inside with the Chantry sister," he bowed in Elinowy's direction, "and she announced who he was. He drew a knife and we subdued him. And, uh, at least one of my patrons here this evening can identify him as the man that robbed him."

Elinowy listened in on the conversation the guard was having with the victim of the mugger. It occurred to her the man might have tried to assault her to, although he seemed to respect the Chantry. At least he knew she had nothing worth him taking. So he was smart. She almost felt bad at the circumstances that now befell him. But those who chose a life ripe with vice were likely to end up victims of it.

Cainan had been about to engage the barkeeper in some friendly chat when the arrival of the guard caught his attention and took her away from the bar. He turned to watch as they described the Sister's part in apprehending the thief, and he had to be impressed by her; maybe he *would* roll the dice, after all. She was tall; taller than average, anyhow - almost of a height with Cainan, he guessed; and slim; he often preferred the curvier ladies, and shorter - he liked how they felt curled against him the morning after... but she was attractive, though as many sisters, she looked like she could be an intense woman, if provided enough... stimulus.

*Now that could be fun*, he thought, smiling into his ale.

Martin approached the sister, who was scraping the last bits of soup from her bowl, and sat in front of her. Now that he got a closer look at her he could see she was fairly attractive, with long red hair - much redder than his. Other than that, and her unusual height, she looked like a perfectly ordinary Chantry sister, clothed modestly and completely unassuming.

"Good evening, sister," he said courteously, in a voice low enough to give them an illusion of privacy. "I'm told you played a key part in apprehending a robber. I'm quite impressed - and intrigued. Would you mind enlightening me as to what exactly happened tonight?"

Elinowy placed her spoon down in the bowl and turned to the guard with an honest smile. "I really did very little. I was out this evening ministering to the poor. As I wandered into the Alley behind this Tavern I happened upon the man over there." she said pointing to the tied up man. "He had considered robbing me, but upon noticing my robes was kind enough to sheath his knife and merely engage me in conversation. He spoke of his taking money from people in the Tavern and elsewhere. I suggested that he might consider a new line of business as we are here to work together to bring the Maker's blessings back to the world. He agreed to come with me into the Tavern. I immediately inquired of the Bartender if he might have employment for the man, such as security or something that might use his skills for the good of his community. The man panicked, drawing his blade. The Tavernkeeper's men subdued him and then provided this delicious bowl of stew for me. And here we are."

Kalian managed to linger just within earshot, listening in on the guardsman's conversation with Elinowy, while Ben and Tessa resumed serving drinks, and tavern craic gradually resumed.

"Impressive," he muttered quietly to himself. "That Chantry sister must be incredibly persuasive."

"Is that so." Martin stared thoughtfully at the sister. After hearing her story he still wasn't sure if she was incredibly naive, ridiculously brave or plain crazy. "It seems... remarkably reckless of you, sister. Your robes may protect you from many things, but not from a knife or a sword."

He paused but she didn't seem fazed. At all. As if she either wasn't aware of the danger she'd been in, or simply didn't care. He looked at her fingers for a hint of nervousness, a twitch, a sign of anxiety. There was nothing. If she was lying about either her circumstances or motivations, she was good at it. The interesting thing was that he'd never seen her before. Jader was not so big, and there weren't so many sisters at the Chantry that he should never have seen her face in a crowd, unless she was fairly new around here.

"May I ask what you were doing in this neighbourhood, so late at night, sister...?" The questioning note at the end of the sentence suggested she might want to give him her name.

While he kept most of his attention on her, he did catch a few glimpses of the man that lingered nearby, clearly eavesdropping on the conversation. The man's dark complexion and curly hair

suggested kinship with the family that owned the place, though it might just as well be a coincidence.

Elinowy did not mind the guard's inquiries. She told him how it happened from her perspective, she was not one to bend the truth unless under severe duress. "Elinowy, Sister Elinowy. I was looking for poor and marginalized brothers and sisters to assist as best as I am able. I like to make sure others are fed before seeking anything for myself self. Thus I look for others to help most evenings as darkness falls and desperation sets into people's souls."

Though most of the tavern patrons had returned to their previous entertainment, Kalian noticed a well-dressed man observing the guardsman and Chantry sister's conversation with as much interest as him. As he listened, Kalian's concern grew. Elinowy had done his family a service, and even if her faith in the Maker bordered on delusional, the guard seemed unnecessarily suspicious of her. Plus, the apprehended robber was still decorating the tavern's floor. He chose that moment to interrupt.

"Pardon me. Sister, will you be staying at the chantry?" asked Kalian. If so, she'd need an escort. If not... He should check with Tessa first, but he was pretty sure room 2 was unoccupied. Worst case, he could let her sleep in his bed and he'd sleep on the floor in his father's room. "If not, you can stay here, for tonight."

Martin waited for the sister's reply with interest. He had a feeling he hadn't seen the last of her, and he wasn't sure yet if that was a good thing or a bad thing, but he certainly was curious.

Elinowy looked at Kalian with grateful eyes. "I have no place to rest my head, my journey does not allow me to take shelter with my sisters. May the Maker bless your family for such kindness."

"Sister, if that is not too much trouble I would ask you to come to the station tomorrow so we can take your testimony. It'll be instrumental in this case, as you were the one who brought the suspect here. You can drop by whenever you like, I'll make sure they know to expect you even if I'm not there. Anyway, I will trouble you no further tonight, but please be careful. If you stumble upon a similar situation in the future, I would urge you to call the nearest guard."

Elinowy nodded in acknowledgment to the guard. I will make sure to stop by. I would ask clemency upon the man, he has the potential to change, and should be encouraged accordingly. But I will tell what I have witnessed.

He turned towards the guardsman, who looked to be about his own age, with light brown hair. "I'm Kalian Winter. My sister and her husband run the Raven's Roost Tavern. Do you need any help taking that man to the constabulary, guardsman... Uh, what was your name, ser?"

Martin turned his attention fully to the young man, who apparently really was related to the owners of the tavern, and gave him a courteous nod.

"I'm Martin, Martin Josceran. Pleasure to make your acquaintance, ser Kalian, and thank you for your kind offer. Usually I wouldn't trouble a civilian with this but since I don't have reinforcement... I would appreciate your assistance." This Kalian fellow looked young and fit, and able to handle himself, and the help would come in handy if the prisoner had to be carried or dragged.

The prisoner was still dazed and only half-conscious, which wasn't a surprise considering the blow he'd taken to the head.

"I think we're going to have to help him walk," Martin sighed. He reached for the man's right arm, and waited for Kalian to do the same on the left side.

Kalian took the prisoner's left arm, and together he and Martin managed to heave the heavy man to his feet. He weaved like a drunk, but didn't struggle. Kalian's sister hurried over before they reached the door. "I'm helping Guardsman Josceran take him to the constabulary," said Kalian. "Room 2 is open, right Tessa? I told the Chantry sister she could sleep here tonight."

Tessa scowled, but nodded. "Just for tonight. This is a business, you know Kalian. Try not to forget. And come straight back." She gave him a stern look that meant *and don't fly in through your window*.

Elinowy watched Kalian talk to his sister and the quick words exchanged by them. "I really don't require a room if you don't have space. A blanket by the hearth would be more than adequate. I could help sweep up after you close for the evening. I am truly blessed by your generosity no matter how small." she said to Tessa.

"Oh, no, Sister. Please disregard my words with my brother, they weren't meant for your ears. Room 2 is indeed empty as Kalian said, and the Raven's Roost welcomes you for the night." Tessa shook her head. "My brother is a generous soul, and I was reminding him of his obligations. Last night Kalian gave the whole contents of his coin pouch to three young Ferelden refugees."

Elinowy smiled at the story. "It sounds like your brother has a good heart, The Maker will bless him for his compassion far more than his losses.

Cainan had been watching the scene unfold with great interest - the crime-fighting Chantry sister, every inch the demure and proper maker-fearing lady but clearly capable enough to bring down the lout by the door.

"An uncommonly generous act," Cainan remarked, looking to the man as he made to help the guardsman. There were interesting characters around these parts, he decided; perhaps he would be back again. He took out some silver coins and passed them to the woman behind the bar. "I'll have another ale, if you would - and something for the Sister, if you would care for some company?" he asked, politely, looking to her, before turning back to the lady behind the bar, adding "Whatever is left can be for the sister's stay; all these acts of charity have me feeling a little self-conscious," he joked, though the money was hardly a sacrifice for him.



Tessa accepted the gentleman's coins with raised eyebrow and a gracious smile. "Thank you, ser," she said, but stopped herself from asking if he was planning to stay in the room with her. His coin covered room and board for the night either way, and the room was equipped with two single beds.

"I am Monsieur Cainan Valentine Sauvage, at your service," he said, to both ladies, bowing his head slightly in a polite gesture.

The sister turned around and looked at the man with a pleasant smile. "Monsieur Sauvage, I am Sister Elinowy Ursulas of the Bette Noire Chantry. Thank you, acts of charity and generosity are smiled on by the Maker, who am I to refuse? I will take a mug of tea if you would. You see, the Maker provides when you react in kindness his blessing multiply. You now have a book room for the night in place of a vagrant woman living off your generosity. You will be remembered." she spoke toward Tess.

"Thank you, sister," said Tessa with head bowed to hide her eye-roll. She began preparing the woman's tea.

"Perhaps we should move our conversation to a table instead of the Bar." she said gesturing to a nearby vacant table.

## Sins of the Father

Posted on 01 Oct 2020 @ 1:40pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#)

**3,790 words; about a 19 minute read**

**Mission:** [Prologue](#)

**Location:** Streets of Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 15th - Night time, after "A Rogue, a Guardsman, a Mage, and a Chantry Sister, walk into a bar"

**Tags:** Kalian, Martin

OOC: After "A Rogue, a Guardsman, a Mage, and a Chantry Sister, walk into a bar"

The prisoner was as heavy as his height and build suggested, and he was barely stumbling along even with Martin and Kalian dragging him. They had to wiggle a little to get through the door, which had not been made to allow three men through at the same time, and then they were in the dark street outside. The cool air of the night, salty with the scent of the sea, was refreshing after the smell of smoke and ale inside.

"Thank you for your help," Martin said to his companion. "Don't think I could carry him on my own. I hope this is not taking you away from your business."

"My sister's business, really. She's the oldest and has a family to look after." Kalian grunted under the weight of the man they were half-dragging. "The least I can do, helping a city guard who's

helping us."

The fresh air must have done the prisoner some good, too, for he started to look a little bit more lively. He shook his head then winced, eyes blinking owlishly at his surroundings. Maybe he could walk part of the way after all. Still, Martin would make sure the man received some kind of medical attention once he'd been brought in.

"Wh - what's going on," the prisoner slurred.

"You are under arrest," Martin informed him. "We're taking you to the station now. You will be given a chance to advocate for yourself when you appear before the magistrate."

"What - no !" The man began to struggle, though his hands had been bound behind his back. All he succeeded in was nearly slip from Martin and Kalian's grasp, and he would have fallen on his face had they not tightened their hold on him.

"Fighting us is really not going to help your case," Martin remarked, though he did not really expect the man to take heed. "I suggest you come with us quietly and you might get away with a short prison or labour term."

"No - you don't understand," the prisoner gasped between short, panicked breaths. "My son - I left him waiting for me. I have to go back ! Please ! He's only four years old, he can't manage on his own ! Please, I beg you ! I'll come good and quiet after that !"

Martin did not even slow down, though it was hard to maintain a good pace when the prisoner was literally digging his heels in the ground. "Tell us the address and we'll send someone from the Chantry to look after your child." Someone from the Chantry and half a dozen guardsmen, because Martin really didn't expect there to actually be a child.

"Address ?" The prisoner scoffed. "You think if I had an address I'd be stealin' ? We're refugees from the Blight. Lost everything, never recovered. We live in the street and sleep in the dirt, like dogs - worse than dogs. I left me boy hidden in one of them side alleys. He won't show for anyone but me. I have to go, please !"

The man certainly was *not* dressed like he slept in the dirt like a dog. Kalian did not believe his story for one moment, and even if true, leaving a child alone in an alley said nothing good about the prisoner's character. "I know Jader rather well. In what alley did you leave your child - between which two businesses?"

"I... I don't remember, 'xactly. It were in, uh, in the guild district. Near... uh blacksmith shop. That was it," gasped the prisoner. His arms flexed against the rope tying his hands behind his back. "We're goin' the wrong way."

Kalian caught Martin's gaze and rolled his eyes. There were multiple blacksmiths in the guild

district. "The one next to a brothel, or the one next to a tailor shop?" asked Kalian, knowing that there was no alley in Jader that fit that description.

"Er, the... the one next to..." The prisoner must have understood that his ploy was not working. He pulled violently away from Martin and Kalian, clearly meaning to make a run for it, but with his hands bound behind his back found it impossible to keep his balance and fell face first in the dirt.

Martin sighed. "You know, you could make this so much easier on yourself."

Kalian looked down at the prisoner unsympathetically. "People do live on the street and sleep in the dirt, unfortunately. You don't look like any of them, even now. Just calm down. If you haven't injured or killed anyone, I'm sure the magistrate will take that into consideration."

"Wait ! Wait !" The prisoner struggled to get to his knees. "Look, I'll give ya money. Good money ! I didna kill no one, just stole a couple of moneybags. It ain't gonna benefit anyone if you turn me in ! But it can benefit you lot real good to let me go. I'll pay, I'm good for it !"

Martin's eyes narrowed. He took one step forward and leant to grab the prisoner's shoulder, but made no attempt to help him up. Instead he squeezed the man's arm, painfully so.

"I'd ask where you think you'd get that much money, but it doesn't matter because I'm sure I misheard," he said. "You're not actually suggesting that the Jader guard can be bought - let alone by a petty thief. You wouldn't insult me so, would you ?"

The prisoner suddenly didn't look so sure of himself, but tried to keep his bravado. "Come on, dun' act all high and mighty. Money's money, right ?"

Martin yanked him abruptly to his feet. "You're really lucky that the Jader guard also doesn't beat up our prisoners," he said. Under his quietly agreeable voice there was cold steel.

The prisoner looked pleadingly to Kalian, thinking he might find a more agreeable audience there.

Kalian scowled at the man and helped yank him to his feet. "Jader is my home, my community. People like you make it dangerous for everyone. People like you make citizens afraid to help the poor. If I had a part in turning you loose then anyone you hurt, anyone you rob... Well. That would be on me."

They began moving again, the prisoner not helping, but not hindering their forward progress. Kalian figured the man was probably planning to try something else.

"Oi, come on, lads. I ain't as bad as all that. Only took from those what could stand to have a few coins lifted. I didn't rob no poor bastards. Gave to the Chantry too, I did. Every week, and got me blessings from the sisters for my generosity. That's how I was taken in by that pretty, smooth-talkin' Chantry sister. She tricked me. If it wasn't a trick, then where is *my* coin pouch. Answer me that!"

"Why, I'm sure a saint like you, who donates regularly to the Chantry, must have given it all away to the poor," Martin said sarcastically. "Or are you suggesting the sister," he allowed incredulity to colour his voice, "may have lifted it?"

Although in truth, the only proof he had of the sister's identity was her habit, and many before had used it as a disguise.

"She did step out of the tavern for a few moments after he was, uh, detained. I didn't see what happened to his coin pouch." Kalian admitted to the guardsman. Then he addressed the prisoner. "Doesn't change the fact that you robbed Jader citizens."

"How can I repay the money I stole if it was stolen from me? But, like I said, I've got me a stash of coin. Two fine, upstanding men such as yourselves, an honorable city guard and a citizen. You could put it to charitable use, feeding and housing the poor, if that's what floats yer boat, yeah. Just untie me and I'll show you where it is."

Kalian grunted a non-response. The man was tenacious, but also heavy, and dragging him to the constabulary proved to be more strenuous than he'd anticipated.

Martin snorted. "You know, even if the sister did steal your purse, it wasn't yours to begin with, so I'm not sure we could qualify this as thievery. Anyway, we're not interested, and just so you know we'll add this bad attempt at bribery to the charges you will be facing."

Seeing he was getting nowhere, the prisoner lost all pretense of amiability. "You guardsmen - " a stream of obscenity poured out. "Ye think ye can bully us 'round - "

Martin stopped dragging the man, so suddenly that he stumbled and nearly fell backwards. It was enough to momentarily stop the flow of abuse coming from him.

"You've actually managed to really irritate me," Martin said, in a tone of genuine wonder yet still amiable. "So this is how it's going to be. Either you shut up and come quietly. Or I'll just have to knock you out and add struggling against law enforcement to the list of charges. Your choice. You might want to think this one through."

The man's face was turning an ugly shade of red, as he clearly made a great effort to swallow back whatever bile was building up. In the end he said nothing, although his glower of pure and absolute hatred was almost enough to kill; and though he did nothing to help, he did not actively resist when Martin and Kalian dragged him the rest of the way to the station.

Audrey was still on duty when they arrived, and she looked up incredulously when Martin came in, stepping sideways through the door so he could pull the prisoner behind him.

"Martin, you do realize that you're actually off-duty, right? That means you're supposed to be

home."

"Well, I was going to," Martin shrugged, running a hand in his coppery hair. "But an innkeeper needed help dealing with a mugger."

"You ain't got no proof," the prisoner spat.

"You were positively identified by a witness," Martin cut him. "And I'm not the one you need to convince, so keep your breath for the magistrate. Audrey, please, please throw him in a cell before my ears start bleeding."

"Only if you promise to actually go home afterwards, and leave your report of this... incident... till tomorrow. Take pity on me Martin, the night was nicely quiet until you came in," Audrey snorted, but she grabbed the prisoner's arm with a strong grip.

The prisoner did not resist - he'd have had a hard time putting up much of a fight with his hands still tied behind his back - but he looked over his shoulder, glaring at Martin and Kalian. "You'll pay for this one day !"

"Alright, enough with the threats." Audrey pushed him firmly ahead and towards the holding cells in the back.

"Thank the Maker," Martin mumbled when the prisoner finally vanished from their sight. "They all try something at some point but this one was quite... persevering. Anyway, don't let his threats bother you," he added, looking at Kalian. "His sort is usually quite happy to remain out of sight, when they're lucky enough to escape prison."

Kalian's grin had a rueful twist. It seemed he couldn't stay out of trouble, even when he was helping a city guardsman. "My mother used to say that when doing the right thing is hard, that means it's the Creators' will. Or, um, the Maker's will." His mother Danyssa had revered the elven gods and had tended to speak of the Maker as though he was another of the creators. "I'd rather he come after me instead of my sister and her family." Out of sight would be fine - no witnesses, so he could defend himself with magic.

"Well, I hate to impose on you even further, but would you be able to come back tomorrow and testify ? Since we brought him all this way, let's make sure it's not all for nothing, eh ? I'd do it now but I think my colleague is going to kick us out as soon as she comes back."

"Yes, of course. It's my civic duty," said Kalian, with complete sincerity. He could use some good will with the city guard. A few of them knew him and thought he was a drunk, but that was part of his camouflage. "I can accompany Sister Elinowy, since she's staying at the Raven tonight. Not that she'll need an escort, but it couldn't hurt."

Kalian lingered with Martin before walking back to the Raven's Roost. "Did I hear the other guard say

you were supposed to be off duty?"

"Err..." Martin pushed his hair back awkwardly. "I guess I theoretically am kind of not on duty right now. But it's not like I can take off the uniform and suddenly not care, you know? I don't usually go looking for trouble in my free time, but when trouble finds me, well..." he shrugged, his smile amused in a fatalistic way. "It's not like I had much of a plan for tonight anyway."

"I'm impressed by your dedication. No wonder you got to the Raven so fast," said Kalian. "I hope you'll come back under, uh, less official circumstances."

Martin laughed. "I got there fast because I was on my way to have a drink, not because of any special dedication on my part, rest assured. But I'd be happy to drop by under less... official circumstances. It looked like a nice place to hang out." The patrons had looked like an alright sort of crowd to Martin's eye, and he had some practice in this kind of assessment. This was not his usual haunt, purely by virtue of not being the inn his Templar friends favoured, but it was close enough to his place. "Are you headed back there? It's actually kind of on my way home, so we might as well walk together."

"I am headed back there, and thanks, I'd like the company. Sorry your plans were ruined. I like to think the Raven is a nice place to hang out, but I may be biased." Kalian gave the guard a lopsided grin. "My grandfather bought the tavern near the end of the Hundred Days Cough plague. My father took it over, and now my sister and her husband run it. We tend to get locals in, craftspeople from the guild houses, and their apprentices."

Audrey came back then, shaking her head. "Can you believe that lout offered me money?"

Martin laughed. "No, really?"

"He did! Well, if anyone asks, he already had that blackened eye when he came in." Audrey walked to her desk and pulled the heavy log book closer. "I'll log this in. What are you still doing here, Martin? And take your friend with you."

"Alright, alright, we're leaving already! Have fun."

"Fun? Well, I suppose I got another couple of hours before we get the first drunk fight of the night," Audrey snorted, already dipping her quill in the inkwell. "Or yet someone else complaining about disappearing orphans or whatever."

The grin that spread across Kalian's face listening to the two guards banter faded at the mention of disappearing orphans, and he thought of the three young people in the alley the night before. Refugees, probably orphans, living on the street and vulnerable. There was a refugee camp on the outskirts of town, but at night it was even more dangerous than the Jader streets.

Audrey did not look up as Martin and Kalian left the guard station and closed the door behind them.

The night had grown chillier as the hour grew late, though it remained warm enough for the oncoming summer, and it smelt like it might rain the next day. In fact the sky looked a little bit cloudy now. Perhaps the last rain until Bloomingtide. Jader, being a port city, always got uncomfortably moist in the summer days.

Kalian followed Martin out into the cool dark of the spring evening, thinking. Things had been slightly different for the elves in the alienage. Hahren Liriel organized and made space for as many as she could in the community. The humans of Jader just expected the Chantry to take care of the human refugees, and without Reverend Mother Giselle the city would not have survived. "Martin, did she say that people are going missing? Orphans? That is, if you're allowed to talk about it."

"Well, it's not really confidential. We've had a couple of reports come in about missing people. Problem is, those people were refugees, so it's a bit hard to ascertain their identity, or if they even actually exist." And one of them had been an elf, which made it a case that few people even pretended to care about. "Personally I don't believe someone would just make up this kind of story but we don't have any witnesses, there isn't a single lead, and... well, anything could have happened to them. They could even have just left town."

Martin had actually tried to follow up on it, but he'd had to give up for the sheer lack of leads. Refugees, in this day and age, were sadly fairly ubiquitous in Jader. It would be some years until all of them either made a new life for themselves, or returned to Ferelden. In the meantime, inquiring about one of them with just a rough description and a first name was an impossible task, especially when a lot of refugees were reluctant to speak to the authorities.

There were several ways Kalian could help. He could search as an owl at night, as a hawk in daytime, and track a missing person's scent as a wolf. But nothing he could openly offer to a man like Martin, a city guard. "Unfortunately, any Fereldens still in Jader have either found work and settled, can't afford passage back to Ferelden, or don't have anything to go back to. And... well, it's no secret that some folks in Jader would be happy to see fewer of them." Kalian didn't speak for a moment, weighing how to offer his help, his footsteps loud in the evening's quiet and almost in sync with his companion's. "I'm, uh, kind of lucky when it comes to finding people. I'll keep my eyes open. If the disappearances aren't random, then sooner or later citizens might start disappearing too."

Martin had been looking down at the uneven pavement, and his head jerked up in surprise at the offer. It was rather uncommon to have a civilian offer their help, let alone for free; but Kalian sounded like he might actually care. Martin glanced at him sideways, sizing him up. The man's face was open and earnest, as much as he could see in the weak light of the moon filtering through shreds of silver clouds. Maybe the offer really was sincere.

"If the disappearances aren't random, refugees are probably a more appealing target right now. Less likely that anyone would look for them," he said thoughtfully. "And it is true that refugees would be more likely to speak to a civilian than a guardsman. But if word gets around that you're looking into this, and this turns out to be something else than a coincidence, you might be the next target."

I'm not sure I could put you in this position, much as I appreciate your offer."

"What part of the city do you usually work, Martin? I don't recall seeing you around," said Kalian, then quickly added, "Not that I often have... uh... cause to, uh, come to the attention of a member of the city guard." *Maker's breath!*, he sounded suspicious even to himself.

Martin laughed at the young man's earnest awkwardness. "Unless you robbed a store recently, I'm pretty sure you'll be alright even if you do come to our attention. Anyway, I don't often patrol around your sister's inn. I'm more often on alienage duty, or on the docks, or sometimes they send me around the Chantry on the account that I know my Chant of Light better than average. Cosy guild district patrols are for people who can suck up better than I can." He saw Kalian's face and smiled. "Joking. I actually volunteered for this kind of duty. It's much more interesting this way. More of a chance to make a difference, really. And, well, you know, the poorest people are not always the most dishonest."

"And the rich are rarely the most honest," said Kalian. Interesting, that Martin worked the alienage. Tessa had a charitable arrangement with the alienage - each morning Hahren Liriel sent a pair of elves to collect the tavern's left-over stew, and Cook would prepare a fresh batch for the day and evening. In the morning Kalian could ask what they knew of Martin. Though at this point Kalian would be surprised to hear anything negative. Still, Kalian wasn't quite ready to tell Martin that his mother had been an elf.

By then they'd made it to the street where the Raven was located, and were slowly making their way up the street towards the brightly lit tavern. They'd actually walked past Martin's street, but he preferred to walk Kalian all the way back, just to be on the safe side. Jader had grown increasingly dangerous of late, especially at night.

"What about you, Kalian ? You mentioned the inn is your sister's business, so what is your occupation ?"

Kalian rubbed the back of his neck. "I take odd jobs here and there. But mostly I work for my sister at the tavern. Our father helps out, advises, and looks after my niece and nephew while Tessa's working. Father inherited the tavern from his father, and transferred legal ownership to her. Tessa has a sharp head for the business of running a tavern. And her husband Ben, he's a good man. Supportive. Smart enough to do what she says and let her have the final say in making decisions." What Kalian did not say was that sooner or later he'd make a mistake, and get caught using magic. Then templars would seize him, and anything he owned.

They arrived at the Tavern's outer door, carved with the likeness of a Raven. Kalian's grandfather had it made and named the tavern in tribute to his wife. A crumpled piece of paper lay on the ground, and Kalian absently picked up the trash and pocketed it before turning to Martin. "Why don't you come in for a drink? On the house. Well, the first one will be. " He grinned at the guard and pushed the door open. "Tessa will charge you for the second."



## Two Mules for Sister Sara

Posted on 02 Oct 2020 @ 4:38pm by [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#)

**3,184 words; about a 16 minute read**

**Mission:** [Prologue](#)

**Location:** The Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** After A Rogue, a Guardsman, a Mage, and a Chantry Sister, walk into a bar

OOC: Continued from A Rogue, a Guardsman, a Mage, and a Chantry Sister, walk into a bar

The sister turned around and looked at the man with a pleasant smile. "Monsieur Sauvage, I am Sister Elinowy Ursulas of the Bette Noire Chantry. Thank you, acts of charity and generosity are smiled on by the Maker, who am I to refuse? I will take a mug of tea if you would. You see, the Maker provides when you react in kindness his blessing multiply. You now have a book room for the night in place of a vagrant woman living off your generosity. You will be remembered." she spoke toward Tess.

"Thank you, sister," said Tessa with head bowed to hide her eye-roll. She began preparing the woman's tea.

"Perhaps we should move our conversation to a table instead of the Bar." she said gesturing to a nearby vacant table.

Politely straightening her robes, Elinowy sat down at the table. She motioned for her new companion to sit. "Please, join me."

Cainan took a seat, amused at the heavy-handed guilt wielded like a Warhammer. "Thank you, Sister," he said, taking his seat.

Tessa brought a tray into the common room, and set a tankard of ale and a teapot and cup on the gentleman and Sister's table. Then she tactfully laid the key to room 2 between the two drinks. "Please let me know if you need anything else."

Taking the teapot, Elinowy briefly sniffed to the tea to see if it has steeped enough. Satisfied she poured some into the cup then looked at Sauvage. "This will sound odd, but you strike me as out of place in this tavern as I am. What does a man of means seek in a place like this?"

Cainan chuckled at that, looking around for a moment; his was not the only fine coat in the establishment, it was true, but the others all had the subtle imperfections of the *trappings* of wealth; the scuffed sleeve of ever so slightly different material to hide a tear, the wrong style epaulettes, last seasons colours and, more often than not, the cut of cloth made for someone a size bigger than the wearer; all signs of those accustomed to wealth trying to make do *without* it. His clothes, by comparison, were fine enough to know his lineage by; and an exact fit to boot.

"You have a point, this is not my usual fare," he admitted, lounging slightly in his chair. "but the old haunts were getting dull, and my attempts to spice things up were... received poorly," he admitted, thinking back to the last few haunts of his; the Rose, although the most recent, was certainly not the only establishment that had reason to ask him to leave. "So I thought I'd try the next place along, and already I've seen the least subtle thief in Jader taken down by a humble sister of the Chantry, a man that literally gives all his money away and *at least* three people who clearly can't play cards or dice to save their shirts," he shrugged slightly, raising his tankard. "Who would I be not to see where this goes?" he asked, taking a sip. "So tell me, where is your destination? Jader is so out of the way, unless you are on your way to Ferelden; I'm not used to seeing Sisters in Jader outside of the Chantry."

Elinowy smiled. A gambler. It made sense. His appearance help with intimidation of his opponents. She could respect that. Much like her scarlet robes created an immediate reaction in those she interacted with, it brought guilt, fear, respect and generally a more respectful attitude from others. That disposition could be used to advance the cause of the Chantry as needed.

"I am not from Jader, can't say I have visited the city before, but I am on a spiritual journey directed by my Grand Cleric. I go where the Maker takes me, looking to help others while having no means unto myself. It teaches faith and humility. And quite a journey it has been. The streets are cold, but the hearts of so many burn bright with Andraste's love for the Maker.

What is your principal trade? You look to me a man of leisure, but judging by the swelling of your knuckles, you embrace violence frequently. A mercenary of sorts? Or are you perhaps working for yourself?"

Cainan held his chest in mock heartbreak. "You wound me, madam!" he laughed, before continuing. "It is true that I am fortunate enough to be able to choose what I do, so I tend to choose what interests me. Alas, I suffer from malaise when held in one space or position for too long, so I move from employ to employ with my changing tastes. I have some investments, my father owns a trading company; other than that I have been a mercenary, a bodyguard, a raconteur and, briefly, a man of the sea; though I'll admit, the life within a strict hierarchy did not agree with me," he admitted, with a wince. In truth, he had been so bad at it he had been booted off mid-journey; Cainan had met Captain Richelieu when he had bartered his way as a passenger on his ship; even then, he had gambled the good captain out of his coat, but had instead written off the debt in lieu of payment for his passage back to Jader. "Most recently I have taken to relieving men of their financial burdens at the gaming tables throughout the city, while I seek my *next* purpose."

"I am curious," Cainan began, leaning in a little to show his interest. "What led you to a life in the Chantry?" While she wore little or no makeup from what he could see, she was still plainly attractive; in any noble house she would have had her fill of suitors, and he suspected from the way she had not only taken out a thief but also gotten herself a room for the evening that she would have been adept at The Game; perhaps even had she a commoner's roots.

Eyeing the man curiously, Elinowy likewise leaned in a little. "The call of the Maker manifests itself

in unusual ways. Perhaps your unrest is more than mere malaise. As for my story, it is unexceptional. I was an orphan of the streets when a kindly man took pity on me and brought me to the Chantry. I was educated and raised by the sisters, and in due course of time, I joined the order. My days consisted of singing, sharing with the poor and helping maintain the Chantry. The Maker called to me one night, a group of horrible mages attacked and destroyed our Chantry, murdering many of my sisters including our beloved Reverend Mother. From the ashes, through our grief, I brought our community together, and with the help of the local village. we rebuilt, and the song of Andrante continued on. I carried on as the new 'mother' even without proper ordination. The hierarchy took notice. My Grand Cleric has plans for me, but I am on a journey of discernment before following the path the Grand Cleric envisions." she stirred her tea looking for reactions in Cainan.

Cainan had to admit, he hadn't expected that; though the idea that people might gravitate to her in times of strife was not hard to believe. "Such a story, I knew you would be an interesting woman," he admitted, though it did not come out as flirtatious as he had thought. "And as for myself, if the Maker intended me for the Chantry, I fear the skills he gave me draw me to other callings."

He considered for a moment, as they held each others gaze. "So this is not the usual type of initiation for a sister... *Mother*, then?" he clarified, internally squirming at her gaze; she had the piercing gaze of a Revered Mother, at the very least. "So you follow the call of the Maker and do good deeds in his name in the places he delivers you too? How do you know when you've found his will? That this meeting or that opportunity is just a coincidence, rather than the Maker's expressed will?" he asked, interested.

A slight chuckle came from the sister. "Heavens no. What I may be undertaking is not common. The Maker has a most creative mind, many things are supplied in the Maker's will, but it is up to us to take advantage of these... opportunities. I am following the path of one such opportunity. If the Maker truly wills it, that will become manifest. If it does, I will never be a proper 'Mother'. While that may have been my ambition for myself, the Maker may have other plans for me. This is the discernment I seek. So I am journeying, in faith, and in humility to see how the Maker might use me."

She looked Cainan squarely in the eye in a way that hearkened unto a strict school matron. "I would venture to say, that this 'chance meeting' of us in this place neither of us belong in, indeed may become something more. I cannot speak for the will of the Maker, there is an irony of purpose in doing so, but a man of your skills maybe be just what the Maker requires in the near future." she settled back in her seat, tipping her teacup in salute to her table companion.

Tessa kept an eye on the unlikely pair. The nobleman fit the description of a gambler who'd made trouble in a few other taverns in Jader, and the unusual Chantry sister who had lured that thief to his demise strangely was not lodging at the chantry. They were like a pair of characters from a Tethras serial. With her husband holding the baby, Tessa returned to the odd couple's table with a pitcher of ale and noticed the key to room 2 was still on the table between them. "Would you like a refill, ser? More tea, serah?"

Elinowy covered her teacup with her hand. "Thank you my dear. I am fine with what I have." she said authoritatively but with a smile.

Cainan considered his tankard a moment, smiling. He had already surmised that room number two would have only one occupant tonight; the sister, or Mother-in-waiting, was not flirting with him; but she was interesting, and he had been so painfully bored with the mundane recently. He could feel the tumble of the dice in his head; the dice of carnal desires landed firmly on one; the dice for his curiosity... well, it hadn't come to rest yet, but he could already tell it was higher than a four. "One more before I return home, I think," he said, smiling at the innkeeper. "My thanks, madam," he added, as she retrieved the ale for him. From the ale and his previous fare at the Rose, he felt a pleasant warmth in his belly; but he retained his senses and, he supposed - his coordination.

A ragged woman worked her way through the Tavern crowd and dropped a red rose on the table. "For the lovely lady from the mothers of the disappeared." she whispered. The gasp as she recognized the sister's robes was audible. "Maker, no! Sister! I am so sorry. I had not realized. Forgive me."

Slinowy smiled at the woman with great kindness, reaching out and touching the woman's head. "It is fine my sister. Andraste smiles on your desire to kindle human love. If the gentleman wishes to purchase a rose, it will not be refused."

Cainan felt the dice shift and suddenly the one became a two. Slim odds to make it six, but he would always play the long odds at least once. "What manner of gentleman would not offer a woman a rose?" he replied in mock bewilderment, a silver coin appearing between his fingers in a flourish. There was no way the flower was worth so much, but Cainan liked to splash the money around; it intrigued women and incited men, and both offered their own brands of entertainment once a whiff of gold or silver was had.

The ragged woman looked stunned for only a moment before she took the coin, bowing her way backwards before he could change his mind. Cainan lifted the rose and smelled it briefly before handing it over to the sister. "You know, no one has ever had cause to mistake me for an instrument of the maker," he said, with an amused smile. "But I'll admit, I'm curious to see what he has in mind... which skills of mind do you expect he has use of?"

The Chantry sister gave Cainan a wide smile as she sniffed the rose he had just handed her. . "Oh kind sir, you already have helped advance the good will of the Maker. A simple act of generosity, such as to that poor woman." She signaled to the ragged woman trying to blend into the shadows. "It's alright, come closer." The woman like in fear of dis respecting a woman of the Chantry timidly approached the table again. "Dear sister, tell me again, what you were collecting alms for when you presented us with this flower?"

The woman spoke with barely a whisper. "I meant no offense. The proceeds of these flowers benefit the families of the Disappeared."

Elinowy smiled in a warm matronly way, even on her young face. "And tell us my child, who exactly who are these disappeared?"

The woman looked sheepish, but her voice grew stronger. "Numerous member of families in the Refugee camps have vanished, often on night such as this. My brother is one of them. We are collecting funds to bring awareness to our plight from the city Guards, or perhaps hire individuals to help protect our people."

Sitting back away from the table, Elinowy turned her attention back to Cainan. "So your simple act of chivalry and generosity has provided hope for those in distress. Who knows, perhaps they may even have collected funds to hire a rakish professional such as yourself. Or you might even feel compelled to help them in their plight for other reasons. The Maker calls us in mysterious ways."

She turned back to the ragged woman, extending her hand to place a blessing upon her. "Go my child and spread the Chant of light and the Maker will return his bounty upon the world."

Cainan watched as the ragged woman bowed her way backwards, now as before impressed with the reverence offered to the woman. Cainan was not a heathen; he followed the chant, or what parts he felt applied; and he observed the major holidays and such, but he had never been one to sing in the streets or openly pray; it was fair to say that the Maker turning his back on his creation was not a situation that Cainan felt needed fixing, so sufficed to say he was hardly a religious fanatic. But he did envy the woman in that moment; not Elinowy, the recipient of such reverence, but the old woman, who believed in something so hard as to be all-encompassing.

"So... does the Maker call you towards the refugee camp?" he asked, his eyes watching the woman leaving the tavern rather than returning to his companion at the table. Whenever he was bored, he could always count on the city to provide him with the entertainment or distraction he craved. "Even a lady of the Chantry might have need of an escort for such a visit..." he offered, finally returning his gaze to her.

The sister considered the man's words. Certainly there was something amiss with the poor in the refugee camp. And as much as she trusted the way of the Maker, sometimes it was good to have a little help, especially in violent areas. It seemed clear enough the Maker was tying her to this man for some reason, so she should best investigate where it led. "I would be grateful for your escort ser."

The return of the guardsman and the man who had helped him return the thief to the station did not go unnoticed, and Cainan had the notion that the man scrutinised him for a moment before taking a seat and ordering some ale with his companion not too far away. Cainan's immaculate appearance and clear incongruity with the surroundings was, he decided, the probable cause.

"Well, if we plan to approach the refugees in the morning, it would make sense for me to stay here too," Cainan stated, smirking; the implication was clear, but he had no intention of pushing the issue - more letting the implication hang in the air for a good ten heartbeats, unaddressed, before

turning to the woman who had provided the key to room number 2. "Madam? Would there be another room available?" he asked, producing his money.

Tessa paused at the table. The gentleman and the sister... my, but wasn't this a fascinating turn of events... worthy of a Tethras drama! Tessa's eyes shone with interest, and yet she kept her expression and tone neutral but informative, with the practice of a seasoned tavern proprietor. "Room 2 is equipped with two single beds, ser. If you would prefer one large bed, Room 1 is available."

Pitching an eyebrow slightly at the implications, Elinowy smiled at the Tavern keeper. "I am certain Ser Sauvage would be more suited to the single bed while I keep in Room 2. If you are pressed for space, I am still more than happy to sleep next to your hearth."

Cainan smiled at that and handed the money over to the barmaid. "Ah, but what a night that could have been. Then I shall take room one, and the good sister shall keep her bed," he said, casting a glance at the hearth. "Not to say anything unkind about the common room, but that hearth does not look so comfortable to *my* eyes as it seems to the sister's, and I couldn't bear to have her sleeping on the floor on my account." With that, he drained his tankard of ale and laid it carefully back on the table, as he stood. "Dear Sister, I take my leave - until the morning?" he asked, bowing his head to her before accepting the key from the innkeeper.

The sister lifted her tea cup to the gentleman as he arose. "Thank you for your generosity, ser. Your kindness will be returned in kind. I pray the Maker brings you such dreams as to ignite your imagination. I will see you in the morning to start our adventure." she said with a pleasant and amused smile. It was risky to toy with the passions of men, but Elinowy felt fairly secure in her loyalty to the Chantry. The Maker would work things out to his purpose.

## A Dragon Hunt and other euphemisms

Posted on 06 Oct 2020 @ 5:58pm by [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Mage Kalian Winter](#)

**3,540 words; about a 18 minute read**

**Mission:** [Prologue](#)

**Location:** The Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 15th - Night time, after "Sins of the Father"

OOC: Continued from "Sins of the Father"

They arrived at the Tavern's outer door, carved with the likeness of a Raven. Kalian's grandfather had it made and named the tavern in tribute to his wife. A crumpled piece of paper lay on the ground, and Kalian absently picked up the trash and pocketed it before turning to Martin. "Why don't you come in for a drink? On the house. Well, the first one will be. " He grinned at the guard and pushed the door open. "Tessa will charge you for the second."

Martin only hesitated a second. Although it was fairly late, he was on second shift and not expected to show up at the station until lunch, and an ale sounded good after the excitement of the evening. And since Kalian was offering... well, maybe this was why his sister was the one in charge of the inn. If memory served, he'd also offered - quite spontaneously - a room for the night to the Chantry sister. Generosity certainly appeared to be a defining trait of Kalian's character.

"Sure, why not. After all, I'm not on duty. But only if you'll let me buy you a second one as well."

They passed through the outer door, then the inner door. The tavern was winding down for the evening and only a couple tables were still occupied, as their usual Monday-night patrons were early risers. Kalian was not surprised to see Sister Elinowy sitting at a table with the well-dressed gentleman he'd noticed earlier. He motioned Martin to the bar and went around behind to pour two ales, then set one in front of Martin. Tessa watched from across the room with raised eyebrow, but didn't protest. Kalian raised his tankard. "To peaceful evenings and new friends."

The ale was a nice golden colour and the tankards were clean. Overall it looked like Tessa ran a tight ship. Martin clinked his tankard with Kalian's and took a long sip, the ale light and refreshing after this long evening. He took the time to savour it, intrigued to feel subtle notes of elderflower and honey.

"Nice ale," he commented. "Tastes a bit like Duvellan's but lighter. I'm curious now, where do you get it from?"

Naturally, if they'd owned this place for three generations, they must have good connections to all the local breweries.

Kalian paused to savor the delicious amber brew himself. Despite his reputation with certain members of the city guard, he rarely drank enough to become intoxicated. Intentionally dousing himself with cheap beer was an effective way to create that impression, but spilling *this* ale would be an affront to Sylaise. "It's brewed by the Jeannine brewery, owned by a cousin of my brother-in-law. You might even say this brew is what brought my sister and her husband together." Kalian took another appreciative sip. "The recipe has changed over the years, but it started as a collaboration, between our family and his."

"Well, now I kind of regret not coming here before. Maybe I'll drop by with my friends next time. Then your sister can be happy that your generosity brought in more paying customers." Martin gave his new friend a crinkled-eyes smile. Gauvain would like this place, he should bring him here by way of an apology for not showing up tonight. "It looks fairly quiet, I imagine it's not everyday that you get a kind of ruckus like what happened earlier. It's lucky the sister was here, mugged patrons can't be good for business."

He glanced at the sister, who was talking quietly to a rather well-dressed man - the same one who'd been hanging around already when Martin had interviewed her. The man's appearance tickled Martin's brain, as if he ought to know him, and yet he was sure he'd never seen him before tonight.

Probably just a resemblance.

"Of course, with her involved, the Chantry's probably going to want a copy of the full report of the incident." He sighed ruefully. "I suppose I better watch my handwriting. And my spelling."

He paused for a moment, turning the tankard around to see the beer sloshing and foaming gently. "I don't mean to worry you, or your family, but... just in case this mugger wasn't working alone, you should be careful over the next few days. The Sister is protected, to an extent, by her habit, but you are not."

Kalian imagined more guardsmen stopping in for drinks. The Raven's usual clientele were mostly law-abiding locals who wouldn't be put-off. And Tessa would be pleased – and his family would be safer. "I appreciate the warning, I'll be careful."

He took another sip of his beer and recalled the crumpled paper he'd picked up on the street outside the Raven's front door. Paper was not an inexpensive commodity. He took it from his pocket and smoothed it out on the bar. "I picked this up just outside."

It was a single-page advertisement in large block letters, with the bottom third torn off. Kalian read it out loud.

Do you want to reclaim the dignity of an honest day's pay  
for an honest day's work?

We offer One Royal per day plus Room and Board  
for qualified, able-bodied workers.

Hiring Daily at the following location-

"The location must be on the part that was torn off." Kalian gave a low whistle. "*Maker's breath*. One gold a day."

"That's... a lot of money," Martin commented, brow creasing into a frown. In fact it was more money than *he* made, and while the city guard often complained about their miserly pay, he couldn't imagine unskilled labourers being paid more. Either someone with too much money was feeling uncommonly charitable, or the work was dangerous. Martin couldn't help but notice that no information was given at all on the nature of the jobs thus advertised. Even more likely, this could be a trap to rob desperate people their last coins. "Where does it say to go to take up this suspiciously amazing offer?"

It couldn't hurt to take a closer look. Preferably with back-up.

Kalian turned the sheet of paper over. A note was written on the back in a slightly smudged but



careful hand. He read this side aloud too.

*"My Dearest Jaquenetta,  
I can not turn away from an opportunity like this,  
to earn enough money to take care of you properly.  
I'm doing this for us and for our future.  
I promise to return before the baby is born,  
and be a proper husband for you and a father to our child.  
I have enclosed every coin I could lay hold of to keep you until then.  
With all my love,  
Costard"*

"Well, it doesn't look like this Jaquenetta got the message," Martin said. "The money probably got stolen. Seriously though, if this Costard had an ounce of common sense he'd have given her the money directly..." he trailed off. The name Jaquenetta, when he said it out loud, tickled his memory. Without meaning to he pictured the fuzzy image of a young woman in a tattered skirt, with a heavy belly and a thick country accent. "Jaquenetta, Jaquenetta... I've heard this name before."

"Someone you might know?" asked Kalian. Jaquenetta wasn't an uncommon name, but Costard sounded Fereldan... or possibly a variety of apple. And the flyer, offering work - it sounded too good to be true.

"No, it was at the station." Martin took another sip, though the ale probably didn't help. "It was a couple of days ago I think. A pregnant girl. We could barely understand a word she said, with that accent of hers. Typical southern accent, the kind you hear close to the border." Much different from Martin's own, clipped northern inflections, though a decade in Jader had eroded his native accent. "She wanted to report the disappearance of her boyfriend. I think Audrey interviewed the father and he confirmed threatening the boyfriend. Everybody assumed he just got scared after getting her pregnant and ran away..."

A fair assumption at that, and a common enough story ; a guard's life made for a somewhat more cynical approach to life. But now it looked like the assumption may have been a hasty one, and unfair to poor Jaquenetta's boyfriend. Assuming this was the same one - after all, Jaquenetta was quite a common name.

Kalian pictured Costard, a poor man soon to become a father. "If he had no way to support a family, the work offered by the flyer would be extremely tempting. So you think this Costard took the job, but Jaquenetta never got the note and thought he was missing?"

"Could be. May I ?" Martin held out a hand to take the flyer, and he smoothed the crinkled paper on the counter to examine it more closely under the light of the nearest candle. "Cheap paper," he

muttered to himself as he felt the flimsy texture of the easily-crumpled paper. "Definitely not Chantry-quality velum. Hand-written by someone literate enough to use words like *reclaim* and *dignity*, and not make spelling mistakes. They used a poor-quality quill though, there's a blotch... another one here. Funny for someone so generous to be so cheap, eh?" He didn't really expect a response, he was puzzling it out loud as he usually did, not really used to having an audience while he did that. "Costard. Sounds foreign. Isn't that a Fereldan name?" He flipped the paper over. "Able-bodied suggests manual labour, qualified suggests craftsmanship, but then it'd make more sense to post this on the guild boards. Also, it's strange to want someone qualified without specifying what they need to be qualified for. And of course there's that ridiculous pay. Hmm, definitely sounds like they're hiring for a dragon hunt."

Kalian rubbed the edge of the paper between thumb and forefinger. "They... whoever they is... might have another reason not to use Chantry-quality velum. There are folks that would gather up all the flyers, scrub 'em clean, and resell them blank. This cheap stuff can only be used once. Or reused to write a note on the back." He paused to consider Martin's other comments. If this was really about hunting dragons, a royal a day wasn't so impressive. "Dragon hunt?"

"Sorry, guardsman terms. Hiring for a dragon hunt is what we say when an offer sounds too good to be true or when things just don't add up. It usually turns out to be some sort of scam. I don't suppose you or your sister ever saw who's leaving this sort of flyers behind?"

"This is the first flyer like this I've seen. I picked it up because I thought it was trash. At least you'll be able to tell that poor woman what happened to her betrothed. Although, if this is a *dragon hunt* the news won't be good." Kalian lifted his tankard and drank, then looked over the job advertisement again. "I wouldn't be surprised if there are more of these flyers posted around the refugee camp. It'd be worth visiting, to see if we can find more, or at least one that doesn't have the hiring location torn off."

Martin nodded, glancing down at his ale, vaguely surprised to find it half gone already. The good stuff always went down easily.

"Yes, it's worth at least a look." There were different sorts of criminals, but those who preyed on other people's despair certainly ranked amongst the worst on Martin's personal shitlist. "Though I'm not sure we'll ever find out what really happened to that guy."

Since it appeared Costard had not left of his own volition it was likely that the man was either gone or dead, and the dead more often than not had no face or name among the poor. The rich could sometimes be identified by their clothes, tattoos, or other distinctive marks. It was harder with the poor, especially when the bodies were more than a couple of days old. That line of thought was too gruesome for the evening though, and Martin shook his head.

"It's odd though. This kind of stuff is usually aimed at middle-class citizens, not refugees and poor people."

Kalian shrugged. "If it's legitimate work, I could be tempted by a royal a day. If it's a dragon hunt... well, like I said, Jader is my home and my family is part of this community. Plenty of other citizens will be just as tempted by an offer like this, once word gets around. If you're going to visit the refugee camp, I'd appreciate if you'd allow me to go along." He smiled and finished off his tankard, not hiding his intention to visit the refugee camp, with or without Martin.

Martin looked up from his tankard to study Kalian's face. The man seemed to have perfected the art of the guileless, mischievous smile that probably got him out of a lot of trouble on a daily basis. Maker, he wasn't even *trying* to pretend that he would leave this whole thing alone.

"It would be better... *safer*, for you to not get involved," Martin said half-heartedly. He already knew where this was going, and the truth was it would be easier for Kalian to get refugees to talk to him. Even when Martin dressed as a civilian, apparently there was a sort of something about him that still marked him as a guard. Still, involving a citizen in what could potentially end in bloodshed was a heavy responsibility. "And safer for your family."

Eyebrows knit together, Kalian put down his empty tankard. "I understand that poking around could lead to something risky and even dangerous. But come on, we're talking about a visit to the refugee camp, looking around, asking a few questions. The refugees are just people like us. Poor, and fallen on hard times, but they care about the safety of their families as much as any of us."

Martin could understand Kalian's feelings ; his family had been around for three generations, he was bound to have an attachment to Jader that Martin himself couldn't share, having lived there only his adult years. At the same time, this sort of willingness was rare, especially in someone who didn't seem particularly interested by a job in the guard.

"Kalian... I'm grateful for your help tonight, I really am. But you have no obligation to me, or the guard, or..." he tapped the flyer with his index, "...this Costard. Why do you want to help ? Really ? Lots of people have been citizens of Jader longer than you or me, and most of them certainly don't feel compelled to do anything. Maker, they feel deserving enough after just paying their taxes."

He looked across the tavern at Ben, baby in one arm, his other arm around Tessa's waist, the two of them saying goodnight to Ben's two mercenary friends. Kalian's niece was asleep in his father Armin's room. Dilana, the elven serving girl had started washing up in the kitchen, and soon Dilana's husband and brother would arrive to walk her home to the alienage after closing. Tessa and Ben would take the children to their home next door, and then Armin would lock up the Tavern for the night. It was a good life working at the tavern, but it wasn't really *his* life. Kalian's future was always overshadowed by potential discovery and betrayal.

"When the blight in Ferelden began and refugees started flooding into Jader, my niece Iris was a baby. We tried to convince Tessa to take the baby and go live with our grandmother in a remote cottage. My sister refused to hide when there were people in need, people we could help. Our mother... she was an elf, you see. And elves look after their community. She raised us to do the same." There had been so much chaos at that time, so many people in need, that Kalian had been

able to help people, anonymously. "I know I'm not guard material myself. I, uh, don't have the right skills... but that's no reason not to do the right thing, if I can."

The revelation about Kalian's mother was unexpected, and Martin's eyebrows rose marginally higher. Despite the Empress' more liberal leanings, this sort of confession was not casually made, not even this close to Ferelden. Mentioning his elven heritage was a clear gesture of trust from Kalian, and it also explained perhaps why he might care about the fate of those less fortunate than himself.

Martin studied Kalian's earnest brown eyes for a moment longer before he yielded. If he was going to get involved regardless, it'd be better to keep him close. And really, he already was involved, or so anyone seeing them talk tonight would assume.

"Alright. Fine. The truth is, I could use the help, there's a lot of ground to cover."

And, he thought but did not say, most of the other guards would have little interest in investigating this. A waste of time, they'd say. They would help, if Martin asked, but they'd be more likely to scare off any potential information source than anything else. Kalian, on the other hand... refugees might talk to him. While trying to steal his purse, maybe, but that'd be a start.

"But if we're doing this, we're doing it my way. You won't go without me, and you'll stick close to me at all times. No running off. I have no doubt that you can handle yourself but I'd feel really bad if anything happened to you because of this, so for my peace of mind, please take this seriously."

"I swear on Andraste's holy knickers, I will take it seriously." Kalian grinned widely, pleased that Martin would accept his help, and cheerful enough to try teasing him a little. "If you don't mind me saying so, your serious demeanor is part of what tips people off that you're a guard. Makes people stop and think, second guess themselves about what they may or may not be feeling guilty about, and whether or not anything they've done lately could be considered a crime."

"You think?" Martin lifted an eyebrow, surprised and amused at the same time. Being too serious was definitely not something he had often been reproached with. Least of all his family. "You're giving my roguishly handsome face too much credit. Most criminals I deal with don't feel very guilty about their... occupation. Except maybe those two siblings I caught nicking some apples on marketday. They looked properly chastised when their mother picked them up at the station." He chuckled at the memory. "Maybe next time they'll think it through."

"I like to think most people don't set out to break the law. They just get caught up in what they want, can't think of better ways of getting it, and don't consider how they might be hurting someone else." Kalian's smile faded and he looked at the flyer. "When do you plan to go?"

"I'm on second shift, so I'm supposed to start around lunchtime. If you and the Sister are free then, I'll take down your testimonies and then she can head over to the Chantry, or whatever it is that sisters do in their free time, and you and I can head out. I have alienage duty but not before mid-afternoon, until then I have free patrol." Martin finished the last of the ale, somewhat regretfully. "I'll

tell my fellow guards where we're headed, just to be on the safe side."

"Since I'm going with you, and you'll... not exactly be there in your official capacity as a city guard... maybe we could meet at the guardhouse in the morning after breakfast, and get an earlier start?" Kalian rubbed the stubble on his chin. "I'm thinking ordinary people are more likely to be out and about in the refugee camp - willing to gossip and talk - in the morning, while the more... criminal element that roam the streets at night are sleeping." He smiled crookedly. "Or maybe I've just read *Hard in Hightown* too much."

The idea had merit. Being there outside of his regular patrol times would allow Martin this extra bit of flexibility in how he handled the situation. After considering the notion for a moment he nodded.

"Sure, that sounds good. I didn't have any other plans anyway, so we might as well get it done." Sleeping in would wait until his day off, he supposed.

After setting down his wooden tankard on the counter he stood, noticing as he did so that the common room was now empty. Even the sister and her admirer had retired for the night, and it looked like Kalian's sister was waiting for them to close down and finally go to bed. Martin flashed her an apologetic smile.

"Well, I know I promised to buy the next one but it's getting late. Tomorrow night sound good ? We can debrief and maybe I'll bring a friend, too."

Kalian nodded and Martin held out his hand. "Thanks again for your help, and see you tomorrow."

## 1. Lore's Labour's Lost

Marginalized people are going missing in Jader.  
Someone is offering unusually well-paying work at a mysterious location.  
Coincidence?

### Stumptown

Posted on 11 Nov 2020 @ 10:48pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**1,765 words; about a 9 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Guard Station

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 16th, morning

**Tags:** Kalian, Elinowy, Cainan

OOC: after "The Best Beans come from Antiva" and "Rising with the sun"

Kalian, walking just ahead of his two new friends, arrived at the Guardhouse and opened the front door just as three guards – two men and a woman - were leaving. He stepped back, held the door open for them, and bowed his head deferentially. Though Martin was a reasonable and fair-minded man, it was usually best to keep a low profile around guardsmen. Kalian's two companions, however, would stand out anywhere.

The flowing scarlet robe billowing out as she approached the Guardhouse, Elinowy indeed made quite the impression. The Guards in practiced reverence moved back a step as she approached. She lightly nodded to each as she passed, reining in her robes by placing her arms firmly against her sides. She certainly stood out to the eye, her tall stature, becoming face and the fierce red of her robe and hair could easily take attention away from her other two companions.

The guards had been about to walk past the small group without further ado, until their leader noticed that the Chantry sister appeared to be headed to the station. He stopped, eyes pausing on her face as he registered the fact that he did not know her, then down to take another look at her scarlet garb, then up again.

"Sister, I see you're headed to the station - is there anything we can do to assist you ?" Enguerrand asked, polite but a bit distant, somewhat put off by the fact the Sister was clearly a foreigner to Jader. Although he only rarely patrolled the Chantry area, he did go to the Sunday Chant every week, and he'd have noticed such a... *striking* figure.

Elinowy paused by Enguerrand, "I have an appointment with a Guardsman by the name of Josceran. I am to provide testimony to an altercation at a Tavern last evening. I would also like to inquire of the fate of the suspect. I believe he is a man who might embrace redemption." she stated, giving the man the look of one waiting on a bellhop to port their luggage.

Kalian gripped the door tightly, still holding it open. There were guards like Martin, sincerely dedicated to helping people and upholding the peace as best they could. And then there were other city guards... overly enamored of their own importance.

"I... see," Enguerrand said, his tone suggesting that he really didn't. He shared a glance with his two companions then shrugged. Clearly this was Martin's mess to deal with, and he was happy to have as little to do with it as possible. "Martin did mention having to see witnesses. We'll leave you to it then. Thank you for doing your civic duty, sister. And you as well... huh... do I know you ?"

His sharp gaze stopped on Cainan's face, then Kalian's, struggling with dim remembrance.

Kalian bowed, trying to project the persona of an ordinary concerned citizen, and *definitely not an apostate mage*. "If you've ever been to the Raven's Roost tavern, you may have seen me working there, ser."

Josceline, a new and eager recruit, rested her hand on the hilt of her sword and huffed, impatient to get to the docks and investigate the rumor about smugglers. But she and Gérard had to wait for the more senior guard Enguerrand, who still hesitated, his gaze lingering on the handsome gentleman.

Cainan kept his Wicked Grace Face in check, but took in the demeanour of his new acquaintance with interest. The guard, who Cainan had met several times under the influence of many drinks, did not seem to register their acquaintance either, which was probably for the best; Cainan had previously taken the man for a week's wages in an ill-conceived bet over who could climb onto the tavern roof first. The guard had not been particularly graceful as he had taken his tumble, but the wine and spirits he had imbibed had at least protected his bones somewhat, if not his pride. But it was the hairs on the back of Kalian's neck that interested him, and he wondered if he had been in a similar experience with the guard in the past; to his credit, if the guard recognised either of them, he had definitely perfected the art of disguising his suspicions and intents behind a veil of complete and utter dim-witted vacancy.

He met the gaze of the guard with a dashing smile that conveyed an air of complete and utter lack of concern as to whether the man recognised him or not. "Well, we should certainly be along, lest bureaucracy be left unserved," he said, brightly, intentionally missing out the word justice. The woman with Enguerrand shot him a dirty look, but Cainan had the distinct impression that any word longer than three syllables did not register with the leader of the patrol.

She continued to shoot him a glare as they left, and Cainan wondered if he should stop by later and annoy her some more; Guardswomen could be very interesting in the boudoir. He watched the three leave for a moment, tipped an imaginary hat to Kalian who still held the door, and sauntered into the guardhouse.

Kalian released his held breath in a quiet hiss as Elinowy and Cainan entered the guardhouse and he followed along behind.

Johann looked up from the front desk at the strange trio. A strikingly beautiful Chantry sister, a nobleman and... his servant, most likely. "May I help you?"

Kalian cleared his throat. "Excuse me, ser, we are here to see Guardsman Martin Josceran. Is he in?"

Johann took his time to finish writing his entry into the book before he looked up, gauging each of the visitors in turn. His gaze lingered a bit longer on Elinowy, on account of her presence being the most unexpected. Then again, he knew Martin attended the Chantry regularly, so it'd make sense they'd seek him out specifically, he supposed.

That didn't explain the Rivaini-looking man, or the well-dressed *gentilhomme* though.

Johann had made it long enough in the Jader constabulary to know that sometimes it was better not to ask too many questions, and he felt like this was one of those times.

"I'll check," he said finally. "Please wait here." He closed his ledger after making sure the ink was dry and went into the back room, with a last glance at the unlikely group at the door.

Kalian, Elinowy, and Cainan were left standing in the foyer whilst the guardsman scampered off to – Kalian hoped – fetch Martin. Vaguely concerned any conversation might be overheard and used against them, he regarded his two companions. In their presence, he was practically invisible.

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Martin had just finished preparing the testimony reports, based on what Kalian and the Chantry sister had said the night before, when Johann came in. The older guardsman eyed him with a somewhat sardonic look.

"So, what trouble did you get yourself into, Martin ?"

"Hmm ? What do you mean ?"

"They're a Rivaini, a Chantry sister and some sort of rich fellow asking for you. Sounds like the beginning of a bad joke actually. A Rivaini, a Chantry sister and a rich guy walk into a guard station...? If that doesn't spell trouble I don't know what does. Pray do let me know what the punchline is." Johann snorted. "For your sake I hope it doesn't involve an actual punch."

Martin rolled his eyes. Johann was sometimes a little bit too enamoured of his own wit, to his detriment.

"Nothing of the sort, if you must know. They're witnesses to a crime. The loudmouth in the second cell ?"

"Oh. That one. Foul language for sure. I, huh, may have dropped his breakfast. So much swearing makes my hands shaky, you know." Johann mimed a shaking hand to illustrate his meaning.

Martin stood. "Anyway, I'll take care of this."

"You do that. I got accounts to finish for this afternoon. The boss is meeting the Sénéchal and asked for something up-to-date, not that anything would make the old codger happy."

"They'll be in and out, don't worry. We won't disturb your mathematical efforts. I mean, I'd love to help, but like you said I have my own trouble to handle." Martin grinned, and Johann sniffed in mock disdain.

"As if I'd trust you to put two and two together."

Gathering his papers, quill and inkwell, Martin followed Johann back to the front office where Kalian and the sister were waiting, and - who was that? Martin frowned. He'd seen that gentleman speak to



the sister, but he hadn't expected him here today. He came around the front desk while Johann went back to his seat.

"Kalian, Sister Elinowy, thank you for coming. And, huh... I'm sorry, I don't think we've been introduced, monsieur...?"

Cainan gave a little bow, a flourish of his hands. The number of times he had graced the cages for the night, it was a wonder that so few of the guards had actually recognised him. Of course, it had only ever been *for the night* - it had always been Cainan's experience that it was the *bureaucracy* of the guardhouse that was the main deterrent to recidivism, and not the complicated (and frankly class-based) system of justice practised in Orlais.

"Monsieur Cainan Sauvage, at your service," he said, returning to his relaxed stance. "I offered to escort the Good Sister for the morning; one can never be too careful on streets so rough," he said, with a smile. "And your name, sir?"

The memory finally clicked in Martin's head. Sauvage. So this was the Mister Sausage who had roughed up that whiny Fereldan mercenary, Weylin. Funny, he didn't give the impression of someone who could be so tough in a fight. Then again, he did carry that rapier with the comfortable ease of someone who knew how to use it.

"Martin, Guardsman Martin Josceran." Funny how this Monsieur Sauvage didn't look at all worried. Maybe he didn't know about the complaint.

Kalian looked from Martin to Cainan curiously as the nobleman introduced himself. Martin seemed suspicious, but then Martin had questioned Kalian at length about his motives so perhaps suspicious was Martin's natural state of being... or a side effect of his profession. He shifted uncomfortably. The guardhouse was not a place he wanted to linger any longer than necessary, and reminded him why they were there. "Sister Elinowy and I are ready to make our statements regarding the prisoner."

## Zoinks, look for clues

**Posted on 22 Nov 2020 @ 8:27am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)**

**Edited on on 22 Nov 2020 @ 8:36am**

**1,333 words; about a 7 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Guard Station

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 16th - morning

OOC: Continued from Stumptown

"Right, yes, of course. Thank you for coming, Kalian, Sister." Martin put what he was carrying down on the desk, quill and inkwell and paper. He held out two documents, one for each of the witnesses. "Here are the statements I drafted based on your testimonies. Please read them carefully and let me know if anything is inaccurate, or if any detail is missing. I will make the necessary changes. If everything is in order, then please sign and date the document, and I will countersign on behalf of the Jader Constabulary."

Kalian accepted the document Martin handed him, and scanned the contents, carefully reading for anything that might result in his sister's tavern being held liable to the slightest degree. He was satisfied, and in no small way impressed with Martin's diligence. "This looks to be in order." He reached for the quill, carefully dipped it in the ink, and signed his name and dated it. Then he politely offered the quill to Elinowy.

Taking up the quill and the document, Elinowy carefully read through the guard's summary. She nodded as she read. "Although I am certain I did not feel as threatened as your narrative states, the facts are mostly accurate." she stated. With a stroke of the quill she signed her name, with remarkable penmanship. "Is this all, or do you require any more information?"

Kalian nodded to the sister, it was a good question. But Martin didn't answer, distracted by Elinowy's escort, Cainan.

Once Kalian and Sister Elinowy had taken the written document Martin handed them, he turned towards Monsieur Sauvage. The - obviously wealthy - nobleman was watching the proceedings, apparently bored or perhaps amused, it was hard to tell with that poker face of his.

"Monsieur Sauvage, how fortunate that you should have come today. I must inform you that we have received a formal complaint against you, from a Ferelden citizen by the name of Weylin."

The name did not seem to spark any recognition in Monsieur Sauvage, who looked vaguely nonplussed. "Only one complaint? I must be slipping. Who is this... Weylin, again?" Cainan asked, casually.

"A mercenary," Martin specified. "Whom apparently you, huh, had an altercation with. In a tavern. Yesterday. Since you're here, perhaps you might give us your version of what happened?" He already had the testimony of the innkeeper and the waitress, and he didn't feel particularly motivated to arrest the man, but he did want to see his reaction and what he'd have to say. If nothing else, it should be entertaining. Martin did want to make Monsieur Sauvage sweat a little, as a just retribution for making him handle a brawl complaint at the end of his shift, but also as a mild attempt at dissuasion should any future similar happenstance occur in the future.

"Mercenary..." Cainan trailed off, thinking. "Oh, the lout in the *Rose*!" he said, suddenly as realisation dawned. "Why yes, I did engage a gentleman fitting that description in a bit of a lesson in etiquette; he was typically... *Ferelden* about the affair - all hands, no grace," Cainan said with casual

ease. "I *ensured* he would remember the... appropriate way to address a lady in Orlais. *Before* laying his hands on her," he added, his eyes taking a dangerous glint. He observed the guardsman with the same easy smile, but harder eyes.

Kalian regarded Cainan with surprise. The Rose... he probably meant the Rose of Orlais, one of the taverns close to the docks. The proprietor... Robert, Kalian recalled... should have expelled that Fereldan mercenary. Ben and Tessa, and Kalian himself for that matter, would never have allowed such behavior at the Raven. Then again, the Raven's clientele were mainly locals, drinking with their neighbors.

"Sounds like Cainan gave that Fereldan an education." Kalian wondered whether or not Martin would consider that education deserved. A Fereldan mercenary was unlikely to file a report to the guardsman if only his pride was damaged.

"So you gave the Fereldan gentleman a lesson on behalf of a lady?" Martin lifted an eyebrow. *Lady* was a kind way of addressing a waitress, and not something he had expected of Monsieur Sauvage, given his social status. But maybe this had been more about an excuse to start a brawl than any real concern about the lady in question. Either way, Cainan did not seem to care too much, nor did he seem overly worried about the potential repercussions of his behaviour. "Next time you might want to report this man to the Guard, rather than take matters into your own hands," he stated mildly. "Starting brawls can cost lives, and livelihoods, and usually not that of the offending party."

Cainan, though he felt no real need to alter his behaviour, nodded his assent. "I will endeavour to avoid such situations in the future."

Considering the matter closed to his satisfaction, Martin turned towards Kalian and Sister Elinowy.

"Thank you for signing your testimonies. This definitely makes a conviction more likely, though of course the final decision belongs to the magistrates. Sister, Monsieur Sauvage, I do not keep you any longer. Kalian, if you're ready, we have this other matter to take care of."

Kalian cleared his throat. "Uh, Martin... Sister Elinowy was planning to look in on the refugee camp after our deposition, with Cainan as her, uh, escort. That's why Cainan came to the guardhouse with us." It seemed Cainan might have a particular penchant for defending ladies. "I suggested we go together."

The Chantry sister stood as the men were talking. "An excellent suggestion Mr. Winter. I would certainly appreciate being accompanied by several of Jader's finest gentlemen." she motioned for Martin to stand up and join them.

Cainan looked at the other two men, smiling. Suddenly his chivalry was undercut somewhat by the rush of others to fulfil the same role, though he reasoned that there was nothing better to do, and perhaps a good deed in the eyes of the chantry... or, at least, the *city guard* might work in his favour

later on. *Especially* as he had no intention of avoiding brawls in the future.

"I've never worked with the city guard before, but it's true that I intend to escort the good Sister to ensure she didn't come to any harm; if we're all heading to the same place, it makes sense to travel together," he said, casually leaning against the wall as he did so. "I suppose this means it's not just a few errant rumours then? People are disappearing?"

Kalian pulled the partial flyer from his pocket and handed it to Cainan. "I found this on the street last night. Someone is offering substantial wages, but for what isn't exactly clear." He gestured for Cainan to turn the sheet over. "Someone wrote a note on the other side. Martin says a pregnant woman by that name reported her betrothed missing. Did you say you've heard rumors?"

Martin wasn't so sure about bringing in someone else, but then he wasn't really sure about any of this. This whole operation was a spur-of-the-moment decision, one he might live to regret later. At the same time, ignoring those disappearances had never sat well with him. At this point, he wasn't in a position to refuse any help. At least, judging by the state the Fereldan mercenary had ended up in, Monsieur Sauvage could hold his own in a fight.

"As Kalian says," he said, "We've had a few reports. Nothing sufficiently tangible to warrant an official investigation, but too many similar occurrences for it to be a complete coincidence. I'd be interested to know where you heard those rumours. That might give us further clues. So far the only disappearances I heard of were Fereldans, if other people are being targeted we need to find out."

OOC: Continued in 'No Meeran or Athenril for these'

## No Meeran or Athenril for these

Posted on 22 Nov 2020 @ 8:36am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**2,598 words; about a 13 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Refugee Camp

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 16th - morning

OOC: Continued from post 'Zoinks, look for clues'

Kalian pushed the constabulary door opened and stepped out, followed closely enough by his companions that there was no need to hold the door open this time. Kalian turned east at once to walk along the road toward the footpath that crossed the river to the alienage and the refugee camp.

Martin followed, moving his shoulders uncomfortably in his civilian clothing. Going into the refugee camp dressed as a guard would be asking for trouble, especially when he was off-duty, but without

the authority of his rank he felt oddly vulnerable. He hadn't gone so far as to leave his sword behind though, and it hung comfortably at his hip. The refugee camp had started out as a refuge for the downtrodden but over the years had grown increasingly cut-throat, and even in plain day light the guard rarely ventured so far out. In truth, most of these refugees had no legal existence at all in Orlais, which made them ideal victims for any unsavoury schemes.

In addition to that there had been problems before, when guard patrols had been beaten up and forced to leave the area, and they had been lucky to make it out alive. This was another reason why no one was willing to look into these disappearances. They saw the refugees a little more than an inconvenience, and many would be happy to see them disappear altogether.

Cainan had made a point of *not* spending a huge amount of time in the areas surrounding the refugee camp, and saw nothing in its nature now that made him regret this decision. It wasn't the obvious lack of any rule of law, or the predatory eyes that watched the group as they passed, or even the obvious organised crime that operated in broad daylight; no, it was the *desperation* that pervaded the camp as if a bad smell, or a fog. Cainan liked his wine, his women and his zest for life, and he appreciated a good mix of all three at any one time. This place... drained the contentment from his life whenever he thought about it. He looked over to Elinowy, but as expected she seemed unaffected by the setting; a chantry sister must, after all, be a champion of the needy and the dispossessed; and these people were certainly needy and lacking in possessions.

"How long has this been here now?" Cainan mused as they walked.

"Since the beginning of the blight in Ferelden," said Kalian, looking sideways at the nobleman. "About four years."

Jaslyn hid in the shadows of a building across from the guardhouse with her hood up and observed the four humans emerge. Kalian Winter, she'd managed to recall while waiting, was one of two children born to a cousin of Hahren Liriel - an elf who'd actually *married* a human. Not that she personally didn't enjoy bedding the occasional human, but to purposely give birth to human children was appalling. Not that she could have children, with the taint in her blood. The Chantry sister was still with Sauvage, her quarry. Strange, because Jaslyn hadn't pegged the nobleman as the religious sort. And they were now accompanied by another human man, a city guard, apparently. Jaslyn decided to wait until the foursome were well ahead of her - the Sister, in her scarlet robes was hard to lose - then follow.

Kalian asked Elinowy, "Are you planning to minister to the refugees, sister? Back when Fereldans began to arrive at the beginning of the blight, they found housing at the workhouse at the edge of town - the Chantry oversees it. But soon, the workhouse was overwhelmed and a camp grew around it. Your presence will be a great comfort, I'm sure, but you should know it's also a dangerous place for the unwary."

Elinowy kindly tapped Kalian's arm. "While I do appreciate your concern, I trust the Maker as my shield and strength from those that would do me harm. The downtrodden require compassion and

generosity. I will give what I can, and if something comes up, the Maker will provide." The smile on her face was serene like one walking through a mountain meadow, not strolling into the filth and desperation of a refugee camp. Her optimism could be infectious, hopefully more so than the camp that would soon surround them.

"Even so," Martin put in, "it wouldn't hurt to use caution. After all, the Maker provides to those who provide for themselves. I recommend that any overt show of wealth be avoided. Also limit eye contact and stay close together. If you have a purse, I suggest hiding it inside your clothes rather than hanging it at your belt. If you see beggars, do not stop or even slow down. Usually it is just a ploy to see whether you have any money." He was looking more particularly at Elinowy as he spoke. "Sister, while I respect your drive for compassion, there is a time and place for that."

"I will keep aware of my surroundings should the situation deteriorate, but I am certain the Maker will not place me into a situation that we cannot overcome." she answered confidently.

Martin turned to Cainan next. "Are you sure you want to come along, Monsieur ? I do not mean to frighten you but it's quite obvious that you are well-off, and over there that will make you a target. There may be real danger for you, perhaps more so than for Sister Elinowy. I cannot order you to stay behind, but I do recommend it strongly. I can't guarantee your protection out there."

"I appreciate the concern, but I do not frighten easily. Besides, I'm curious to see where this all leads, and if I have *one* failing, I would say it was my curiosity..."

At least Martin wasn't too worried for Kalian. Cainan's wealth and Sister Elinowy's cloth made them targets, and his own status as a guard did not help either ; Kalian was perhaps the best suited to the task at hand. His skin colour showed his Rivaini origins, and the refugees would relate to that more than to Orlesian features, even if Kalian's family had lived in Jader for generations. He was not rich, if not poor either, so he would be less tempting a target. He was perhaps the safest out of all of them.

"Kalian, I think you should do the talking," Martin said. "I'll just loom behind you and try to look dangerous."

"Try?" Crossing the footbridge, Kalian flashed his new friend a cheerful smirk. Even without his uniform, Martin looked like the kind of man who would help the vulnerable. "You definitely look dangerous. I doubt anyone will mess with you, or with any of us while we're together." Also, he wouldn't need to use his magic.

As they passed the alienage Kalian said, "I don't mind talking to the refugees." That was the reason they were going to the camp. "They are just people after all. If we treat them with respect, show them we care about their situation, then..."

Kalian's speech came to an abrupt stop as the workhouse loomed into view, surrounded by the ragged tent settlement that had grown around it like mushrooms. It had been a while since he

visited the refugee camp as a human, instead of flying overhead. The refugee camp did look dangerous.

The poverty of the camp was very apparent. Elinowy had to admit to herself that she really had nothing beyond her prayers to help these people. Venturing into places like this was much simpler with a full mission of Sisters at her side and of course Templars making themselves very obvious at the gates. But her journey was to be based in humility and reliance upon the providence of the Maker through others. She did say a quick prayer as they entered the camp.

It had been a couple of months since Martin had set foot in the camp - last time it had been to look into the fencing of stolen goods after a streak of robberies in the wealthier districts of town - and it looked the same, if not worse than before. Access to clean drinking water was always an issue, as proven by the pervasive smell that surrounded the camp like a halo of misery. Some of the stronger children and women made a living hoisting buckets of water from the river for a modest fee, and some people bathed in the sea, but there was definitely no bathing house in the camp.

There were a lot of apparently idle people about. Some children dressed in rags played in the street with a ball. A few men and women lounged in front of their huts, made of wood, mud and whatever odds and end they could get their hands on. The most fortunate were lodged in the workhouse but that could not be more than a hundred, and even that many would be stretching the local Chantry's resources. Most of these people had just fallen on hard times and now found it nearly impossible to get a job - no one would hire a Fereldan from the camp - but there were also more than a few thieves and murderers in the lot, as Martin was well aware. He kept his hand close to his sword and his eyes on their surroundings, assessing each man and woman as a potential threat before moving on to the next one.

Cainan walked as he always did, with confidence and authority, one hand on his rapier and a lack of concern that either discouraged challenge from those who knew that had not the skill to match him, or *invited* challenge from those with the mistaken belief that they did. There were a couple of obvious tails on their group, watching them from a safe distance, but none that seemed willing to engage the confident fencer, or the rough-looking bruiser that was Martin in civilian clothing.

Jaslyn had followed at a distance, listening to their conversation with her keen elven hearing, and paused at the gates to the alienage. It seemed her quarry planned to visit the camp. She decided to wait until they began to mingle with the refugees, then saunter in as though she had business there herself.

The first group of people they encountered were day laborers, people who appeared reasonably clean, loitering near the workhouse gates and available for hire to anyone looking for cheap temporary labor. Beyond them were tents and lean-tos, some single, some in groups, and a few more sturdy cabins. The refugee camp was like a haphazard, run-down village, peppered by campfires. Conditions here were worse, by far, than the alienage. A few children clung to men and women who sent them furtive glances, but many of the very young refugees lived in the old workhouse, cared for by the Chantry.

Elinowy was acutely aware of the effect her robes had on the refugees around her. To their dismay, she was not accompanied by wagons or retainers bearing supplies, so most merely bowed their heads to the sister as she passed. She kept a pleasant and welcoming smile on her face. IF they passed close enough, she would reach out a hand to touch their shoulder. It was important for the downtrodden to feel human touch. When so many looked on them as undesirable, a simple gesture could help convey the Maker's love for his creation.

Well, it looked like the Sister's habit still granted her the respect of the masses, even in this downtrodden hole. At least for now, in plain daylight, while she was not alone. Matters would have been quite different at night, if she'd been venturing here alone. But she wasn't going to do that, or at least Martin fervently hoped so.

As they approached several of the men waiting approached hopefully. Having identified the sister and Monsieur Sauvage as the wealthier ones in the group, they focused their efforts on them.

"Muscle for hire, ser ?"

"Sister, can I do anything for you ?"

"Please pick me, I can read and I know my Chant !" As way of proof the man started singing the first verses of the canticle of Andraste.

Unfortunately he had been blessed with a voice better suited for the dissonant verses. Martin winced slightly. He had to respect the Sister's ability to keep her smile serene as the holiest of canticles was butchered in song in front of her.

"I'd pay him to stop singing," he whispered to Kalian.

Kalian nodded in fervent agreement with Martin. "That may be his main source of income."

Elinowy looked upon the man savagely butchering the sacred verses. She stepped away from her companions and walked up to the man, whose dress was as rough as his singing voice, stood directly in his way, and began to accompany him in the singing of the canticle. The sister's voice was significantly better, but she kept her pacing and rythm to match the wretched man. And as their two voices joined in unison, her's rose louder and the skill of a trained Chantress was very apparent. As if the robes were not enough, the song attracted the attention of those gathered around. Many of the devout joined their voices to the chant, and from the muddy streets and unsanitary odors grew something hauntingly beautiful and unprecedented. Elinowy turned to face the growing crowd, taking the shoulders of the man who had started the chant and turning him also towards the crowd and stepping back leaving him at the center of the eerie harmonies. She smiled serenely. The Maker wanted all of his creation to sing. For just a moment this little mud hole in Jader was a slice of paradise.



Kalian stared in open-mouth wonder as Elinowy transformed the small crowd with her beautiful singing. As the music grew, he nudged Martin, and whispered, "Now you know how persuasive she can be."

Martin finally remembered to close his mouth. Normally he'd have joined in the Chant but he'd been too surprised to utter a sound. For a brief moment he'd been transported back in the Chantry during prayers. He could almost smell the wood and incense, instead of the lingering stench of the camp.

"I guess music does soothe the savage breast," he whispered back.

"Sister Elinowy," said Kalian, "That was incredible. I don't think I've ever seen such a moving demonstration of the Chant of Light's power."

Elinowy spun herself about looking at the gathering of faithful. A proud smile crossed her face. "Give people the opportunity to help one another and make their lives better, and they tend to impress you."

OOC: Continued in post 'Found Cake'

Jaslyn had been weighing the possible ways she could get Sauvage's attention and draw him into a preferably private conversation. So far she had considered picking his pocket, challenging him to a duel, and propositioning him. But then, the Chantry sister instigated a singing distraction and an opportunity Jaslyn could not resist. The elf took advantage of the crowd to ease up close. She rested her hand on his arm and spoke in a low voice pitched only for his ears. "Pardon me, monsieur Sauvage, I need to speak with you." Without another word, she strode back toward the alienage and came to a stop, within sight of his companions, but well out of hearing range.

OOC: Continued in post 'Suspicious Distraction'

## Found Cake

Posted on 22 Nov 2020 @ 8:40am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**1,283 words; about a 6 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Refugee Camp

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 16th - morning

OOC: Continued from 'No Meeran or Athenril for these'

Kalian saw Cainan follow a short hooded figure away from the refugee camp, but he was still close enough to help if they got into trouble. Kalian pulled the torn flyer from a pocket and addressed

Martin and Elinowy. "Why don't we try showing this to a few people, and see what they say?"

"I guess..." Martin said distractedly, eyes on Cainan, frowning slightly in concern. "I did tell him, no alms..." his hand rested on his sword, ready to intervene should Cainan appear to need it ; but so far he seemed to be handling the situation. Martin stifled a gesture of annoyance. He couldn't keep people safe if they strolled away to tend to their own business. That Cainan seemed to be able to handle himself was neither here nor there.

"Cainan seems quite capable of looking after himself," said Kalian. As he watched, the person who'd accosted Cainan and enticed him away put back their hood, and he saw it was a pretty elf-woman. "It's only one elf, and whatever it's about, doesn't appear to involve alms."

"Elves..." Elinowy uttered. The joyous exultation of the people of the camp joining the Chant in one voice suddenly became dulled. Elves brought deceit and treachery. She turned and looked with narrowed eyes at Cainan in the distance. He seemed unbothered by the wretched thing, she reminded herself that it was his business, not hers. Still Elves intervening in their undertaking boded poorly. She would need to keep her wits about her and trust the Maker would make truth known.

"I suppose you're right," Martin granted grudgingly. At least they were still close to the entrance of the camp and in plain daylight, so danger should be minimal, and they needed to get the ball rolling before he had to show up for his next shift. "In the middle of the day, the worst that can happen is for him to get his purse stolen I guess." And Monsieur Sauvage looked the sort who could afford to lose his purse.

The small crowd had begun to disperse, and the hopefuls looking for work having realized they weren't about to get hired had lost interest. The closest was a brawny man, his short brown hair turning grey at the temples, lines of worry and weariness etched deep in his face. What he had been before ending up here was anyone's guess. A farmer, perhaps, or a farmhand. A great many of them had lost everything, their land still tainted and unable to grow anything.

"How about we start with this one ?" Martin suggested.

They approached him and the man looked up, wary but lips turning up in a smile when he saw the Sister.

"Thanks, Sister," he said gruffly. He spoke decent Orlesian but with a thick Fereldan accent. "That was a mighty fine Chant you gave us. Our lot ain't used to that. Not that many services down here. Ah, huh, forgive me, the name's Breagan. I'm a good worker. I know you're not hiring right now - " there was a sort of canny world-weariness in him as he said that, " - but if you get the chance to recommend me..."

"Good to meet you Breagan. If I do hear of anyone looking for help, I will remember you." Kalian reached out and shook the man's hand. "We are looking for help of a different sort, Breagan. Can you take a look at this? Have you seen it before?" Kalian held out the torn flyer.

Martin stuck close to his two companions, hand resting on the hilt of his sword as a subtle warning not to look for trouble. He scanned their surroundings again, biting back a curse when he realized that Cainan was nowhere in sight. There was nothing he could do about that now, but he'd have to make sure Cainan did make it out of the camp in one piece.

"Oh... sure, why not." Breagan took the scrap of paper Kalian gave him and peered at it. "Oh. Oooh. That thing." He glanced at Kalian, then at Martin, narrowing slightly his eyes at him, probably seeing the Guard in him even without the uniform. "I knew it was trouble from the start. It's been going around the camp. My sister wanted me to apply but I told her, nothing honest pays that good. I was right, wasn't I? Else the guard wouldn't get involved." His eyes rested again on Martin, who sighed in annoyance. How did they *always* manage to spot him as a guard, no matter what?

Kalian smirked at Martin. So much for the guard's cunning disguise. Although in Kalian's opinion it said a lot about Martin's character – not just to him, but to the refugees - that Martin was willing to pursue this problem on his off-time. "What do you know about the work they're hiring for?"

"Huh, well, I don't know. I didn't apply and I told my friends not to." Breagan shrugged. "Maybe you can ask Isla? She lives two streets back from here. I think her sister was thinking of taking that job. Can't blame her if she did, she's got her ailing aunt to take care of. And that orphan she adopted. And a dog. Who can afford to feed a dog, really." He rolled his eyes. "Well. I did tell her."

Now that he mentioned it, Martin noticed that a few dogs were sniffing around piles of filth, one of them lapping the dirty water that had pooled at the corner of a house. They looked like the mongrel offspring of Mabari and local strays.

Kalian regarded the dogs curiously, an idea germinating in the back of his mind. "According to Fereldans, Mabari are supposed to be quite intelligent. In battle, they fight side-by-side with them. It's said that they have some kind of bond with their master. I'd bet some of those Mabari know where people are being taken, if they could only tell us." Or... would those dogs communicate with a wolf?

"Thank you, Breagan. If I hear of work, I'll recommend you." Kalian shook his hand again, intending to speak to his sister about the man, although Tessa and Ben already employed as many people as the Raven could support.

Kalian turned to Elinowy and Martin. "Let's look for this woman, Isla, that he mentioned."

Elinowy nodded. Her dedicated protector had wandered off with the... elf... and had not yet returned. Troubling. She looked on the two gentlemen with her, they seemed more than capable of dealing with the sensitive nature of the refugee park. Kalian was highly empathetic with the poor and Martin clearly kept a presence of authority and strength. She prayed for Ser Sauvage, but her immediate purpose was to find this Ilsa woman.

"By all means. Brother Breagan, please lead the way." she requested.

Breagan half-opened his mouth then, after a last glance around, thought better of it. He'd obviously not expected to be showing them around but the day was slow, and it was the sister who'd asked. Martin suspected he'd have gotten a less positive response if he'd been the one to suggest this arrangement.

"Eh, why not." Breagan raked a hand in his hair. "Don't got nothing better to do. This way then."

Martin's suspicious nature flared ; it objected to them being led anywhere by one of the locals, no matter how honest the man appeared to be. But he also knew they wouldn't get anywhere if they didn't take a chance at some point, so he swallowed back his objections and followed meekly.

OOC: Continued in 'A Sister's story'

## A Sister's story

Posted on 28 Nov 2020 @ 11:23am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**3,361 words; about a 17 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Jader - Fereldan refugee Camp

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 16th - morning

The refugee camp grew more miserable the deeper they went into it. Some of the huts were mere scraps of cloth and broken driftwood, and baked mud. There definitely was no shortage of mud, and it had been put to good use by the Fereldans. As they walked Martin noticed several people selling earthenware and shaping mud bricks, that they then baked in ovens dug into the ground. Others seemed to be working leather ; what animal it came from, Martin could only guess, but it did look disturbingly canine. That made the content of the stew one old lady was selling even more suspicious.

People stared. At the sister, mostly, and then surreptitiously at Martin. They paid a lot less attention to Kalian, who may be the only one who perhaps might walk safely this neighbourhood near nightfall. Even though he had somewhat better clothes than the refugees, and was cleaner, he walked in this particular way, as if he belonged there. Martin envied silently his ability to just blend in.

Elinowy made her way through the mud and filth of the camp with poise and grace. She had lived in squalor and had brought relief to many in her local village set upon by hard times. Places like the refugee camp were a slice in time. Those that scraped and clawed to survive today were the farmers and artisans of tomorrow if they persevered with the Maker's will. The filth and poverty could be a crucible to building true character. She did not look down on them or pity them. If humanity joined

together even these mud holes could be turned to paradise.

"Here we are." Breagan stopped in front of a shack, as miserable as the rest of them even though some effort had gone into making it more homely. There were even some wild flowers growing in a pot on the window sill. "Isla ! You there ?"

After a second a hand pushed back the scrap of cloth that hang like a curtain where a door should have been. A thin woman with grey hair twisted in a bun looked warily at them. In her hands she cradled a steaming mug.

"Yes ?"

"The Sister wanted to speak to you." Breagan nodded deferentially at Sister Elinowy. "About that job. The one Orla was thinking of taking ?"

Isla's face grew more pinched, and Martin couldn't help but notice the dark rings around her eyes and the deep lines etched in her face. "What about it ?"

A low whine came from behind her and a dog came between her legs, looking curiously at the newcomers. It was quite ugly, with a head too big compared to the rest of its body and a shaggy white coat, but the hound's blue eyes looked eerily savvy. The dog whined again, almost as if voicing a question, head tilted as it looked at Elinowy, then Martin and finally at Kalian.

"Eh - you're keeping Snowball ?" Breagan said, looking surprised. "But Orla - "

"She's gone. Not back yet. What do you want to know ?" Isla's tone was not quite hostile, but not warm either. If Breagan had not been there, it was unlikely she'd have spoken to them at all.

"A pleasure to meet you Madam Isla," began Kalian with a respectful bow, his eyebrows knit together with unfeigned concern. "My name is Kalian, and this is Martin and Sister Elinowy." He crouched and offered his hand toward the dog, who cautiously closed the gap to take a sniff.

"We've seen this dodgy flyer offering work for pay that sounds too good to be true. And we've heard about people going missing." Kalian showed her the torn flyer. Snowball allowed Kalian to give him scratches behind his ears. His tail swayed gently but the dog remained alert, listening to the conversation like he understood. "The good people of this camp have suffered enough. My friends and I want to investigate and find out what's really going on. So, please tell us, where did your sister go to apply, and what did they tell her about the work she'd be doing?"

Isla leveled a skeptical frown at the young man, and would have told him to mind his own business if not for the Chantry sister with him... and Snowball seemed to like him, and the dog was never wrong about people. "The meeting place is down the road past the so-called workhouse, about an hour's walk. She spoke to a dwarf woman with a real qunari bodyguard. Said it'd be hard work, digging underground, that's why the pay is good."

The haggard woman looked up at the beautiful, tall Chantry sister, like a vision of Andraste. "Sister, if Orla is in trouble, will you help her?"

"The Maker be with you. Might we come in?" Elinowy stated with a kindly smile and a gentle voice. She opened her arms disarmingly as she stepped forward to enter the woman's hovel.

It looked like Isla had been about to say no, but sister Elinowy did not really give her a chance to get the word out ; she was already sweeping inside the hut. Isla stepped aside, perhaps moved by an ingrained respect for the sister's habit ; then, looking at the rest of them, she let her shoulders slump.

"I suppose you might as well come in, then," she muttered waspishly.

Kalian watched open-mouthed as Elinowy barged into the poor woman's house. Chantry sister or not, it was an appalling intrusion, trampling the last vestiges of this poor woman's dignity. He hung back, exchanging a look with Breagan.

Breagan looked like he may object, then thought better of it and went in with Martin. Snowball kept sniffing Kalian's heels, apparently intensely curious about something. Maybe Kalian had stepped into manure - or worse.

Kalian went in last, feeling profoundly uncomfortable to be where he had no right to be.

The hut did not look much better inside than outside. Dried mud crackled, revealing the flimsy wooden structure underneath. Some of the holes had been covered with scraps of cloth or plugged with straw. Though Isla clearly tried hard to keep the place clean there was still a pervasive smell, suggesting that the neighbours may be piling their trash somewhere nearby. A small fire burned in a hole dug in the dirt. Some of the fuel was wood, but also dried manure - which, in fairness, burnt well and was cheap to come by.

A small statuette of Andraste had been put up in a small alcove dug inside the wall. That explained Isla's reaction to Sister Elinowy ; Fereldans as a whole were rather devout. Martin could not fault them for that.

"Well, then ?" Isla gathered the frayed ends of her shawl and wrapped it more tightly around her, back ramrod straight, wearing her pride like armour as she let strangers into her miserable home. "Do you lot work for the guard ?" She glanced at Martin, who tried not to groan out loud. *Everytime.*

The sister moved deliberately around the modest hovel, carefully looking at the minimal amount of sentimental affects. Reaching down by the fire hole she took up a small bundle of dried weeds likely used as kindling. She cupped the brittle stalks in her hands, balling them together like a nest. Taking a small twig, she lit it in the hole and took it and her small bundle to the icon of Andraste. Patting the small ball of seeds down at the base of the statue, she set them alight with the twig. The

flames were not large, but flared quickly and set about smoking. The tendrils of the miniature blaze lightly scorched the statuette. She blew gently on the embers stirring them to flame again and sang ""Arise, Aegis of the Faith. You are not forgotten. Neither man nor Maker shall forget your bravery So long as I remember."

Taking her time, she turned back toward Isla with great sensitivity. "Thank you for allowing us into your home. It is important that we know the beauty of a life, not just find answers to questions." she said.

This time, Kalian managed to keep his mouth shut as Elinowy used the last of this poor woman's kindling to damage one her few possessions and create a reminder of the Maker's bride being burned at the stake. He sighed. "Madam Isla, when was the last time you saw your sister? Is there anything else you can tell us?"

"There isn't much to tell. Isla went to the meeting place, got the job, said she'd be back in a while. I'm keeping Snowball while she's gone."

"What about Seamus ?" Breagan asked, genuine concern coating his voice. "That's Orla's adopted son," he added for the benefit of Elinowy, Kalian and Martin.

"He's working. The docks. They have use for scrubbers. He'll be here tonight." Isla looked at them in turns. "What's going on ? Why are you all interested in what happens here ? No one ever cared, before. But now we're finally getting some good jobs, you pay attention ?"

It wasn't true that no one ever helped or cared. Kalian's family had helped when the refugees began arriving. But Jader had gotten used to the refugee presence and had fallen into complacency. If he was honest with himself, Kalian might have done more to help them.

"Your cries are heard by the Maker, and while situations do not seem to change, the will of the Maker is always at work. You are not forgotten. We come to seek the lost and end oppression of the faithful." Elinowy responded.

"I truly hope this work is on the up-and-up, that this flyer has lead to a good job for your sister, and everyone else who was hired." Kalian recalled that after breakfast he had wrapped a pain au chocolat in a clean cloth, intending to give it to Martin. He took it from his pocket and handed it to Isla, then bowed to her and exited her home.

Breathing deep the smoke from the small pyre she had constructed, Elinowy completed the rite of adoration for the bride of the Maker. She had blessed the home with the greatest gift she had to give.

Martin watched Kalian leave, holding back a wince. Maybe this whole thing could have been handled better, he thought as the smell of burnt wood wafted to his nose. Saying so here and now would hardly be helpful though.

"Forgive me, but how long has your sister been gone?" he asked, using his good guard voice. The one he used to get information out of witnesses, as gentle and soothing as he could make it. The glower Isla gave him suggested it wasn't working so well this time, but she still answered.

Kalian waited just outside Isla's destitute home, listening to Martin continue questioning Isla through the flimsy walls. Isla's visitors had attracted a few hollow-eyed onlookers, and Kalian hoped the attention they gave the woman didn't bring her trouble. It was perhaps too easy for the citizens of Jader to look away. The blight ended three years ago, and yet these people still suffered. He made himself bear witness to the plight of the Ferelden refugees. Worse than losing their lives, the refugees had lost hope. They were ripe for exploitation.

"It's been three days. Almost four. But she said she's been gone a while, so there's nothing to worry about." She said it like she was trying to convince herself.

"Did she get any pay in advance?"

Isla actually laughed, a harsh, mocking sound. "No one would ever pay one of us in advance. Too scared we might run off with the money without doing the work."

This was looking more and more fishy. "Do you know of anyone else who took the job?"

"A couple. Haemish from Redford and Gil, Robert's son, from down the street."

"Any of them come back yet?"

Isla hesitated, biting her lip. This time there was fear in her demeanour, as well as anger. "Not yet," she snapped at last. "What are you implying?"

"Nothing," Martin said gently. "Sorry for the inconvenience. And thank you for your time."

"Wait," Isla said as he made to leave. She was still holding Kalian's pain au chocolat in her hand, clutching it so tight that some of the chocolate oozed from the end of the pastry.

Martin turned back with a quizzical look.

"My sister... Orla... she's a good person. I know you don't believe that, but she is. If something fishy is going on, she had nothing to do with it. I know our lot usually get blamed when something goes wrong." Isla exhaled a breath, mouth turning down, the bitterness apparent in her expression. "I cooperated with you, because I want you to know we're honest folk. Humble, but honest. Tell that to the guard, or whoever sent you sniffing around."

"If that makes you feel better, I really don't think that your sister has anything to do with this. If anything, she's -" he almost said, *a victim*, but caught himself in time. "- involved by mere



happenstance. But we'll do our best to get to the bottom of this." Martin hesitated just a moment before adding, "if you hear anything, please send word to the guard station. My name's Martin."

He was taking a small risk, telling her this, however much she'd already guessed. He'd acted somewhat impulsively, and hoped he wouldn't live to regret it. Isla's eyes narrowed slightly, then she simply gave him a sharp nod, and said nothing more as he left her house.

Elinowy saw the others taking their leave. She stamped her fingers in ash left before the statuette. She marked her forehead with a rough shape of the sun and turned to Isla. "Blessing upon your home and all who reside here. We will protect your sister if need be and return those you love to you as the Maker wills. "May I?" she asked of the woman lifting her soot stained fingers before her. The woman looked at her oddly, but bowed her head in submission to the sister. Elinowy traced the symbol of the sun upon the woman's forehead. "May the Maker grant you every blessing. Go in peace to bring the light to the world." She then turned and made her departure from the home, leaving Isla dumbfounded as to what all had just happened.

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Judging from the sun's position, Kalian guessed the time at midday. After Martin and Elinowy emerged from Isla's hovel, Kalian said, "I think I'll be taking a walk tomorrow morning, and see if I can find the dwarf woman she mentioned, and learn more about," he held up the flyer, "reclaiming my dignity."

Martin frowned. "You can't just show up, alone. These are potentially dangerous people we're dealing with. Clearly there are more disparities than we know about, and we know about quite a few. This suggests either a killer, or a large number of organised people."

He turned around, looking at the camp surrounding them. The sun had risen higher while they spoke to Isla, and while a few onlookers still gawked most of the refugees had gotten over their curiosity and gone back to their business. The warm light of the sun did not make the camp much more hospitable, though.

"There's no profit in killing poor people, I think they probably are getting recruited to work." said Kalian. Several nefarious explanations came to his mind, but he wasn't going to voice them where Isla might overhear through her thin walls. "Just going to the meeting place and applying for a job should be safe enough."

"I didn't say you shouldn't go. I'm saying I'm going with you." Martin pulled at the coppery strands that fell in his face. "The hair's shaggy enough, with a bit of dirt I'm sure I can make a convincing refugee."

Kalian rolled his eyes. "I doubt it. There's no way you'd pass as a refugee, Martin. The closer to the truth your story is, the more believable. I'd go with you're a guardsman disgraced for some reason. Maybe you arrested the wrong nobleman, or gambling debts. Oh, I know. Caught in a compromising

position with the guard captain's spouse..." Just as Kalian was warming up to creating a spicy cover story for Martin, the Chantry sister emerged.

The sister came out of the hovel quite some time after Martin. She walked up to the pair, the ashen markings clearly on her face. "I think that went well. Did we learn where the workers are going for this job?"

"We know where to meet with the person doing the hiring," said Kalian. "Martin and I plan to pose as potential workers and ask questions tomorrow morning."

"Oh acting!" Elinowy said excitedly. "I performed in several of the Chantry passion plays when I was young. I even got selected to be Andraste the year I entered the order. What part shall I play?" she asked with eager eyes.

"Uh... Elinowy... Martin was just saying, it could be dangerous, and he's not wrong," said Kalian with a smirk in Martin's direction since his comment conflicted with what he'd said to the guardsman moments ago. He'd only known the Chantry sister for a short time, but he already knew it would be nearly impossible to talk her out of anything she'd set her mind to. "Let's head back to town, and talk about our plans for tomorrow."

"The Maker will provide for us. A place thriving with such depth of faith and hope will certainly give us a clear path to proceed. Or even an unclear path, but we will proceed." Elinowy replied stoically.

"Well, it'd still be a good idea to have a plan," Martin said. He was beginning to wonder if the Sister tagging along was a good idea. Not that he didn't appreciate her volunteering to help, but he could tell even from their short acquaintance that she was not the kind who could ever manage to keep a low profile.

As they passed the alienage gates, Kalian said, "My sister will be expecting me back this afternoon to help out with preparations and serving at the Raven's Roost this evening. I'll let her know I'll be away tomorrow." He wondered if Elinowy would need to a place to stay that night. "What about you two?"

"I go where the Maker leads me. For now, I can find my way about the city. I can rejoin you later at the Tavern if you wish. Or if I can provide some help to your sister in exchange for her generosity last night. I am at your service." Elinowy stated.

"I have to get to work," Martin said. "Actually I'm going to be late if I don't hurry. If you're busy tonight maybe we can meet early tomorrow to hash out a plan before we head to the meeting place. I'll also... ask around a bit. See if anyone'll talk to me about this whole thing. I think it's bigger than we suspected. So, anyway... should we meet at the inn tomorrow morning, Kalian ? If that's alright with you and the Sister, of course."

"Fine with me. We'll meet at the Raven in the morning. That's where I'll be until then," replied Kalian.

It felt good to have a plan, to be doing something. To the Chantry sister he said, "Cainan paid for your room last night, so I'm sure Tessa will welcome you tonight. You can come back with me now, or whenever you're ready." Even though he was pretty sure his warning would be ignored, he added, "If you decide to explore Jader, be careful."

Elinowy smiled kindly at Kalian. "Thank you for your offer. Again even if I might sleep next to your hearth it is enough for me. But I will certainly see you this evening and on the morrow of course. I would appreciate your company back a ways, but I must confess being quite new to Jader, and I really should be about familiarizing myself with the city and its people."

## Signing up for Trouble

Posted on 09 Dec 2020 @ 4:23pm by [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Mage Kalian Winter](#)

**1,847 words; about a 9 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th - morning

It was quite early when Martin came to the Raven's Roost, dressed in civilian clothing. The tunic may have been white once, years ago ; now it was sort of brownish and threadbare. The patchy trousers weren't much better. Martin had kept his standard issue boots, figuring that would work with pretending to be a disgraced guard or mercenary. After a long hesitation he'd decided to leave his sword behind. Swords were expensive, and not something that someone desperate enough to take this job would carry.

This aside he hadn't done anything to his appearance, except neglecting to shave this morning. The faint stubble gave him a roguish look, he thought. Maybe he should keep it even after this investigation was over.

He pushed the door to the inn. A couple of patrons were having breakfast in the common room, and the smell of fresh coffee lingered in the air. Kalian's sister seemed to be overseeing everything with the mastery of a knight-commander. She was so serious, compared to Kalian's more easy-going demeanour, it was strange to think they'd received the same education. Then again... under his carefree veneer, Kalian was a dedicated man ; as evidenced by his volunteering to help with the current situation. Martin gave Tessa a friendly wave.

"Good Morning, Martin," said Tessa, welcoming Kalian's new friend with a worried look. Her brother had tried to reassure her that he would be fine, escape or evasion was easy for a person of his talents. But, Tessa was more concerned about what could happen if and when the guardsman and the unusual Chantry sister saw those talents in action. "Have you eaten? Please, help yourself."

"Oh - thanks," Martin said. He filled a mug with the aromatic black brew and took a sip, taking his

time to savor it. Raoul had many qualities but he preferred tea in the morning, even though Martin had tried to show him the error of his ways. He'd given up in the end, and usually got his fix at the guard station, but the quality of Tessa's coffee was much better. Freshly ground, it seemed. "Thank you for your hospitality. I hope I'm not imposing. I don't want to take advantage of Kalian's kindness."

"You're not imposing. I'm happy to do what I can to help. It's the way Kalian and I were raised," said Tessa. Her brother was so excited to be doing something for his community. He hated always hiding his skills, but he did it so he could continue to be a part of her family and a part of her life. If Kalian was found out now, where would he go, what would he do?

Tessa appeared to be preoccupied still. In fact she'd been preoccupied the night before, too, and Martin couldn't blame her. He felt a little stab of guilt at the thought that he was letting Kalian get involved in Guard business. If he could have counted on the help of his fellow guards, he could have refused Kalian's well-intentioned offer ; but he didn't, and he was lucky that he hadn't been formally forbidden from pursuing this investigation, be it on his free time.

"Look, I... I just want you to know that I'll do my best to keep Kalian safe." He wanted to say more, but no matter how he tried to express it, it sounded awkward, so he just gave her a slightly forced smile.

"My brother is remarkably resourceful. The Maker blesses each of his children with different gifts, and Kalian promised me he wouldn't do anything stupid. I'd rather you promised he didn't end up incarcerated," said Tessa with a crooked smile as though she were making a joke, but she was thinking of Kalian locked in a circle tower. She gave Martin a genuinely fond smile. "He likes and respects you, Martin. So do I."

Kalian came down the stairs from his room, wearing an old pair of trousers and a patched tunic, a ragged cape that had once belonged to his father over his arm. Otherwise his appearance was much the same as usual. He'd changed his mind several times, but finally decided to leave his staff behind. Without his staff it would be harder to focus his magic, especially at a distance. But his staff could be confiscated, and he hoped not to need it.

"Martin!" Kalian greeted him with a wide grin, enthusiastic about the day ahead. He picked up a pain au chocolat from the table and bit into the sweet, flaky, buttery goodness. A smudge of chocolate at the side of his mouth, Kalian spoke with his mouth full. "So good. You have to try these, Martin. Coffee?" He picked up the pot with his other hand.

"Thanks, your sister was kind enough to offer me some already," Martin lifted his mug as way of proof. "Won't say no to the pain au chocolat though."

The pastry was an Orlesian staple, but the chocolate itself must be imported from Rivain. That was the advantage with Jader being a port city, they had access to a wider variety of goods. And Kalian's family had Rivaini roots, maybe they still had ties to that country that gave them more opportunities

for trade. The pastries were definitely amazing, still lukewarm from the oven.

As he ate, Martin eyed Kalian's disguise. His clothes were just as ragged as Martin's, and he would have looked properly miserable were it not for the bliss permeating his face as he took his first sip of coffee. They both looked a little bit too well-fed to be truly paupers, but that could work to their advantage ; clearly the people behind the flyer were looking to hire people in a good physical condition. Kalian had a bit less muscle than Martin perhaps, but still looked in good shape.

"So what's our cover story then ?" Martin asked after he swallowed his mouthful. "You got kicked out by your sister after you kept feeding freeloaders for free, and I got dishonourably discharged after accepting bribes in the guise of pain au chocolat ?"

"Yup, that works," said Kalian with a grin, then stuffed the last bite into his mouth and picked up another chocolate-filled croissant. "But to make it convincing, a man like you wouldn't want to talk about *why* you were dishonorably discharged." *Much like the guardsman didn't talk about why he left the templars.* But Kalian wasn't going to ask about that. Martin was entitled to his secrets, just like anyone.

As they talked together, a woman in a yellowed shawl covering an aged outfit that was far too tight moved from a nearby table over to them. She approached slowly. "Do you kind gentlemen have anything to help a downtrodden woman of the streets?" she said in a strong voice that made an effort to sound weak and frail. The woman's face smiled at them. The striking blue eyes and splash of red hair falling out from the shawl made it quite obvious who it was, not to mention the unusual height of the poor woman.

"Good morning, sister Elinowy," said Kalian, wiping his mouth on his sleeve and adding to his own unkept disguise. Under that old shawl, the tight tunic left far less to the imagination than her chantry robes, and Kalian took unabashed pleasure in appraising the sister's disguise. "I must say that you are beautiful no matter what you're wearing. But if I may make a suggestion... If you identify yourself as a *woman of the streets*, people may jump to an unintended conclusion about your, uh, profession."

Elinowy looked a bit perplexed at Kailian's comment. "...you mean...." she looked down at herself and briefly turned herself about, assessing her tight shirt and pants. She suddenly broke out in laughter. "I had not considered that. Oh my." she said laughing at herself.

"Wasn't that on purpose ?" Martin said with a slight grin, before he remembered who he was talking to. "Uh, no offense, sister. I just assumed the, er, assumption, was part of your disguise." He paused. The Sister's outfit really was more revealing than he would have liked, being at least two sizes too small. He didn't want the people they were tangling with to get any ideas. "Are you... quite sure that this is the best outfit for our mission ?"

A serene look returned to Elinowy's face. "This was the outfit provided. The Maker considers it to be adequate for our needs. I will not question it. If I must keep the facade of a common trollop, then

there is a need for it." she stated confidently, while at the same time draping the shawl lower to cover more of her chest.

Obviously there would be no disputing the Maker's will with Sister Elinowy. Martin would just have to accept that she knew what she was doing. Maybe she was right after all - other people would be too busy oggling to take a good look at her face.

"If you're sure," he conceded, bowing his head. "I suggest we keep using our real names. Sister Elinowy is a newcomer so won't be known, and Martin is a common enough name. Though your name is a bit more unusual, Kalian, so maybe you should pick a fake name?"

Martin wasn't worried so much about Kalian, but about his sister and their business. If he was recognized and they successfully put an end to whatever was going on, it might leave a few dangerous people feeling less than charitable about the three of them. Martin had no family in Jader, nor Sister Elinowy, but Kalian did.

"A fake name?" Kalian shrugged. "Do you really think I need one?"

The tavern's back door opened and Kalian's niece Iris ran in, followed by her father Ben carrying baby Gabriel. Kalian picked up Iris, and she threw her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. Tessa encircled them both in an embrace, then Ben shifted the baby to one side and squeezed them all with one arm. Yes. Yes, Kalian needed a fake name, to protect his family.

"What do you think, Iris?" asked Kalian of his imaginative niece. "I'll be playing pretend and dress-up. What should my pretend name be?"

Iris frowned and thought as seriously as a four-year-old can. "You're Korbyn," she pronounced. "Like a raven."

*Right. No shape-shifting apostates around here.* Kalian kissed her forehead and put Iris down gently. "Thank you, Iris. Korbyn it is."

Kalian turned to the others. "Ready to go?"

"No, but let's go anyway," Martin said drolly.

Elinowy reflexively reached back to pull the hood of her habit forward to go outside. Her hands of course found nothing. She smirked a little at her own silliness. "Sorry old Habit. I shall have to keep my guard up to avoid looking out of place." She followed the others, trying to find something to do with her hands besides grasp them in her usual way or hold them in proper prayer formation. It felt uncomfortable.

## This is not the mage you're looking for

Posted on 09 Dec 2020 @ 7:03pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

5,377 words; about a 27 minute read

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 16th - evening

"Soooo... I thought we were going for a drink. Why are we going to the guardhouse, again ?" Gauvain asked, a little sullenly.

"We're not," Martin said, biting back a smile. "We're going to a tavern."

"Really." Gauvain raised a dubious eyebrow. "Because the Orlesian Arms is in the other direction. Just so you know."

"I'm aware. I thought you might like to try a different place for a change."

"Not if *a change* involves breaking up a brawl or arresting a suspect," Gauvain muttered.

Martin rolled his eyes. "I asked for your help once, half a year ago, in how many years, and you never let me hear the end of it."

"I got an earful from the Knight-Captain. *And* the Revered Mother. And the men called me "Guard dog" for months." Gauvain sniffed. "Though I must admit breaking up a brawl is almost as much fun as starting one. Maybe I should have been a guard like you."

"You're way too sanctimonious to make a convincing guard," Martin snorted. "Ah, here we are." They had arrived at the intricately carved door of the inn.

"The Raven's Roost ?"

"Yeah. I came here to arrest a mugger the other day. They have some good ale."

"Drinking while on duty ?" Gauvain tutted. "Aren't you a fine specimen of the Jader Guard. Well, lead on."

They pushed the door open, revealing the cosy interior and quiet chatter of the patrons. The tranquil atmosphere was a stark contrast to the Orlesian Arms, where a scratchy-voiced bard had been singing *every* night for the past *three* weeks. It was a good thing Martin had discovered the Raven's Roost now because he may have had to arrest the man if he had to be subjected to his voice one more time. Or at least fine him heavily. There was *no* way this man had a license from the Bard's

guild.

Martin looked around for Kalian, as he and Gauvain walked to the bar. He still owed him a beer, after all.

Kalian lugged a fresh keg up the cellar stairs and locked the cellar door, then hefted the keg onto his shoulder and staggered in the Raven's back door. Tessa hurried toward him and whispered, "Templar in the house."

He handed her the cellar key and replied, "No problem." He'd blend in as usual, the templar would never even notice him. Kalian took the keg to the bar to find Martin sitting there waiting for him. Next to him sat a templar. *Andraste's holy knickers*. Kalian swallowed. "Hello Martin. Uh, good to see you."

Martin greeted Kalian with a big smile while Gauvain lifted a curious eyebrow.

"And you as well. I still owe you a drink. I hope you don't mind that I brought you an extra customer. Gauvain, this is Kalian, his family owns the place. He helped me out with that mugger I mentioned a minute ago. Kalian, this is - "

"Ser Gauvain Hauteville, de Villaret," Gauvain interrupted him. "But you can just call me - "

"By a wide array of surnames," Martin put in, "most of which should not be repeated in polite company."

" - Gauvain, if you're going to serve me an ale. Which Martin is going to pay. Make that a pint."

"Uh..." Kalian put down the fresh keg, using the distraction as a cover his nervousness. A *templar*. Martin came in with a templar. "A pleasure to meet you, uh... Gauvain." Kalian left the new keg to settle while he filled two pint glasses from the previous one, then set them down in front of Martin and the templar.

"You two seem like close friends. Or siblings even," said Kalian, recovering from the initial shock of being introduced to a templar. He gave Gauvain his best nonchalant and innocent smile. "Always good to welcome new customers to the Raven's Roost."

Kalian considered slinking off on a made-up excuse but decided that would be suspicious. He poured himself a half-pint, and leaned casually against the bar. "How was your guard shift this afternoon, Martin?"

"Oh, nothing special. I was on alienage duty but things have actually been quiet there. It won't last, but it's nice." Martin's grin had a painful slant to it. The Alienage was not usually short of excitement. In the past years the Guard had had to deal with several murders, a reported haunting that turned out to be an elaborate con, several instances of fencing stolen goods, and even a case of child



abduction.

Martin had taken advantage of his uneventful patrol to speak to Patrick, his main informant in the Alienage. It seemed there had been one case of a disappearance, which might be related to the current affair, but nothing was less certain. The elf in question had been in debt so he may also have just fled his creditors. The main moneylender in the alienage, a dwarf by the name of Thorold, could be particularly inventive when dealing with debtors.

The need for a distraction was immediately fulfilled as a sudden flash of red entered through the door. Somewhere between the Scarlet Robes and the flame red hair, the tall sister from the Chantry always grabbed people's attention. She moved with grace and a practiced aloofness coming from years of practice. She quickly moved to the table with the Guard and the Templar. She smiled at Kalian and handed him a large armful of freshly picked flowers. "For your sister, perhaps to reflect the beauty of her generosity." she turned and looked at Martin and his companion. "Constable Josceran, it seems you are taking up with people of orders lately. Who is your associate?"

Sister Elinowy appeared to be as flamboyant as ever. Martin gave her an easy smile. "Not sure *taking up* is the right way to put it, I've known Gauvain for years. Hauteville de Villaret, that is. Gauvain, this is Sister Elinowy, who is... visiting?" Martin was not actually quite sure why the sister was here, but he suspected it was no mere happenstance.

Gauvain gave the Sister a Templar's salute, hands crossed over his chest. "Sister, welcome to Jader. You shouldn't be surprised by Martin's association with us, he used to be one of us after all."

From behind the bar, Kalian choked on his mouthful of ale. Martin used to be a templar?

Martin shifted on his feet, slightly uncomfortable that Gauvain would bring this up in front of people whom he didn't know that well just yet, even if he considered them to be friends. "Yes, then I realized people would be calling me Ser, and I had to drop out. All that formality, I just couldn't stand it," he joked, a little bit weakly. A change of subject was in order. "Sister, will you partake with us? I'm buying."

"Some Tea please Martin, if you would." she politely responded giving Martin a glance over with a curious eye. A former Templar. Very interesting. She was curious as to why Martin would have truly given up the service, it was not entered lightly. It would also give her an interesting insight into the temptations and failings of the Templar order, something that if her discernment carried through on its proper course would be most enlightening and helpful.

Kalian set about preparing Elinowy's tea, grateful for the brief excuse not to look Gauvain or Martin in the eye. Had he said anything suspicious to Martin so far? He was pretty sure he hadn't. Once he'd poured a heaping spoonful of tea herbs into the teapot, he added just-boiled water and then set the teapot and a cup down before the sister.

Meanwhile Gauvain was taking a swig of ale, eyebrows rising as he enjoyed the fresh taste and the

hint of elderberry.

"Martin wasn't joking, you really do have some nice ale," he said to Kalian. "I can't believe I never came here before. And, you don't have a bard, thank Andraste and all her Disciples for that small blessing. I may have to come here more often."

"Compliments of our ale are deeply appreciated, Gauvain," said Kalian. Templars disliking bards – that was a new one. He recalled a tavern in Jader that was favored by templars. One Kalian always avoided. He'd heard the owner was allowing his son to entertain customers as a bard. "Do you mean the Orlesian Arms? It's not always a good idea to employ family members. But don't tell my sister I said so." Kalian gave him a friendly and self-deprecating wink and raised his half-pint glass. *Just a friendly bar-server, no mages around here.*

"They run a most generous hospitality here. I am indebted to their kindness. Speaking of which, Kalian, were is your sister? I need her help for our undertaking tomorrow." Elinowy asked.

"Oh, uh, Tessa..." Kalian looked around as though he didn't know his sister was hovering in the kitchen, ready to intervene or create a distraction. She emerged from the kitchen carrying a tray with two bowls of stew she delivered to another table. "Tessa, do you have a moment?"

Tessa approached and bowed her head to the templar. "It is an honor to serve a soldier of Andraste, ser knight." She gave her brother a sideways scowl. What was Kalian thinking, getting involved with templars. He'd told her his scheme with his new guardsman friend, and the strange Sister. But now, socializing with a templar?

"This is Martin's good friend, Gauvain." Kalian glanced at Martin, unsure if the templar knew about what they planned to do tomorrow. "Elinowy needs your help, Tessa."

Elinowy sipped her tea and then turned to look at Tessa with a smile. "Tessa, wonderful! I need your help. We are venturing out discreetly tomorrow as we look into the recent disappearances in town. I have need of appearing like a low caste working girl. Something that would allow me to blend in as a common woman walking the streets. I thought you might have something I could borrow to wear.

Tessa's eyes narrowed, and she folded her arms across her chest, a rebuke right on the tip of her tongue. But Kalian was giving her that pleading look, and the last thing she wanted was for Elinowy's clothing to give her brother away. "I'm sure I have something you can wear that is less obvious than your Chantry robes." Tessa looked around the tavern. "It's not too busy right now. Come with me to our home next door and we can go through what I have." Tessa headed for the tavern's back door.

Tessa poked her head into her father's room at the back of the tavern. Through the door, Armin could be seen in his wheeled chair, reading with his four-year-old granddaughter Iris, with baby

Gabriel in his lap with a wooden toy in his mouth. "Papa, I'll be at home for a bit."

Tessa opened the back door and gestured for Elinowy to follow. They passed the tavern's cellar and crossed a small outdoor work area to the back door of a cottage she unlocked. Inside was a neat, compact yet comfortable kitchen and sitting room, a simple family shrine with a statue of Andraste and a halla statue, stairs to a loft and a bedroom off the main room – Tessa's destination.

Elinowy made her way into the Tessa and Kalian's living quarters. She scanned the room closely seeing what she could learn about the family from their domestic environment. The home had all the hallmarks of a hard working family with close interpersonal ties. She stopped briefly saying a short prayer before the statue of Andraste. The deer figurine positioned near it was concerning. It spoke of elves. Deceased elves and their pagan rites. Perhaps a family tradition that had been carried down over generations. Still a heresy she would need to be mindful of. She would keep a sharp eye for other cues.

She considered the wardrobe in the corner, then pulled a wooden box out from under the bed. "Perhaps we can find some suitable things among my family's old clothes. Mine, Ben's and Kalian's," said Tessa.

Elinowy knelt down by the box and smiled kindly at Tessa. "Thank you. I pray the Maker will bless you for your kindness and generosity." She opened the box to examine the contents. Older garments that had been kept for some reason, sentimental or otherwise. She found a simple tunic, faded from wear, but holding a touch of styling that had likely been a cherished outfit sometime in the past. It would do. "Might I try this?" she asked of Tessa.

"Whatever you find that is suitable," said Tessa, smiling. The tunic had been her own, something she'd bought for herself before she and Ben were married. But it was only worn fabric, she'd never wear it again.

A patched but clean pair of trousers, possibly a man's were in the box. No skirt or shift or dress was apparent, but there was a handmade shawl that would round out a potential outfit. "Perhaps these as well?" she inquired.

The shawl had been left behind by a tavern guest at some point, but the trousers had been her father's, before the run-in with a chevalier when he'd lost the ability to walk along with his wife, Tessa's mother. "Of course, Sister. Whatever you need. If you'd like, I will have your Chantry robes cleaned while you're gone."

Elinowy looked thoughtfully at the assorted garments nodding to herself. "I think these should do adequately. Thank you for offering to have my robes cleaned. I washed them in a stream some miles west of Jader a few days ago, and it would likely please everyone more if you did have them freshened up. May I try these on?"

"Of course. I'll step out and give you some privacy. If those clothes don't fit, go ahead and choose

others." Tessa pulled the bedroom door shut behind her. While the Chantry sister was occupied, she sorted through her mending box and assembled a needle, thread, and a few scraps of cloth.

Elinowy quickly arranged the chosen items on the bed. Removing her Chantry robes, she proceeded to change, finding the clothes to be a bit... snug. The clasps and ties all closed, but whomever these items had belonged to was certainly nowhere near the Sister's stature. The tunic fit, in that she was able to move her arms and head comfortably, although particularly in the chest it was restrictive. Elinowy twisted the tunic in an attempt to pull it completely on. The pants were too short, and a bit tight in the waist. Elinowy was a little disappointed that the disguise that had been provided to her didn't fit all that well. But she trusted the Maker had a reason for the ill fitting costume. She finished dressing and looked upon herself in the small mirror mounted to the chest of drawers. Elinowy made an awkward face as she look in her disheveled and binding disguise. She considered it nothing special to look at, and that was the point, so she accepted this would be how she would face the journey ahead. She opened the bedroom door to allow Tessa back in. "What do you think?"

Tessa looked the tall woman up and down. "Uh, well, in that outfit you do appear desperate enough to take one of those jobs, and no one will mistake you for a Chantry sister." She hoped her brother wouldn't forget she was a sister. Tessa held out the small package to Elinowy. "A needle and thread in case you need to make minor adjustments."

Smiling gracefully Elinowy replied. "Sadly my studies at the Chantry never covered proper sewing. I can darn small holes, but alterations are a little beyond my skill. We had skilled seamstresses in the village do most of our mending, and Sister Caithlin had a steady hand. These will certainly do. Thank you for your great generosity. If I can change back into my habit, I will gladly take these for the morning."

This tantalizing insight into the odd sister's past brought to mind a long list of questions, but Tessa felt the need to return to her family business without an extended delay. "It is a great satisfaction to help those who need it, when I can," she said modestly, and gestured for Elinowy to return to the bedroom and change.

Elinowy proceeded to remove her disguise and fold it neatly on the bed. She looked around the Winter's home as she donned her Habit again. Their family had been a tremendous blessing from the Maker. She had need of little since she had arrived in Jader. Kalian and his sister seemed content to take care of all her earthly needs. As she tucked her long red hair beneath the scarlet hood, she said a quick prayer for the Winters and the Raven's Roost. Trying times were coming, she prayed the Maker would see fit to allow it to pass this home.

Kalian watched Tessa and Elinowy - one his prime interference and the other his prime distraction - leave with a sinking feeling. He smiled weakly at Martin and his templar friend.

Gauvain shifted a little bit closer to Martin. "That Sister is a bit... weird, isn't she?"

"You don't know the half of it," Martin said, swallowing back a laugh. "But she's helping out on a case."

"That's unusual..." Gauvain trailed off, eyeing Sister Elinowy as she followed Tessa out.

He wasn't wrong, the Chantry rarely got involved in mundane business. If he was honest, Martin had asked himself the same question. He was sure the Sister had some kind of agenda. That did not mean she did not have good intentions, but he still would like to know what she was up to.

"Does the Revered Mother know about Sister Elinowy being in Jader?" Martin asked.

Kalian tipped back his half-pint, curious to hear Gauvain's answer. It was strange to him that Elinowy didn't seem to have any connection to Jader's Chantry.

"If she does, she didn't tell the grunts," Gauvain snorted. "But I'd assume that she does. She usually is aware of most of whatever's going on at any given time." He took a swig. "Now let's talk about more pressing matters, such as this outstanding ale. I'll have to come back with Jérôme and Flavien." He gave Kalian a mischievous grin. "We'll make this place the favourite haunt of all the Templars and we'll run the Orlesian Arms out of business. Then maybe they'll actually hire a decent bard."

Kalian's throat seemed to close and he choked on his beer, his dark skin a little paler. "Uh, that, uh, would be." He coughed and cleared his throat. "Sorry. That would certainly be a great boon to my sister's business. Very thoughtful of you, Gauvain." *Maybe he could get a job at the Orlesian Arms.*

"We don't have a bard at the Raven just now, but Sister Elinowy has a beautiful voice," said Kalian, hoping to shift attention away from himself. "Not much incentive is needed to get her to sing, we can ask when she gets back."

Ben had just served stew to another table, and was chatting with customers. No help there. Kalian said, "Can I get either of you a refill? Or a bowl of stew?"

"I'll never refuse a refill," Gauvain said, pushing his nearly empty tankard towards Kalian. "Do you have any toasted breadsticks? Or grilled pork rinds?" He paused, peering at his host. "Are you alright? You look a bit pale."

"Oh, uh," Kalian cleared his throat and refilled Gauvain's tankard. "We don't have grilled pork rinds, but we could get some for next time. I'd be happy to toast some breadsticks." That would give him an excuse to hide in the kitchen for a least a short time.

"He's just horrified at the thought of you emptying his sister's pantry," Martin said, smacking

Gauvain on the arm. "On top of drinking his cellar to utter and absolute desolation."

"I'm not promising anything," Gauvain said, dignified.

"Don't worry," Martin said to Kalian in a mock whisper, "he's actually loaded. That's *Sire* Gauvain Hauteville, if you didn't know. Just charge him double for everything."

"I own nothing but what the Maker provides," Gauvain said piously. "Unfortunately the Maker has seen fit to saddle me with terrible friends. I must have been a Darkspawn in a past life. Or something. Oh, thanks," he said, taking the ale Kalian handed him. "So, come on now, tell me the whole story, how did you meet ? Martin's not usually that great at making new friends."

"Says the man who's still hanging out with me out of sheer desperation," Martin snickered.

Although he joked, there was some truth to what Gauvain said. Martin was friendly and easy-going with everyone but let few people close. His occupation as a city guard coupled with his natural inclination towards distrust were partly to blame, and the natural consequence was that he had a great many acquaintances but few true friends, Gauvain being one notable exception. Patrick, his Alienage informant, might be another, and Raoul, his landlord. Still, while Martin didn't know Kalian all that well yet, he liked him ; in no small part because he'd offered his help, no strings attached, with such earnestness - even though he had nothing to gain. That was not the manner of a deceitful man.

"We met right here at the Raven's Roost," said Kalian, glad that Gauvain had brought up a fairly safe topic of conversation. "Sister Elinowy brought in a thief who had been mugging some of our customers on their way home. After my brother-in-law Ben and his friends apprehended him, Martin came to collect the mugger and take him to the guardhouse."

Kalian laughed, recalling the previous night and loosening up a little. "That mugger was surprisingly creative, making up bribes to get us to let him go."

"And you refused ?" Gauvain laughed. "You don't know how to do business, either of you. Should have taken the bribe, then taken him in anyway."

Martin rolled his eyes, though he knew Gauvain was joking. "I don't think he actually did have any money, he was just hoping we'd drop our guard long enough for him to make a run for it. Plus the Guard doesn't take bribes."

"You mean *you* don't take bribes," Gauvain said cynically. "Oh, don't look at me like that, it's the same everywhere. Bad and good apples in every basket. Except in the Order I suppose, since money wouldn't do us much good anyway." He took another swig of ale.

"Speaking of the Order, what happened to Jérôme and Flavien ? I thought they were supposed to join us later."

"Oh, they got sent west. We got an escaped mage - " Gauvain stopped abruptly, obviously remembering a bit late that they were in mixed company, and gave Kalian a rueful look. "Oops. Wasn't meant to let that one slip. Don't tell anyone I told you, yeah ?"

"No, no. I would never... Uh, west you say?" Kalian lowered his voice and allowed his very real fear of being hunted himself to infuse his tone. "So, they aren't hunting in Jader? We're safe here?"

"Safe as a babe in his mother's arms," Gauvain assured him with a dismissive wave of his hand. "Besides, there's still plenty of us around here, only a handful went on the hunt, so if anything did happen, we'd be close by."

The last thing Kalian wanted to talk about with a templar was blood magic, but a question had been nagging at the back of his mind. "Martin, do you remember when we were in the refugee camp and you mentioned the missing people might be victims of a killer? I didn't want to bring this up where that poor woman Isla could hear, but what if people are disappearing because..." Kalian did not need to feign fear and disgust. "B-blood magic?"

"Victims of a killer ?" Gauvain put in before Martin had time to say anything. "My, you don't get bored, do you ? Please tell me it's not like... that *other* time ?"

"No, no," Martin shook his head somewhat moodily. "Nothing like that." He paused. "I think."

"You're filling me with confidence." Gauvain rolled his eyes before turning to Kalian. "You know, blood magic has a pretty distinctive stench. And also, I'm pretty sure we'd have found the bodies by now. Maleficarum aren't usually much good at hiding their tracks, thank the Maker for small blessings. More likely this one is just a lunatic. Or several lunatics, I guess."

"Gauvain, you're terrible at reassuring people," Martin commented.

"I know. What did you get involved in, this time ? Does this poor fellow know what he's getting into ?" Gauvain jabbed a thumb at Kalian.

"We're just looking into this thing with the disappearances." Martin shrugged. "Since nobody else seems to care. Figured we might as well take a look. I guess it could be a blood mage after all."

"You're just saying that to rile me up. Or to hire me into your little gang. Well, it's not happening. I got drills tomorrow. Four hours of drills. So no gallivanting around town for me, thanks." Gauvain looked at Kalian. "You should tell him no, you know ? He always runs into good samaritans who'll help him investigate this or that. Tell him no and then maybe he'll get into less trouble."

"I guess you'll miss all the fun, then," Martin said, feigning being disappointed. "You know what, Kalian, if this does turn out to be blood magic I guess we shouldn't tell him, since ser Gauvain is going to be so busy, you know, drilling. Such a *fascinating* occupation."

He forced a laugh, although it came out more as a groan. Kalian had been listening to the two men banter, obviously old friends, equally fascinated and chagrined to be included in the conversation. What would Martin say if or when he discovered his new friend was a mage? Would Martin and Gauvain hunt him together? Apostates didn't resort to blood magic unless desperate for good reason – the only way to learn was from a demon. But the chantry templars used it to create phylacteries. "If you don't mind, this talk of blood mages is making me queasy. It's probably just some kind of scam."

Gauvain laughed good-naturedly. "Well, back to the point, you really don't need to worry. We only got one mage missing, and we have strong evidence he's headed west. And I don't think he'd stoop to blood magic. He's stubborn, obnoxious and annoying but not quite that desperate. Mages aren't that different from normal folks, you know ?"

"Uh, right." *Mages were not normal folks.* Kalian cleared his throat and consciously gathered his usual swagger around him like a cloak... or a barrier-shield. "For the record, I thought that looking into it all was my idea, and Martin is tagging along with me." He grinned.

"Oh, no," Gauvain groaned. "Another one just like Martin ! Where do you even *find* them ?!"

"It just so happens that *some* people, I mean concerned and dedicated citizens, appreciate the heroic work guardsmen commit themselves to doing around here, day after thankless day," Martin said, winking at Kalian. "Don't be like that Gauvain, jealousy is so unbecoming."

Gauvain snorted. "Well, don't expect me to swoop in and save you this time. Since you have all these *concerned* and *dedicated* citizens to help you now." Although his tone made it clear he was joking, his grin faded quickly. "Seriously though... you should be careful. You ruffled a few feathers, not so long ago."

Martin groaned. "Please don't remind me."

Kalian chuckled, and joined in the teasing a little. He was beginning to like this Gauvain, even if he was a templar. "Who, Martin? Ruffle a few feathers? Surely not."

"Well, without going into too much salacious details - "

"There are salacious details?" said Kalian, warming up to his role as Gauvain's audience. "Now I really want to hear this."

"Gauvain - " Martin said, in a half-hearted protest that was promptly ignored. Gauvain just *loved* telling that story.

" - Martin was investigating something that involved men of, shall we say, loose morals, who were being beaten up within an inch of their lives by their client. Turns out, there was someone fairly



important involved. And instead of shutting up and burying the whole thing, I'll let you guess what this hardheaded cretin did." Gauvain didn't give Kalian time to guess much of anything. "Bring them to the magistrates, of course. All for nothing, really, except if his goal was to make powerful enemies."

"I was just upholding the law. As in, you know, doing my job ? He deserved it, anyway - can you imagine he tried to bribe me ?" Martin's tone didn't hide how offended he'd been by the offer. "And it wasn't all for nothing. He got fined."

Gauvain rolled his eyes. "Yes, a whopping two gold sovereigns. Like that'll really stop him from doing it again. I daresay the scandal was more punishment than the fine. And you're still stuck on alienage duty six months later," he chortled gleefully, obviously finding more humour in that than Martin ever had, then glanced at Kalian. "They're never letting him patrol Hightown ever again, mark my words. I'm surprised you didn't hear of it. That particular scandal was the talk of the Jader good society for weeks. It was hilarious. Aside from, y'know, the poor men who got beaten up, and Martin making a mortal enemy..."

Martin wasn't surprised at all that Kalian hadn't known - he didn't imagine his new friend met the Jader socialites on a daily basis. Another reason to like him ; at least he said what he meant, and meant what he said, unlike this serpent's nest that high society could be. Martin should know, his own family was part of it, though at the bottom of the ladder.

"Well, I was hoping to hide it - yes, thank you Gauvain - but now you know my deep, dark secret," he said to Kalian. "And this is why my fellow guards won't follow me on this investigation. Not just because they don't care about what happens to the refugees, but mostly because associating with me... carries certain risks these days." He shrugged ruefully. "I probably should have warned you earlier. Sorry."

Kalian shook his head, smile faded and eyebrows knit together. "I'm glad to know a man like you who follows his principles, Martin. I don't think it was all for nothing, and not because the perpetrator paid a fine. Those men that got beat up, whether all of them appreciated it or not, you stood up for them... when nobody else did."

"For all the good it did them," Martin sighed. "Last I heard they were still doing street work. If you see what I mean." Judging by Kalian's face, he did. "Anyway, I think I'm going to call it a night. Have to rise early tomorrow, after all. Especially you, Gauvain, with all your, you know, *drills*."

"Jest all you like," Gauvain said haughtily. "At least I practice. I bet you got rusty. Can you even still swing that sword or is it all for show ?"

"Oh, you're so on," Martin said, laughing. "I'll show you how wrong you are next saturday." He glanced at Kalian. "We do mock tournaments two saturdays a month with some of the guards and Templars. You should come and watch some day, if you got free time. Anyway, we'll be on our way now." He fished a few silvers out of his purse and set them on the counter to pay for the drinks.

"Yes," Gauvain said, "please do come and see Martin get thoroughly humiliated when I show him the importance of drills. Anyway, nice meeting you. I'm sure we'll meet again."

## Suspicious Distraction

Posted on 10 Dec 2020 @ 8:26pm by [Rogue Jaslyn](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#)

2,914 words; about a 15 minute read

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Outside Refugee Camp

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 16th - morning

OOO: following post 'When there's no Meeran or Athenril' and concurrent with post 'Found Cake'

Cainan blocked out the sound of singing as best he could as he took in the sights, sounds and smells of the refugee camp. And there were a lot, of each. He could smell the funk of desperation and hardship; the hunger as they looked at his coat, and the cogs wheeling as they took in the look of his sword; Cainan knew his own capabilities and stood unfazed, but the place left a bad taste in his mouth.

Jaslyn had been weighing the possible ways she could get Sauvage's attention and draw him into a preferably private conversation. So far she had considered picking his pocket, challenging him to a duel, and propositioning him. But then, the Chantry sister instigated a singing distraction and an opportunity Jaslyn could not resist. The elf took advantage of the crowd to ease up close. She rested her hand on his arm and spoke in a low voice pitched only for his ears. "Pardon me, monsieur Sauvage, I need to speak with you." Without another word, she strode back toward the alienage and came to a stop, within sight of his companions, but well out of hearing range.

Cainan turned and watched the figure move away, not so far to be advantageous for an ambush, but definitely separating him from his companions. Under normal circumstances, he wouldn't have bothered approaching, but the woman, whoever she was, knew his name... and while Cainan did his best to be well known, he couldn't fathom how his reputation had preceded him in *these* parts.

"I'll be back shortly," Cainan said over his shoulder, absently, as he watched her walk away. He knew the guardsman would take care of Sister Elinowy, and he had been feeling surplus to requirements anyhow.

Cainan approached where the woman had stopped, his eyes taking in the surroundings as he went. No obvious signs of a trap; other than the woman herself; she was shorter than him, obviously lithe, and to his eye did not hold herself like the refugees around them; at least, so far as he could tell from his vantage point. The weighted lines of her cloak gave away the presence of weapons at her hips, and though he couldn't tell for certain, he guessed knives or perhaps short swords. That in

itself was not so concerning, half of everyone he had passed had at least a knife on their belt.

Jaslyn watched Sauvage approach her position, and when he got close, she threw back her hood, poised to draw her daggers. She had changed since the last time she saw this man in Val Royeaux. Back then men such as him would have regarded her as an insignificant, invisible servant. Now, she was a Grey Warden. He might not recognize her at all. Or if he did, she was ready in case he attacked.

Cainan stopped to take in her features, fighting the urge to give her his most winning smile. She was elven, and a redhead, with fair features and full lips - all things he enjoyed, but he held himself back from his instinctive flirtation; something beyond the woman knowing his name in a place like this. Something about her face was familiar, but he couldn't place it. But her eyes... They were the deepest green, beautiful, and somehow haunting. He felt an itch at the back of his neck as she met his gaze, like a warning of danger he couldn't see. Curiously, he had felt it once before, though why the only time he had seen a darkspawn would come to mind as he gazed into the eyes of a fairly beautiful elven woman, he could not say. He ignored the feeling, his eyes lingering on hers for a moment longer before he took in her features again. He knew he was staring, but she was a puzzle; he was certain he had definitely seen her before.

"Your face is familiar to me," Cainan said, slowly, finally. He cocked his head to the side slightly as if it would help him remember. "You have me at a disadvantage to know my name when I don't know yours; under normal circumstances, I might assume to have crossed your path in some tavern, where I would no doubt have propositioned you, but I would definitely remember those eyes of yours if I had," he said, leaning back, casually - a move to set her at ease if nothing else. She was a taught spring; he wondered for a moment if she had been hired to kill him, but her face lacked the expression of one ready to kill. Then again, he doubted the best killers gave such signs away.

Cainan took a moment and glanced over her frame - leather armour, well suited to her. She was no refugee, that much was certain. Neither was she a conquest of his, either - no chance he would forget waking next to *her*, and he could count on one hand the number of elven women he had bedded. But she was certainly not just using his name - there was a look in those eyes that indicated she knew *exactly* who he was.

It seemed that Sauvage recognized her but didn't know who she was. Jaslyn nodded to herself, she wasn't out of danger yet. His bold statement that under other circumstances he would have propositioned her brought a brief smile to her lips. If she'd encountered a handsome man like him in a tavern, she likely would have made advances first. Jaslyn filed that prospect away for later consideration... if he didn't try to kill her after she explained who she was and what she wanted.

"My name is Jaslyn." She watched him carefully for any indication that he'd begun to remember her as she dispassionately stated the pertinent facts. "In Val Royeaux I was the servant and friend of Helana Dimont when she became the wife of your friend and gambling partner, Antoine Marchal. I

am the elf accused and convicted of his murder. However, the Grey Wardens disappointed the hangman by recruiting me."

So far, Sauvage hadn't drawn his sword, so she pressed on. "I saw you at the Rose of Orlais last night, playing cards with another friend of Marchal's, Richelieu, and two other men. You helped that serving woman – Camila. I thought, perhaps, you'd be willing to talk to me about a problem impacting the elves and the poor of Jader."

Cainan looked at her, as comprehension dawned. "Helana's servant..." he said, slowly, as he took a moment to look at her.

Suddenly, he was back in that smokey parlour room, laying five cards of the same theme and flashing his winning smile at the quiet rage behind Antoine's eyes flashed, briefly, before his facade slipped back into place, and he tossed the cards down, sourly. He knew there was something behind that mans eyes, the man had anger problems, but he had never imagined...

Cainan had always been a carefree person - a man who beat his competitors without thought of how that affected them. 'Lacking in grace', his father had once said; not unkindly - it had been an attempt to dissuade him from his lifestyle, born of love. And he hadn't listened. And then, Antoine had missed their weekly game. And then, Richelieu had, in a quivering tone, imparted the events of the night after they had left. How Antoine had taken his frustrations out on his wife, as (unbeknownst to them both) he often had. Cainan had just watched Richelieu as he relayed the story.

They hadn't played that night.

He was lost in bad memories for a moment; he didn't know who had killed Antoine, Helena or Jaslyn - but he knew his part in the suffering that had come before, and that had been exclusively theirs. He had come here on a whim, half anticipating to be bored and wander back to a bar when Elinowy was done stringing him along, and now... he found himself not caring what it was this woman wanted from him - only that he had been the cause of significant suffering, and he felt guilty.

"I'm sorry, you were saying about a problem?" he asked, shaking off the bad memories.

Jaslyn watched Sauvage's reaction warily for any sign that he might take revenge on her for the murder of Antoine Marchal. Recognition flickered in his visage, followed by regret, and some other emotion she could not identify. She had the impression that she was witnessing a rare thing, a slip of his gambler's mask that momentarily had her thinking of other unguarded expressions she might enjoy eliciting from him.

It seemed he was willing to listen.

"A number of elves have gone missing, and Hahren Liriel asked me to look into it. Rumors are circulating about work being offered with exceptional pay." She paused a moment, still watching his

handsome face. It was possible that Sauvage and Richelieu could be in it together.

She paused for a moment, and Cainan had the idea that he was being judged for a moment as she studied him with the same intensity as he had studied her. She was still guarded - and he could guess why; from her perspective, he was an unknown, and possibly complicit in the actions of the monster Antoine. Maker, if he had known what that man's habits had been...

"I've seen the posters," Cainan affirmed, looking back to where the others had been standing; they were following one of the men off on a lead. He supposed this wasn't the actions of a diligent bodyguard, after all; but sister Elinowy had a member of the literal city guard with her, so he supposed he was off the hook; though seeing her under those robes was decidedly off the cards. Still, it had always been long odds to get that far to begin with; he'd suspected she was merely toying with him in any case. But it would have been interesting to be the loyal bodyguard for a change, at the very least. "Sister Elinowy of the Chantry, her companions and I came looking to see what could be found of these... mysteriously generous offers, and the people that took them up," he added, leaving out that Martin was with the Guard; he doubted anyone here didn't already know, but there was no fortune in confirming it. "I don't suppose you have anything on the disappearances? What they might be being taken for?" he asked, though the most obvious answer was not a pleasant one.

"The first possibility I considered was that elves were being gathered together to be sold to Tevinter slavers. But such an endeavor would be difficult to hide, and I could find no evidence among the ships and cargos in port. And I've heard that humans are also disappearing." Not that humans couldn't be sold into slavery, but the humans in power were more likely to take notice.

Cainan frowned at that. Missing elves... Elves weren't slaves in Orlais, but equally did not attract much support from the establishment, either; in a way, more people might notice if they *were* property, but humans being in the mix was more brazen, and - rightly or wrongly, someone should have noticed. That said, the humans in question were refugees, and Cainan doubted many in Jader would inquire if some suddenly stopped being on their doorstep. "It's hard to move slaves by land, and near impossible to do it this close to the border and not be seen doing it; if they aren't being shipped out, then the people might still be local. But for what purpose?" he mused, trailing off. "I don't suppose you found anything in your searching that might hint at the answer?" he asked, acknowledging that she had clearly been at this much longer than he and the others had been. And there was still the query of why she had approached him in the first place; her body language was closed, she didn't view him as a friend, or at least, didn't know what to make of him. So why approach? He knew there was something that she wasn't telling him - some card she had yet to lay down, and he was ready to call.

"One thing I did find... Until quite recently, Captain Richeleiu was deeply in debt, and the reasons for his change of fortune are not public." She stopped short of suggesting Richeleiu was guilty of something.

Cainan blinked, and he unconsciously felt the weight of his purse on his hip; half the coins in that

leather pouch would not be there had it not been for Richelieu's recent change of fortunes. And it *had* been an abrupt change, and not one from playing cards, either - at least, not with Cainan. Richelieu had always made bets his wallet could not cover, and Cainan, through good-natured sportsmanship (or perhaps a streak of an overly-competitive ego) had always let him.

But Richelieu involved in *anything* nefarious was almost laughable. "Javert Richelieu is a fair seaman and a bad gambler, but he's no *slaver*," he said, almost laughing at the notion. "I've been on his ship; served on it, even." It was how they had met, the good captain allowing him on board. His cargo had been cloths and silks, destined to be turned into fashion items for the Val Royeux elite. "He deals in overpriced silk and makes his living feeding the millhouses of Val Royeux."

But he could not deny that there had been questions he had wanted to ask regarding the sudden windfall his friend had come into; questions he had pointedly *not* asked, because deep down he did not want to be responsible for the answers. *Oh Javert, what have you done?* he asked himself, silently. But no, it *couldn't* be...

He had not spoken for a few moments, and Cainan forced himself to swallow his doubt and clear his throat.

"What is it you think he has done?" he asked, unable to look her in the eye.

Jaslyn shrugged. "Perhaps he has done nothing, or perhaps you don't know your gambling partner as well as you think." Sauvage had acknowledged he recalled Jaslyn as Helana's servant, but so far had not expressed an opinion on the adequacy of her punishment for the crime of killing his friend. "Or perhaps he knows or has seen something. Something that did not strike him as nefarious at the time."

"I would ask two favors of you, Monsieur Sauvage," said Jaslyn. "First, will you go with me, to speak to Captain Richelieu, and find out what he knows and if he is involved?"

Cainan wanted to say no; he didn't want to pull on these threads, lest the tapestry of his friendship with Richelieu start to unravel. But he couldn't. The last time he had ignored warning signs, two women had nearly died and it was only because they had defended themselves that Antoine had been stopped. "... I will go with you to learn what the truth of the matter is, whatever that may be," Cainan replied, sighing. He hoped Richelieu wasn't involved, but he couldn't take that chance... not again.

"Second, as a courtesy," said Jaslyn conversationally, "I would appreciate your telling me if you intend to complete the hangman's job and execute me for my crime."

Cainan blinked for a moment, trying to figure out what she meant, before the obvious dawned. "You mean Antoine?" he asked, frowning. It was then he realised, he hadn't realised what had happened *after* Antoine's death; Richelieu had not made him aware of the fate of the women involved, though Cainan had known Antoine's wife had returned to her parent's estate, for a time;

he had always assumed her servant had either returned with her, or moved on to get away from the region. Shame gripped him, and he felt once again that he was indebted to her for Antoine's actions and, more importantly, his own *inaction*. "I... never expected you to carry a sentence for what Antoine did. As far as I'm concerned, the only person who needed punishment got what he deserved. You have nothing to fear from me."

"Thank you." The tension finally left her form, and Jaslyn gave a short nod. Then she looked him up and down in a frank, appraising way. "Good. I can think of many more interesting things we can do together, rather than fight to the death."

The glint in Cainan's eye returned as he smiled back at her. "Oh, *really*?" he asked, giving her an equally appraising (and appreciative) look. "Well, I'm sure a fight between us would be fairly interesting, so the bar is already pretty high," he said, smirking. He looked back towards where he had left Elinowy, Martin and Kalian. "...and it seems my commitments have wandered off together," he added, amused. "That leaves me free if you had any ideas of where to go from here...?"

Jaslyn grinned back at him. She did indeed have some ideas.

## Strangers on the Road

Posted on 15 Dec 2020 @ 6:44pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**4,440 words; about a 22 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Jader road - past the workhouse

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th - mid-morning

The sun was only starting to rise higher in the sky when the group of three set off towards the refugee camp. The streets were already busy at this early hour, mostly with merchants and artisans going about their craft. Bakers were bringing out the first batch of the day, hoping the tantalizing smell would attract customers. It was all a stark contrast to the misery they were heading towards.

"So, Kal - Korbyn, I think you should do the talking. You can probably be more convincing than me at being not-a-guard," Martin said with a self-deprecating grin. And Sister - I mean, Elinowy - " he stopped, wondering if there was a way to suggest she not talk like a particularly fervent Chantry Sister without sounding offensive. "Er, well, we probably should just let Korbyn talk to them."

Gathering her shawl up against the breeze, it occurred to her how comfortable and familiar her habit was. She felt out of sorts not wearing it. "Very well. But I assure you I am quite familiar with speaking like a regular commoner. I discourse with them often during my duties." she replied.

"I can do the talking," said Kalian, "but I don't think you have anything to worry about, Martin. Remember, you're a disgraced guardsman, and Elinowy..." Kalian had considered the Sister's

appearance more than a few times that morning and had decided the problem with her disguise was that if she was a prostitute, she'd have a substantial income. Speaking in her usual way was the best way to convince the dwarf that Elinowy was truly destitute. "I think it's best for Elinowy to speak as she usually does, to regular commoners."

They'd reached the river by then and set foot on the stone bridge that led to the workhouse. Down the road past the workhouse, Isla had said. They had a bit of walking to do before they reached the meeting place, which in itself was suspicious. Someone honestly trying to hire refugees would have more luck holding interviews directly at the workhouse. Why set the meeting place so far away, if not for nefarious purposes? Martin's hand fell to his hip, missing the familiar weight of a sword hanging at his belt.

"If things look like they're about to degenerate," he advised his two companions, "don't hesitate to run, alright?"

"The Maker will guide us. If we must flee, a way will be opened." she replied confidently.

"I agree with Martin. Running away if things go wrong is the best option. Let's hope if we make the dwarf doing the hiring nervous, she just tells us to get lost," said Kalian. They passed by the refugee camp and workhouse, then headed south down the road. "We should try to find out where they're taking people, and what this work is, and why they're paying so much."

"Worst case scenario, if the recruiter gets suspicious, we leave and then we can always try to follow her from afar without getting seen," Martin said. "But safety first. I urge you to consider, Sister, that should there be clear danger you take that as a sign the Maker wants you to run. Besides, if you don't run I can't run either; I'm sure you wouldn't want my blood on your conscience." He gave Elinowy a quick smile.

They were just leaving the Jader city boundary when Kalian heard riders on the road, coming up behind them. He moved to the side of the road, and his gaze settled on group's leader. A pretty woman with long silver hair riding a horse. No, he realized, it was an unusually small horse or pony, and the size of the horse had thrown off his perspective. The attractive woman was a dwarf. He hoped she was not the dwarf woman they were looking for, but either way he still bowed as her entourage approached, and called out, "Good day, fair rider."

Rhi had been asked by her mother to see what this new request for a contract was about. She had gathered four of the family guard, two heavy warriors and two who knew their way around not being seen unless they wanted to be. Rhi had wanted to hire a mage, though finding a mage who was not in the circle, would not be easy.

She had made her way to the stables, made her way to a small dark grey horse with a black mane



and tail. "Avandra, you ready for a good walk sweety?" She asked her horse as she had fed her a sugar cube. The horse blinked and nuzzled Rhi. After saddling her up and her guards doing the same with their horses the group left the stables and headed out of the city.

The sun had come up and the group had made it through the city and was on the road to their destination, when they came upon a group of three walking along the road. As Rhi and her guards approached she could see that all three were human, two men and a woman. The two men were dressed in clothes that showed that they had seen better days. The light haired one walked as if he knew how to handle himself. *Former soldier or guard possibly.* Rhi thought. The other, a dark haired man, was cute and had a smile that said.....well.....she grinned at the thoughts that ran through her head. Yet when the woman turned enough for Rhi to see her face and the flash of red hair. Rhi slowed her horse as her and her guards got closer.

The woman with the two men looked like she may be a lady of the night yet the way she walked said differently. To Rhi it didn't matter, thoughts, oh so many thoughts ran through her mind as her eyes sparkled with mischief. It took her a moment to actually realize that the dark haired man had called out to her. Pulling her attention from this red haired beauty, she looked to the one who called out.

Martin watched the dwarf woman approach. Her appearance was striking, if nothing else. Her ample, comfortable breeches looked like the sort favoured by sailors, but he had yet to meet a sailor comfortable on horseback. Her escort, if not her jewelry, hinted that she was more than a mere sailor. Some sort of mercenary? Could she possibly be the recruiter they were looking for? If so, her group was one Qunari short, but even like that Martin didn't like those odds. His hand went to rest on the pommel of his sword but only dropped to his side as it found only thin air.

She slowed Avandra down to a slow walk to keep pace with the three. She inclined her head and gave the young man a mischievous smile. "A good day it is. (she glanced at Elinowy) Especially when I come upon such a treasure." Her gaze lingered for a moment before returning to Kalian and Martin. "What brings you all out on a walk on this fine day?" She shook her head slightly then smiled. "I am so sorry, where are my manners. I have forgotten to introduce myself." She extended her hand to each of the three as she introduced herself. "I am Rhiannon, second in command of the ship Night's Kiss."

It looked like Elinowy's disguise worked just fine. Martin really, really hoped the dwarf woman didn't try to pay for the Sister's charms. Things could get very awkward, very fast.

At least it looked like he'd been right about the sailor part. He'd never seen that dwarf while he patrolled the docks - and he'd have remembered her, if he had seen her - but then again, he'd only patrolled there a handful of times in the past years. Her accent definitely sounded local.

Elinowy turned in curiosity to watch the rider's approach. The lead rider was an affluent looking Dwarf. While a member of a lesser fallen race, Dwarves had proven themselves honest honorable traders. She had negotiated on her small Chantry's behalf with them for years. Unlike her feelings for elves, dwarves were certainly a tolerable species. She gave a friendly smile to the approaching

rider who curiously slowed. Kalian's greeting brought her along side. She seemed to attract the Dwarven woman's attention. "Partha Salroka," she said. Peace Friend was a practiced phrase for greeting trading partners, which she said with a surprisingly good accent. There was a familiarity that did not fit the rough clothes and surroundings, not that the tall red headed woman really fit to start with.

Kalian barely controlled his eyeroll at the Sister greeting the dwarf *in dwarven*. So much for their disguises. He attempted to recover. "A pleasure to meet you, lady Rhiannon, second in command of the Night's Kiss. My name is Ka – Korbyn, and this is Martin, and this is Elinowy. We saw an advertisement for workers, and we are looking for employment. It is our understanding that we may find the recruiter outside of Jader, along this road." He bowed deferentially. The poor woman in the refugee camp had said the dwarf doing the hiring was accompanied by a qunari, although this pretty dwarf and the recruiter could still be one in the same.

Well... they could always claim Sister Elinowy had been fostered by surface dwarves as a child, Martin supposed. Or, worst-case scenario, they'd say she was moon-touched - and hope the Sister didn't know, or ask, what that meant.

"Lady." He bowed, a tad stiffly, and hoped he looked at least a little gruff. "We don't mean to get in the way of your party, but if you see the recruiter please tell them to wait for us. We really need that job. I don't want my sister," he pointed to Elinowy, "to have to do street work anymore."

While far from the fiery red of Sister Elinowy's, Martin's hair was coppery enough to make a sibling bond believable, and it would also fit in with the Sister's disguise. Hopefully she'd forgive Martin the barely-veiled hint regarding her profession.

The whole disguise and dishonesty thing was proving difficult for Elinowy. At Martin's comment, she shot him a side long glare before reminding herself that they were acting. She did her best to recover. "Y-yes. What my brother said. We are poor and in need of work and he would like to keep me off the streets," she stated, immediately feeling ill at ease with herself. "So as not to offer my bodily charms in return of currency or sustenance." She should have stopped while she was ahead.

Rhiannon gave a surprised look and very mischievous smile when the woman spoke to her in Dwarven. "Partha Salroka to you as well." She looked to Kalian and batted her eyes as he introduced himself and the other two. When Martin bowed, Rhi noticed his stiffness in it. *Ex soldier or guard. Must have just gotten out*, she thought. Her smile brightened though at his bow. Her attention moved back to Elinowy when Martin called her his sister. *Hair color was right*, Rhi thought. Then the look from Elinowy to Martin cemented the image the three were creating. *Brother, sister fallen on hard times. A friend trying to help them out.*

Rhi listened quietly as the three spoke. Her eyes never leaving Elinowy for very long though. "It is a pleasure to meet you all. Oh sweetheart, you are not in my way at all." She smiled warmly at Martin, and looked to Elinowy. "No, no, no such a vaen (beautiful) young woman should never have to resort to such things." Her voice filled with a warmth, curiosity and mischief. "You are looking for a dwarf

who is hiring workers. (pause) I am always looking for extra help aboard the Night's Kiss. Sadly though I do not think I am the dwarf you are looking for. We have just returned to port and I have not had time to post an advertisement." She gave a sigh as her attention shifted between the three.

"I do find it interesting though. For I am in search of a dwarf as well. May it be that we are looking for the same one?" She shifted slightly to keep all three in her eye line. Her tone became quick as she sat up more in her saddle, "Gresh, Kelec, double up with Barres and Farek." The two guards immediately moved to double up with the other two. Rhi looked back down at the three. "Now I will not take no for an answer. Martin, you take Leesa there, the grey one and Korbyn you take Valsama the chestnut." Rhi moved a little closer to Elinowy, reached out her hand, "Miss Elinowy, you can come sit with me up here on Avandra." Her smile was warm, inviting with a hint of a devilishness.

Martin wanted to refuse the offer; he wasn't sure it would do much to help with their mission, and he didn't like the way that dwarf looked at Sister Elinowy. But try as he might, he couldn't think of a reasonable objection that wouldn't completely throw their disguises. Truly destitute people would jump at an offer like that.

Which, come to think of it, seemed a bit too generous to be sincere.

Riding as opposed to walking seemed a good idea. Elinowy had sat on a horse once when she was quite young. One of the Sisters at the Chantry had brought in a small pony to entertain the younger children during a festival. The horse had marched in a circle while one of the Sisters held her in place in the 'saddle'. She had never had much need of horses in Bete Noire. But the principal seemed fairly straight forward. The hind quarters of the horse barely came above her waist, so riding it shouldn't be too difficult. She smiled kindly to Rhi. "Thank you Milady. I fear in our poverty, my brother and I are not accustomed to horses much. Thank you for your generosity." She took the dwarf's hand and began to figure how to negotiate her way onto the horse. There was no step or stirrup or whatever they were called. She put one hand on the hind quarters of the horse and pulled on Rhi to try and hop up on the beast. Not exactly successful, her momentum carried her face into the back of Rhi's shoulder. "I am so sorry," she muttered struggling to write herself on the back of the animal. Curiously her feet hung barley cleared the ground while sitting on the horse's back. Ungainly and uncomfortable as it was, she presumed this would be better than walking.

Kalian flashed Martin an amused and chagrined look as if to say, *whatever this was they were involved in now, was nothing like what he expected*. He watched in consternation as the lovely Rhiannon's retinue followed her orders and doubled up on their mounts to leave a horse each for himself and Martin. Kalian knew the basics of horse-riding, relying on his specialized knowledge of some animals, but he was by no stretch a skilled horseman. Still, he took the chestnut's reins, spoke softly to Valsama, then climbed into the horse's saddle. "Thank you, lady Rhiannon. This is a generous and unexpected kindness." Kalian wondered if it was some kind of trick. Or, if this kind dwarf was connected to the suspicious work offer, maybe it was legitimate after all. Or, he mused, looking at Elinowy pressed against Rhiannon, perhaps she just found Elinowy as attractive as everyone else. "Do you know anything about the dwarf we are meeting, and the work she's recruiting for?"

Rhiannon helped Elinowy make her way up in to Avandra. When the young woman slid to get more comfortable she over corrected. She felt Elinowy's face push against her shoulder. When she got settled and held on Rhi smiled. "Oh no vaen, not to worry." She replied to Elinowy

Martin reluctantly accepted the grey horse's reins. The animal had a mean look about it and snorted aggressively when he approached. *I'm sure it bites.* Sister Elinowy looked far from comfortable behind Rhiannon though as usual she remained serene through what promised to be an ordeal. Martin gathered the reins in his left hand, slid a foot in the stirrup and hoisted himself upwards.

There was no way to hide that he was an adept rider, and so he did not even try. He'd owned his own horse since he was nine until, at fourteen, he'd had to leave it behind when he'd gone to be trained as a Templar. There he'd been trained to ride on a heavy war horse, able to keep a good pace under the weight of a man in full armour, because running after mages occasionally required speed.

The Guard, on the other hand, owned only a couple of horses for emergencies, not an usual occurrence by any stretch of the imagination. If anyone asked, Martin would have to make up some sort of story, he figured as he adjusted the length of the stirrups. The Grey - Leesa ? - tried to take advantage of his momentarily awkward position to rub against Kalian's horse, and Martin pulled sharply on the reins. A little bit further, Rhiannon looked eminently at ease, reins loosely held in one hand. She didn't seem to mind the slightest how Sister Elinowy clung to her to keep her balance.

Come to think of it, it was a little bit unusual for a sailor to handle horses so well.

"Thank you again for helping us. Are you from around here ?" Martin asked Rhiannon. It couldn't hurt to find out a bit more about this charitable dwarf.

Rhi had heard Korbyn ask about the dwarf they were all heading to see. "Roxa I believe her name is. I do not know much of anything really. My mother and I were contacted this morning about negotiating a contract. I have heard that she has a Qunari with her. Not sure what he is called." Her tone was light and conversational.

When Martin had mounted the horse and as he rode, it was evident that he knew horses. She gave him a nudge when he thank her and gave him a very mischievous grin when he asked if she was from around here. "Martin, my dear. It is no problem at all. We are all heading in the same direction." She paused for a moment giving him a wink. "I was born here in Jader. Well actually aboard the Night's Kiss. Have spent the majority of my time out to sea. (pause) Is it that you are wondering why you may not have seen me around, that you ask me this question? Or is it that your are, how do you humans say it, using a line pick up on me?" As she says this she smiles warmly at Martin though one hand gently brushes one of Elinowy's hands.

Kalian took in this information thoughtfully. The recruiter's name was Roxa, but their current dwarven hostess admitted to knowing no more than they did. He doubted that her guards thought giving up their mounts to double-up was *no problem at all*, although he sensed only irritation and

indulgence in their sidelong glances. As though inviting vagabonds to join her company then flirting with them was completely ordinary behavior for their mistress.

The beast moved uncomfortably under her as she found herself now clinging to Rhiannon. This was not the pony ride of her youth. She struggled to maintain her balance, each movement the horse made seemed to fight against her. She felt Rhi's hand brush against hers. Elinowy figured it was a cue to try and calm down. She was squirming a bit much for riding so small a horse. This was all just so new. The others were speaking, she paid little notice as she was trying to not fall to her death. She clasped her arm around the Dwarven lady's midsection trying to steady the continuous motion of the horse. The beast, Avandra, seemed to sense her unease and shifted again beneath her. Elinowy began to feel herself slide back off the creature's hindquarters she roughly rode on. She pulled herself closer to Rhi, but instead slid off the horse, accidentally pulling the Dwarven lady with her. Mercifully she hit the ground first and could catch Rhi, as she fell on top of her.

Rhi felt Elinowy slipping from Avandra, it was too late. Her attention temporarily on the two young men, by the time she reached to grab Elinowy to try to help her stay on Avander the two of them were on the ground. Still Rhi was quick enough to turn so as to land facing Elinowy.

Elinowy reached up for the falling dwarf, she lay on her back grasping upwards, her breath momentarily taken away as she hit the ground. The dwarf landed face first on Elinowy's stomach. She took light solace in that the landing was softer and she likely didn't break any ribs. She took a deep breath on the dwarf impacting her and struggled to regain her bearings and composure. "Thank the Maker you are unharmed. I am so sorry Milady. I did not mean to pull you down here.

Kalian slid off his horse, intending to help the two women, but the two dwarfs who had given up their horses were already on the ground, drawing their swords. From where he was standing the two women appeared entwined in a carnal embrace with the dwarf on top, and even the two dwarf guards with swords ready held back, uncertain how to proceed. Kalian held out his arms in a peaceful gesture. "Hey, uh, no harm intended! Lady Rhiannon, are you all right? Sis... uh, Elinowy are you hurt?"

Martin rubbed the bridge of his nose, somewhat chagrined by the turn their deception was taking. Their cover was getting more transparent by the second. And Kalian, bless his soul, too honest to be good at maintaining their lie. No-one would believe he was actually related to Elinowy by blood... maybe they could say they had adopted him into their family, as flimsy an excuse as it was. Martin did not get off his horse, there were already enough people making a fuss and neither of the fallen women looked seriously hurt. He did eye the nearest guard, wondering how hard it would be to grab their sword and knock them out before they had time to react.

The two guards had slid off the back of the mounts that they had doubled up on, pulling their swords. They did not advance seeing that Rhi had turned so that she was facing what might be a possible threat. When hearing Korbyn say that they mean no harm, they stood back slightly, swords still out though.

Rhi heard Korbyn say that they mean no harm and then ask Elinowy if she is alright. She didn't miss the "Sis" as well. Rhi glanced up quickly at her guards and gave a shake of her head. Then turned her attention back to Elinowy. Her crimson eyes flashed brightly as a very mischievous grin crossed her face. Her voice becoming more of a bedroom tone. "Miss Elinowy, if you wanted to get more intimate, all you had to do was ask." She leaned closer, her crimson colored eyes closing halfway, as if to kiss Elinowy. Just at the last moment she got up and held out her hand to help Elinowy up. "Please, Miss Elinowy, forgive me. Here take Avandra, I can walk."

Martin's hand clenched over his left hip, where his sword should be hanging. He was really beginning to regret his lie about the Sister's profession. He'd thought it clever, at the time, but he'd not anticipated it would lead to this shameless flirting on Rhiannon's part. If it got much more serious, he was going to have to play the part of the protective brother defending his sister's honour.

"It may be best if my sister doesn't ride on her own," he said - as if this was not obvious yet. "And we couldn't let you walk while we ride. You already shame us with your kindness. Elinowy, why don't you ride with me?"

Elinowy pulled her self up off the ground and made a hasty attempt to pat some of the dirt off the now even dirty clothes she had borrowed. Standing up next to the Dwarf she started to laugh. "No. Please. Thank you Milady, and my dear brother. I believe I have had enough of riding for the day. Do not concern yourselves on my account. I am quite accustom to walking swiftly. I will try to make sure I do not hold make us tardy for our appointments.

Kalian sighed. They probably looked ridiculous. The two unmounted dwarves had sheathed their swords. On the plus side, he, Elinowy, and Martin definitely didn't look like any kind of threat... much less spies, and there could be no doubt in any of these dwarves' minds about why the three of them were unemployed and desperate for work. He addressed Rhiannon's two unmounted guards and gestured to the chestnut. "You two should take Valsama." He bowed to Rhiannon. "If you'll pardon me, milady, I think it's best if I keep my feet on the ground and walk with Elinowy. Beside you on your mount, my lady Rhiannon, if that is what you wish."

Rhi stepped back a little to give Elinowy room to dust herself off. Even dusty this red haired woman was beautiful. Still the other two were very handsome as well. Rhi looked to Martin when he commented about shaming them. "Oh Martin fraluv, (dear). There is no shame. Please understand that I just wanted to help fellow travelers."

Her attention drawn back to Elinowy as she pretty much insisted that she would walk. A small frown briefly crossed Rhi's face. It was quickly replaced with sly grin. "As you wish Lady Elinowy." She replied as she swung back up in the saddle.

She looked to Korbyn, smiled and nodded her head. The two dwarves mounted Valsama without question. They were quite used to their commander's whims. "I would like that Korbyn, Lady Elinowy. Though only if the two I you wish." Her tone was sincere yet held a little mischief.

## An ill-fated meeting

Posted on 31 Dec 2020 @ 2:43pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**3,392 words; about a 17 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Jader outskirts

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th - mid-day

**Tags:**

The sun had risen to almost mid-day by the time they found the recruiter. In truth Martin had held little hope at this point of finding her but there she was, looking quite bored, sitting on a large rock on the middle of a crossroads, her qunari guard leaning against that same rock as he idly sharpened a dagger. So far she matched the description given by Orla perfectly and besides, Martin didn't figure there were too many dwarves walking around with Qunari friends. He exchanged a glance with Kalian. This was where their mission would either end in success or disaster.

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Roxa had been about to call it a day when she'd spotted the small group heading her way. Probably the dwarf she'd been told to expect ; recruiting had slowed to almost nothing now. The most desperate refugees had already signed up, and the others may be getting suspicious, not seeing the others come back with pockets lined in gold. They may have to update their recruiting methods a bit but there was no hurry, the current workforce did a satisfactory job. With the help of a whip and half-rations as an incentive those Fereldans sure could work hard.

She squinted at the approaching party, frowning when they proved to be more numerous than expected. She was waiting for one dwarf and maybe a guard or two, not a whole effing retinue ! Five - no, seven - no, eight of them ! She shifted a bit uncomfortably. Being outnumbered was never a good thing, even if Gangue was easily worth three of anyone.

"Problem ?" Gangue asked. He was a Qunari of few words.

"Dunno yet." Roxa would have felt better if he hadn't sounded so damn hopeful. She knew - or suspected - that her Qunari acolyte's greatest ambition was to die fighting, but that sort of thinking could be as dangerous to her as to her enemies.

"Say the word." He sheathed his dagger and grabbed the huge, huge sword that he lugged around - and wielded like he would a letter-opener.

By then the party had got close enough for Roxa to get a good look. One female dwarf on a dark grey horse - that must be this Rhiannon she'd been told to expect. Six guards...? But two of them did not have a weapon, and were dressed in rags. One obviously hailed from Rivain, the other's fair complexion and coppery hair gave little indication as to his origins. Orlesian, most likely. And the

last - and tallest - of them was a woman with flaming red hair and... fairly obvious attributes, that were not those she would expect in a guard. Roxa wasn't worried... yet, but she was definitely vigilant now. Her hands found the twin axes at her belt and rested there, in a casually threatening pose.

"Hail, travelers," she called. "Would one of you happen to be called Rhiannon?" Her eyes rested on the silver-haired dwarf woman, whom she'd dubbed the most dangerous.

Rhi made small talk with Elinowy, Korbyn and Martin as they had made their way to the meeting place. After a bit she could see a couple of figures up ahead. A female dwarf and a Qunari. \*This must be Roxa.\* thought.

It had taken a little longer than had been planned but the company had been very pleasant. As the group approached Rhi heard Roxa call out. Rhi seen how the woman stood with her hands on her axes with a practiced ease that said 'I know how to use these.' Rhi gave a nod when the dwarf called out her name. "I am Rhiannon Cadash. You must be Roxa. Forgive our lateness. Found these young travelers (motions to Martin, Elinowy and Kalian) walking this way. It is always nicer to have company while on the road."

By the time they found Roxa, Kalian's repertoire of small talk had been exhausted, and he was beginning to regret presenting himself as the fictional Korbyn in Rhiannon's pleasant company. But he felt no relief at the sight of the recruiter and her Qunari guard.

Roxa regarded the pretty young dwarf representing the Night's Kiss – the captain's daughter, according to her sources. That Rhiannon had, by her own admission, befriended people on the road spoke volumes about her character and potential to be manipulated. The four dwarven guards deferred to her. A grin spread across Roxa's face, oozing persuasive warmth. "I am indeed Roxa. It is an honor and pleasure to meet you, Rhiannon Cadash, of the Night's Kiss."

Remembering that he was supposed to do the talking, Kalian spoke. "M-madam Roxa, the three of us," he gestured to include Martin and Elinowy, "saw a flyer, and we understand you're hiring. One royal a day. What kind of work would we be doing, and where?"

Roxa's attention shifted to the humans, her irritation with the interruption quickly masked. It was almost too easy, exploiting the desperate and gullible. All three humans appeared healthy, and strong enough. The woman was tall and pretty for a human, and by appearances accustomed to working on her back. Deciding which work party to assign that one would take extra consideration.

"It's hard work. Mining. That's why the advertised pay is a royal a day, but you three look up for it. My roster is nearly full, but luckily for you there are three positions left. As for the mine's location, if you want the job I'll be taking you there today." Roxa pointed dismissively to a wagon waiting behind the rock she was standing on. "Wait in the wagon while Rhiannon and I talk."

Martin hesitated briefly and glanced at Kalian. If they got on that wagon, there were committing



themselves past the point of no-return with no inkling as to what lay ahead. On the other hand, Roxa looked like a far cry from a drooling maniac murdering people for kicks, which meant there was something else going on. And from the number of people already involved, something of more considerable scope than he'd imagined.

*Mining ? What the Fade could that have to do with anything ?* But if Kalian had doubts he didn't show them, and knowing Sister Elinowy she would let herself be carried by the Maker's will. Hoping silently they'd find a way to get out of this alive, Martin climbed on the wagon, offering his hand to his "sister" to help her climb.

How Elinowy kept her mouth shut in front of Roxa was a minor miracle in itself. They were there to learn more about the flyer and missing workers. And it seemed the presence of Rhi with them had made the Dwarf recruiter not so discerning. While aching to perform her line of being a desperate poor woman of lowly station looking for work, events seemed to not require her performance. Mining. She had done her share of hard labors rebuilding her Chantry in Bette Noir, hauling and hammering lumber, applying tile and securing windows, but nothing like extracting minerals from solid rock. She felt a bit un-prepared for that type of work, but she had faith the Maker was guiding her to where she needed to be. And if she was called to be a miner, then mining she would do, to the best of her ability. At a minimum, she could bring water to the other workers, and care for their injuries when they occurred. She had many skills that would be useful to those working the mine. She would wait for the moments the Maker chose to use her.

She reached up to take Martin's hand to climb into the wagon. Her long hair flowed out behind her as she turned to wave farewell to Rhiannon. She found the normal peasant clothing to be freeing, a very different look from the hooded habit. Stepping over the side of the wagon she quickly found her way forward in the wagon to await her companions. She lightly hummed and mouthed a passage from the Cantic of Exaltations. A popular chant, no reason a poor desperate woman of the streets wouldnt be contemplating them while waiting. It also gave her hope that the Maker would deliver them from whatever tribulation lie ahead.

Kalian followed Sister Elinowy – no, he must think of her as just Elinowy so he didn't slip up again – into the wagon without protest. Although it did feel like they were willingly stepping into a trap, nothing nefarious had happened... yet. They hadn't been tied up or drugged - they were there willingly. Presumably at the end of the wagon's destination, they would discover the location of the missing people and what was going on there. Kalian was beginning to feel guilty they hadn't warned Roxa, who seemed to be as much in the dark as they were. He motioned in what he hoped was a subtle way for Martin and Elinowy that they should listen to the conversation between Rhiannon and Roxa.

Gangue watched with simmering disappointment as the three humans got into the wagon, just as most of the other humans and elves had done. No protest, no struggling. No blood for his greatsword. He gave a bored sigh and his gaze wandered past the female dwarf Roxa was speaking with, a potentially dangerous foe and yet an apparent ally. Then he focused his attention on the four dwarven guardsmen, fingers wandering to his greatsword's pommel. Now, there was a challenge.

He waited, hoping the four would attack or Roxa would give the command.

Roxa had stopped paying attention to the three humans, entirely focused on Rhiannon. That unusual eye and hair colour made her stand out, even more so with her sailor garb. She looked fairly young, early twenties perhaps, presumably bumped to her current position on account of her mother. This was something Roxa could work with - perhaps even take advantage of. Rhiannon looked confident, probably too confident for her own good. Roxa's face remained neutral but inside she was smiling a toothy, hungry grin.

"Your captain must trust you a great deal to send you to negotiate in her stead," she said. A bit of flattery could not go amiss. "I will not waste your time. I would like to offer you a one of a kind deal. We need goods shipped discreetly. The quantity isn't huge - a few crates, monthly or bi-monthly. For a generous fee, of course. Interested?"

Rhiannon watched as the three humans headed to and started getting in the cart. The short time she had spent with the three Rhi thought she had a good read on them. Of the two men, Martin seemed like the only one who would not have to much trouble in the mines. Korbyn, it would take a while to get used to hard labor. Elinowy though, she would not survive the mine. Roxa would probably put her to work relieving the stress of those who were guarding those who were mining. Then again, it would depend. If Rhi's suspicions were true about the young lady, what would Roxa do, if it was true. Rhi just couldn't figure out what would bring a Sister out here. *If Elinowy is a sister, then that meant Martin and Korbyn were probably her guards.* Rhi thought. It was Korbyn's slip of 'Sis...' that planted the seed in Rhi's mind.

Her attention shifted back to Roxa when she spoke about how her mom must have such trust in her to make a deal with out her. Flattery was usually nice but the small tone was there. That told Rhi that this dwarf thought she was a push over. So let her think that. "Yes, yes she does. Well I hope so." She put a bit of nervousness in her voice. As Roxa gave a quick pitch to what she wanted Rhi listened carefully. A few crates monthly to bi-monthly with a generous compensation. She knew enough to know that whatever would be in the crates could definitely cause major issues if customs decided to do their jobs.

She gave Roxa a warm and innocent smile. "Yes, yes, we are interested. I would like to discuss the details over a drink." She reached down to fish out a a leather whiskey holder. "Spirits from the Night's Kiss." She and her guards will follow Roxa.

Roxa allowed her toothy, hungry grin to spread across her face. This youngster was not so naïve as she appeared, bringing her own liquor to a negotiation with the Carta. There was more than one way this sailor could be useful to her. "Excellent, first mate Rhiannon. Please do accompany us to the mine, where you can see the operation firsthand and we can work out the finer points of our arrangement."

"Gangue," barked Roxa, striding toward the wagon's front seat.

With a frustrated grunt, the qunari stopped fondling his pommel and followed his mistress. He lifted Roxa into the driver's seat of the wagon, then joined her, taking the reins.

Roxa did not sit on the wagon's bench seat, but instead climbed up to perch on the seat's back, looking down at her three new *recruits* and toward Rhiannon with her retinue on horseback following behind.

"You there," she addressed the red-haired human woman. "What's your story? Why are you here instead of comfortably plying your trade in a brothel?"

Elinowy was not really grasping everyone's preoccupation with thinking her the harlot. She stopped her humming and looked up at the dwarven woman. "I am just a desperate poor woman of low station looking to make money." she recited with some eagerness. "I've not been in a brothel, but I do have experience balancing accounts receivable against staffing resources." In truth her experience as a "mother" of her Chantry had her much more suited to manage a mine than actually work inside one, but she would need to play the part the Maker presented.

Kalian had been getting more worried about the potential consequences of Elinowy's disguise. If there was one thing he knew about the deception of hiding in plain sight, was that it worked best if he kept the lies and fake information to a minimum. Elinowy had done well, not pretending she'd been in a brothel, and his mind raced thinking of a way to build on her offer of skills she truly possessed.

"If I may add, madam Roxa, Elinowy has only recently taken up uh, this work. She was really good at managing the accounts for the, uh, merchant company she used to work for. But then the owner disappeared and took all the money with him. A customer at the tavern where I used to work said that if she was so desperate, she should try, uh..." Kalian shrugged, playing the part of the irresponsible family friend. "I guess they call it the oldest profession for a reason."

Roxa stroked her chin and considered this information. She did need someone she could trust to manage the books and manage supplies. The current bookkeeper was Carta, undoubtedly skimming, but fully on board with all aspects of the operation, including the indefinite delays in paying the workers. Roxa regarded the red-haired woman's brother. She could use a family bond to control one by threatening the other. "New, huh? She'll have plenty of eager customers in the camp to break her in."

"Hey !" Martin did his best to infuse his voice with indignation. "That's my sister you're talking about !"

Roxa gave him a disillusioned look, almost overflowing with condescension. "Then that makes you her pimp, I suppose. And not a very good one at that, or you wouldn't be here."

Too bad Martin couldn't summon an embarrassed flush on command. "We couldn't go on as we'd been doing. This is our chance to start again and get a better life. Better than the street."

"Yet you pimp out your sister, but not yourself." Roxa snorted, amused. She would have done the same, had she had a sister and need of coin. She glanced at the quiet Rivaini, then at the red-haired beauty. If that one wasn't worth her keep in the mine, Roxa already knew where she'd be assigned. In fact, she might give her to Gangue for a night, to loosen him up a bit.

They had reached a junction with a small path and Gangue pulled the reins to direct the horse to the right. It knew the way well, having picked up workers several times a week for months now. The ride was a little bit rougher there than on the main road, the uneven terrain making the ride bumpy. Roxa was used to it and easily kept her balance, smirking when one of the humans nearly fell out of the cart after an especially bad lurch of the cart.

Kalian had been trying to think of something to say. So far whatever he said to Roxa made their situation worse. They were headed southeast, through a thick forest, along a road that was little more than a path. The wagon shifted suddenly, giving him the sensation of nearly falling out of the cart, but he caught himself just in time. After that, he held tight.

Gangue glanced at Rhiannon, reins loosely held in one hand. The horse had smelt that they were headed home and needed little further prompting, giving Gangue leisure to examine their guest. She looked tough and resourceful. Of course her diminutive, dwarvish height put her at a disadvantage, but if she was fast she could still prove a worthy opponent.

"You know how to use that ?" Gangue asked, pointing his chin at the sword hanging at her belt.

Rhi listened to Elinowy answer Roxa's question. The more the young woman talked the more Rhi was being convinced that she was not a woman of the night. She was still not convinced though that she was a Sister. Maybe awaken one or more likely a disgraced initiate. Then Martin spoke in defense of her. He truly sounded as if he was her brother.

When Gangue asked her if she knew how to use her sword. She tilted her head and gave the Qunari a wickedly mischievous grin. "Ohhh this old thing? Why I would hope so. Have had this sword in my hand since I can't remember when." She un-sheathed it slowly. The rapier was a double edged straight blade. With an Orlesian guard. The blade, guard, and grip was a mat black in color with a dull crimson line down the middle on each side of the blade. The grip was wrapped in black leather. The guard and blade looked to be made of black mithral. The pommel was also black mithral infused with red diamond dust.

Gangue tilted his head as he examined the sword. Its understated elegance was more appealing than an heavily adorned weapon, but he sneered inwardly at the flimsiness of the blade. A rapier. Absolutely no match for his two-hander. Still, it could be good fun if the dwarf was good at dodging.

"Care to test your skill ?" He tried not to look too eager - Roxa had told him that it scared people off when he did that. Come to think of it, she'd asked him not to smile for the same reason.

Rho looked at the Qunari and gave him a playful grin. "Test my skill? Why, what skills are you referring to? Sword play, dancing, cooking? Course there are many other skills that you could be referencing." She slid her rapier back in its sheath.

Roxa threw back her head in a deep-bellied cackle and reached over to slap Gangue near the base of his neck. "Ha! She got you there, Gangue. Dancing. Cooking. Heh, heh! In a battle of wits she already has you beat." Roxa shifted her attention back to Rhiannon, eyes narrowed but still chuckling unpleasantly. "You're smart, sailor girl." Maybe *too* smart. Roxa would be careful with this on.

Gangue scowled and turned his back on Roxa and that other irritating dwarf who had denied him the satisfaction of an honorable fight, while also insulting him with some kind of Bas joke. He consoled himself with the knowledge that eventually Roxa would give the command he wanted most to obey.

## Mine, mine, all mine

**Posted on 14 Jan 2021 @ 3:07pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)**

**2,913 words; about a 15 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Carta Mining Camp

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th - late afternoon

OOC: After 'An ill-fated meeting'

Despite the clear sky overhead, the sun was getting lower on the horizon and shadows cast the wagon in low light as it bumped and shook along the narrow road through dense forest. Kalian observed that trees and underbrush had recently been cut back to widen the trail enough to accommodate the wagon, but the fallen trees and branches had been left along the roadside. Woodcutters would have gathered it to sell, or at least to remove the threat of fire come late summer.

The forest trees thinned a bit, and the horse pulling the wagon perked up and moved faster, though the qunari at the reins hadn't urged it. A light breeze carried the scent of the ocean, along with the welcoming smell of woodsmoke and the less pleasant smell of a latrine somewhere. They must be nearing the camp.

Kalian leaned slightly out of the wagon to get a better look at the camp as they approached. It appeared to be on a bluff, maybe cliffs overlooking the sea. Rocky outcroppings forming a natural barrier around most of the camp. He saw only four buildings - one of them a guardhouse, and a forge. At first he saw only half-a-dozen humans and dwarves, heavily armed and armored guarding the camp's open side. Some of them were holding crossbows.

The qunari brought the wagon to a lurching stop, and a man Kalian guessed to be a worker by his clothing and lack of weapons, came forward for the horse. The only other workers seemed to be at the forge. Where were all the missing people?

Roxa stood on the wagon seat and looked down at the young sailor and the three gullible additions to her workforce. "New recruits get a tour of the surface camp when they arrive. Rhiannon Cadash, second in command of the Night's Kiss, would you like to join the brief tour before we adjourn to my office for that drink and negotiation? You may bring two of your retinue with you, the other two may wait here with your horses."

Rhiannon paid attention to her surroundings as the group approached. The armored guards, the four buildings and the lack of workers. Once at the camp a worker came up to take the wagon. As everyone was climbing down Roxa offered to have Rhi and two of her guards come on the tour with the new recruits. "I could use a good walk about."

Kalian scrambled out of the wagon, and offered a hand to assist Elinowy climbing down.

Taking Kalian's hand Elinowy stepped down from the wagon. Not her most comfortable trip, but it felt good to be out and moving. She stretched her arms over her head, which only made her overly tall stature seem even larger. Her red hair whipped around her head as she worked the discomfort of the ride out of her body. She proceeded to look around to access the mining camp.

Martin slid off the cart after Sister Elinowy and stretched his spine. It had been a bumpy ride, and longer than he would have liked. While still close to Jader, they were still far enough that no help would be forthcoming anytime soon. He'd swapped patrols around so that he wouldn't be expected at the station before tomorrow, and after that... well. Hopefully the situation would be resolved by then.

Still, as he looked around the camp he was getting an increasingly ill feeling in the pit of his stomach. This operation looked much bigger than he'd assumed. Half-a-dozen guards, that he could see - probably more in the building that looked like a barrack. This meant that Roxa must have a well-organized supply route to bring enough food for her people, without being spotted.

"This way," Roxa gestured for them to follow her. Although she'd claimed the tour to be for Martin, Kalian and Elinowy's benefit, her attention was all on Rhiannon. "We have our own blacksmith, as you can see."

The smith was, unsurprisingly, a dwarf. What did look surprising was the fact that his beard was trimmed short - barely more than a stubble - and the large tattoo on one of his cheeks. Martin remembered that tattoos had meanings in dwarven society, but he had no idea what this one in particular stood for, especially as it was half-covered in soot. The smith was fanning his fire with a bellows, muscles bulging with effort. Each gust of air made the coals glow brighter and small puffs of soot marked a black ring around the fire.

Martin glanced around, noting that while there was a couple of daggers there, the bulk of the smith's work seemed to be on tools. Shovels, pickaxes, hammers and chisels, rather crudely made but serviceable. What truly set him on edge though was the chains and cuffs. *Uh-oh. Not looking good.*

Kalian caught Martin's gaze, exchanging a worried look. He'd seen the chains and cuffs too.

"We are mostly self-sufficient," Roxa was saying, "we recycle the iron of broken tools to make new ones. It keeps costs down - and it's more discreet."

Rhi paid close attention to what she could see and what she heard. When they came upon the blacksmith she felt a small yearning to go and pick up a hammer and join him. She immediately noticed the tattoo and knew he was or at least pretended to be castless. "It is always better to be as self sufficient as you can be. Better for the bottom line."

"This," Roxa continued as she walked on, "is the guardhouse. Our guards take turns to sleep and eat there."

The guardhouse looked big enough to host maybe a dozen bunk beds, and Martin wondered if the other guards were sleeping or if the house was just bigger than necessary. He fervently hoped it was the latter.

"And my office is right there. It's simple, but comfortable enough." Roxa was showing a building a little bit more elaborate than the others. At least it looked like the wooden planks making up the walls were better fitted on the frames, and it looked less drafty than the guardhouse. The whole set-up looked fairly recent, some sap still oozing from some of the planks used to build the camp.

"And, huh, that building?" Martin asked, pointing at the fourth one.

"That?" Roxa's smile was a bit toothy. "That's the resthouse for our workers. Doubles up as an infirmary."

"And... where are the workers?" Martin tried to sound eager.

Roxa's smile widened, and it was a disturbing sight. "Gangue will show you while I speak with Rhiannon. If you would?" She gestured at Rhiannon to follow.

When the tour came to an end, Rhi glanced at the three new workers after she had seen Roxa's smile. What ever this operation was, it didn't seem to bode well for the three. Rhi gave a nod and a wink to Elinowy, Korbyn and Martin. As they moved to follow Gangue.

Turning to Roxa, Rhi inclined her head. "Efficient, small, you have any trouble with the workers?" she asked as she followed Roxa.

"Nothing serious," replied Roxa evasively, sizing Rhiannon up. She probably had a conscience, but Roxa could work with such inconveniences. She led the other dwarf to her office. "It's hard work, as I warn all new recruits. Humans and elves just lack stone sense and natural dwarven stamina, and we get the occasional human that never did a hard day's work in their life. Most adjust, but a few resign and leave." Roxa flashed that toothy grin. Yeah, a few chose to leave, but they didn't get far.

"Ah. Here we are," said Roxa, opening the door to the only truly well-built building. She regarded Rhiannon's guards. "I'd prefer your escort wait outside, but bring them in if you must."

Rhi had noticed the building that Roxa pointed out as hers. It had looked like it was made better than the others, yet when she walked it she found it quite pleasant. At least for what the camp was like. She had motioned for her two guards to stand outside by the door.

The front room they entered was furnished with dwarf-sized furniture, a cleared desk, book shelves devoid of books but holding a stack of advertising flyers, two or three ledgers, dirty plates and tankards, and a random assortment of low quality daggers and swords. Matching cushions on the wooden chairs, a colorful rug made of fabric scraps, curtains on the windows, and a small family portrait of a middle-aged dwarven couple and their young daughter who was not Roxa, gave the room a homely feel incongruous with the dwarven woman running the operation.

Roxa took the chair behind the desk and gestured for Rhiannon to take a seat on the other side. "Where shall we begin – drinking or negotiating?"

Rhiannon had grabbed the bottle of spirits from her saddle pack before she had entered the dwelling. When she did she took in the surroundings. Dwarven furniture and the picture. Which she found interesting, seeing how the little girl was not Roxa. Rhi moved to the desk, put the bottle of spirits on it and then took a chair. "Very cozy here. Your operation is small though I can see the potential it has. As long as the overhead stays relatively low." She noticed the container which held the spirits also held two glasses, which Rhi took out and placed on the desk. "Negotiating and drinking are definitely two very different things." She poured half a glass into the small glasses each. "That being said, a drink to the possibilities first. Then we discuss what it is that we can do for each other."

Roxa gave Rhiannon a somewhat toothy, insincere smile. "I can drink to that. Stone and salt !" She lifted her glass and, though she made a big show of it, only allowed a few drops to pass her lips.

Rhi lifted her glass, "Blood and stone." she finished the toast. She downed the glass and set it upside down on the table. Rhi felt the nice slow cool burn run down her throat. She had been drinking this since she was old enough to

"On to business, then. I've shown you the operation, and told you what the shipment would be."

She hadn't specified what it was they were mining. The hired help didn't need to know. Not that Roxa was foolish enough to imagine Rhiannon wouldn't look the moment her back was turned.



"Naturally I'm counting on your... discretion. The destination of the first shipment will be Kirkwall, though that may change for future shipments. So, tell me... what kind of fee are we talking about?"

Rhi listened quietly as Roxa went into just a little more detail than she had before. Not much though, which was fine with Rhi. She suspected that Roxa knew enough that the crates would be inspected by her and her mother before the destination was reached.

"Well, our normal fee would be 500 gold plus 150 silver per crate." Rhi smiled. "What I can offer is 300 gold plus 125 silver per crate. Special offer." Rhi smiled.

"Ah." Roxa hid her displeasure behind a small sip of her drink. The price was extortionate. Of course there was a discretion fee, but this Rhiannon really was trying to milk it for all it was worth. No matter, she'd have to talk her into something a little bit more reasonable. Roxa always found compelling arguments, one way or the other. "That is slightly above what I was expecting. It's only a few crates, so you can carry other shipments as well to make the journey worth your while." She settled into what promised to be a long bargain.

"This way," Gangue grunted to Kalian, Martin and Elinowy.

Elinowy joined her companions in following the Qunari. The camp appeared to have modest facilities, for a small operation. She wondered as to what they were mining and what the expected output should be. There was no large ore processing facilities, so it seemed likely they were producing precious metals. Her mind moved through potential logistics to operate such an undertaking.

Kalian wished he could talk with Martin and Elinowy in private about what they'd learned so far, and how they were going to escape. "Excuse me, sir?" Kalian addressed the metal-skinned giant who was leading them toward the north side of camp. Roxa had called him Gangue and although he didn't know much of the dwarven language, Kalian was pretty sure that was some kind of insult. "Do new recruits ever arrive and change their mind about joining? What happens then?"

Gangue stopped walking and turned his full attention on the darker-skinned human. His mouth spread into a terrifying grin and his hand caressed the pommel of his enormous sword. "You want to quit?"

"Nope." Kalian raised his hands in surrender, or supplication. "No, sir, not me."

The smile dropped from Gangue's face and something like a disappointed growl rumbled in his chest. The qunari continued to lead and soon they stood at the edge of a rocky ravine.

Kalian looked over the edge and thought of a cake with a thin slice cut out of it. The rock face of the

other side of the ravine was a long stone's throw away. He could see an opening to the ocean to his right, a stream flowing along the ravine floor, and where the ravine closed like the center of the cake to his left. A wooden platform rigged with some kind of pully system rested in a dock at the top-level to their left. Far below around the platform dock at the ravine-floor level, stood three heavily armed guards. There were no other people in sight.

"The workers are down there. In the mine," said Gangue.

The sick feeling in Martin's stomach had begun spreading to the rest of his abdomen. This operation was even bigger than he'd feared, and the earlier interlude between Kalian and Gangue made it clear that "quitting" this new job wasn't an option. In fact, at this point they were really prisoners operating under the guise of freedom.

"Go on." Gangue pointed to a wooden platform that was suspended by a crane over the ravine, close enough to the edge that they could easily step on it. An elaborate system of pulleys allowed it to be lowered or lifted, according to what was needed. "On there."

The Qunari said his words like each one cost him, or as if he had only a finite amount of them and was saving them up for later, but his expression and the impatient snap of his fingers were eloquent enough. Martin hesitated; there was no telling if they would even get an opportunity to come back to the surface. Once they were down there... the image of being buried alive - literally - certainly sprang to mind. On the other hand they were unarmed, and Gangue looked like he knew how to handle that two-hander. Even so, it may be a chance they had to take. Martin tensed.

"Go on, if you want to get paid," Gangue said, clearly annoyed now.

Kalian dragged his gaze away from the edge and back to his companions, Elinowy and Martin. The sister appeared... serene as usual. The guardsman looked worried, and Kalian couldn't blame him. In spite of the intimidating qunari, so far they hadn't seen clear evidence that people were being forced to work against their will. To someone like Rhiannon, on the surface - literally - it probably looked like a legitimate mining operation. Kalian, Martin, and Elinowy wouldn't know for certain until they either talked to workers or went down to the mine and saw for themselves. Kalian nodded reassurance to Martin as he stepped onto the platform, confident he could escape as a bird and bring back rescue. They'd get through this.

For a long second, heavy with tension, Martin hesitated but he trusted Kalian; he relaxed his stance. "Sorry," he said to Gangue. "I'm... afraid of heights." It was only half a lie; he certainly didn't feel confident about the lift's ability to bear all of their weights combined. But the moment had passed and the opportunity was gone, so he stepped forward onto the platform, and waited for his companions to join him.

Elinowy made her way as instructed onto the at best rickety platform. She had no great love of pain or dying, but she placed herself into the will of the Maker, certain that he had purpose to any potential suffering she may be called to endure. All the same, she started to lightly sing from the

sacred verses as the platform began its decent into the abyss. As death was not immediately forthcoming, she looked down at the mine floor. IN the mix of torch light and lanterns she made out shadowy workers, making their way slowly about their tasks. As they lowered the sound of whips and jeers of labor taskmasters was apparent. It was quite obvious the mine was trying to make up for lack of worker enthusiasm through intimidation and fear. These were not the most efficient means to run such an enterprise, but it did save on costs in the short run.

With all three of them standing on the platform, Gangue moved to the lift controls. The lift descended into the ravine, to the mine.

## Unfavorable Wind

Posted on 30 Jan 2021 @ 2:04pm by [Rogue Jaslyn](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#)

**3,660 words; about a 18 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Jader Harbor – Richelieu's ship

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 16th - afternoon

OOC: After 'Suspicious Distraction

Jaslyn had put up her hood, and now strode toward the docks beside the nobleman. He had not given her permission to use his first name, and the elf thought it was perhaps best she continue calling him Monsieur Sauvage, to avoid any premature pretense of friendship. He had agreed she didn't deserve a death sentence, and agreed to help her speak to Richelieu, and she was grateful. Jaslyn even hoped he was right about his friend, even though it would put her investigation at another dead end.

They passed warehouses to reach the pier at the east end near the harbor master's offices. Jaslyn held her hood with one hand against a strong breeze that carried the smells of salt air, fish, and the hard work of men and women. "Have you visited Captain Richelieu's ship very often, Monsieur Sauvage?"

"I've been on it a few times, I even sailed with him, once; paid my way by sparing his debt," he replied, sighing. "The Cassabianca has been his pride and joy for over ten years, he spends more time on it than he does at home in Val Royeux. Sometimes I think he should marry the boat and make it official," Cainan joked, half heartedly. Whatever could be said about Richelieu, he always loved his ship, and his life as a captain.

Jaslyn led the way to Richelieu's ship, the Cassabianca. She was no sailor, but she could see that it was one of the largest in the harbor, with sleek lines and three masts. Three guards stood at the gangplank, and Jaslyn came to a stop, resting a firm hand on Sauvage's arm. "You will have to ask to speak to Richelieu. They've already turned me away."

Cainan felt her hand on his arm, and stopped, sizing the guards up. They weren't people he knew; nor were they people that Richelieu would normally hire. Richelieu had a type when it came to his crew; quick to smile, but equally able to look tough - the sort of genuine looking strong, but gentle giant. Richelieu was no giant, so he liked to know the men weren't likely to mutiny.

These were not in keeping with his usual crew-type. They were just huge; all scarred and muscled, and armed with clubs and rapiers, though each looked able to rip a plank, or another sailor, in two.

"Where's Richelieu?" Cainan said, resting his hand on his pommel.

"Who wants to know?!" the dimmest looking sailor demanded, looking at Cainan. He was sizing his clothes up, and Cainan could tell he was wondering if he could get away with robbing him. What the hell had happened to the Cassabianca?

Jaslyn's hands rested on the hilts of her daggers beneath her cape, ready to stand with Cainan if the guards attacked. The nobleman had already gotten further than she had - these goons responded to his question.

"His old friend, Cainan Sauvage. We have business together," he announced, his eyes moving from one to the next. The mention of business had a curious effect; all three men stood straight and instantly looked more professional.

"Ah, er, Monsieur," the first man said, smoothing his tone; he sounded northern, not Orlesian; and certainly didn't look Orlesian. "Yes, ah - Gar, go get the Captain!" he hissed to the man next to him, who lumbered back up to the ship, leaving the other two standing awkwardly. Cainan turned and looked back at the docks, as if casually surveying his surroundings.

"I think they are under the impression that I'm one of their employers," Cainan said under his breath, rolling his eyes. "I see Richelieu is hiring dumber than usual. That's... unexpected."

"Hurlocks would be smarter, and not as greedy," said Jaslyn, with a smirk. She'd seen the way they looked at her companion before he identified himself as a business associate of Richelieu. The guards didn't seem to pay much attention to the potential threat posed by herself and Monsieur Sauvage, and she released her hold on her daggers. "Such employees do beg the question, what exactly is the business that Captain Richelieu and his real partners are involved in?"

Cainan was bothered by that, as well; now he looked, he couldn't see much of the crew that he was familiar with, and he wondered what had befallen them. Richelieu had always prized a good crew above the most profitable trade routes; at least, that had been Cainan's impression.

Gar, the man sent to inform Richelieu he had a guest, returned. "Captain says to bring you on board."

Jaslyn reached for Sauvage's arm. "May I? That is, if you don't mind presenting me to the Captain as your... associate."

Cainan hooked his arm out, for her to take. "It would be a bit remiss of me to leave you alone in such company, especially after you asked for my assistance; I *am* a gentleman, whenever I can be," he added, the simple action announcing their association to the ship guards and challenging them to question it.

As they walked onto the plank, the guards made way for them, looking at Cainan's elven companion; while he knew she had armour under her cloak, they were more interested in her figure and her face; pretty, fair - they assumed a more... carnal relationship between himself and his companion.

"I can handle myself, though I do appreciate your chivalry." The way the three guards looked at her as they walked up the plank – an elf woman on a nobleman's arm - suggested certain conclusions. Jaslyn tossed her hair flirtatiously to enhance the impression and paused with Sauvage near the center mast.

Jaslyn could see no people working on deck. She knew little about ships, although the *Cassabianca* was docked, so she presumed the sailors were spending their pay at taverns and brothels along the wharf. In addition to the three guards, Jaslyn noted a woman with a crossbow looking down at them from the upper deck at the ship's bow.

"If Captain Richelieu doesn't recognize me, feel free to tell him whatever you think best about who I am. I don't need acknowledgement or respect, and I don't need you to defend my honor. I just want to find out what he knows about the disappearances of elves and poor humans in Jader." She looked up into Sauvage's handsome human face to make sure he understood.

Cainan chuckled under his breath, looking up at the crossbow wielder watching them from the upper deck. "Oh, I'm sure you don't *need* me to defend anything," he replied, amused. "But sufficed to say, if things do go sideways, you will have me at your back, honour or no." He gestured towards the doors towards Richelieu's quarters. The woman above hadn't taken aim, which he appreciated. He opened the door for her and they walked into the slightly warmer interior. The room was as he remembered it; Richelieu's office and quarters took up the width of the aft of the ship. The sleeping chambers were walled off from the office, which was before them. The walls were lined with bookshelves with charts, navigation equipment and letters that Cainan knew included such things like writs of exemption, and favours used by sea captains as proof of their rights to be in certain waters, though there appeared to be fewer of these than he remembered. The room was illuminated by candles in sconces, and on the desk at which Richelieu now sat, going over papers by candlelight.

"Evening, Javert," Cainan said, amicably, though his eyes were drinking in the details of the room, and of the captain.

"Cainan?" Richelieu asked, blinking rapidly; clearly he had been expecting someone else. Cainan suddenly got the distinct impression the guard who had announced them had forgotten his name and just flubbed it. "Why, what are you doing here?"

"Can't I drop in to see a friend?" Cainan asked, smoothly, casually strolling into the light, gesturing to Jaslyn. "We were in the area and I thought I would drop in and see you, and Harlan, Jules, Kanpery and Fariweather," Cainan added, reeling off the names of Richelieu's principle officers, who had been with him for time immemorial. The flinch the man's face had for each name told him they were no longer aboard, but he continued without breaking stride. "Though I see you've hired some new security types since my last time aboard; is the textiles shipping business *really* getting so rough as to need those three trolls on the pier?" he asked, jerking his head back towards the deck.

Jaslyn took in the accoutrements of Richelieu's office, books, instruments, and papers that would take significant time to search. The captain himself had the same self-important bearing she recalled, serving him at her mistress' home in Val Royeaux. But now Richelieu appeared weary, stressed, and even guilty. He also showed no indication of recognizing her, which was for the best, and yet he didn't acknowledge her, an elf, either.

"Those new guards were hired by, uh... my new first mate," said Richelieu. Jaslyn observed the captain's manner bordered on fearful, but he was not afraid of *them*. "You really should not be here, Cainan, my friend. I'm quite busy. We can discuss our mutual comrades another time... over drinks." He got up from his desk, went to the door and peeked out, then stood next to the door, an invitation for them to leave.

"New ... first mate," Cainan repeated, unmoving. "You no longer sail with Kanperry? Moira is the best sailor this side of the Amaranthine." It was said as a statement, but it was clearly a question. Richelieu was visibly sweating. Cainan looked again at his friend; paler than he had ever seen him, and maybe wearing a bit thin; something was very wrong, and he wondered what could have affected the man so when he was docked safely in an Orlesian port; he looked like he was being run down by a Qunari Dreadnaught. "So, tell me about this new first mate - does she... he? Does he play wicked grace?" he asked, reading his friend for the answer to the gender of the first mate.

"He's... not the gambling sort," Richelieu replied, cautiously. "Is there... something I can help you both with?" he asked, giving up on getting rid of them politely and moving to expedite things till they moved along.

"Ah, as for that," Cainan said, gesturing to his companion. Richelieu fixed on her, though if he recognised her, it didn't show.

"Captain Richelieu, I'd like to ask you a few questions about incidents that may be connected." Jaslyn adopted a mild and conversational tone of voice. "Someone is offering mysterious work at unusually high wages. Elves in Jader are missing, along with poor humans, especially Ferelden refugees. It is rumored that you recently paid off some rather large debts, and despite your recent improved fortunes, most of your long-time crew members have taken jobs aboard other ships, and

some have disappeared altogether."

Richelieu shrugged, but didn't look either of them in the eye. "Profits have been exceptional. Besides, what business is it of yours?" He glanced to Cainan then looked away. "So what? I've had extra coin to lose to you at cards. You never worried about that before."

"No, I never have been," Cainan replied, looking at his friend. He had crossed his arms, he realised; but he didn't uncross them. His false demeanour of amicable friendliness had fallen away, replaced with concern, and disappointment. "But then, you never gave me cause to worry about it. Till now."

"Captain, I am not accusing you." Yet, Jaslyn thought. "Hahren Liriel asked me to look into elves disappearing in general. She also said that your cook's brother came to the Cassabianca looking for his sister, but was turned away by the guards. Where is Julanna?"

Richelieu's eyes flashed with regret, and despair for a moment, and Cainan felt a lump suddenly form in his throat. Had he not known Richelieu's face so well, he might have missed the absolute howling, haunted look in the other man. But Cainan knew Richelieu, had studied that face for hours from over his cards or his wine. He knew every line of his face, knew every twitch of muscle, every tell... So it was easy to tell that something awful had happened to Julanna. Cainan just started at the man as his facade, or what passed for it, returned.

"Julanna - ah... she chose to sign on with another company. Left the ship a few weeks ago," Richelieu said, pointedly not looking at Cainan. But Cainan could see nothing but the man he had called friend, who was lying about the fate of his friend. Cainan was completely unable to speak for a moment, as he re-read that face, looking for reassurance that he was wrong - that this man, his *friend*, had not just lied about his ship's cook. Julanna had been a simple, gentle woman - barely more than a girl in a woman's body.

"How could you allow that to happen?" asked Jaslyn. There was something false in Richelieu's manner and story. According to her family, Julanna was a savant in the kitchen, everyone in the alienage was looking forward to her Summerday visit. But she was also naïve and slow in many respects. "Why didn't you notify Julanna's family?"

Cainan found his voice again. "Tell me what you did to Julanna," Cainan said, quietly. His tone could not be mistaken - it was simple, direct, and had the same effect as a coup de grace. Richelieu was trembling, trying not to look at Cainan.

"I think, ah, that's enough - terribly busy, must -"

"Tell. Me. Now." Richelieu blinked, and slumped back into his chair, whimpering as his facade dropped for good. He began to weep; quietly - as if he had finished wailing long ago, but not finished with the tears. "Tell me how she died," Cainan finally said, fighting tears of his own.

"Oh Cainan, I'm in trouble," Richelieu whimpered, finally looking him in the eyes. "I only wanted..."

I *needed* to pay my debts. I needed the money, and they offered me so much for so little; just... changing my cargo. It wasn't even *illicit* - just metals - Silverite, for Andraste's sake!" he cried, and then settled down, defeated. "I didn't think anyone would get hurt. It was even good - easy work, great money - I paid off all the debts on the Cassabianca and even turned a little profit, after," he added, bitterly. "But Kanperry didn't like it. She... asked questions I didn't want the answers to, and she left; chose to seek her fortunes elsewhere." Richelieu met Cainan's eyes again, and softly wiped his cheek. "I should have done the same, but..."

"You wanted to roll the dice a little longer," Cainan finished for him. He felt tired, watching his friend. "So what happened?"

"Well, I needed a first mate, and... *he* made it a condition of the next trip." Richelieu said, spitting the pronoun. "And that's how I got my new first mate, Gerlach Robertson," he said, his tone regretful and his tongue barbed. "He was the one who had approached me, initially; wanted me to change my route, my cargo... offered me more than any legitimate route should have. I should have asked more questions, but..."

"But you didn't." It wasn't an accusation, Cainan realised; and felt sickened when he saw, suddenly, himself sitting in Javert's place. How often had he not asked those questions himself?

Richelieu shook his head, solemnly. "No, I didn't. And everything that came afterwards... came to pass because I didn't ask questions I didn't want to know the answer to." He took a moment, then took a bottle of rum from his desk drawer and unstoppered it, taking a healthy swig. "Well, Fariweather... you know how he gets. Kept asking questions, and Robertson - he didn't like it. Fariweather came to me with letters; ledgers he had taken from Robertson's room; Ledgers that didn't have columns for things like 'wages'. I... I didn't want to believe."

No wages. Jaslyn felt sick, her fears for the missing people confirmed. But she still didn't have the answers she came here for.

Richelieu swigged his bottle again. "Robertson noticed the ledger's disappearance and got to Fariweather before I could smooth things over. When we got to our drop off rendezvous, he had Fariweather and Harlan row him out to meet with the captain of the other ship. I... I don't know what happened there, truly. But he rowed himself back - alone. And Jules..." his voice cracked, as a new wave of tears began. "She just kept asking where Harlan and Fariweather was. She didn't even *understand* - she was just asking how they'd catch up. But Gerlach..." he took a few shuddering breaths, and Cainan felt his heart tense. "He killed her... made an example of her for the others. One trip and I lost three of my longest, truest friends. And by the time we had docked back at port, I had lost the rest of my crew, either to desertion or to Gerlach. Robertson had those that had left replaced within the day; all louts, brutes and... unsavoury types. They've taken the ship, Cainan. She isn't even mine, anymore - not really. I own it on paper, but it's Robertson who commands her. I'm practically a figurehead. A puppet captain," he mused, his gaze falling to the desk.



Cainan was silent for a time, as he processed what he could.

"And now here you are, wallowing in self-pity and drink, after you watched your criminal ally murder an innocent woman, and two members of your crew are dead or worse." Jaslyn leaned on the desk, looming over Richelieu. She could barely contain her loathing for this man. "Why haven't you reported this criminal, Gerlach Robertson, to the authorities?"

Richelieu cringed. "I would lose everything. The Cassabianca. My estate in Val Royeux. My reputation. And... and he threatened my wife!"

"You already jeopardised all those things," Cainan said, quietly, as he felt the anger roll off of Jaslyn beside him. "You jeopardise them every day you're in business with these people. You could perhaps be forgiven when you didn't *know*... but to give them your crew? To gamble that reputation to help them kidnap, murder and do Maker knows what with the ore you smuggle for them... You made a choice. Make another one now; a better one. Tell my friend what she wants to know, and we will do the rest."

Jaslyn resisted the urge to slap Richelieu, not just for his selfishness, but for the order of his priorities. Instead she yanked the bottle out of his grasp and slammed it on his desk. With effort, she concentrated on the reason she was standing here in the presence of this ship's captain no better than Antoine. In a firm and commanding tone she rephrased her previous question. "The missing people. *Where are they?*"

"Th- there's a mine... r- run by a carta dwarf... s- southeast of Jader. On the coast. Exporting silverite ore." He grabbed for the bottle and took another swig. "You can't tell *anyone* I told you."

Having obtained the information she wanted, Jaslyn stepped back to let Cainan take over. She went to the door to keep watch in case the first mate returned.

Cainan watched his friend... watched *Captain Richelieu* for a few moments, feeling drained. He could see the inconvenient truth in front of him; that Richelieu was a mirror image of his own failings; failure to ask the right questions, to confront that uncomfortable feeling; failure to recognise the path he walked down was lined with the suffering of others. It was like looking into a mirror if there but for the maker he had gone.

He didn't like the view. He slowly stood, slipped his purse off his belt and tossed it onto the desk, where it landed with a heavy thud that startled the other man, who looked up at him with questioning, bloodshot eyes. There was no doubt from Cainan's expression that this wasn't charity.

"I won't carry coin earned that way. I won't be a part of this," he said, quietly. "Take your money, make your way to Val Royeux and escape with your wife. Or not, I don't care. But you still owe me every coin in that purse, and I won't accept it till it was earned honestly. And if you're not willing to do that... well, then those coins are the worth of your soul," Cainan said, softly. "Three rounds of drinks and a lucky hand at cards. If you're comfortable being damned for the contents of a Tuesday

night on the town... well, then I guess you have what you are worth," he said, turning away from the man he had once called friend. Richelieu didn't speak.

Cainan didn't look back to see if his friend pushed the money away or not; he didn't care. He walked through the door and out onto the open deck, breathing the cool, crisp sea air as he did so, feeling momentarily cleansed of the last few minutes.

Jaslyn put up her hood and followed Cainan, closing Richelieu's door gently behind them to avoid raising suspicion among their audience of thugs on deck - working for a man named Gerlach Robertson, not Richelieu. She took Cainan's arm as she'd done before, and together they walked down the Cassabianca's gangplank with a casual stride. Jaslyn didn't relax until they left the docks and she was relatively certain they weren't being followed. "I could use a drink."

## Labor ipse voluptas

Posted on 30 Jan 2021 @ 2:27pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**3,521 words; about a 18 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** The Mine

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th - evening

OOC: After 'Mine, mine, all mine'

The entrance of the mine had been secured with thick wooden planks, both tied and nailed together. Even to Martin's inexperienced eye, the structure looked rather unreliable, and while he'd never been claustrophobic before he did feel a shudder up his spine as he stepped inside the stuffy tunnel. The ventilation was poor, based on the heavy atmosphere and also on the lingering smell of wet earth, rot and human waste. On the ground, a makeshift railway had been built, an extremely basic and narrow one but functional.

Though the entrance was quite wide, the tunnel grew narrower only a few steps in, and Gangue's horns looked incredibly cumbersome in this confined environment. Maybe now was a better time to overpower him... but Martin's line of thought was squashed as they got to the first curve of the tunnel and ran into a couple of guards. They wore somewhat ill-fitting armour, suggesting it had had a previous owner, and their weapons looked crudely made, but it was more than enough against unarmed men.

Kalian knew little about mines, but he had the distinct impression that there had been an older, more robust entrance, and that it had been hastily and less securely widened. And yet, it was narrow enough to be secured and held by only a couple of guards. If this was the only exit, it wouldn't be hard to prevent workers from leaving.

"Oh, hey," said the first one, a dwarf with long, braided brown hair. Though a fair amount of dirt covered his face, Martin could only just make out the tattoo on his left cheek. "Long time no see, Qunari." The last few words were said with a considerable lack of enthusiasm.

Gangue grunted wordlessly.

"Bringing some new fodder?" The other guard was a human, with tawny skin that suggested Antivan roots, tall, brawny and bearing a look of supreme boredom on his face. He did eye the newcomers with a bit of a leer, but while he completely ignored sister Elinowy his eyes rested a little longer on Kalian.

"There he goes again," muttered the dwarf.

The extra attention from the Antivan guard didn't go unnoticed by Kalian. Good to know... maybe he could use that to his advantage.

"New workers," Gangue said, terse as ever, and he turned to leave. One of his horn hit the supporting beam overhead with a wooden sound and a growled curse escaped the Qunari. A muffled snicker escaped from the dwarf's mouth, but quickly vanished when Gangue glared over his shoulder at the offender.

"Alright, new workers," the human said. The leer had gone, leaving only the bored look behind. It did his already unappealing looks no favour. "I'm Angelo, this is Bratan. This way. Any of you used shovels or pickaxes before?"

"Huh... I shoveled manure a few times before," Martin said. It had the benefit of being true - he'd helped out taking care of the horses a few times back home - and also fit his backstory.

"Gardening and splitting firewood with an axe," said Kalian affably. "And cleaning. Pickaxes look not much different than a broom with a heavier business end."

Looking up at the overseer with her large innocent eyes, Elinowy responded, "Large tools were not usually available for me to work with. I have done some work in restoration and domestic maintenance, and lots of cleaning up." Her mind went to the heavy beams and wreckage that needed to be cleared when the Chantry had burned. It was weeks of exhausting labor, but it still wasn't trying to break rocks.

"It'll have to do," the human guard, Angelo, said. "Anyway, you'll learn fast." There was the barest hint of a threat in his tone.

"As best humans can ever hope to," the dwarf sniffed. He sounded surprisingly snobbish for someone in his position.

"We're very motivated," Martin assured them. "Huh, when do we get paid? Everyday?" He did his

best to look and sound as naive as he'd been pretending to be.

Kalian nodded enthusiastically, adding his feigned naivete to his friend's.

The two guards shared a look and Bratan had a fit of coughing that sounded suspiciously like a snicker. The pause before either of them answered was too long to be comforting.

"Nah, you get one lump sum at the end," Angelo said half-heartedly, barely attempting to be convincing. "They use the benefits from this place to pay you, see? So you gotta wait till the stuff gets sold before they can pay you." He sounded like he was reciting a line he'd been forced to learn.

"Oh, I see. And, huh... what "stuff" are we talking about?" Martin asked. He felt like the situation was truly stretching his less than stellar acting skills.

"You humans can't begin to understand the stone, so just stick to *stuff*", Bratan sniffed. He definitely seemed to labour under the misconception of his own superiority.

"Oh, come on Brat, don't be like that," Angelo cooed, then snorted.

"Don't call me that," the dwarf grunted.

As they spoke they had been walking further into the mine. Small lamps hung at regular intervals, casting a weak, yellow and flickering light across the narrow tunnel. It was in fact so narrow that at times they had to pass one at a time, as two people could not walk side by side. The smell of smoke from the lamps was, in places, overpowering. Sounds echoed far in the distance, carried by the stone and dirt enclosing them.

A little further still the tunnel opened into what looked like a wide natural cave, with stalactites hanging from the ceiling, some of which had reached the ground and now looked like beautiful white columns. A makeshift camp had been built there, and as they stepped closer Martin saw the missing Fereldans. Some were carrying crates or bags full of dirt and rocks ; others were washing the contents of the bags in a shallow natural pool. A bit further, near the entrance of another tunnel, a few were using pickaxes to dig into the walls. A few large firepits gave slightly better light in there than in the tunnel, though the stench of smoke was proportionally greater too. Several more guards watched the proceedings, though when looking closer Martin could tell they were more interested in the dice game two of them had going on than in the miners.

"Here," Angelo picked up pickaxes and shovels and tossed them to Kalian, Martin and Elinowy without warning. "Now get to work. The others will show you what to do."

Kalian managed to catch both the pickaxe and shovel that was thrown at him. He winked at Angelo – just in case he could exploit the Antivan guard's interest later.

It was evident to Kalian that the hardest job they'd seen was digging the... some kind of ore, maybe.

He pointed to the furthest group using pickaxes and shovels, thinking to speak with his two companions on the way there. To Martin and Elinowy he said, "Looks like we can join in over there."

As they walked toward the group wielding pickaxes and shovels, Kalian said in a voice pitched to be heard only by Elinowy and Martin, "Guards keeping the workers in the mine... this doesn't look good."

"You have a knack for euphemisms, don't you," Martin grouched. "This looks like bloody Tevinter." His expression grew darker. He had been to Tevinter before, and he hadn't enjoyed it. "Well, we got this far. Now we need a plan."

"Certainly some of the workers will have a solid notion of what is going on. Maybe we can ask discreetly." Elinowy hinted.

"So, we talk to a few of the workers and find out what's going on?" Kalian did a quick count of workers and guards and observed, "A shovel or pickaxe is no match against a sword in the hand of a warrior, but the workers outnumber the guards by at least five to one."

"But they're untrained. And... look. Some of them have shackles. The troublemakers, I'd wager. And I've seen at least two with lash marks." Martin glanced around, as surreptitiously as he could. A lot of the workers looked drawn and thin. They probably didn't get served the best fare.

"Hungry stomachs and strong backs can be a powerful ally in a crisis." Elinowy stated, "Perhaps with sympathetic suggestions, we can find a means for the odds to shift in our favor."

As Kalian neared the group of workers at the entrance to a side tunnel, a Fereldan man was earnestly trying to get the attention of a guard. "Please, ser, please tell serah Roxa I must speak with her. My dear Jaquenetta needs me."

"Get back to work," said the guard with an irritated growl, then walked away.

"Excuse me," said Kalian, thinking of the note he'd found on the back of a flyer. "Is your name Costard?"

"Do I know you?" Costard asked. He picked up a shovel and headed to the tunnel. "You three must be new here. Don't get caught resting or they'll make you regret it. Come on, I'll show you what to do."

"Is it so bad here?" Martin glanced at his friends. "Maybe we should quit." Playing dumb was always a safe bet.

"So you don't know yet what you got into?" Costard snorted as he led them deeper in the tunnel. Sounds echoed eerily around them, but their voices were adequately covered by the noise of steel hitting rocks. "This is hardly what the flyer promised, friend. There is no quitting."

"Why not? I mean, worst that can happen, they don't pay us, right?"

"Maker help you." Costard shook his head. "I've been begging for days to be allowed to go. My fiancée... she's with child. Due anyday now. I thought I could make some quick money and be there for her when the time comes. Now... it looks like I won't even be there. I can't imagine what she's thinking of me now."

"And they won't let you go?" Martin asked.

"No. At first they made excuses, now they just ignore me. I guess they don't want me to tell anyone about the cosy operation they got here. I'm beginning to wonder if they'll even let us go one day, let alone pay us."

"The Maker looks out for those that look out for each other. You, your fiancé and child are not alone. Even now there is hope." Elinowy prattled on with a sincerity to what she said, even if it had no course of action. She shifted the heavy pick axe she carried from one shoulder to the other.

"What about the other workers? Together, you way outnumber the guards. Why don't you rebel?" asked Kalian.

"The others are scared, or they still hope to get paid. Or both." Costard stopped and lifted his pickaxe. "Here looks like a good spot." He hefted his tool, swung it and hit the wall. The pickaxe bit into the rock and small pieces of stone flew across the tunnel. "Basically, break the rock down, one of you gets it into a basket, once the basket's full you empty it in the cart. Another group goes on to clean it and separate ore from rock."

"What kind of ore?" Martin asked, squinting at the rock. It looked like... well, rock.

"Silverite. I heard one of the guards mention it." Costard shrugged. "For all the difference it makes."

Silverite? Martin with renewed respect at the pile of rocks. He'd thought silver or iron, he hadn't imagined the ore could be something as rare and precious as silverite. His father owned a silverite sword, a family heirloom that would go to his older sister someday, and it was worth a lot of money. No wonder Roxa didn't want word of it leaving the mine.

"Come on, get to work," Costard urged. "We'll get in trouble if we're idle for too long."

Elinowy raised an eyebrow at the mention of the precious metal. She had purchased a silverite goblet for the Chantry a few years prior. It cost a hefty sum, but few materials showed the majesty and fire resistance of silverite in rituals before the villagers. Its reflective abilities provided a useful teaching tool to the sisters as they described Andraste's passion at the stake. She began to understand the profitability of such an enterprise.

Kalian lifted his pickaxe into position, and copying Costard's movement brought it down against the rock wall, breaking loose a few pieces. He turned to Elinowy. "Maybe best that you start by shoveling rocks into a basket?"

The guards looked bored and less than watchful; if they'd worked under Martin's orders he'd have given them a good telling-off. Still, one of them had begun glancing more and more often at their little group, hand drifting towards a short, thick whip at his belt, so Martin hurried to pick up his own pickaxe. He could tell just by holding it that the balance was off; and when he struck the first blow against the stone, the dull sound revealed the poor quality of the metal almost as much as the blunted end.

"We can take turns shoveling," he suggested as he hefted the pickaxe again. It wasn't unlike wielding a sword. "To get a bit of a break."

The heavy rhythm of physical exertion was a familiar sensation to Martin. He even kind of enjoyed it - for the first hour or so, maybe. Then it started being boring, and then the pleasant warmth of exercise deepened into a burn. If he'd been practicing his swordskill, this was the point where he'd have stopped. As he worked he looked around, studying the layout of the mine, the miners and the guards. It kept his mind busy, at least, rather than thinking about the hard labour.

The men threw themselves into the work, Elinowy let the heavy blade of her pickaxe fall to the earth as she watch the others as to what she was supposed to do. It looked simple enough. Hit rocks. Break rocks. Repeat. she walked closer to the wall of rock and lugged the pick axe up to her shoulder trying to focus on an area to strike with the blade. She swung. Sparks flew. As did the pickaxe as it popped out of her hands and bounced back at her. She narrowly dodged the free flying tool. The Guard with the whip start chuckling to himself. Her fingers throbbed as she bent down to left the pickaxe up again. She looked at it blankly. Certainly it couldn't be that difficult. She raised it up again and swung. Her arms felt the impact of the blade even with the minimal force she projected it with. The blade struck the ground and turned sideways glancing of the rock. She felt betrayed by the dumb tool. There was something too this she just had to figure out. She watch as Kalian Martin swung their axes. The sheer strength that they wielded the tools.

"Less watching and more hitting!" shouted the guard with a laugh. "Ye aint gettin paid ta watch the men's backsides. Git to it!"

Elinowy lifted the pickaxe again, her arms aching from the first two blows. She started to wonder how these people could do this all day. She swung. A tiny chip of rock flew off the wall. She looked at the tiny piece laying down in the piles of dirt along the wall with amazement. It actually worked! She had broken a rock. Not a big rock, but a rock all the same. She picked up the axe victoriously and smashed it downward, once more deflecting and popping out of her hands.

"You there." the guard grumbled as he started to stand. "You best git a shovel and do something useful." He gestured over to the pile of tools.

Elinowy closed her eyes for a moment in resignation. She calmly drug her pick axe over to the wall and left it leaning as she picked up a shovel and proceeded to scoop up the broken rocks at the base of the wall. Rocks were heavy. She felt her jarred muscles protested the weight. She reasoned that the job could be accomplished in shorter burst of digging to depositing the ore into the baskets. After a few minutes she found a rhythm to the movement, much like her training in dance. She would scoop, lift and throw in almost fluid motions that carried momentum instead of enforcing her will on each movement. She found this was something she could do. Oddly, she looked remarkably graceful doing it.

Once the baskets were filled, workers carried them to the cart in the center of the cave. One guard inspected the contents, then gave the go ahead to empty them in the cart, and the workers returned to their spot. None of them looked very happy, and many stumbled under the weight of their loaded baskets. Some were thin to the point of starvation.

*Still, if they're strong enough to work, they're strong enough to rebel...*

He'd never been one to shirk hard work, but by the time they'd filled one basket, Kalian was ready for a break. He tied his ragged cape around his waist and kept pounding the rock wall. Watching the other workers made it clear that breaks were not allowed.

An elven man who couldn't be much out of his teens and a familiar-looking older human woman with grey hair approached to take up a filled basket. She looked like Isla, the woman they'd met in the refugee camp. "Excuse me madam, do I know you?" asked Kalian.

The woman shook her head and stumbled. The elf reached out a hand to steady her. "Orla, rest here a moment. I can take this basket of ore by myself."

"No, no, Varvin. The guards will punish you if they notice I'm missing, then they'll punish me too. I can do it." Orla started to pick up one side of the basket, staggered, then collapsed.

The elf, Varvin, crouched beside the human woman, obviously worried. "Mamae and Hahren Liriel told me I shouldn't come. But I didn't listen. Orla has been good to me. She said I reminded her of her son, Seamus."

Kalian rested a comforting hand on the young elf's shoulder and looked to Elinowy. "What's wrong with her?" He had healing magic, but if Orla was suffering from a lack food and rest, his magic wouldn't help.

The scarlet haired sister laid down her shovel and approached the woman. Elinowy looked closely into the woman's eyes as her fingers went to the woman's wrists. She watched her breathing. This was more than simple exertion. The sweat on the woman's brow was not from her work. "She needs attention. Someone bring us some water." she calmly ordered.

Martin dropped his pickaxe to kneel by the fallen woman, acutely aware that they'd only have a



couple of minutes before one of the guards came to check what this was all about. He only knew the basics of patching up someone in the field, and he really couldn't tell if Orla's pasty complexion, ragged breathing and sweaty brow was caused by mere exhaustion or sickness. Sister Elinowy would probably know, but she also wouldn't be able to do much without any supplies.

"Whatever's wrong, she's not getting up," he diagnosed with uncomfortable certainty. The image of Isla, wrapped in the tatters of her shawl and dignity, flashed into his mind. He didn't want to have to go back there being the bearer of bad news. "We need to get her to the infirmary."

"There is no infirmary, not really," said Varvin. "There's an area for the sick and injured to keep them out of the way, but no healer or herbalist. I can show you where it is, but then I have to keep working. Anyone who doesn't work, doesn't eat. And that's not the worst punishment." He sounded scared.

Elinowy slipped her hand up. "I have training as an herbalist and I am not an unskilled healer," she claimed. "She needs immediate care, if you can take me to your place of resting. I will see what I can devise for her."

An infirmary with no healing was little better than a mortuary, Martin thought darkly. Maker help him, if there were dead bodies in there he'd make sure whoever was guilty was put on trial and sentenced with the harshest punishment the law had to offer.

"Well, at least she can rest," he offered, for what little comfort that was. Varvin looked bleak and terrified, and Martin couldn't fault him. The elf's gaunt frame suggested he might be next to collapse. "Here, let me." He took Varvin's place to support Orla.

Kalian supported Orla's other side, and together they made it to the mouth of the tunnel. The young elf pointed across the main cavern. "Over there." Varvin kissed Orla's forehead, then hurried back into the tunnel.

## Breaktime and Other Fictions

Posted on 20 Feb 2021 @ 7:50pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**4,102 words; about a 21 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** The Mine

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th - evening

OOC: After 'Labor ipse voluptas'

Orla's head lolled over her chest. Clearly she was beyond exhaustion and barely conscious. The guards looked up as Martin and Kalian approached, at first suspicious then disinterested. It was probably not the first time something like that happened. Interesting... pretending to carry an

injured worker could be a good way to get close to the guards and attack them by surprise.

Elinowy followed the men closely before breaking off to stand before the guards. "I need to help this woman. I have experience working with the sick, and I can tell you if left unattended that woman will be dead by night fall. Dead workers mean less work. If you allow it, I will see that you have a stronger and healthier work force."

The others staggered on as she made her case before the indifference of the guards. Finally one waved his hand at her. "You do what you must. But if ya lag about or that one dies, its double the work for you tomorrow."

"The Maker bless you." Elinowy responded with a slight gesture of blessing that she caught in mid action. She turned and hurried to catch up with the men.

"Come on," Martin said to Orla encouragingly. "Only a few more steps and you can rest."

The designated place was an infirmary in name only. A few thin bedrolls tossed to the ground and a dirty pitcher of water were the only empty gestures that had been made to ease the suffering of the ailing workers. They eased Orla onto the last bedroll, one with such a wide hole in the middle that it was barely better than lying down on the stone ground. There were a couple of others - one girl who looked barely out of her teens and an older man - neither of whom were moving. The old's man rattling breath was the only indication that he was in fact still alive. Martin glanced at Kalian, and saw the same outraged anger on his face as he felt deep inside.

"Well, in case there was any doubt, here is proof of Roxa's intentions toward the workers. She must plan to work each of them to death." During and after the Blight in Ferelden, Kalian had seen people malnourished and exhausted, suffering from sickness. His eyebrows knitted together, considering what his magic could and couldn't do to help. "Do you know anything about healing, Martin?"

"Not much," Martin said in a low voice. He looked down at Orla, who was hugging herself tightly and shivering. "I can do stitches in a pinch, if you like your scars jagged. And if you need anything bandaged I'm your man. But this..." he half-turned to grab the pitcher, grimacing in disgust when he saw the dusty swill inside. "Do you know anything about healing?"

"My grandmother Mirren taught me some things that could help." *Spells* for healing. Kalian untied his ragged disguise-cape from around his waist and wrapped it around Orla. "During the blight I sometimes helped an old healer. A good, hot meal and a peaceful night's sleep in a warm bed could make all the difference for Orla here, but these others need more. What about you, Elinowy, can you help them?"

Elinowy looked upon the sick and dying in the wretched excuse for an infirmary. These were beautiful creations of the Maker, tossed aside by greed and fear. There was ample material to make a month of homilies, but these people needed healing, or at least comfort in their suffering. "It is true I am a trained herbalist," she said positively, but her voice lowering as she looked around the

barren cave. "If we were on the surface, I could likely forage sufficient plants to make a difference. But here..." Her hands moved to the hem of the blouse she had borrowed. Normally her robes had a variety of basic remedies sewn into their hemwork. But she was in another woman's clothes, pretending to have another woman's life. At the moment she was as powerless as the poor creatures around her.

Kalian took a deep breath. He could not hide what he was from Martin and Elinowy if it meant letting these people suffer. But then he thought of an alternative plan. "Elinowy, you don't have much to work with, but surely praying to the Maker would bring these poor people some relief?"

Martin hesitated. While praying could only help these poor people's soul, it would do little to ease their physical woes. It was better than nothing, but their time may be better used plotting an escape and bringing back help, or looking for clean water to offer them... he had no time to voice an objection though, before Sister Elinowy started praying.

Elinowy looked at Kalian dumbfounded. From the short time she had known the man, she knew he had some instruction in the Chant and basic tenants of spirituality. Certainly he didn't buy into the superstitious ignorance of the masses. Prayer, while useful to attune one's spirit to the will of the Maker, was not something to be treated as a wish list or petition to control the creator of the universe. She started to protest, but looking on the old man laying on the cot, she felt sorrow and pity, IF the action of invoking the maker brought some comfort in this and helped the poor man along as he passed form this world, perhaps there was some value in it. She felt powerless, and pathetic to draw upon mere sentiment. All the same, she collapsed to her knees and began to sing. Her voice resonated off the dark walls of their underground prison. A serene and haunting aria, that might just shake back the gloom in this place of death.

While Elinowy prayed over the old man, Kalian knelt next to him on the other side and rested one hand on the man's chest, and held his hand. Opening himself to the fade, Kalian poured healing magic into the old man's body. The rattle faded from his breath, and the old man settled into a deeper sleep. "Thank the Maker," said Kalian without the slightest hint of irony. It was the sister's prayer that made this tiny ruse possible. "I think your prayers helped him."

"What?" Martin, who'd been distractedly looking around for potential weapons, looked back at the old man, utterly flabbergasted. He'd certainly never heard of a prayer having such an effect on a physical wound before.

"Arise, Aegis of the Faith..." he whispered, quoting the Chant, staring at Elinowy, then back at the old man. Slowly he knelt by the Fereldan to examine him, still stunned by what he'd just seen. The old man's eyes fluttered open and he looked back at them in surprise, clearly much more aware of his surroundings now, though still weak.

There could really only be two explanations for this; either Sister Elinowy was a mage, or she was blessed by the Maker. And, since Martin had not seen her cast a spell, that only left one option really. He stared at her, half-expecting a divine halo to flare around her.

Elinowy continued her song, her thoughts absorbed in the melody and expression of grief her soul felt. She began to be aware of others saying something. Her eyes opened to see the others staring in awe at the old man she knelt by and at her. She didn't understand.

"This... this is incredible, Sister," Martin whispered. "How did you do that?"

To be fair, she looked as surprised as he was. If she'd looked remotely smug he'd have assumed some kind of trick. Her surprise suggested that she was being genuine. Martin looked back down at the old man. Was he special in some way, for the Maker to grant this prayer when he'd turned his eyes away from this world long ago? Or was Sister Elinowy simply blessed in some way?

Unaware of the turmoil in Martin's thoughts, the old man gave Elinowy a crooked, gapped-tooth smile. "Thank you, Sister," he said hoarsely in heavily-accented Orlesian.

Kalian, on the other hand, looked distinctly uneasy. Even though he'd been the one to suggest Elinowy pray, he'd probably not expected it to work.

This, whatever it was, had to mean something, though Martin couldn't fathom what.

Elinowy looked about her silently. "I did nothing," she said quite honestly. Truthfully she looked frightened. Whatever was going on, was none of her doing. The Maker intervening in such an affair was unheard of. Only Andraste could make petition of the Maker, and she had done nothing of the sort, only a song of praise in mourning. Something was out of place. Was this a sign. That would require an inquest by the Chantry. Such things did not take place. Healing was a reaction to elements in nature... water, herbs, sunlight. Spontaneous restoration was a work of Magic that perverted the will of the Maker. She looked around her. There were only her companions, and the sick. Her thoughts went to the Elf that had accompanied them with Orla. But he had departed when they arrived. Did the mine employ a Mage? Or was this an act of an apostate?

Her eyes shifted back and forth between her companions. Kalian was a simple helper in an Inn. He was quick to help others, and despite his sister's taint of elfin religiosity, seemed unremarkable in his aspirations. Martin was a guard. One who carried authority, but he was also a failed Templar? Why had he left the order. If he was a mage, they would have pursued him, not freely socialize with him. Something was indeed odd, she would need to keep a wary eye on him.

Kalian's dark skin took on a redder shade. *Maferath's balls!* His little ruse to help the poor man without giving himself away had gone both much better, and much worse, than he'd expected. And now he feared that when his two new friends found out he'd tricked them, neither would trust him ever again. And yet, healing the man had been the right thing to do. "The important thing is, he's feeling better."

The apostate-hiding-in-plain-sight went to check on the girl, in her late teens, and very thin. He rested his hand on her forehead, she was hot with fever.

The old man took the pitcher of water and drank thirstily despite its murky appearance. "My granddaughter, Marie," said the old man with tears in his eyes. "Wore herself out trying to make up for my weakness, worked hard enough for both of us. Will you sing your prayer for her also, my Lady?"

"Yes," Martin echoed. "Will you? It sounds like a good idea." Now that the shock was receding, his natural inclination towards mistrust and skepticism returned in full force. Whatever had happened here was either a miracle, or magic, or a trick; and he dearly wanted to know which it was. This time, if Sister Elinowy worked her miracle, he'd be watching closely.

Just then, he heard the heavy footsteps of a small group approaching, and a glance towards the entrance of the cave revealed Roxa, Gangue, Rhiannon and her guards approaching.

Elinowy looked at the old man looking for healing for his granddaughter, taken aback and in terror of what was being requested of her. This was not her doing... she didn't think. The Maker did not intervene in the affairs of man until they turned to helping one another. Wasn't she trying to help the others? Maybe the maker just needed simple obedience to make statement to the people. Elinowy didn't feel blessed, just aghast and confused. This was the work of Magic, she was convinced. And Martin was egging her on in his ruse. Her eyes narrowed as she looked at him. Not today apostate! Her eyes locked on Martin's as she began to once more sing. If he flinched to open the fade, she would catch it.

As far as Kalian could tell, the girl was malnourished and exhausted, but in better shape than her grandfather had been. Kalian once again used his healing magic, with as much subtlety as he could manage.

Marie's fever broke and her eyes fluttered open. "Grandfather? I feel better, so much better," she said, then slipped into a peaceful sleep.

"My lady! You are indeed a worker of miracles!" The old man knelt at Elinowy's feet and kissed the hem of her skirt.

Elinowy kept her eyes steeled on Martin, her vocals for the song well pitched, but lacking the depth and emotion of her previous cantering. Upon the old man falling at her feet she literally shrieked. "Eeek!" she stopped singing and knelt down besides the old man. "Please no. I am nothing. Just a sister, and you my brother. Please stand. If this is a Miracle by the Maker, rejoice and be grateful in thanksgiving. Hold your Granddaughter close. For the will of the Maker will always be made manifest. We don't know how long we have our loved ones. Cherish them."

She helped the old man to his feet and then approached the newly healed young woman. She gently felt the woman's forehead with the back of her fingers. The fever was gone. She shot a look over at Martin.

Martin's eyes narrowed as he watched the old man pay obeisance to his robed saviour. Something was off. He had been entirely focused on her as she prayed, yet he had felt nothing. No blessing, and definitely no magic coming from her. While he had absolute faith in the Maker and the Chantry, he refused to believe that a miracle could occur while he watched, and he felt absolutely nothing, not even the slightest hint of divine grace.

Sister Elinowy was a mystery, that much was certain. She'd arrived in Jader wearing the scarlet robes, yet she had not introduced herself to the Chantry and did everything she could to keep a low profile. She did not seem to have any money, living off the charity of Kalian's sister. Which led Martin to wonder... was she truly a Sister? Anyone could don a red robe. Many would want the protection such a garment provided. Especially... apostates.

*But I saw no magic...*

Maybe she was just very, very good at hiding her magic in plain sight. If she was in fact an apostate, she'd have been used to hiding in such a way.

And yet, if that was the answer, this meant she had been willing to risk discovery to help two refugees who had nothing to do with her. She had gone out of her way multiple times to help. She could just have stayed at the inn and enjoyed the hospitality of Kalian's sister, rather than come with them.

"This is really impressive, sister," Martin said quietly. "I'm eager to see what other miracles you may be able to pull off."

He was baiting her, she was sure of it. "I suppose it will be enlightening to us both," she replied coolly to Martin.

"When was the last time you both ate?" asked Kalian.

"If we don't work, we don't eat." The old man hung his head. "Yesterday an elf snuck us some bread. At least, I think that's when it was. Underground like this, the only way to know when one day ends and the next begins is the shift change of Roxa's guards."

"We have to figure out a way to get them some food," said Kalian to Elinowy and Martin. "And we need a plan to rescue all the laborers."

The old man lifted his head, hopeful. "I've been watching them, the guards. I know their habits. Let me help get my granddaughter out of here alive."

Martin's hand fell at his side, looking for the hilt of a sword that he did not find. He wasn't sure about Elinowy. That was bothersome. If he knew for sure they had a mage in their ranks he could have worked with that, and sorted out later the legal intricacies involved in having an apostate running loose; but so far all he had were suspicions. And there was little time to hatch a complicated plan

anyway ; any second now the guards would bark at them to get back to work. Roxa's arrival had provided a welcome diversion but it wouldn't last.

"Freeing the labourers is our most pressing goal," he said. "There'll be time to tend the wounded after that, and in much better conditions." He paused, thinking quickly. "I saw some of the workers are in chains. Troublemakers, I take it?"

"Oh, yes," the old man said, nodding. "There aren't enough chains for everyone, and it makes it harder to work, so they save them for the ones who caused the most problems. A few of us tried to fight their way out some weeks ago. They didn't get far, and once they were taken down the rest of us surrendered. Not that I was much use either way." He looked down at his thin arms, the bones jutting out beneath the skin, the thick blue veins running across the back of his hands like a spider's web.

"If we could free them," Martin said, looking at Kalian and Elinowy, "they could help us rally the workers and start a riot. They outnumber the guards four to one, at least. If we organise them we have a decent chance." He was tempted there and then to ask Elinowy if she was a mage, to confess if she was so they had a better chance to make it ; but it was unlikely she'd admit it in front of so many witnesses, and he didn't want the others to be distracted when their lives were at stake.

Martin spoke of revolt and uprising. That sounded more like the man of action he had claimed to be. But Elinowy considered that he was correct. The important thing was to free these people and bring the attention of the authorities to this clandestine mining operation. There would be time to properly ferret out Apostates when their situation was less dire.

"I agree. Free the troublemakers, rally them all," said Kalian, still surprised that neither of his friends had called him out for using magic, instead Martin and Elinowy cast suspicious glances at each other. "We should coordinate so all the workers riot at the same time, so the guards will be overwhelmed. I'll bet Roxa isn't paying her guards so generously they won't run if they can."

"Any idea where the keys to their chains may be ?" Martin asked.

The old man nodded. "The head guard has them. A dwarf called Theriana. Blond hair, big nose, wears a brigandine. Sometimes she leaves them with her helmet by the fire, but usually she wears them at her belt."

Martin thought he'd seen her, she had been standing slightly aloof from the dice game as if to pretend she wasn't taking part in it, but she'd been just as interested in the outcome as any of her men.

"Two choices then," he said. "We can try to get the keys, but I don't see how we can do that without raising the alarm. Or we can use our mining tools, and try to break the lock to get the chains open." He glanced back. "Either way we need to decide quickly, if we want to use the distraction of Roxa's presence to our advantage."

"We'll have to wait until Theriana is asleep to get her keys." As a rat, Kalian was pretty sure he could steal the keys if she was sleeping. As an owl, he could scoop up the keys if she left them on the ground. *Too many ifs.* "Breaking the locks with mining tools might be our best option."

Elinowy looked over at Roxa's group, that had not yet become aware of their group in the infirmary. "It is clear that we must bring this operation to an end. What could be a source of prosperity to the region is being hoarded by the greedy. This could be so much more. "The dwarf Roxa could be good leverage in controlling the rest of the guards."

Kalian followed Elinowy's gaze to where Roxa had entered the main cavern, along with Rhiannon, the dwarf they'd met on the road, and two of her guards. He'd liked the pretty dwarf and wanted to believe that she'd have nothing to do with Roxa if she knew what was really happening here. "Roxa has that qunari to defend her, so we'd have to defeat them both. What about Rhiannon, do you think she and her guards would join us in leading a rebellion, or defend Roxa?"

"We can try to work with her," Martin said dubiously. By the looks of it, Rhiannon was a smuggler so he was less than confident she'd help them - potential witnesses - over Roxa - her potential employer. "It costs nothing to give it a shot, but we shouldn't count on it." He almost suggested that Elinowy *pray* for a change of heart in Rhiannon, but held back. Snark was not going to help.

"The dwarf Rhiannon extended kindness to us on the way here and endured awkward missteps on the journey to our benefit." Elinowy stated with a slight shrug at recalling herself falling off the horse. "The Maker would want us to extend like kindness to her, even if its just to remove her form immediate danger."

"So, we need to break the trouble-makers' chains and spread the word among the workers to be ready to revolt," Kalian summarized. "Plus warn Rhiannon, and watch for an opportunity when Roxa is separated from the qunari."

The old man said, "The workers assigned to carry baskets of ore, they move all over the mine. I'll talk to some and they can start passing the message."

"I'll try to speak with Rhiannon." Kalian considered asking Elinowy, who had captured Rhiannon's interest on the road, but the sister was already in enough danger.

"And I'll start working with the miners in chains," Martin said. He had a fair idea how to best break the locks - he used them on a daily basis, and had seen in several instances how prisoners managed to break free of them. He'd also seen a locksmith at work several times, so he knew what the internal workings of the locks looked like. Now was the time to put this knowledge to good use. "Sister Elinowy can start rallying the rest of the miners, she has that touch with the common people." He gave her a wry look.

"I can certainly speak words of encouragement for the workers to come together and throw off their



bondage." Elinowy spoke boldly considering the righteous cause of freeing the oppressed.

"We're going to need a signal," Martin said. "Preferably something that is not going to give them a heads-up." He paused, thinking. "Well, the signal could be me hitting one of the guards."

Elinowy was not so certain their insurrection should start with violence, but Martin was certain capable of making a show of it.

Just then their luck ran out, as one of the guards - presumably eager to look like he was actually doing something in front of his boss - popped his head around the corner. "Hey, you ! This ain't break time ! Get back to work you filthy lot !"

"Yes, ser!" The old man lurched fearfully, bent next to his granddaughter and shook her awake. Kalian helped him get her to her feet.

"I needed these worker's help to get a sick worker here to the infirmary. They were just leaving." she spoke out boldly walking directly in front of the guard to block his view of the others. "I need to speak with Roxa about supplies for this infirmary. I can find herbs in the local woods that would improve worker output and health."

The guard looked past Elinowy to the sick workers and laughed unpleasantly. "You're not here to pick flowers in the woods topside. Get back to work." He brandished the whip at his side.

"Come on," said Kalian, with a wink for the old man and a nod to Elinowy and Martin. If they could free the workers, there'd be no need for an infirmary. "You heard him, we have work to do." Kalian planned to warn Rhiannon, then help the old man spread the word.

## Negotiations

Posted on 27 Feb 2021 @ 11:01am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#)

**2,385 words; about a 12 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Carta Mining Camp

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th - evening

OOC: After 'Mine, mine, all mine'

By the time the negotiations reached a standstill, Roxa's glass was empty and her annoyance rising. She'd thought Rhiannon would be easy to sweet-talk into anything she wanted, but the sailor had more backbone than she let on. She'd refused to budge on a few key issues, chiefly amongst them the amount of the fee but also other concerns Roxa had regarding the liability and traceability of the crates. She had made some perfectly reasonable suggestions on these counts that the little whelp

had refused to even consider.

"Maybe it would be easier if I were to speak with your mother directly," Roxa said testily.

Rhi pushed her empty glass off to the side. She had not poured another drink since the first. Her instincts about Roxa had been right on the money. Very tough in her negotiations. It had come down to a few things. Rhi could see Roxa's frustration. Which was what Rhi wanted.

Roxa huffed. "I'm sure we can reach an agreement." Though they had failed to do that for the past hour. "Why don't we go for a tour of the mine itself? I think you might better understand the necessities of our operation once you see for yourself."

Gangue had returned some time before and stood by the door, like the good little hound he was. Roxa motioned to him, twisting her fingers in a discreet hand signal. He showed no sign that he'd even noticed, but she knew he understood her orders. Wordlessly he moved away from the door and waited for them to take the lead.

"This way - if you please?"

Rhi gave a nod. "I would like a tour." She smiled a mischievous smile as she stood, picked up the two glasses and drink and put it away. As the two walked out of Roxa's dwelling, Rhi looked to her two guards and gave a noticeable nod. "If you do not mind, my guards will follow behind." She glanced at Gangue then to Roxa. Without hesitation she continued. "I know we can come to a deal my dear. Listen, I will drop a quarter from the fee and guarantee its safe and untraceable delivery. If something happens and the cargo can not be delivered then you will get a full refund plus the quarter that I am taking off. (mischievous smile and a wink) How does that sound Roxa darling?"

Roxa made an effort to adjust her features into gratitude, resulting in an expression more like indigestion. "That is an, uh, reasonable offer." Her toothy grin returned to deliver a well-practiced lie. "You must understand that I aspire to maximize profits so that the workers may benefit from a larger share. They work quite hard... as you will see when we tour the mine." Roxa adjusted the sword strapped to her back in an unconscious gesture born of long habit.

Gangue followed along without comment, his eye on the two guards with Roxa's guest. He imagined a fight with those two along with this dwarven sailor would be a challenge worthy of a qunari, if only Roxa would give the word.

Rhi looked to Roxa, "If I could have a moment to talk with my other two guards." She moved over to where they stood with the horses. She leaned in and spoke quietly to the two of them. It was only a few moments then she returned. "Sorry, just wanted to make sure that they knew that I was going on the tour."

Roxa led them across camp to the edge of a rocky ravine that bordered the north side of the mining camp, and pointed to a wooden platform raised and lowered by a system of pulleys and a crane to

and from the ravine floor. "The lift is dwarven design, obviously." Roxa stepped onto the lift.

Rhiannon and her guards followed Roxa onto the lift. One of her guards watched Gangue openly while the other stood as if he didn't really pay attention.

Gangue waited until the four dwarves were on the lift, then he stepped on and took the lift's controls.

Rhiannon gestured east as the lift lowered. "As you can see, we have access to the Waking Sea. But, it's not a safe place for a ship to moor close by, too many rocks beneath the waves. A long boat, though, can row in from a ship anchored further out, pick up ore, and row out."

Rhiannon knew this coast line and knew that not very many ships would be able to get close to the shore line here. "Are you not worried about the possibility of pirates coming across your ship while it is anchored out?"

Roxa shrugged, unconcerned. "That's the reason why I'd be paying you to take care of this part of the operation, isn't it ? Or one of the reasons, anyway. Besides, this stretch of coast is not overly populated. Pirates would tend to lurk on the usual trading routes between Jader, Ferelden and Val-Royeaux, I should think."

The lift, with a heavier charge than usual, was creaking along slowly. As it descended deeper into the ravine, a strong gust of wind made it sway slightly, making some of the guards look a little bit nervous. Roxa allowed a superior smirk to play on her lips. When they reached the bottom of the ravine she was the first to hop off nimbly before offering a gallant hand to Rhiannon.

Rhi gave Roxa a nod and a smile when she replied to question about pirates. When the lift shifted under the weight and a gust of wind, Rhi shifted with it. A sailor since she could walk, a little shift on an elevator was nothing. When it came to a rest Roxa extended her hand to Rhi, which she took. The woman's hand was ruff and there was strength in her grip. Which Rhi could appreciate. Roxa would notice Rhi's hand felt the same.

"This is half of a shipment," Roxa gestured to a few wooden crates piled by the entrance. "The other half will be ready soon. I do hope we can come to an agreement before then."

Rhi looked over the crates and gave a nod. She continued to look around yet spoke to Roxa. "Proper placement of the beams, bracing good. I would like to see more."

"Come and see." Roxa led the way, always more comfortable underground than she was on the surface. She knew the tunnels so well, she could have navigated them with her eyes closed, but she adopted a more sedate pace to allow the others to keep up.

Gangue came last and his horns made a dull sound as they scraped against the ceiling. He mumbled a curse in Qunari, clearly uncomfortable, and hung his head lower. Roxa sneered ; she'd

told him time and time again to cut those things off, or at least trim them down to a more manageable size, but he stubbornly refused to. Misplaced ego, in her opinion.

"We've been working here for a while but making real progress over the last few weeks. Production has increased tenfold, which is why we need to look for new transportation arrangements," she explained as they walked. "Fortunately we managed to recruit a lot of workers." Though some were beginning to be too weak to work, and Roxa hadn't yet worked out what to do with them. She figured they could always toss the bodies into the sea, if it came to that. "Ah, here we are."

They'd reached the main cavern, the center of operations. A few of the Fereldans looked up as the group arrived, one even looked like he wanted to talk to Roxa, but a quick warning from one of the guards put a prompt end to it.

Rhi followed next to Roxa as they entered the mine proper. She could see that it was a fairly good replication of dwarven work. Roxa must have had a hand in it. She listened as Roxa spoke about making real progress the past few weeks. Along with hiring more workers. At this point they entered the main cavern. Rhi noticed the workers there. Fereldan from the look of them. Rhi gave them a slight nod before she looked to Roxa. "Very nice operations. I think we can figure this out. As I said earlier, I will drop a quarter from the fee and guarantee its safe and untraceable delivery. If something happens and the cargo can not be delivered then you will get a full refund plus the quarter that I am taking off." Rhi turned to look at Roxa and smiled. "That is best I can do for now. Once we establish a regular shipment time then we can negotiate a better deal."

"Of course. Your best offer for now. I understand," replied Roxa. This girl was too clever for her own good. But fortunately, the carta dwarf had a back-up plan to negotiate directly with Rhiannon's mother, with far more leverage. In the main cavern, Roxa heard someone singing. The voice of a woman, incredibly beautiful even though the song was one of those annoying Chantry melodies.

Gangue always hated going into the mine, but this time he heard music. He swung his horned head around, trying to pinpoint the source. Huh. He wrinkled his nose. The area where spent workers were left to die.

Rhiannon heard the signing. It sounded like it might be the young woman who traveled with her here.

"Must be coming from the, uh, infirmary," said Roxa with a glance at Gangue. He nodded, and she changed the subject.

"You may be interested to learn that the surface land above and surrounding the mine belongs to dwarfs – a father and daughter - who were banished from Orzammar. Their quarters are at the far side of the main cavern through a tunnel." *Quarters* was a rather loose description of a part of the mine cut off from the rest by a barred door. Roxa's lips pulled back in a predatory grin at Rhiannon. "I'll introduce you."

Rhiannon still listening to the song, when Roxa said something about the mine being owned by a father and daughter who had been banished from Orzammar. "Father, daughter. Banished. Interesting."

"Right this way," said Roxa with a chuckle. She nodded to Gangue as they made their way to the barred door at the northernmost part of the cavern, where she expected to add one more prisoner to her little jail. She planned to disarm and detain the clever dwarven sailor while Gangue killed her two guards. With her daughter held hostage, Rhiannon's mother would have no choice but to accept any deal Roxa dictated.

"Uh, excuse me!" Kalian – aka Korbyn - jogged toward them, still carrying a pickaxe, but held with the heavy end down. "Lady Rhiannon, please, may I speak with you?"

Roxa frowned at the vaguely familiar human interrupting them at such an inopportune time. If she wasn't still pretending to be a friendly host and legitimate mine manager, she'd have told Gangue to kill him. Instead, she signaled Gangue to block him.

Gangue grunted with irritation, not only was he not allowed to kill this human, his opportunity for a real challenge was delayed again. The qunari stepped between Roxa's guest and this bas worker.

Rhi heard the young man approach. She looked to Kalian and gave him a smile. "Korbyn correct. Go ahead dear."

Kalian had not really thought through what he would say, and now he had to think of a way to warn Rhiannon, and fast. With bowed head and the pickaxe on the ground beside him, he knelt in the dirt before the pretty dwarf. "Thank you, my lady. My petition concerns the chestnut beauty, my true love, Valsama. Tell her that Leesa betrayed her, and her clan is in danger." Valsama and Leesa were, of course, two of Rhiannon's horses. He lifted his head and winked. On his knees like this they were closer to the same height. "There isn't much time."

Rhiannon listened carefully as Kalian spoke about his love being betrayed and that there is not much time. What caught her attention was the name of his love and the one who betrayed her. They were the name of her horses. She gave him a slight smile as she secretly hand signaled her guards to be ready. "I will my dear."

Without speaking plainly Kalian couldn't be certain Rhiannon understood his warning, but he was mostly sure he had conveyed the message that they were all in danger. He got to his feet and bowed first to Roxa, then he bowed to Rhiannon with a flourish and his best flirtatious smile. "Well, they're not paying me one royal a day to chat with pretty dwarves. I have work to do, if you'll excuse me," he said affably, and then he balanced his pickaxe on his shoulder and hurried off in the direction of a mine tunnel.

Roxa narrowed her eyes and regarded Rhiannon suspiciously. "It seems you have a human admirer." Roxa would have sent Gangue after the human, but she would need the qunari's skills.

Rhi grinned at Roxa. It was a mischievous grin. "He is cute for a human." She turned to head back the way they came. "I must be getting back. I know that my mother is waiting on my return." She grinned. "I would like to say goodbye to the three that came with me." She started to walk. "If that is alright with you. It won't take long. I know they have work to do."

Roxa scowled as Rhiannon turned away from her. "Well then. Perhaps you will meet the mine owners later." Roxa still planned to throw Rhiannon in the cell with the other prisoners, it would just be a little more complicated in the middle of the huge cavern. "Let me show you the ore we're collecting. Our output is quite impressive."

A scuffle near the mine entrance between a bas worker and one of Roxa's worthless guards caught Gangu's attention, and since Roxa hadn't given him permission to engage her three guests in battle – yet – the qunari went to investigate.

OOC: Continued in 'Uprising' and 'The end is near'

## Uprising

Posted on 28 Feb 2021 @ 10:49am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**4,520 words; about a 23 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** The Mine

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th - evening

OOC: After 'Breaktime and Other Fictions'

Pickaxe in hand, Martin shuffled across the cave, head hanging low and obsequiously staring at his feet, the very picture of dejected defeatism. He glanced discreetly around as he walked, noting that most of the guards avoided going too deep into the dark, cramped tunnels and stuck close to the main cave and the main entrance, where the air was fresher and less stuffy. Obviously they were confident that there was nowhere for the workers to go and therefore nothing much to watch. Martin fully intended to put this laxity to good use.

The worker he'd picked to free first was a tall, surly looking man who was digging into the wall as if it had personally offended him. Like the others only his ankles were shackled, leaving his arms free to work. He was probably imagining Roxa's head spiked on one of the rocky outcroppings. A woman, also shackled, was gathering the ore into a basket, long uncombed hair hiding her face as she worked tirelessly.

"Looks like a good spot," Martin said as he got near them, hefting up his pickaxe and eyeing the wall speculatively.

"Eff off," the man growled without even glancing at him. He was muscular - the ragged remains of his shirt did not hide that fact - but his hipbones jutted out in a way that suggested he hadn't had a filling meal in a while.

"Come on," Martin said agreeably. "I'm nothing but a companion of infortune."

"You think no one's tried this before?" The man looked at him this time, if his scathing glare could be counted as such. "You're just trying to get credit for my work and take the food I earned. So, eff off. You look like you can earn your own bread."

"Huh." Martin eyed the wall, hefted his pickaxe and struck. Shards of rock flew. "Working your butt off all day for a slice of bread? Doesn't sound exciting."

"Like *you're* doing better!" the man snapped.

"What if I told you there's a way to *make* it better?" Another hit, digging a slightly deeper hole in the stone.

"What do you mean?" the man sounded guarded but marginally less hostile, and the woman, though she kept working, was listening to the conversation.

"What's your name?"

There was a brief silence as the man swung his own pickaxe. "Geoff. Why?"

"I'm Martin. Just got here this morning."

"I know. I saw. And I don't care." Geoff shrugged. He was a good head taller than Martin, with short brown hair and a beard, and a nose curved like a hawk's beak. The sweat on his skin streaked through layers of dirt. "Now tell me what you're on about or scram."

"Alright, listen. We want out, and I'm pretty sure you do too. We all outnumber the guards, four to one if not more. Even with pickaxe against longsword, I'm pretty sure we can take them. If I break the padlock on your chains, will you join us?"

"We tried that before," the woman interjected, speaking for the first time. "That's how we ended up in chains in the first place. If we pull a stunt like this again they'll probably kill us this time."

"Is that worse than being worked to death?" Martin mused out loud. "Bit more dignified, if anything, I suppose."

"He's right, Sorrel," Geoff said, exhaling a long breath out of his nose before he struck the wall again. "I'd rather take my chances than wait until we're too weak to even fight back."

"They don't gain anything in killing us," Sorrel said. "We can keep our head down, get the job done, and..."

"And then what ? Work here for the rest of our lives ?"

"You are witnesses," Martin said. "I honestly don't think Roxa will just let you go."

Sorrel bit her lip, clearly conflicted, though she never stopped working.

"So..." Geoff dropped his tool and knelt beside her, rubbing a hand on her back and whispering in her hear.

While they conferred in a low voice Martin glanced back at Roxa's party, trying to spot Kalian. Time was of the essence and he hadn't anticipated that he'd need to spend so much time convincing the workers to fight. He needed more time.

"Look, make up your minds," he said, turning his attention back to Geoff and Sorrel. "I need to talk to the others and we're running out of time."

They paid him no heed. The two of them were looking at each other, so close they must feel the other's breath on their faces, until Sorrel lifted her head and kissed Geoff softly.

"It's a promise, then," Geoff whispered, then looked back at Martin. "We're in. If you can get rid of those chains I'll take you to Sofia. She was our leader... before everything went wrong. If anyone can rally the people here, she can."

Martin exhaled a relieved sigh. One battle won, a dozen more to go. "Okay then. Get back to work before anyone gets suspicious, while I work on your chains."

Geoff stood and pretended to hack at the stone again with feigned enthusiasm, while Martin pretended to be sifting through the rocks on the ground. While there was some movement in their vicinity, the guards would probably not bother to check. He squinted at the padlock in the semi-darkness, gratified to see it looked as crudely made as the rest of the equipment. Cheap iron was brittle, he knew that from experience, and just looking at the blunted tip of his pickaxe he could tell how cheap this iron was. Still sharp enough to break skulls, mind.

"Don't move your feet," he commanded.

The padlock was a very basic one. It looked impressive because it was big, but that actually suggested that it was less sophisticated and intricate than a smaller lock would have been. Inserting two fingers in the shackled loop, Martin pulled it away from the top of the lock. Once he was sure there was no slack left, he used his pickaxe to hit the side of the lock, careful not to hit his own fingers in the process. The quick, short strikes were meant to shake the pins off to allow the



lock to open.

"Are you sure you know what you're - " Geoff stopped abruptly when the lock suddenly sprang open. "Doing. Obviously. You've... done that before, haven't you ?"

"Only once," Martin said, feeling quite smug. They had lost the key to a prisoner's shackle. To this day Martin suspected Audrey of having misplaced the key on purpose, to get back at the petty thief who'd spat a glob of green mucus into her face. The keys certainly had turned up suspiciously fast once the man had been broken out of his chains. They'd still had to wait two days for the locksmith to return from a visit to a relative, and to show them how to properly smash a lock open without smashing the prisoner's arms in the process. Two days was a long time to spend chained to a wall.

"Are you some kind of thief, or - " Geoff sounded entirely too impressed by that small trick - or maybe by the thought of Martin being some kind of high-profile thief.

"Later. Your turn," he nodded at Sorrel. Working on her lock took only marginally longer than Geoff's and the young woman kicked away the chains with savage bliss. When she stood, Martin realized that she was just as tall as he was.

"I'll show you where Sofia is," she whispered. "Geoff, you get Andrew."

"Sorrel - " Geoff began in protest, but she shushed - him with a fierce look and he closed his mouth, subdued.

"Let's get this done," Sorrel said. "This way." She pointed him to a short elven woman, with short spiky hair, who was working on the other side of the cave.

They pretended to carry baskets of ore as an excuse to move across the main cave. As they did so, Martin looked surreptitiously around, trying once again to pinpoint Elinowy and Kalian.

Elinowy made her way around the edge of the mine floor passing the message to any workers she came upon. In a short time whispers would be traveling down each of the tunnels of the mine. She soon found herself back to the lift they had come in on. The rickety device was high overhead, and likely closely watched by Roxa's guards while their boss was moving about the mine itself. She had to find a way to get near Roxa's group. Certainly there was a way to resolve this without blood shed. Violence of the magnitude about to transpire, and the profitable operation of a mine were antithetical no matter how profitable the ore extracted. This was just a matter of allowing fairness and mutual prosperity. If everyone could just sit down together, this could all be worked out.

She saw Roxa and her entourage peering in on the ore dumping carts. Roxa was saying something about percentage of output. Elinowy made her way forward and was stopped by a guard.

"You there! Get back!" the guard snapped, unhitching the whip from his belt.

The Chantry sister put her hands in front of her to show she was unarmed and not a threat. "Please sir, I need to speak with the administrator."

"Hah! The Administrator? What... oh you mean Boss Roxa. She's got no need to speak to the likes of you." the guard responded. He unfurled the whip as Elinowy got closer.

"I implore you, sir. It is of the Highest priority that I speak with Roxa. A terrible mistake is being made." she pleaded.

The whip retorted with a snap, the sting of its end ripping into Elinowy's shoulder. Her hand quickly moved to cover the open tear. "The only mistake being made is you." the guard snarled trying awkwardly to be clever and failing. He pulled back the whip preparing to strike again.

"What is going on here." came the icy voice of the Qunari.

The guard froze in mid strike. A hint of terror creeping into his voice. "Nah...No boss, sir. Just getting one of the workers back in line."

"This is a guided tour for a distribution partner. We are not to be disturbed." the Qunari hissed back quietly.

"Aye... I got it boss. So sorry. I'll take this care of this little bint real quick and quiet like." the guard stammered.

"See that you do, and allow no more disturbances. Or I will take care of both of you personally." The Qunari stated with finality before turning back to catch up with Roxa and her guest.

The guard grabbed Elinowy by the collar of her shirt and drug her away to a side tunnel. "You are going to regret that sister. You got the boss upset with me. That comes out of your hide." He shoved her down the passage out of the light of the central opening. Throwing her against the wall of the mine, he curled up his whip.

Struggling to get back to her feet in the rubble along the mine wall Elinowy fought to speak calmly. "What I have to say to your boss will get you rewarded. You just need to take me to..." her sentence was cut off by a hard slap across her face.

"Ain't nothin you can say she's gonna wanna here. Fact is, you probably wont be able to speak much in a minute." he said marching up to her and lifting her up to press her against the wall. "Shame, you actually got a nice face for a tunnel rat. Maybe once you have healed a bit I can get you assigned to a more comfortable duty." he sneered directly in her face.

She closed her eyes. Teaching her sisters to defend themselves was part of basic instruction. She had practiced this scenario at the Chantry. It was just a matter of leverage, pressure and timing. She felt the man's breath on her face. Her thoughts turned to Andraste, and what she would do. The verses came to her.

*...The Maker is the rock to which I cling.*

*"I cannot see the path.  
Perhaps there is only abyss.  
Trembling, I step forward,  
In darkness enveloped."*

What began as a mere hum grew to her full voice. The guard looked at her confused. Her heartbeat bent into conformance of the cadence of the verse.

"Though all before me is shadow,  
Yet shall the Maker be my guide.  
I shall not be left to wander the drifting roads of the Beyond.  
For there is no darkness in the Maker's Light  
And nothing that He has wrought shall be lost."

With a shift and a twirl and the impact of a high arching heel the eyes of the guard shifted from a confused threat, to a dilation born of extreme pain. With a groan the man collapsed to the mine floor. A final twirl from the sister knocked him into the realm of the unconscious. She quickly bound his hands and feet with his whip, leaving wrist strap to secure the handle in his mouth. She left him in the dark of the tunnel and rushed out to find her companions. She wouldn't have much time.

Kalian returned to the first tunnel he and his friends had worked, found Costard, and explained their plan.

Costard nodded gravely. "I would rather die bravely today, fighting to return to my beloved Jaquenetta, than go on living this half-life separated from my love and our child."

"Pass it on. Tell everyone," Kalian urged. "If we all work together, there aren't enough guards to stand against us. Be ready."

As Costard went deeper to approach a group of workers, Kalian exited the tunnel and saw Martin walking into another tunnel with a woman as tall as him. He strode forward as though under orders, and caught up to the Martin and the woman just as they stopped next to a short, elven woman with dark spiky hair, whom Kalian at first thought was stocky for an elf until he saw the muscles in her

arms bulge as she swung her pickaxe. She was in chains.

Martin and Sorrel had emptied their baskets in the cart before shuffling onwards to the elven woman, who was working only just hard enough to avoid a rebuke from the guards. Clearly she was trying to save her strength. As they reached her, Martin noticed Kalian approaching. It was lucky that Roxa was still speaking with Rhiannon, and the guards otherwise preoccupied. Otherwise a group of four might have garnered unwanted attention.

Sofia didn't look up but had clearly seen them. She kept working, neither increasing nor slowing her pace.

"Sofia ?" Sorrel said tentatively.

This time the elven woman paused, glancing at them over her shoulder through dark bangs of hair. "You're unchained," she said, as if making a casual observation. Her accent suggested she was not a native of Jader, though she didn't sound Fereldan either.

"This man freed us - " Sorrel glanced around, suddenly wary, hesitant when she spotted Kalian who was now close enough to hear them.

"It's alright, he's a friend," Martin said. "Listen - Sofia, right ? We don't have much time. We need to put an end to this before people start dying. Roxa's never going to pay any of us, and she's never going to let us go either. I freed Geoff and Sorrel from their chains. Our friends are passing the word among the workers, but they need someone to follow. Someone like you. We're almost ready now. Are you with us ?"

Sophia's smile was equal parts burning anger and icy revenge. "By the Black City's gates, I'm in. Turn me loose, handsome." She shoved her shackled foot toward Martin and addressed Sorrel. "So. You and Geoff believe the others will support us this time?"

Martin set to work immediately. It was easier the third time as he knew exactly where to hit the lock to dislodge the pins.

"Yes, I think so," Sorrel said. "Roxa kept none of the promises she gave to appease them. Double rations ? Didn't see the hint of them. Longer breaks ? Pfft. And she promised to pay us *soon*, and we've yet to see a copper from her. Empty promises won't be enough to save her this time. Anyway, I'd rather risk it than work myself to death. The way I see it, we don't have much to lose."

"We don't even need everyone to join us," Martin said, still squinting at the lock as he worked. "If two thirds, or even half the workers join us, we still stand a decent chance."

"Really. And who are you, exactly ? Some kind of soldier ?"

"You could say that." The lock clicked open, much to Martin's satisfaction. "Okay, listen. Surprise is

in our favor. We need to act in a coordinated manner. When I attack, everyone goes for the guard closest to them." He looked up quickly enough to see Sofia doing a quick hand signal, and Geoff on the other side of the cave signaling back.

"Wouldn't it be better to wait until Roxa and her cronies leave?" Sofia asked, still signaling.

"No time. The guards are going to notice something any second now." The atmosphere in the mine was building into something heavier, and deadlier. Martin could see the miners glance at each other, some of them moving subtly - or not so subtly - to a better position. "Plus, there's a chance Roxa's guest will side with us, so don't attack her party unless they attack first. The Qunari's mine." It was going to be a tough fight, but Martin was in better shape than most of the workers, so it made sense for him to pick the toughest opponent. He just hoped he wasn't going to live to regret it.

"Some of our people are still in chains." Sofia finished signalling and picked up her pickaxe.

"We'll have to free them after this is over. They can still throw rocks at the guards, if they feel confident they'll hit the right targets."

"Fine. Give me a minute to move into position and give the signal. Sorrel, with me." Sofia moved, following the wall to keep away from the main sources of light.

"Uh, Martin?" When it came down to fighting, Kalian knew he would need to use his magic openly. It was the right thing to do, anything to improve their chances of getting the workers out alive, even if it meant losing Martin's friendship. And Elinowy... well, a Chantry sister might not be able to forgive an apostate. "I, uh... I was thinking that uh... a mage in a situation like this could be helpful. Not all mages are bad, right? Quite a few of them are just well-meaning folks, doing the best they can to do the right thing... Using healing magic and defensive spells to help people. Do you, uh, know what I mean?"

So Kalian had noticed Sister Elinowy's little manigance, too. Martin had had time to mull over what had happened, and he'd come to the conclusion that she must have used magic, and somehow he hadn't picked up on it. That was the only thing that made sense. After all, he'd never been fully initiated as a Templar. He'd always been able to tell when someone used magic, before, but if Sister Elinowy was an apostate in hiding she must have had practice using her magic on the sly.

And Kalian, ever gallant, was awkwardly suggesting that Sister Elinowy may not be evil, for all that she was an apostate - and, presumably, a usurper of the Chantry robes.

"I know exactly what you mean," Martin agreed. "Do you think a mage, in a situation like this, would help?"

But then, to Kalian's relief, Elinowy found them.

The sister's appearance was rather messy, the braid of her hair had partially unraveled and her shirt

was clearly ripped at the shoulder with some bleeding. "We are short on time. The word has been passed down the tunnels.

"Good job," Martin said. He glanced about the mine. The workers had stopped moving and changing places, and now they were waiting, only barely pretending to work. The deception would not hold much longer.

"I'm taking the Qunari. Kalian, think you can get to Roxa ? Elinowy, you, er... help however you think you can. And, hum, maybe pray for us." That was as obvious a suggestion as he could make that using her magic now might be a good idea.

"I never stop praying." she responded not quite picking up on the suggestion.

Kalian glanced in Roxa's direction, and saw that Rhiannon and her two dwarf guards were still with her. "I can. And I'm pretty sure Rhiannon will fight with us."

Martin picked up the basket of ore. Though it was nearly empty he pretended to make a big effort to heft it up before heading towards the cart. It was close enough to Roxa's party for his purpose, and fortunately Gangue was hanging back from the rest of the group. Martin just hoped the miners did rise to the occasion, otherwise he was going to spend a very unpleasant moment.

Kalian hefted another nearly-empty basket of ore, and followed Martin. His stomach churned, and he chided himself for feeling more nervous about using magic in front of his friends than worried about trying to fight a dangerous dwarf and her hulking qunari. As the three of them got closer, Kalian winked at Rhiannon just as they attracted the attention of a guard.

"Hey, get back to work you lazy sods - " one of the guards shouted.

"Now !" Martin yelled and, dropping his basket, he swung his pickaxe at Gangue's head.

Elinowy took a balanced stance, as she did starting her morning prayers. She couldn't quite believe it was coming to this. But here she was. The Maker's will be served. She closed her eyes, focused on the cadence of her heart and she sang.

"Though I am flesh, Your Light is ever present,  
And those I have called, they remember,  
And they shall endure.  
I shall sing with them the Chant, and all will know,  
We are Yours, and none shall stand before us."

She sang loud and strong. Her voice echoing through the caverns. As the sound bounced from the walls of the mine, it created an eerie harmony that resonated. There was power, not of magic, not of arms, but of hope and the call of men to band together for good.

Kalian cast a barrier spell on himself, Martin, Elinowy, and Rhiannon. Without a staff, he had to concentrate to focus his magic, and even then his range was limited. He would need to stay close to be effective. Elinowy's song was so inspiring, he felt bursting with courage. With Gangue's attention on Martin, Kalian tried to flank the qunari.

Rhiannon heard Elinowy song and felt a surge of hope of run through her. She has fought with mages before, her mother has hired apostates over the years to help protect the ship while they were out. So she felt the familiar magic as the barrier spell had been cast. She pulled her rapier and stepped forward. She had no idea which of the three had cast the spell. At this point she didn't care.

That Qunari had inhuman reflexes. Martin's hit would have been strong enough to knock him out, if he hadn't turned his head so fast that the pickaxe ripped along one of his horns, digging into the flesh of his face and leaving a gaping wound all the way down to his chin. Gangue howled in pain as blood spurted. Though the wound was not life-threatening, like all head wounds it bled profusely, and it must hurt. A lot, judging by the profanities that followed. Martin swung again but this time Gangue was ready, already pulling out his greatsword from its sheathe as he deftly evaded the hit.

"Ashkost kata !" he snarled, lifting the greatsword with only one hand as if it weight nothing.

Martin had no knowledge of Qunlat but he could venture a guess as to the meaning. He said nothing, saving his breath for the fight ahead, looking for weaknesses in his opponent's stance. Gangue wore little armour, but Martin's main advantage was his enemy's bulk. It made it harder for him to move. Up to a point. Gangue wasn't bothering with finesse, he swung his great sword at Martin like a hammer. Behind the blood, he was smiling.

Kalian touched the qunari's hip from the side and cast winter's grasp. Gangue's side froze, partially immobilizing him for a few moments. Around them, workers were fighting guards. But also, guards and workers were running for the mine's entrance. Kalian cast barrier on his close-proximity allies again.

Rhi shifted out of the way as the Qunari swung. She was about to take a swing with her rapier yet Kalian slipped in and touched Gangue's hip. She watched as a layer of ice froze the Qunari.

*What the...?* Had Martin just seen *Kalian* of all people use magic ? *Kalian* ?!! He gaped. The shock and surprise froze him as surely as Kalian's spell had frozen the Qunari, and he lost the opportunity to strike. Already Gangue was shaking off the spell, the thin layer of frost on his skin glistening as it melted, and he flexed his muscles, attention shifting onto the bigger threat - Kalian. Kalian the Mage, Kalian the Apostate.

Elinowy had remained focused on the gathering battle as she sang her song to inspire the courage of her allies. She kept her attention toward the big Qunari and Martin. Surely the apostate's magic would come out shortly. And then it did, but it didn't. Martin seemed as caught off guard by the sudden frost spreading up the Qunari's side. It was then that she noticed Kalian tucked in the fray. He looked like he was casting magic. The electrical feel of the air around them screamed that magic

was being unleashed... by Kalian. Elinowy's song stopped in shock. The sister looked at the young man with surprise, disappointment and sadness.

Kalian stumbled back at the sight of the giant oxman turning toward him. Martin had not swung his pickaxe. Elinowy's song had stopped abruptly, taking his courage with it, to be replaced by the slimy crawl of fear along Kalian's spine. He risked a glance at the Sister, and at Martin, saw their expressions, and realized in that moment that his failure to admit that he was an apostate might have doomed them all.

Rhi had always been good around magic and magic users, whether they were apostates or not. With out looking at anyone of the three she yelled at them. "Don't stop! Keep it up!"

OOC: Continued in 'The end is near'

## The end is near

Posted on 21 Mar 2021 @ 3:34pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**4,665 words; about a 23 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** The Mine

**Timeline:** Cloureach 17th - night

OOC: After 'Uprising'

Now that Kalian had revealed himself as a mage, Gangue's attention had shifted squarely onto him. Martin's mind reeled with all that this implied but there wasn't time to dwell on it in the face of mortal danger. He took advantage of Gangue's distraction to attack again, though his pickaxe looked somewhat ridiculous compared to the hefty two-hander favoured by the Qunari. Gangue dodged with a snarl, then slashed at both Martin and Kalian with a mighty blow of his greatsword.

Kalian's attempt to nimbly dodge the qunari's greatsword ended with him tripping backward over loose rocks. He landed hard on his back, knocking the breath out of him, the greatsword slashing through the place where his chest had been just a moment ago. He rolled over and staggered to his feet. The Qunari reminded him of a bear he and his grandmother had fought, after he'd accidentally sent a firebolt its way.

Martin wasn't used to fighting without armour. Though it had been a while since he'd carried the Templar full plates, he always wore the Guard thick leather armour on patrol ; though the lack of it gave him greater agility he keenly felt the loss of protection. Even more so as he wasn't used to relying exclusively on dodging, and his reflexes in that regard were a little rusty. He avoided Gangue's latest hit, only just, nearly tripping on the uneven ground of the cave as he did.



Gangue easily carried his momentum into another blow, aimed again at Kalian. Martin jumped in front of him, pickaxe in both hands as he used it to parry. Although he managed to deflect the blade, the old, dry, brittle wood of the pickaxe handle broke under the strain. *Oh damn.* Martin tossed the metal head of the pickaxe at Gangue's face, just to buy a second, looking around for a weapon - any weapon. The Qunari's headwound was bleeding profusely still, blinding him on his left side.

"Kalian ! Glyph of Paralysis !" Martin shouted, half-commanding, half-pleading. He didn't even know if Kalian, having not benefited from formal teaching, would know this one.

Of course! Kalian was muttering the words and making the motions with his hands around them even before the tiny voice at the back of his mind wondered how much Martin knew about spells. A faint glow shimmered into being around them where they stood without a second to spare. The qunari stepped toward them and froze.

The spell would not hold Gangue for very long. Martin looked frantically around for a weapon. A few steps further one of the guards had fallen ; the blood seeping through his hair suggested he'd been hit by a stone and knocked out. Martin ran to the body and pulled the sword the guard hadn't had time to use, swearing between his teeth when the blade got snagged on the man's belt.

Kalian wiped the blood from his face using his sleeve. He searched for Elinowy in the chaotic milieu, and saw her fall to the ground, a guard looming over her. He ran toward her, taking up a discarded shovel on the way.

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Henker had signed up as a guard for Roxa just for the easy money. So far it had been good, dice games everyday, a few whippings here and there... way better than in the army before he had deserted. But he had not signed up for this kind of shit. If the workers won, Henker had few illusions about what they'd do to him. It was this thought, rather than loyalty to Roxa, that encouraged him to fight. But, true to his cowardly nature, he chose the target that he thought would be easiest ; the tall (clearly addled) redhead who thought this was an appropriate time to sing.

"Shut up you whore !" Henker shouted vindictively, as he came at her with his sword.

Her focus on the newly revealed Kalian the Mage was quickly broken by the guard slashing his blade across her. She winced as her knees buckled. The guard drew back for another swing as she gasped for breath, her hand covering the laceration trying to hold back the blood pouring out.

A smart man in this situation would run for the mine's exit and try to escape on the lift. Henker was not a smart man. Instead, he pulled his whip from his belt for more fun.

Kalian ran up behind the guard and slammed the business end of the shovel into his head with all the force he could muster. The man toppled over to the side. "Elinowy," gasped the apostate, dropping to her side. In his worry and rush to help, he didn't stop to ask for her permission, but

wrapped one arm around her shoulder for support while covering her hand that was held protectively over her stomach with his. Reaching for the fade, he poured healing magic into her abdomen.

The burning pain from the laceration had Elinowy's eyes closed as she fought to recall prayers to the Maker between moments she wished for the peace of joining the maker. The goings on about her in the battle faded to a distant blur or irrelevance. The guard dropped next to her, she didn't notice. Tears flowed from her tightly closed eyelids. Her breathing was short and belabored. Her world was a dark envelope of pain.

She barely recognized her body being elevated as Kalian supported her aside from the sudden wrenching pain in her abdomen as her position altered. A weak moan came from her lips. She felt something change. A warmth in her belly spread out through her body. It shook her mind from the prison of pain she had been in. Somewhat confused she managed to rationalize what she was experiencing. Magic! Her eyes shot open. "No!" she called in a broken voice, the hand that cradled her belly fought to push away Kalian's hand. She grabbed Kalian's wrist, fighting to lift it from her stomach.

The rush of healing magic flowed through her. It felt... wonderful. The grip on Kalian's wrist went from forcing him away to pulling him back tightly against her. The moan she let out was no longer of pain. In her mind she cursed herself for what she was doing, but by the same token was not inclined to stop it. Elinowy's blood coated Kalian's hand as the gash in her belly stitched itself back together with his healing touch. She gasped filling her lungs with air as the magic worked through her.

Kalian could see the wound closing as fading. Around the torn fabric of his sister's shirt he made out something odd. Dark markings on Elinowy's skin. Something was written on her.

Kalian's mana pool was nearly exhausted, recovery would take a few moments at least. He breathed heavily, as shaken by his friend's near-death as though he had nearly died himself. It had been a struggle, maintaining the flow of healing energy while she fought him, but in the end she surrendered.

Gently, he moved the torn fabric away from her belly, to check the state of her wound. He used the edge of his tunic to wipe away the blood, and as he expected, the scar was red and puckered where the flesh had knit together. What he did not expect was the tattoos - intricate patterns of ink across Elinowy's belly extending to parts he would not presume to investigate without her permission. They looked like runes of some kind, clearly magical, in fact the ink might even be infused with lyrium. Strange indeed, for a pious Chantry sister.

"Elinowy? I'm sorry, it's going to be painful, but you have to get up," urged Kalian. "We're still in danger."

The warmth of the healing magic faded being replaced by a tingling numbness in her stomach. Elinowy's blue eyes opened and looked up at Kalian. The sudden cascade of thoughts were hard to

organize. Her friend was an Apostate! She felt her pulse begin to quicken. But he had also healed her in the most amazing way. That's couldn't be evil. Could it? She sat up, then looked her the shredded blood soaked shirt to her stomach. The wound has closed. The notion of magic healing her repulsed her at the same time as feeling unusual notions of gratitude and affection for the Apostate that had done it. Her life continued, against the will of the Maker. She could see the edges of her tattoos being slightly exposed, she looked back to Kalian in terror. Her hand dropped to cover her exposed abdomen. Did he know? As a Mage could he read the inscription etched in her flesh? Her heart beat faster.

Kalian had arisen and was assessing the battle still going on around them. He was right. First things first. She and he were going to have a serious conversation when this was over. But now there were more important issues. She struggled to rise and looked about the chamber.

Back on their feet, Kalian scanned the area. Skirmishes were playing out all around them. There was Rhiannon fighting Roxa. And Martin against the qunari. "Maker's breath! Martin needs help."

Taking a couple tender steps, her wound was a dull ache. She would not be the best in a fight, but she could still sing. Her friend, the apostate mage the source of her salvation and condemnation would need help as well as the others bravely risking their lives around them. She chose some verses, dedicated to the valor of Andraste.

"Lady of Perpetual Victory, your praises I sing!  
Gladly do I accept the gift invaluable  
Of your glory! Let me be the vessel  
Which bears the Light of your promise  
To the world expectant.

The air itself rent asunder,  
Spilling light unearthly from the  
Waters of the Fade,  
Opening as an eye to look  
Upon the Realm of Opposition  
In dire judgment."

While everyone fighting on the side of truth would be uplifted by the song, Kalian specifically felt his depth of magical force flow through him like he was being filled a new with strength and power. She kept on singing as she found the body of her attacker nearby. She took up the whip fallen beside him. The braided leather handle fit well in her hand. She lashed the whip out and circled it near her as she followed Kalian, adding emphasized cracks in the tempo of her song. In her current state, she may not be able to beat an assailant in combat, but she could certainly make them look for a better target than the tall flame headed woman soaked in scarlet brandishing a whip.

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Roxa wanted to scream as she saw all her hard work unravel before her very eyes. Bloody Fereldans. She should have kept them all in chains. Longsword in one hand, shield in the other, she slashed at the nearest rebel, determined to execute as much of her workforce as necessary. The thrill of battle didn't diminish the burning fire of anger that burnt in the pit of her stomach.

"Rhiannon !" She looked for her *guest*, and how fortunate was it that she hadn't locked her up yet - Roxa's eyes widened as she saw Rhiannon took down one of her own guards, rather than the rabble attacking them. With a cry of rage, she threw herself at her.

Rhiannon had moved take on Roxa. As she has slipped around the others she came up to one of Roxa's guard. He was quick yet he had not expected that this dwarf was as nimble as she was. Three moves Rhi had taken the guard with a slice across the throat. She stood with a mischievous grin over the guard, she heard her name, looked up and that mischievous grin turned wicked. Her eyes gleamed with an excitement. "Let's dance." Her voice was soft yet almost feral, as she pulled a long dagger from its sheath, in her off hand. When Roxa threw herself at her, Rhi waited till the last moment to parry.

The sailor's parry deflected her longsword, and Roxa thrust her shield forward to push Rhiannon back. Damn that human, he must have warned her. Or she was in on this rebellion from the beginning – she arrived with the instigators. That prospect enraged the carta dwarf. "I should've locked you up from the start instead of listening to your prattle. You want to dance? I'll lead." Roxa roared and swung her sword.

Even though Rhi was ready for Roxa, the woman's shield still found some purchase. Backing up a couple of feet, Rhiannon knew she was going to be bruised from the force of the blow. Rhi's smile grew more feral as she slipped into a dancers pose. Roxa swung her sword, Rhi brought up her dagger to parry, the arm that took the brunt of the shield bash. The sword and the power behind it, slid down the blade. Rhi pushed forward, turning Roxa's blade though not quickly enough. As the blade sliced across her forearm, leaving a crimson line.

Rhiannon took the blow and twisted out of the way, flourishing her rapier, bringing it around to slice down Roxa's sword arm. Rhi danced away to turn and face Roxa. "You dance well for someone who has two left feet." She grinned. "Trust me though, if you had wanted to use me to get to my mother. You would have made the biggest mistake of your life."

Blood rolled down her side from the wound in her sword-arm. But Roxa had at least scored first blood. She circled around the other dwarf, glancing around her. Gangue was busy fighting that human. Half her useless mine guards had run away, and the ones to stay and fight were falling. Good thing the lift was at the surface level, they were all stuck here. Roxa threw her shield at Rhiannon, then holding her sword in both hands, rushed her shouting, "I'll send you back to your mother in pieces!"

Rhiannon nimbly shifted out of the way when Roxa threw her shield at her. "Pieces you say. You

can try if you would like. Just know, you die here today." As she slid to the side, parrying Roxa's sword. As she did she took her own swing with her long dagger, just missing.

Roxa barely dodged the dagger, saved by unusually fast reflexes. It was not the first life-or-death situation she'd been in, it was not even the worst. But no matter what, Rhiannon'd head would end up on a spike, she thought in cold fury, and screw that deal with her mother. She'd pay the higher fee if it meant she was done with this backstabbing traitor.

"Not today," She hissed. Although her shield was gone she still had her sword, and it was a good solid longsword, not a flimsy rapier. Where did Rhiannon think she was, at court in Val Royeaux ? "You picked the wrong side, cloudgazer ! The Carta will know what happened here."

Neither of them had the advantage, at that point. Roxa fainted to the right, then pressed and tried to score a hit on Rhiannon's left arm to get her to drop her dagger.

Rhiannon watched as Roxa fainted to the right. She seen it coming and shifted to block Roxa's press with her dagger. Still the shock of the heavier blade pushed Rhi back a foot. As strong as Rhi was, this woman was stronger. What Rhi had was her quickness. And she used it. Pivoting so that the strike from Roxa seemed less, Rhi struck out rapier.

Roxa parried the riposte, infuriated to see Rhiannon block her so easily. She'd thought of her as a lightweight, an arrogant pup taking advantage of her mother's name and influence. She hadn't expected her to be actually good with a sword.

Around them, the fighting went on, and it was not going too well for Roxa's men. Gangue had gotten injured - she'd heard his grunt of pain, though she hadn't looked back - and she could feel the tide of battle turning against her. She had little time to regain the upper hand. Roxa's hurry was her downfall ; she hit again, overextending herself in her eagerness to finish the fight, and when Rhiannon dodged, she stumbled.

Rhiannon had not thought about how long the duel had gone on. For Rhi fighting was her joy, her passion so time didn't matter to her. She had just parried another blow from Roxa, when she heard the Qunari grunt in pain. This almost distracted her. Enough that Roxa took advantage and struck hard. Rhi had just scramble out of the way as Roxa stumbled as she overextended herself. This gave Rhi the opportunity she was looking for. Like a ballerina, Rhi pivoted to her left, spun to face Roxa's back, as she laid open a huge gash across Roxa's back. "You said the carta would know what happened here. I know they will. Cause I will tell them. You see, (as Rhi walks around to look Roxa in the eyes) I am the Carta, das'tang." As she ran her rapier across Roxa's throat.

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Martin managed to yank the sword free just as Gangue shook off the last of the spell. The blade's balance was poor, and the steel probably brittle, but it would have to do. Gangue was looking around for Kalian but Martin did not give him time to search any further.

"Hey, ox-man ! You're fighting me !"

That was possibly not very inspired but it did the job ; Gangue's attention focused on Martin again, and with a growl of impatience he stepped forward, bringing his greatsword over his head in one formidable swing. Martin rolled to the side and took advantage of the Qunari's temporary imbalance to strike his arm, leaving a deep gash in his bicep. The blow was intended to weaken more than anything ; he was not delusional enough to think he could take his opponent in only one hit.

Gangue's muscles rolled under his skin as, with a grunt of effort, he managed to pull another sweeping blow with very little momentum. That show of strength was unexpected, even from a Qunari. Taken by surprise, Martin raised his left arm, forgetting simultaneously that he was wearing neither shield nor armour. He was fortunate that the blow had so little strength behind it. Even so, the sword sliced deep, and the Qunari sneered victoriously as blood spilled.

Both bleeding now, they sized each other up, breathing heavily. The fight was by no means over. The Qunari showed no sign that his injuries bothered him at all, nor much sign of fatigue. Martin looked at his left eye crusted with blood, his tall horns, then glanced at the ceiling.

Probably seeing this apparent distraction as a good opportunity to finish him off, Gangue swung at him again, as expected. Martin dodged and nearly tripped, deliberately sloppy in how he moved. Let the Qunari think he was tiring ; Martin had a plan.

Kalian hurried toward Martin, unsure of how best to help. He concentrated and cast barrier on his friend, but without his staff he couldn't heal Martin from a distance. Around them, the tide seemed to be turning. He'd saw a guard fall at Costard and Varvin's feet. Sorrel with a tall surly man he hadn't met, fighting side-by-side. And the elf Sofia, directing other workers.

The air shimmered around Martin and he felt the tell-tale tingle of magic on his skin. Well, he wouldn't begrudge the extra help, though the sensation of magic being cast on him was uncomfortable at best. Still, less uncomfortable than taking a hit from that greatsword. Martin stumbled again voluntarily, letting air come out of his lungs in short gasps, and Gangue's lips stretched into a triumphant sneer. The Qunari lifted his sword in another mighty blow and Martin dodged to the right again. Just a little bit further... He couldn't keep this up much longer ; he was beginning to actually feel the strain, though the absence of armour gave him that much more endurance.

"Faithless vermin," Gangue hissed, and stepped closer. Just where Martin had been luring him all this time.

With his left eye blinded and his attention on Martin, the Qunari had failed to notice the protruding stalactites. They were high enough to not be a problem for anyone else, but Gangue's horns went quite high and he looked stunned when they hit stone with a dull sound. Martin took the opening ;

sidestepping the blade of the greatsword, he stabbed the Qunari beneath his lowest ribs, where his vulnerable midsection was exposed.

A stunned expression on his face, Gangue staggered and dropped his greatsword. For a moment it looked as though he may fall over ; but, with a roar of anger, he caught himself. Eyes gleaming with fury looked down at Martin as the Qunari's left hand closed around the sword and, with surprising strength for one so injured, he punched Martin in the face. It felt like being hit by an ox-cart. Martin was not sure exactly what happened, except that he landed on his back, the breath knocked out of him, ears ringing. Without Kalian's protective spell he may have been down for the count, or even worse.

Kalian hurried toward Martin and the oxman with Elinowy beside him, bolstered by her song and inspired - in ways he couldn't stop to think about just then - by the bad-ass way she cracked that whip.

Martin was on the ground, the oxman's great axe near him. The huge Qunari was gravely injured with a sword protruding from his middle, and yet he was still on his feet and staggering toward Martin. Kalian cast Glyph of Paralysis.

Gangue froze, his hate-filled gaze turning toward Kalian. "Saarebas scum!" Roxa had promised him an honorable death in battle. But when last he'd seen his boss, she was losing her fight with that other dwarf. Roxa had no honor, he knew that, just as deep down he knew she never intended to keep her promise.

He should help kill the qunari while he was immobilized, but Kalian had only ever killed one person, and that was mostly an accident. Instead, Kalian hurried toward Martin, and put his hand over his friend's left arm. Looking into Martin's eyes with a mixture of apology and determination, poured healing magic into the wound.

Martin's sleeve was wet with blood but the pain faded and his skin tingled as Kalian's magic poured into his arm. It felt not unlike icy water cascading on his skin, unpleasant but numbing. Kalian looked... well, he looked like someone expecting to be rejected. That was an expression Martin had seen before, more than once. There wasn't time to dwell on it, though ; Gangue was still in fighting form, albeit seriously injured.

"Thanks," Martin said, getting to his feet. "I owe you - duck !" He barely had time to grab Kalian's shirt and pull him aside before a sword hissed through the empty space where he had just been.

The warrior's timely intervention put Kalian off balance, and he fell to the cave floor.

Taking advantage of their distraction, Gangue had pulled Martin's sword from his wound and had nearly beheaded Kalian with it. Blood still poured out of his abdomen wound, drenching his trousers, but he seemed to have found his second wind. The great Qunari lifted the sword preparing to finish off the miserable mage. As his arm swung the blade he felt a sudden pull at his horns,

yanking his head to the side, throwing off his aim at the mage, just narrowly missing taking its head off. The ox-man turned about to find a long leathery whip entangling his horns. The red headed female was at the other end of the lash. The qunari tossed his head to the side, pulling the bloodied young woman off balance. She skipped a couple steps struggling to maintain her grip on the whip. The Qunari snorted at her, swinging its sword in an upward arc and quickly severing the whip into two lengths. The female awkwardly let the broken leather cord drop to the floor before retreating nearer her companions.

Kalian scrambled to his feet awkwardly, amazed at the bravery of his companions. Elinowy had actually challenged the qunari with nothing more than a whip. He stepped back, hoping to keep the Oxman's focus away from the Sister.

Without pausing to think Martin found the two-hander Gangue had dropped and picked it up, grimacing slightly at the weight of the weapon. Good thing Kalian had healed his arm.

"Give up," he called to the Qunari. "You're bleeding out. If you surrender you can still live."

He might as well have been speaking a different language, for all the attention Gangue gave him ; he was still fixated on Kalian, lips pulled in a sneer that bared his teeth.

"Nehraa atash !" And he charged.

Martin didn't really have time to think twice about it. He stepped in front of Kalian, hefting the greatsword into a parry, allowing the Qunari's blade to slide harmlessly aside. Gangue lost his balance ; Martin kicked his supporting leg, making him fall on one knee, and pivoted to gain momentum as he brought down the greatsword on its previous owner, pinning Gangue to the ground like a giant butterfly. He must have hit an artery because blood spurting violently. Gangue shuddered, his skin turning a lighter shade of grey as the shock and hemorrhage hit him. Martin had seen this before. The Qunari would be dead within minutes and with him the last chance Roxa had had of reclaiming the mine. There wasn't much resistance elsewhere, the guards either subdued or dead by the miners.

Kalian leaned over, bracing his hands against his knees, panting. "You got him, Martin. You saved my life. You both did."

"Kalian, Elinowy, are you - Sister !" When he saw the blood covering her mid-section Martin dropped the greatsword and rushed to her side. "You're bleeding, let me - " He lifted her shirt before she had time to protest, and without really thinking about the impropriety of what he was doing.

Whatever Martin had expected to see, this... wasn't it. He stared at the white skin of Elinowy's belly, the thin, pink line where her wound must have been, and the delicate swirl of tattoos surrounding it. They were unusual, not similar to anything he'd seen before, and covering the greater part of her belly, stopping just under her ribs. Then Martin realized that he was holding the shirt of a barely-clad Chantry sister, who also happened to be a beautiful woman, and he felt his cheeks burn in



embarrassment. The burn was quickly magnified by the palm of the sister's hand smacking against his face at her disapproval of having her shirt lifted and gawked at.

"...sorry." He let go of the tunic, though it was little more than rags by this point.

The sister did her best to straighten what was left of the garment loosely covering her chest and recover what little dignity she had left. She covered her stomach where she had been wounded out of embarrassment. The shirt was completely ruined. Elinowy owed Kalian's sister a shirt. Not that she had money to acquire one, but the maker would supply something. She had full confidence in that. But for now, the battle was clearly going in favor of the miners, with the great ox-man brought low by Martin. How they would get out of this pit was still something to be determine. [Kalian]

Kalian had gaped at Elinowy's exposed stomach, until the smack of her hand against Martin's face brought back his sense of propriety. Surely they could find something less bloodstained and ruined for her to wear, he thought as he scanned the cavern.

The cavern was not a comforting sight.

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## Freedom's Consequences

Posted on 26 Mar 2021 @ 4:19pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**4,339 words; about a 22 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** The Mine

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th – late night

OOC: After 'The end is near'

Less than an hour before the cavern had echoed with the sounds of pickaxes banged against stone, the groans of exhausted workers, whips cracking, and the cruel laughter of Roxa's guards. Now, small scattered groups of workers gathered, talking and laughing, though some were still in chains.

The battle had not been easy. More than a dozen bloody corpses littered the cavern floor, along with Gangu and Roxa. Many guards had turned tail and run for the mine exit along with workers. But the lift was at the surface level as usual, and for some reason, the guards' shouts for reinforcements, or rescue, went unanswered. The guards had been cornered. If not for Sofia taking tactical command of the workers, they would have suffered severe casualties.

Near the western tunnel nearest the mine entrance, Sorrel and a tall man with a beard had sequestered Roxa's surviving guards and organized a few workers to guard them. The old man

they'd met in the infirmary was unlocking the manacles binding a worker, while his granddaughter called out that they had Theriana's keys.

Sofia and two other workers stood sentry at the mine entrance, keeping an eye out for the lift in case more of Roxa's guards descended, whilst advising workers not to wander into the ravine, where they could be seen from the camp above.

Varvin had hastily set up a new infirmary in what had been a guard lounging area. Whilst Varvin was doing his best to render first aid to Costard and other injured workers, Orla searched through supplies that had previously been under the guards' control. There was enough food there for everyone in the mine to partake of one large meal.

From the furthest reaches of the mine, two voices were calling for someone to free them.

\*\*\*\*

Kalian barely contained a wave of nausea. He'd never been in a battle before. So many people were dead. So much blood. He cringed inwardly. One more reason not to have anything to do with blood magic - yuck.

Now that the battle was over, the possible consequences of revealing himself as an apostate to a Chantry sister and a city guardsman began to sink in. And yet, there were more people here in need of healing. With a sheepish half-smile that lacked his usual confidence, Kalian said, "I'd better see what I can do to help the wounded."

Kalian looked quite pale, and quite unlike his usual self. The reality of his being a mage had not fully sunk in yet but now that the danger had passed it was slowly dawning on Martin that they were going to have a problem. His civic duty was obviously to report Kalian to the nearest Templars, but...

*But he saved my life, and Elinowy's, and everyone inside this mine. And, damn him, Kalian was smiling. Even though he must know what position he was in - what position he'd put Martin and Elinowy in. If he hadn't, you'd be dead.*

"Huh, right, yes, of course. You should do that," Martin agreed slowly, glancing quickly at Elinowy. He'd expected Kalian to... well, to say something instead of pretending nothing had happened. Ask them to keep his secret, or threaten them, or... anything. But he hadn't - and Martin could see on his face that he wouldn't. Maybe he was just scared to hear their answer.

Kalian opened his mouth to speak, apologizing for the way the Maker made him was pointless and he had no intention of begging for his freedom. People needed his help. Kalian simply nodded and headed toward the injured.

Elinowy was feeling deeply conflicted about Kalian. He was clearly apostate, but everything she had

seen him do was out of kindness and compassion. He had even saved her life... with magic. A fact that she felt gratitude for at the same time as feeling infuriated and a bit unclean. Had prayed to the Maker to try to determine what she was supposed to do with this situation but as yet felt no illumination. She did what the Chantry had taught her. She kept a tight lipped serene composure masking her turmoil as effectively as any courtesan in Val Royeaux.

Martin watched as Kalian walked away, shoulders slightly drooping, the tension visible in his stiff demeanour. Once he was out of hearing range, Martin looked at Elinowy, trying to decipher her thoughts ; but her face was as cryptic as any Revered Mother's.

"I thought it was you, you know," he said after a painfully stretched silence. "The mage. Maker, I feel like a fool now." He paused, looking back at Kalian who was kneeling next to an injured miner. "What should we do, do you think ?"

The comment of being considered a mage by Martin was amusing and brought a slight smirk to her passive facade. "Seriously, I had concluded the same about you. I was carefully watching to see when you would make your move. And while the two of us were circling each other, while the real mage did his work. You almost have to be impressed. If it wasn't purely wrong."

"Well. I think..." Kalian was talking to the wounded woman, offering her his hand to help her up. During his Templar training Martin had been taught to be wary of mages, to mistrust them, to never let them out of his sight. But before that, when he was much younger, he'd been taught to not fear magic. Either way, Kalian did not look like a raving lunatic. In fact, he looked... surprisingly in control, for someone without formal training. "...I think we should talk to Kalian when we're out of here. But for now, we have more urgent things to take care of. Finding a way out of here, for starters, and getting those people the medical attention and rest they need. Kalian's been fine so far, I don't think one more day unsupervised is going to make much of a difference."

Shooting a glance in the direction of the newly found Apostate she saw him in his element, helping others. Elinowy sighed softly. He seemed to be a good man. Why did he have to be Apostate. She suddenly shivered at the thought of him holding her abdomen and the sensations it had sent through her. "Magic is not to be practiced in this way. He should be in a Circle." she stated factually.

"I don't know," Martin said softly. "I don't know what the right thing to do is. You know the law as well as I do, and the law exists for a reason. But... Kalian revealed himself to save us. It seems like a poor way to show gratitude, to surrender him to the Chantry. And... you know how circles feel about apostates."

The last words were spoken in a very low voice. Apostates raised in the outside world were feared, because many were ill-trained and with poor control, and because they did not submit to the authority of the Templars with the same deference as circle-raised mages. More often than not, when such apostates were caught, they ended up branded within a few weeks, or months, or years. Few adapted well to a lifetime inside what was essentially a golden prison.

The Chantry sister looked again at the apostate making sure to avoid direct eye contact. A small tear slid down her cheek.

\*\*\*\* Kalian: After leaving Elinowy & Martin to help the wounded \*\*\*\*

As Kalian approached the make-shift infirmary that was set up in what had been the guards' break area, he could see that Varvin was already occupied with bandaging injuries, with Orla's help.

Varvin looked up at Kalian, and his voice shook. "I saw what you did... you're a... a-"

The expression on Varvin's face, fear combined with hope, filled Kalian with sadness, but he said, "I won't hurt you, you're safe. I'm here to lend my help as a healer. You can assist by prioritizing your patients. I'll do my best."

Without more hesitation, Varvin pointed to a human woman lying on a pallet, a bandage wrapped around her middle. Kalian went to the woman, opened himself to the fade, and poured healing energy into her wounds.

His next patient was Costard, with a sword-wound to his leg. As soon as he was healed, he hurried, limping, to the mine entrance. *Just your friendly everyday apostate healer*, thought Kalian as he cast healing spells. *Nobody who needs to be reported here.*

By the time he'd healed the last injured person, someone had the practical idea to search the Guards' storage area and found supplies. Food rations and blankets were being passed around to the workers.

Now that even more people knew he was an apostate, Kalian wryly decided he should look for Rhiannon. The pretty dwarf had fought Roxa, and whilst Rhiannon had won, he wanted to offer her healing if she needed it.

\*\*\*\* Rhiannon: After the battle \*\*\*\*

Rhi had watched Roxa fall by her hands. In her haste to check on the others she quickly grabbed Roxa's sword and shield then ran to find the others. As she turned the corner she ran into the body of one of her guards. She leaned down and took the ring off his finger to take back to her mother and his family. They will be taken care of. She looked around to see her other guard following the others. She moved to follow.

\*\*\*\* Elinowy: After speaking with Martin \*\*\*\*

The apostate... Kalian.... was healing the injured. Elinowy for all her experience with herbs and potions was of little use compared to a magical healer. She felt like a bit of a fifth wheel in the infirmary. She gave out blessings and said prayers for those that wanted it, but as more and more of the miners marveled at the miraculous powers of the Apostate Mage, the simple sister of the

Chantry made her way out into the mine tunnels to look for others that required aid... and the healer.

Toward the back of the cavern Elinowy heard voices calling out for help. Feeling an opportunity to be useful she rushed down and found a large iron door with bars. She could see a couple of rather emaciated dwarves. "I am here to help. Are you alright?" she spoke though the bars.

"We are hungry and tired, but I suppose we would be alright if we could get out of this cell." one of the dwarves stated back.

"Of course." Elinowy replied trying the latch on the door. It was locked. "How did you become locked in here?" she asked knowing that a criminal would not tell the truth, but since the mine was run by criminal basically it was likely these two were imprisoned just like the rest of them.

"We own this mine. Roxa became greedy and locked us in here." the male dwarf answered in an almost annoyed voice.

"We will get you out as soon as we can." she assured the two. Elinowy spied people moving in the passageway. "Over here!" she called out in a voice far stronger than either of the two prisoners could have managed. The group came closer revealing the one called Geoff with several other miners.

"We need a key or someone to break this lock. These people claim to be the mine owners. Go back to the infirmary and get help!" she asked in a voice that would not be mistaken as a request.

Geoff turned back up the passage as one of the miners came over to look at the door with Elinowy. "Yep. This here is locked up tight. Not a cheap lock like most of the others."

The sister looked back in the cell. "Help is coming. We will have you out shortly."

\*\*\*\* Martin: After speaking with Elinowy \*\*\*\*

Leaving the issue of Kalian's mage-ness to be dealt with at a later time, Martin looked around for Sofia. She was talking to Sorrel next to the fire, waving towards the entrance of the mine then at Costard. Sorrel nodded and took off as Martin was approaching. As he did, he rubbed thoughtlessly the skin of his left arm. His sleeve, crusted with drying blood, hang awkwardly around his arm. Beneath, the skin remained itchy and tender, and scabby where the cut had been the deepest. The muscle and bone underneath still ached but Martin marvelled at Kalian's healing power ; usually, such an injury would have left him unable to use the arm for weeks - perhaps maimed for life if it healed badly. But now thanks to Kalian he should regain full mobility within a couple of days, at most.

"Oh, here you are," Sofia said. "Well. I suppose we ought to thank you. And your friends. Who are you lot, anyway ?"

Martin grimaced, not sure how he could explain it in only a few words. "That's... a bit of a long story. Let's just say we were looking into the disappearance of Ferelden refugees and... stumbled in here. I didn't expect an operation of this scale, to be honest." If he had he'd have brought the whole guard along with him, rather than wing it like this.

"Well, now you know." Sofia snorted. "I'm surprised anyone cared enough to report our disappearance. Or cared enough to investigate."

"It's... fair enough, I suppose. I know Jader has not been... as welcoming to refugees as it could have been."

Sofia shrugged. "That's how it works. If it had been the other way around, you Orlesians would not have been welcome in Ferelden either. Well. Thanks, anyway."

Martin smiled. "I want to say *you're welcome*, but it seems a little bit inappropriate. How many...?"

"Five." Sofia exhaled a sigh. "It's less than it could have been. Less than it would have been but for your apostate friend."

"About that..." Martin bit his lip, unsure what he was going to ask, but Sofia beat him to the punch.

"No need to ask. I don't know who you are, or what your game is, but we owe you. As far as I'm concerned, I ain't seen no mage today, and no one here will say any different."

"Thanks. I'm Martin, by the way." He held out his hand. "Martin Josceran. Jader Guard."

"Guard?" Sofia lifted an eyebrow, a mischievous light dancing in her eyes. "What, really?"

"Believe it or not, it's true. I know I don't look the part, right now..."

"I didn't know the Guard employed..."

"It doesn't."

"Oh. I see." Sofia paused. "Actually I don't, but never mind. Look, officer of the Guard, I just want to get my people out of here as soon as possible. Should I assume you have a plan for that, too?"

So far improvisation had played a larger part than Martin would have liked, but he wasn't about to admit as much. It would be better to keep the miners' morale high, starting with their leader.

"Sofia!" It was Geoff, ambling quickly towards them. "We found people locked up in the back tunnel!"

Kalian approached Martin and the elvhen leader of the workers, but remained quiet and listened to what the tall man said to her.

"People ?" Sofia looked startled. "Locked up ? Weird. Why would they not make them work ?"

"They say they own this place," Geoff said. "I'm guessing Roxa double-crossed them."

"Did you free them ?" Martin asked.

"Don't have the key. I suppose we can smash the lock. Or the key's probably somewhere in there." Geoff waved at the bodies of Roxa and her men, who were being piled together by some of the miners.

Geoff guided them toward the back of the cave, where Sister Elinowy and his people had found the two prisoners.

"Thank the maker you came. These two claim to be the mine owners. They say Roxa locked them in hoping to have control of the mine for herself. The lock is heavy. We need a key or if Martin can smash it open." Elinowy stated.

Kalian said, "Uh, Rhiannon?" He pointed to her forearm, where Roxa's blade had cut her. "I can heal your arm, if you would allow."

Rhiannon had moved up to the others and had told her guard to find the other two and make ready. She listened as the Elinowy commented that the two dwarves claimed that they were the owners and that Roxa had double crossed them. Rhi leans over a little to look at the two dwarves. "They look like the ones from the portrait." Her attention shifted when Kalian pointed out the gash in her arm. "Oh, I didn't notice. Ye...yes please. If you don't mind."

Kalian gently touched her arm, opened himself to the fade, and healed her injury. "My real name is Kalian. Sorry about deceiving you. We didn't know what we were getting into down here, not really."

Rhiannon grinned. Her eyes sparkled a little as she watched Kalian worked the magic. He was quite a handsome young man. "It is alright. I had a feeling that you were all hiding your names." Her tone was warm. She looked up at Kalian and grinned. "Interesting. I and my mother could always use someone with your talents. If you would be interested."

"I was the only one with a fake name, because it's a little unusual and my family owns a tavern in Jader... well really my sister runs it," said Kalian, sincerely grateful for Rhiannon's upfront acceptance of his abilities. "Always a pleasure to be of use to a pretty dwarf." He winked.

Martin watched while Kalian healed Rhiannon. She wasn't one of Sofia's people ; he hoped she could keep her mouth shut about Kalian's powers, at least for the time being.

The uncharitable, unbidden thought crossed briefly his mind that if Rhiannon reported Kalian, he wouldn't have to decide who to betray between his friend and the Guard. He wasn't sure why he found that this idea sat so uneasily with him. Perhaps because it would be taking the easy way out ; or, maybe, if he gave himself some credit, because Kalian deserved better from him. Either way he found himself watching the young dwarf, eyes lidded in concern.

"Let's look for the key first," he said finally, tearing his eyes away from the mage and his patient. "I'll smash the lock if I must but it might be tricky if the lock is heavy."

Kalian regarded the dead, and shuddered. "I guess we'll have to search the bodies." A task that was only going to be more gruesome with time. A funeral pyre would be needed soon, but not inside the mine where the air barely circulated as it was.

Rhiannon looked to the bodies and shook her head slightly. She had searched enough dead bodies in her life time. "Roxa might carry some keys. I didn't search her very well when she fell. I just grabbed her sword and shield."

Searching corpses was not something particularly enjoyable, and it probably said something of Martin's job that it wasn't the first time he did something like that. Searching people, dead or alive, was part of a guard's life. The key at least was not likely to be hidden in someone's boot or underclothes, thank the Maker, so he decided to search only the guards' belts and pockets, starting with their captain. The search yielded only a comfortably hefty purse, which Martin set aside. He'd give it to Sofia to share among the refugees, it seemed like the right thing to do. He moved on to Gangu'e's corpse, which took little time as the Qunari carried nothing of interest. Finally he started searching Roxa's body, finding another purse that he put with the other one at his belt.

Roxa carried several keys ; a small brass one that looked like it must open something smaller, like a chest ; a large black iron key, and a larger one with a distinctive pattern of grooves on the tip. One of those might be it ; Martin got the feeling Roxa hadn't liked to delegate. She certainly hadn't seemed the trusting type.

"I think I got it," Martin called to the others.

Whilst Martin searched the corpses of guards looking for keys to Roxa's jail in the back, Kalian checked the bodies to make sure none of them were still alive and in need of help, while also checking for signs of demon possession. The last thing he wanted to fight just now was an animated corpse.

Rhi moved to follow Kalian and help him. Giving the guards a quick stabby stab to make sure that none were playing opossum. As she helped she leaned in close to Kalian. "Well think about my offer. (small sigh, eyes sparkled) Regardless of your answer. I will make sure that my operations will keep you safe. You will have a safe house when ever you are in need of one."

Kalian noticed, just a little too late, that Rhiannon was engaged in accomplishing the exact



opposite goal to his. Killing a person to end their suffering had not occurred to him, but he understood the compassion behind the act. Kalian enjoyed flirting with Rhiannon, though he'd heard most dwarves only bedded other dwarves. Still, he gave her a flirtatious grin. "Thank you, Rhiannon. I... well, I'm not sure if I need to worry about my safety, yet. But I'd be a fool not to consider *any* offer you made me."

The tunnel in the back was quite dark and cramped. A claustrophobic place to be locked up, let alone for weeks, although perhaps less so for dwarves. They definitely looked weak and hungry, Martin thought as he approached the cell. He couldn't see much in the flickering light of the torches but for the large, dark eyes of the prisoners, a glint of white in the otherwise pitch dark cell.

"Thank the Stone," one of them said - male, judging by his voice. "We've been locked in here for... I'm not sure, but a long time. Please let us out!"

"What are your names?" Martin asked as he checked the lock to see if it matched any of his keys.

"I'm Pyrtin, and this is my daughter Lirta."

"We're the owners of this mine," Lirta added. "We bought the land, we have the deed... well, Roxa has it now," she finished bitterly.

"Roxa's dead," Martin said soberly.

"Good," Lirta said, eyes flashing fiercely.

Martin inserted the bigger iron key in the lock; it turned with a sharp clicking sound. The lock opened and he pulled the door open, allowing the two dwarves to exit the tiny cell they had been locked in. A terrible smell wafted after them as they came out.

"Thank you so much," Pyrtin said. He stumbled and Martin caught him, ignoring the smell.

"Here, take it easy. You've been through an ordeal."

Elinowy did her best to remain busy, praying for the dead, praying for the injured, praying for her own soul as her life had been extended through Magic. In fairness she was not ready to surrender her life to the maker. There was so much left to be done. She had just embarked on her discernment journey and had thus far accomplished nothing that apparently couldn't be done through magical intervention. The maker had not chosen to spare her of the guard's fatal cut, but Kalian had. This was not right. Only the maker should choose who lived or died. Kind as it was, Kalian acted of his own desire to keep her alive, not that of the maker. She felt numb. She felt lost. As she passed by the arrangements of the dead she couldn't help but see her own flayed body laying in their midst. She had no song of thanksgiving. How did one correct for such errors? What did her life mean at this point? Her existential crisis kept her mostly oblivious to the work her companions were doing.

They helped the two dwarves back to the main cave where they were given food and water. While they were being tended to, Martin gestured to Kalian and Elinowy to come closer. There was a distinct awkwardness between them now, in the way Sister Elinowy's eyes refused to meet Kalian's, and in the way Kalian stayed silent rather than chatting amicably. That couldn't be addressed now, though, and definitely not here of all places.

"I think we've done what could reasonably be done," Martin said. "Now our priority is to find a way out. What say you we head back to the entrance of the mine and see what can be done? Maybe we can bribe the guards, or I can climb out somehow." He grimaced a bit as he said the last words. Climbing was not a particular skill of his, though it beat starving slowly at the bottom of a mine.

"We'll figure out something," said Kalian confidently. Worst case, Kalian could shapeshift into an owl and fly up there. But, that was an ability he intended to keep secret. "There were more guards on the surface level. Strange they didn't send reinforcements."

The Chantry sister seemed distant. "I am certain the maker will provide a way out." she answered in an emotionless recitement of a phrase she had used thousands of times in her life as a sister. Undoubtedly the maker had provided a means for their escape from the mine, but her thoughts were too distracted to discern them. There was the rickety lift and there was the sea.

A loud commotion at the mine's entrance echoed through the cavern. Shouts and cheering could be heard coming from the ravine. The lift was being lowered. Kalian followed the crowd out to see Cainan riding the lift down with one of Rhiannon's guards. Which must mean the mining camp at the surface was secure. Kalian joined the rest in raising a cheer.

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## Gambol with a New Friend

Posted on 27 Mar 2021 @ 3:30pm by [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#) & [Rogue Jaslyn](#)

**5,279 words; about a 26 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Jader Hightown

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 16th - evening

OOC: After Unfavorable Wind

Characters: Cainan and Jaslyn

IC:

Jaslyn followed Monsieur Sauvage, wrapped in stunned silence and still absorbing the information revealed by Richelieu. Her declaration that she needed a drink had been met with an affirmative gesture from Sauvage, but instead of taking her to a bar or inn, he'd led her to a part of Jader she'd rarely visited, the stately homes of the wealthy and influential. They came to a stop at a fancy door,

and Jaslyn couldn't help but wonder how often an elf had walked through the front entrance. "Is this where you live?"

Cainan was shaken from his reverie, as they walked into what, in his mind, was the modest part of the wealthier district in Jader, though the tone of her voice let him know that she might perceive it differently.

"Yes, I like to keep a small place for entertaining guests, but I'm often out gallivanting instead of staying here," he replied, honestly. He realised that she might be feeling uncomfortable, but he wasn't sure how to address it without sounding like a pompous ass. In the past he had liked impressing women with his abode, but a lot had changed in the last few days. "Would you like to come up for a drink? I could always just get some money and we could find a tavern somewhere," he offered, hoping the choice might make her feel more comfortable. In truth, he wasn't desperately fond of the idea of going to the tavern in his current mood, but it usually had a way of eventually shaking things out, one way or another; if he was low, it often lifted him up. If he was angry, he'd get into a fight, then either commiserate his losses with the bartender or celebrate his victory with whoever was up for it. In this case, he was somewhere in between, and just a nice, stiff drink was what he wanted to dampen the roiling sea of emotions his conversation with Richelieu had caused.

"Taverns can be so noisy." Jaslyn guessed she was not her companion's usual kind of female guest, and not just because she was an elf. It was evident that Richelieu's revelations had an intense impact on him, affecting not just Cainan's opinion of his friend, but also of himself. Jaslyn gave him a wry smile. Cainan was a good man and she wanted to know him better. "I'd love to come in for a drink."

He held the door open for her in a gentlemanly manner, before closing the door gently. The lights had not been lit; Cainan enjoyed the services of a housekeeper, but not a servant. The place was always spotless, but he had to make his own fires and light his own lamps. He wasn't sure if it was the last vestige of wanting to feel like a common man or just a disinterest in having a paid servant waiting for him to come home like a pet. He had tried to have a dog once, but it had not gone well; Cainan lacked the responsibility to keep it entertained and eventually, he had been adopted by one of the boys down the lane; Cainan was sure the dog was happier for it.

The apartment was all on one level, with an elevated veranda overlooking the harbour at the back. The hallway connected to a fair sized kitchen that Cainan barely knew the way around, and a reception room that he knew far better. The walls had been crafted in decorative plaster, and was far too ostentatious for Jader; it was the fashion in stately homes in Val Royeux, though he had owed the man who made it a good deal of favours and despite the ridiculousness of having it in an apartment in Jader, he had commissioned the man as a way of repayment. Eryk now made a good living plying his new trade to the business associates of Cainan's father, mainly due to the three months Cainan happily allowed the man to renovate (which translated to practice) he small apartment. Cainan reminded himself of how he had been quietly proud of Eryk, and of himself, for that act. It was charity, but Eryk had worked hard to make something of the opportunity. He hung

onto that feeling, fleeting as it was.

Inside, Jaslyn came to a stop in the middle of the carpeted room, and did a slow turn taking in the posh furnishings. His apartment even boasted that decorative plasterwork she had loathed dusting as a maid in Val Royeaux. A task, she reassured herself, she would never have to do again. "Do you have servants?"

Cainan blinked for a moment, shaken out of his reverie. "Oh, no - I wasn't exaggerating about the gallivanting. I'm often off on some new venture or dicing in taverns or such. I have a housekeeper who keeps things from getting too dusty that comes twice a week, and a couple of the local grocers make sure the pantry doesn't dry up, but no one living in or anything," he said, wincing a little at his own words. He had brought women her before, and women of both rich and common backgrounds. He had never been ashamed or embarrassed of his situation before, so why was he feeling it now? Was it because she herself had been a maid?

She didn't look it now, that was for sure. She was still a beauty, it was true; but the look was a fierce beauty, the way an ornate sword might be - beautiful, elegant... deadly. She looked nothing like the elves he had grown up around, and there had been more than a few; many Orlesian nobles enjoyed hiring pretty elven maids and servants - his own father was famous for it, and for taking an interest in their comings and goings, and using a gentle voice and a generous hand. Fairly often one would disappear from view nine or ten months after starting work, with the implications being exceedingly obvious, but never spoken on especially in the vicinity of his mother. Cainan imagined there was a little village somewhere made up entirely of little half-siblings with elven mothers, living off a generous pension from a doting, generous, unfaithful patron.

Maybe that was why he didn't like having servants.

Cainan retrieved a couple of bottles of the good wine from his wine rack, a deep cabernet sauvignon from the north of Orlais and a very nice Malbec from Antiva. In his other hands he carried two glasses, and led Jaslyn out to the veranda. The ships often had lights twinkling from their decks in the harbour below, and the reflections of the moonlight on the water made for why he had chosen this place in the first place.

After lighting a small fire in the firepit to keep them warm in the evening chill, he poured the now breathed wine for them both, offering her the glass.

Her companion had gone quiet, and Jaslyn watched him preparing the wine and lighting the fire... a handsome nobleman waiting on *her*, an elf. What an odd twist fate had taken. She thought of the Monsieur Sauvage she had waited on at the Marchal manor at Antoine's gaming table as she took a seat on the veranda. Sauvage was always focused on the card game, but unlike some of Antoine Marchal's other guests, he'd treated the servants well.

She accepted the glass and took a careful sip. It was delicious, smooth and heady. Jaslyn took a deeper swallow. "Excellent wine, thank you."

Cainan smiled as he poured his own glass, then set the bottle down on the table between them. "You're most welcome," he said, honestly. "Monsieur Sharal owns a wine importing business; a small one, but he does have excellent taste." He sipped his own wine for a moment, looking at the lights from the docks mingling with the reflected lights of the heavens above, as the stars began to shine amongst the brilliance of the moon.

How much he had changed from the journey to the Cassabianca to now, he mused. How much had he had to reflect on, and not had the time to do so. It was as if he had lived his life wearing a blindfold, and only now could see; like he had a sense he had never used, and it was bringing his life into stark relief. He needed to focus on something else, lest he become morose - he would unpick these feelings later.

He turned his attention to Jaslyn; the way the firelight reflected off her hair, the tone of her form. He stopped short of staring, having committed the image to memory; though he looked back out to the docks, his mind studied that image further, looking for signs of the person who had come before the woman she was now. Cainan had known a few women of war before now - he had always assumed that they were just born to it, born with that inescapable talent for fighting, such as the woodworker who understood the wood, or the herbalist who felt at home in the wilds. But Jaslyn challenged those preconceptions; she sat there, the picture of a woman of action, a woman of war - and yet only a few years before she had been a servant, and not one that had stood out as someone not suited to it. At least, not to him; though it was fair to say he had always been busy observing the other players and had not spent an inordinate amount of time studying her for that.

At least, he hadn't back *then*.

"Please forgive the silence, I was lost in thought for a moment," he said, allowing the image of her to slip from his mind and be replaced by the real thing as he looked back to her.

"So, you pretty much know what happened to me since Antoine... May I ask how you went from *there* to... here?" he asked, looking at her with what he hoped was a look that would not offend. She had changed so very much that he was sure he would not have recognised her had he even been a particularly observant guest during his weekly card games with Antoine and Javert back in the days.

Jaslyn raised an eyebrow, momentarily surprised, then unaccountably pleased by his genuine interest. She leaned back in her chair and looked out at the harbor. She'd told different versions of this story. The short version she occasionally told to impress someone she intended to seduce. The story she'd given Hahren Liriel. The version she shared with her fellow Grey Wardens. For reasons she didn't quite understand, she decided to tell this Sauvage the truth.

When she spoke, her tone was light and thoughtful. "The night Antoine Marchal died... was like many other gaming nights. He began drinking heavily after his friends left. He didn't always get violent. Helana and I thought he'd passed out, but she was afraid so I stayed with her in their room. I

awoke in the wee hours when Antoine burst in. Usually he used his fists, but that night he was yelling about being forced to sell a family heirloom and waving a jeweled dagger." Jaslyn paused, looking out at a red-hued sunset. "I truly don't remember if it was me or Helana who put that dagger through his heart. I only remember blood everywhere, and my relief that Helana and I were still alive."

Cainan watched her speak, the curve of her lips, but not out of lust or romance - for reasons he couldn't put into words, it was *very* important to him that he take in the exactness of her words, that he *remember* every detail of this. That his own actions had been in large part a trigger for what had happened to her filled him with unease, and for her to have come so far, changed so much on his account, because of his actions... it gnawed at him. Was he looking for absolution in her words? A reason to let himself off the hook? Some detail that this all worked out for the better? He resolved not to give himself that; even were it to be so. He didn't interrupt her.

"I do recall Antoine's mother standing in the door screaming for the guard. They arrested me, the elf, of course. Helana could have made a case for self-defense, but the scandal would have ruined both families. The Dimonts, Helana's family, sent a healer to me in prison so I would survive for my hanging, and paid me with a promise to continue retaining my parents as servants." Her tone held no hint of bitterness, only resignation. Jaslyn tipped back the rest of her wine and poured herself another glass.

Cainan shouldn't have been stunned, but he found himself unable to move to pour the drink for her. He was not so naive to have never come across the downright corruption of the upper classes, and the lack of justice for those that held power, wealth or status in Orlais was plain to all, but it was different hearing it from her perspective. He had always been on the other side of that arrangement, benefitted from it. He had always wielded that privilege with reckless abandon, and here, now, was the consequence of that behaviour.

He kept his scrutiny of her; it was as if there was nothing else in the world but her as he studied her face, her body language, the movement of the glass in her hand as it went from resting on the arm of the chair and up to her lips.

"A Grey Warden named Riordan came to the prison looking for recruits. He spoke with me and others, and listened to our stories with the deepest compassion and without judgement. Something about him inspired incredible honesty. I overheard tales both horrifying and heartrending." Jaslyn closed her eyes, remembering. "Riordan chose ten of us. Offered the opportunity to escape our punishment and become Grey Wardens like him. Heroes. I jumped at the chance. Only three of us survived the joining."

Cainan wanted to ask what that was, to understand what she had been through; he had heard of Grey Wardens, of course, and had known of a ritual to join them, but not what that entailed. He wanted to touch her hand, to give some comfort in that; though if for the situation or for the departed, he was not sure.

Jaslyn sipped her wine, more circumspect near the end of her story. "Riordan brought us to Jader, to complete our training and join the ranks of Grey Wardens ready to cross into Ferelden to battle darkspawn. He slipped into Ferelden alone, to convince those idiot Fereldans to accept Warden help against the blight. I heard the Hero of Ferelden freed him from prison and he died fighting the archdemon." Her breath caught, thinking of her mentor's death, the first person who had truly believed in her.

"I'm sorry," Cainan said at last, seeing the pain in her eyes as she mentioned the death of this man. There were many details he longed to know, but she had to be able to tell the story at her own pace, or it meant nothing. He waited for her to continue.

"The Wardens were like nothing I'd experienced before. Brothers and sisters, all accepted as equals regardless of race or circumstances of birth. And now the ranks of the Orlesian Grey Warden are swollen with new members whose expectations of becoming heroes were thwarted by two Fereldan Grey Wardens... though I choose to make the most of whatever time I have left." Which was why Jaslyn had not returned to Val Royeaux with most of the other Wardens.

She swallowed the last of her second glass of wine and put down the glass. Though pleasantly intoxicated, Jaslyn had no intention of getting too drunk to enjoy the company of the handsome and charming man who'd listened to her whole story. "Thank you for your attentive ear, Monsieur Sauvage. Do you mind if I call you by your first name?"

Cainan was almost ashamed to not have insisted on it before now. "Please, call me Cainan - you should not have had to call me anything else all day," he said, apologetically. The question served to shake him from his study of her, and he drank a large portion of the glass of wine in his hand; he had fallen behind, and the warm feeling of the wine as it hit his belly was comforting and familiar. He held onto it for a moment, before he allowed himself to step into the uncomfortable, uncharted waters. "I hope you do not mind that I call you Jaslyn?" he asked, annoyed at himself.

Jaslyn nearly blurted the obvious – she had no other name. Though of course he could call her Warden, or Warden Jaslyn. Truth was, what she wanted was to hear him gasp her name in the throes of... something other than an apology. "Please Cainan, call me Jaslyn."

It was a few moments before he allowed the thoughts crashing around his head like waves in a storm to bubble forth, finally releasing a burden he hadn't realised he had been carrying.

"Javert... Richelieu was always terrible at cards," he began, by way of explanation, though it was a terrible start if the look on her face was anything to go by. "Always easy to read, too many tells - to the point you could name his cards by what he did with his hands," he said, remembering the little finger movements the man unconsciously made when he was excited about a hand, or the little wrist flick when he was about to fold. He should have seen his friend's fortunes for what they were long before his confession, he decided. He pressed on; one could only seek absolution one sin at a time, he supposed. "I was never there to play him. I was always there to play Antione. To *beat* Antoine. And I did - over, and over... and over. I enjoyed seeing the rage in his eyes as I laid

my cards and took his money.” He let that hang for a moment, unsure of where his words were taking him. “For me, the rage was momentary; restrained, never acted upon. I never suspected where that rage went after I left, and for the part I played in all that happened...” He swallowed the lump in his throat; he wanted absolution. He wanted to ask for forgiveness, to be forgiven. It was so unyieldingly selfish to ask, let alone expect it; but he had almost asked anyway. He felt ashamed of that.

Jaslyn put her lustful thoughts aside for the moment and listened to Cainan with solemn compassion. She had heard confessions of the sort from other Grey Wardens. Men and women who had done wrong and had sworn to atone for their sins.

“I always thought of myself as a decent man; not particularly *good*, per se; I always understood I lacked responsibility for my actions, and lived with far less cares than any man has right to, but I always told myself that no one was getting hurt that didn’t have it coming to them; that my lifestyle and actions only had consequences for myself. Until today, anyway,” he added, looking into her eyes. “For what little it is worth, I am sorry, for all I did that befell you rather than me.” Cainan had never felt more vulnerable than he did in that moment, as he laid bare in simple words his most earnest feelings. If *only* Antoine had taken a swing at him, instead; if only *he* had been the target of Antoine’s rage, perhaps he would have understood the man better, and perhaps known what sort of reaction he was causing.

Jaslyn shifted her chair so that she faced Cainan, and took one of his hands in both of hers, a personal gesture, though they were still wearing gloves. “What happened to me was *not* your fault, Cainan. You did not make Antoine the way he was, that was all on him. I don't blame you in the least. But if you blame yourself, know that I fully and completely forgive you.” She gazed into his green eyes for a long moment, to emphasize the weight and sincerity of her words. “Today you experienced a personal revelation that has shifted the way you see yourself. And now, going forward, you have gained the wisdom to see that you *can* choose to be a different person. It won't be easy. I know you can do it.”

He looked at her hands, and then into her eyes. They were far deeper than they had any right to be, and he was at risk of falling into them; and he hadn't even had that much wine, he mused. He felt a burst of gratitude at her words, and something far less innocent at her eyes. He smiled, though, and nodded in thanks. Their hands parted, and he drained his glass before pouring more, as he changed the subject. “Then enough of this morose talk, let's drink to happier things and aim for a better evening,” he said, with a winning smile. “I confess I've never gone drinking with Grey Wardens before, are there any good drinking games for two?” he asked, his thoughts suddenly filled with suggestions.

Jaslyn leaned back in her chair. “How about a game of wicked grace, with me? I challenge you.”

Cainan had to smile at that, and patted his pockets for effect. “A wonderful idea, but you've caught me on an off night, financially. Although, I do have some next door-” he began, but she cut him off with a twinkle in her eye.



"Oh, no. Not for coin. Let's wager something else." Jaslyn gave him a seductive smile whilst - one finger at a time - she loosened the glove on her right hand, then pulled it off and tossed it on the table. "Each of us keeps our winnings until morning. Are you up for a game?"

How could a glove be so sexy, he wondered, as he looked at it and felt his heart quicken a little. "Well... *those* are stakes I can *definitely* play with," he answered, slipping his own glove finger by finger until the garment was tossed above her own on the table between them. Cainan produced a deck of cards and, as was customary when supplying the cards, passed them to Jaslyn to deal. He looked her up and down briefly, wondering how many hands of the game it would take before the chill of the evening might move them to a more... comfortable setting.

Jaslyn shuffled the deck with care, the imbalanced slide of cards between one bare hand and one gloved offered a distraction from the anticipation of *playing* with Cainan. She dealt five cards each, then picked up her hand - two knights, two angels, and a song. Still undecided about whether she would play to win, or cheat to lose as quickly as possible, Jaslyn lifted an inquiring eyebrow. "Well?"

As Cainan received his first cards, he looked at what he hoped would soon be his winnings, and then back to the gloves on the table. "I'll wager another glove on this round," he said, placing the cards face down as he slowly removed each finger from its home in his glove, slipping the cloth from his hand and slowly letting it fall into the middle of the table with the others, in a mimicking of the sort he had seen from various burlesque entertainers throughout Orlais. And just like them, he kept eye contact with her as he did it, before drinking a nice gulp of wine. He was normally careful with how much he drank while playing, but with such... *favourable* stakes, it made sense that his level of sobriety would neither help nor hinder the outcome of the game; one way or another, someone was going to be naked. Or dressed extremely inappropriately; but either way, it was turning into an interesting night.

She examined her cards as though studying them would influence her bid, then placed her hand face-down on the table. She pulled off her left glove and dropped it on the table. "I'll raise two forearm guards." Jaslyn unbuckled each one and dropped them on the table.

Cainan watched her face, the curve of her lips, and then the action of her hands as she removed two items that absolutely had no right to be sexy, but somehow managed it as they were tossed with a smokey, challenging look. He took a peek at his cards; nothing spectacular, but that would all depend on how the cards came out. He watched her and looked underneath his coat to meet her bet. "I'll call with two forearm guards," he replied, raising his sleeves to reveal the slim bracers; designed to be discrete and deflect a rapier if caught unawares, they would do little against a heavy broadsword or axe, but Cainan had always been nimble on his feet. He teasingly dangled the second bracer for a moment before letting it fall, and letting her continue to deal.

Jaslyn began her turn by drawing a card from the deck. A knight. If she discarded the song, she'd have a strong hand. Jaslyn discarded the knight, and licked her lips, smiling at Cainan. "Your turn."

Cainan looked at the card, before looking back to his opponent while tapping the top of his face-down cards. He studied her for a moment; though not entirely because they were playing a hand. She had a mischievous twinkle to her eyes that intrigued him. His hand wasn't too bad, but it was nothing to go all-in on. Then again, the payoff could be worth the risk...

He slipped another card, discarding one of the songs in his hand. Three Angels might be enough to win, but how far did he want to press the bet? They had all night, after all.

"I raise you one coat," he said, standing to take the coat off, slowly sliding it off and carefully placing it on top of the table to leave him in his shirt, sitting back down and watching with increasing interest at the make and lining of her chest piece, that hid some of what sat beneath. She might go for her boots, but that seemed more the ante for the next hand.

Jaslyn followed Cainan's every move as he shrugged out of his coat, and exhaled as he tossed it on the table. This game she'd proposed on a whim was turning out to be unexpectedly exhilarating. Without looking at her cards, she stood and began loosening the buckles on her chest piece with slow deliberation, eyes on him. Finally she dropped her chest piece on top of Cainan's coat. Underneath she wore a thin linen shirt that, with the cool touch of the evening breeze, left little to the imagination. Jaslyn took her seat.

Cainan watched as she called the bet and they finished the round; it wasn't fair a woman could turn something as mundane as removing a piece of armour into a spectacle to cause such a rushing in his blood, but there it was. The linen she wore underneath had a lightness to it that he suspected if he positioned her in front of a fire, he'd see every curve through the cloth. Alas, the fire pit was to their side, so he couldn't test that. Something for later, perhaps...

"Call?" he asked, his fingers caressing the cards. He lay his down and watched her reaction, looking not only for the end of the round, but also for any hint of her tells as she learned whether she had won or lost. Hell, whoever won this would be getting a lovely show, and he might be willing to lose his shirt for real this night, but old habits of a gambler were hard to crack. And he liked looking at her, anyhow.

"Your game," said Jaslyn, her voice low and breathy. She gathered up the cards then passed the deck to Cainan, her fingers lingering for a moment on his hand. Her motive for playing was not winning the card game, so any gambling tells she might reveal to Cainan were mixed with a different kind of tell.

Cainan's thumb caressed her hand softly as it lingered, sending a chill up his arm as the hairs on his skin stood erect, catching the chill of the night and giving him goosebumps. The look on her face was clear to read, and he smirked slightly as he started the shuffle.

While Cainan dealt the cards, Jaslyn removed her right boot, but left it on the floor rather than plop it on the table with their clothes. "I'm in."

Cainan looked down slowly to see her boot, and slid his own off and slid it next to hers. He was passed caring about what cards he had; in truth, he'd have gone all-in with nothing more than a raised eyebrow at this point, but he wouldn't have it said he had no self-control; and fleecing someone on the first night tended to dissuade card players from repeat visits.

Jaslyn took more care with the cards in the next hands, if only to make the exquisite delay that much longer. Finally they were down to the last hand, and Jaslyn's last bid. She looked into Cainan's deep green eyes, pupils dilated, and dropped her small clothes on the table, her body thrumming with anticipation and need. "Call."

Cainan could feel his heart hammering in his chest, his neck - hells, he could *hear* it in his ears. He sat bare-chested, barefooted - bare for *all* save his smallclothes, and the bet was... even? Did it matter? He kept eye contact with her as he stood and slid the restrictive garment off and gently set it on the table, his eyes as ablaze from lust as the fire pit. "Call," he said, flipping his cards over on the table before he crossed the distance between them and met her lips with his, never having bothered to see who won; he was happy to call tonight a draw, or lose; hell, whatever led to a rematch would be fine by him.

The night chill was made more bearable for the fire pit, but it was nothing against the heat between their bodies as his hands explored her, caressing every curve and line of her form that he had been studying for hours. He briefly hoped the cushions on the bend that she lay against were enough to be comfortable, but one look into her eyes told him if they weren't then she didn't care.

As the first tinge of light breached the horizon with the promise of the dawn, Cainan and Jaslyn made love with the fervour and anticipation of the last few hours driving them in sweet, energetic need for the release each promised the other, the card game forgotten.

## Better Late Than Never

Posted on 27 Mar 2021 @ 3:33pm by [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#) & [Rogue Jaslyn](#)

**5,855 words; about a 29 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Carta Mining Camp

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 17th - night

OOO: concurrent with 'Uprising' and 'The end is near' and 'Freedom's Consequences'

Characters: Cainan and Jaslyn

IC:

Unbeknownst to Jaslyn and Cainan until it was too late, whilst they were getting to know each other Cainan's friends had concocted a plan to find the mining operation and left several hours ahead of them.

Jaslyn had dismounted frequently to scout, and after discovering the strange encounter with people on... and off horses, she'd had no trouble following the five sets of hoofprints that veered off the main road. She and Cainan found the meeting place, and where the hoofprints continued atop fresh wagon tracks along a recently widened path leading southeast through the forest. The sun had set and one of Thedas' two moons had risen, offering minimal light. They proceeded cautiously, and the distant sound of voices and casual laughter warned them they were close to the camp.

Jaslyn dismounted once again and patted the chestnut mare the Jader Grey Warden commander had assigned to her. Commander Duclos had promised to gather as many Grey Wardens as he could and meet them there in the morning. Problem was, with no pressing darkspawn threat and most of the Orlesian Wardens in Val Royeaux, it might not be more than a handful. She hoped that tavern-owner sister of Cainan's friend would succeed in convincing the Jader Guard.

"We'd better hide the horses and look for a safe vantage point," she said to Cainan in a low, playful voice. "I fancy a bit of voyeurism."

Cainan's smile at that was a bit wolfish, as he gave her a look. "I'm sure something can be arranged... but first we should see what these idiots are up to," he replied gesturing in the direction of the laughter. "Then, I promise you can take all the peeks you want," he added, smirking as he started walking the horses off the road, through the trees and away from the sounds of humans. They found a fallen tree they could tie the horses to and left them enough slack to graze while they were away, before sneaking into the underbrush and up an incline to see from the top of the hill what could be seen in the oncoming gloom of twilight.

The last part of the hill was rocky, and Jaslyn kept her hood up to hide her hair and the two of them lay flat on the stone to blend in. The camp was at the edge of a ravine, on cliffs overlooking the Waking Sea. She saw only a few buildings, not nearly enough space to house the missing people even if they were sleeping in shifts. She saw only a dozen or so dwarves and humans, all armed. Jaslyn and Cainan weren't close enough to look down into the ravine, but a lift bay had been built at the edge.

"So, how do you think we should play this?" he asked, as they surveyed the operation below, trying to spot recognisable faces. The map that Javert had sent him via courier had a little bit of detail on it that he must have had to put his neck out to get; but Cainan was still a long way from forgiving him, even if he had been useful.

"I don't see any workers, only guards, and it looks like that lift is the only way up," said Jaslyn. "So they must keep the workers below in the mine, and maybe rotate the guards in shifts. That tavern owner, Tessa, said her brother and his two friends were pretending to be refugees, looking for work. They're probably down in the mine, with the other workers and the rest of the guards."

Cainan nodded, looking over the scene below. That made sense, of course; no need to move workers from the mine to somewhere open where they could seek to escape; better to keep them close to the work, where the walls of the mine would serve as the walls of a prison. Easy to control,

less chance of runaways and fewer guards needed to keep the workers in line. He looked at her as she continued, keen to defer to her experience; he was a fine hand in a tavern brawl, and with a rapier, he could take the deck of a ship given time and inclination. But assaulting a subterranean fortified position against superior numbers seemed the sort of thing a Grey Warden would know more about, and Cainan's approach had always been direct, and lacking in subtlety.

"As for how to play it... we could try to bluff our way into camp, pretending to be new guards. Or we could wait for reinforcements in the morning, and figure out some way to keep warm without a fire until they arrive." She licked her lips suggestively, then grinned. "Or, we could sneak around the camp and pick off the guards one by one. I'm open to ideas."

Cainan very seriously considered how they could go about keeping each other warm without the use of a fire, and he was very tempted to let the cavalry arrive and take on the job with a much bigger force in the morning, after they had pointedly *not* gotten any sleep. It was completely irresponsible and in keeping with the Way of Cainan, of course; but...

"I cannot believe I am suggesting this, but... let's take all the ideas we just had about keeping warm and try them when we're back?" he said, sighing. "As fun as it would be to do otherwise, I'm sure there's *something* to be said for the element of surprise, and the hour; we could do a lot of good before the reinforcements arrive," he added, really wanting to reach out and pull her into his arms despite his words. "New guards at this hour would raise eyebrows. Darkness leaves a lot of places to hide an unconscious or otherwise guard, at least?" he suggested, wondering the best side to approach from to keep from being seen.

"Agreed. We take out as many topside guards as we can, using stealth." Her mind focusing in on the task at hand, Jaslyn paused to consider. Darkspawn were mindless killing machines, she'd killed them fighting beside her fellow Grey Wardens without hesitation. But these guards were people... the kind of awful people who helped enslave others, but still people. "We can start with those asleep, immobilize them with ropes and gags. But don't put yourself in danger. I want you in one piece when we get back, so I can challenge you to a rematch."

As they made their way quietly down the hill in the dark, they skirted around the circles of light cast by the torches used by the guards that were awake, with many having retired to their tents. Cainan supposed they would work in shifts to keep the watch alive overnight, so they could not be sure of how long it would be before a guard missing from their post might be discovered. Better then to proceed by stealth rather than force, if possible. If not... well, they would deal with that when it came up.

As they came to the edge of the treeline, they kept within the woods to keep watch on the torchlights that illuminated the guards that roamed the compound; one was warming himself by attending the glowing embers of the smithy, just visible from the trees; the building next to it was dark, likely with sleeping guards in it. The building on the other side of the dirt road had some guards who walked the perimeter of it regularly, with one that would occasionally head towards two more distant heads illuminated by torchlight that stood guard around the two buildings farthest

from them, near the lift to the mine.

Jaslyn led the way around the underbrush, slipping into the compound as the nearest guard walked away from them, the light from the torch they carried partially blocked by their head. They both slipped into the shadow of the wooden scaffold on the closest building, hugging the wall slightly so they didn't have an obvious silhouette.

She paused a moment, listening for sound from inside the first building - faint snoring, otherwise quiet - then peeked around the building's corner. She signaled *clear* then before the patrolling guard turned back in their direction, she crept around the building's corner, grabbing a coil of rope from a bench, then slipped through the door with Cainan close behind.

A single candle cast a flickering light on a room that contained shelves, chests, and eight cots, three of them occupied. The man on the cot closest to her was asleep on his stomach, so Jaslyn grabbed his hands and tied them behind his back. Before she could stuff a sock in his mouth, he grumbled, "Mafareth's balls, Deirdre, I said I was too tired."

Cainan raised an eyebrow at that, looking at the man's features and deciding that whoever Deirdre was, she could do better. Jaslyn looked at him, and Cainan shrugged, put on a husky, feminine voice and whispered, "Remember, the safe word is 'Banana'", eliciting a confused grumble as he pulled the man's head back slightly and Jaslyn stuffed his mouth with some cloth. As the man woke up and started to struggle, Cainan quickly brought him to unconsciousness with a hard thump to the back of the neck, leaving him hogtied and unconscious on the cot.

Moving to the second cot, the second man was athletic, wiry, and managed to sleep with a sneer. Not one he'd want to grapple with if it could be helped. "Hmm... oh Deirdre..." he moaned, in his sleep. Cainan gave Jaslyn a look; clearly he had to meet Deirdre. Jaslyn had him unconscious in a few moments and they managed to tie him down to his cot, spreadeagled. He too had cloth stuffed into his mouth; though in this case, his own socks from the boots by his cot.

Jaslyn hurried to the third sleeping form, still snoring loudly. A muscular human woman - Deirdre, she presumed. Jaslyn found a set of leg irons on the floor and nodded her readiness to Cainan. Jaslyn managed to get the leg irons on the woman before she woke up, just as Cainan stopped her making noise.

Strangely, Deirdre was far bigger than either of the men and definitely the most challenging to subdue; wordlessly, Jaslyn and Cainan arranged to do it quickly, quietly and in synch with each other, nodding as they bound her and Cainan snaked his arms around her neck from behind and squeezed her neck till the blood stopped flowing to the brain, and she slumped to unconsciousness. He released her, left her on her front, and they manacled her hands to the cot as well as her feet together.

So far, so good. These three would be alive to face charges. Jaslyn started a quick search of the room and found a paper sheet that looked like orders. She was about to show it to Cainan when the

door swung open.

Cainan whirled with his rapier, the point sliding neatly through the man's heart in a swift, soft motion. The man stopped walking in surprise, managed to look down and then up at Cainan, before he wordlessly slumped against the doorframe and slid to the ground, dead. Cainan watched the body slump, cold. He was not one to murder; kill, of course - in a fair fight. Or an unfair fight, if the needs called for it; but not usually without calling the bastard out and having him draw steel. He wasn't entirely sure what to do next. Fortunately, he wasn't alone.

The man in the doorway toppled to the floor. Jaslyn hurried over, double checked he was dead, then helped Cainan pull the body away from the door and threw a blanket over it. "Next building?"

Cainan nodded, deciding to leave whatever semblance of guilt he had with the slave driver under those blankets. "Absolutely," he replied, briefly looking through the window before he opened the door for her, and following her out into the darkness. There were no obvious signs of patrol here; the lights from torches hovered around the next building across the way, and above the lift down into the mine. A couple still bobbed this way and that from the other side of the compound, but they would get to them eventually if they kept heading round.

Jaslyn was quick and efficient, and Cainan couldn't help but admire the way she stuck to the darker shadows. Cainan didn't take any chances with the first torch bearer, who had stopped to relieve himself against the back of the next building, out of sight from all the other bobbing torchlights. As the man was focused on his task, Cainan snuck in behind with a length of lumber left over from the construction of the lift, he guessed. It was heavier than it needed to be, and truth be told, Cainan wasn't *sure* it hadn't broken the man's neck when he swung it; but a quick feeling of the neck revealed the telltale bump-bump-bump of a heartbeat. He quickly stabbed the torch headfirst into the urine, crushing the head and leaving it to steam and smoke in the darkness, hiding him once more. The man was slumped in a heap at the puddle of his own urine, and once they had cleared the building, he would move him inside.

"Back door?" Cainan whispered, indicating the wood not far from them; there was no light from under the door; he waited for her assent before they entered the building.

This door had been a bit stiff to open, but had given without awaking anyone; the first room was an old kitchen, with a fireplace that was nought but embers. They crossed the room, careful not to jostle hanging pans and cluttered worktops, and then held at the inside door; soft snoring could be heard from someone in the corridor beyond; sliding the door open gently revealed a guard sleeping in a chair, watching the front door. Jaslyn went first, handling her; what struggle there was ended briefly.

Jaslyn's soft leather boots and light tread made no sound on the old wooden floor as she approached the sleeping guard with daggers drawn. Closer, she saw that the guard's chair was balanced on the two back legs and leaned against the wall. A scabbarded sword rested on the woman's lap, her hand on the hilt. A sudden shift in the guard's position would send her toppling

loudly to the floor and alert the others.

She hesitated briefly, weighing the risk of not killing the guard. Jaslyn sheathed her daggers and gently eased the sword out of the guard's hand, then pushed the chair onto all four legs. The guard startled and roused just as Jaslyn brought the hilt of the sword down hard against the back of her head, knocking her out.

The room to the left of her was empty; of people, at least. It had been turned into a makeshift armoury, with sets of the guard's gear and some whips, shackles and other implements of the slaver's trade. Nothing to mine with, of course; they left that to those they imprisoned here. He gave her a look, and the sound of a floorboard creaking upstairs told them they still had work to do.

"See who's upstairs then maybe grab an overcoat each to get a bit closer to the lift patrol?" he suggested, quietly.

Jaslyn gave a grim nod, and whispered, "Agreed." Cainan started ahead of her, and she admired the way he moved - with the grace and subtlety of a cat. The two of them worked well together, anticipating each other's moves, protecting each other's backs. He was the most skilled partner she'd had in some time, both in a fight and in bed.

They crept up the wooden stairs, to the landing, where the dormitory beyond could be seen. Several bodies lay in there, with one returning to his bed from what smelled like a privy. Cainan wrinkled his nose, watching the man extinguish his candle and return to bed. There were six in this room, tightly packed in; too much to hope they would take them all before being discovered. But the doorframe held the answer; this was no small door, it was thick and reinforced, with a hastily retrofitted lock; Cainan surmised that while building the lift, this may have been where the workers had been kept; the presence of weapons by the cots demonstrated these were now the guard quarters, but the door had at one time been bar-locked from the outside, and while the lock was gone, the mechanism remained. It had not been difficult to find a lock downstairs in the equipment room, and he snuck up with it and handed it to Jaslyn, while he snuck in to the room proper and silently collected the heaviest looking weapons before shuffling out and watching as Jaslyn locked the bastards in their own trap.

"Well, that's poetic," Cainan whispered, as they returned to the ground floor. Jaslyn and Cainan moved the woman from the corridor into the equipment room and then retrieved the man from outside, dumping him in the same room before retrieving what they needed and locking that door from the outside, with both bodies shackled hand to foot.

"We can commission a ballad when we're done," said Jaslyn with a smirk. She shuffled through the coats in the equipment room, wrinkling her nose at the smell. Finally she found one that was probably intended for a short human, and shrugged it on over her leather armor.

Cainan peered through the window, as he slipped the overcoat over his clothes. It was a size or two too big, but that just meant he didn't have to leave his own coat behind. The imposter coat smelled



of dust and sweat; clearly they had not invested in any laundry services; he hoped the scent wasn't going to soak into his own coat, as he'd hate to have to throw it away for how it smelled. He raised the hood, feeling it hid his features reasonably if he so wanted. "Shall we head for the lift or clear the last few sentries, first?" he asked, thinking he knew the answer already.

Jaslyn raised her hood and joined Cainan at the window and thought for a moment. "It'll be less risky for us if we pick off the last few sentries first. But now that we have disguises, we can get a better count of the remaining guards and check out security around the lift."

Cainan could see the logic in that, and after a quick check to ensure they weren't about to walk into a sentry at close range, they made their move.

The two rogues exited through the front door and began a slow stroll across the compound. A human paused near the light of a torch next to the last building on the other side of the camp, lit a pipe, and leaned against the building. At the other end of the building, closer to the lift, two humans were crouched together playing dice, apparently. "I count three," murmured Jaslyn.

Cainan scanned left and looked for the telltale signs of another guard - the flickering of light from a torch behind a building, or a silhouette moving in the darkness, but couldn't see anything towards the other building. "Seems like it to me, too; though... can you hear voices?" he asked, straining a little; he hoped they weren't voices of alarm at the finding of a dead body, but they had been careful, and the voices were coming from the direction they hadn't yet been.

Jaslyn listened carefully, Cainan had good hearing for a human. "Yes... three, no... four voices, sounds like... a disagreement." That brought the count up to seven. "We'd better take out the smoker."

They made their way to the visible guard who was smoking, the ember of his pipe giving him away easily. He seemed to recognise the cut of their coats, raised a hand in salute as they approached. It was a quick one-two where Cainan punched him in the throat and Jaslyn did the rest; while Cainan snatched the pipe from falling so the ember would appear more or less steady to anyone watching it; he doubted any of the guards were looking to each other so carefully, but he passed the pipe to Jaslyn just in case while he dragged the limp body into the bushes behind the house, out of sight and covered in the thicket.

He came back to Jaslyn, and she mimed snubbing out the pipe before they resumed their progress.

From the direction of the lift, angry voices carried through the night air. As Jaslyn and Cainan got closer, they could see two of the mine guards standing in front of the lift, blocking two dwarves from boarding. The two dwarves wore significantly better armor, they were the ones raising their voices.

"Our mistress is in the mine. I demand that you allow us entry!" said one of the dwarves.

The other dwarf added, "She's been down there too long. Stand aside!"

"Settle down," said one of the guards, nervously. "Roxa's still down there too. Nothing to worry about."

"Yeah, friend. Be patient, Roxa will signal us to let down the lift when they're ready," said the other guard. He made some kind of hand signal as Jaslyn and Cainan approached behind the two dwarves.

"I think the disguises are working," whispered Jaslyn to Cainan. "You think those dwarves could be allies?"

Cainan took a moment to consider, sizing the body language of the two pairs. "They're definitely agitated, I reckon if not *allies* then at least some *not-enemies*," he agreed; whatever their problems with the mine guards, it was important to note that the dwarves were *not* in chains, either.

Cainan and Jaslyn stood within sight of the guards, but not close enough that their features could be discerned in the torchlight, and in the dark of the early morning, the coats fared well as disguise and reassurance for the guards that they did, in fact, belong. Cainan watched the guards intently; both were giving off soothing words, but they were taught as springs, ready to draw steel. Whether Cainan and Jaslyn picked a side or not, this was clearly evolving towards violence, with or without them. Cainan had a feeling it would be with, as he felt Jaslyn tense at the same time he did himself.

"The Night's Kiss will not tolerate betrayal," declared one of the dwarves. Then both drew their swords.

The lift guards shouted, and the remaining mine guards - those Cainan and Jaslyn had not killed or disabled - came running, weapons drawn. They looked at each other, and the buildings, confused. One said, "What happened to the other guards?"

Cainan could have laughed at the dumbfounded look on his face, that indicated he and Jaslyn had done a fair job of ensuring reinforcements would not be forthcoming; only three more arrived from the darkness that they had missed, making the odds 4:5 if Jaslyn and Cainan joined forces with the dwarves. Much better odds. His hand slid to his rapier, as he pressed against Jaslyn for a moment to let her know he was ready.

A feral grin spread across Jaslyn's face as she drew her daggers and muttered to Cainan, "I have your back."

"When we get home, you can have my *front*, too," he teased, as his rapier slid from its scabbard, reflecting the moonlight in a flash, and they moved as one to lash out left and right, to occupy the guards closest them while staying close to cover each other from the third, who recovered slowly from the change of fortunes and tried to join the fray several seconds after Cainan's first riposte with the closest guard, who barely had time to parry his first two blows before over stepping backwards and losing his footing over some loose rocks, falling backwards into the dark and giving

Cainan precious time and space to slide into form to meet the swinging heavy broadsword of the third guard, leaning back to let the sword sail passed his face before taking two short steps forward as he moved into a lunge, the blade driving into the man's belly and through his diaphragm. The sound of escaping air from his lungs made for an almost surprised sigh as he staggered back, trying (and failing) to catch his breath. Cainan kicked him away and had to wheel away as the first guard came at him again with a roar. If he hadn't moved, that one would have caved his skull in, whether or not the blade had been sharpened. Cainan could feel Jaslyn handling her guard with ease, as he stepped to the side to avoid another blow and then again to lead the man in a circle, watching as the exertion of each blow weighed down his arms. Cainan kept the guard of his rapier up to maintain distance, and before long the man had his back to the now unoccupied Jaslyn, too focussed as he was on Cainan's shit-eating grin.

Jaslyn took on her guard attacker, luring him into pondering lunges at her with a greatsword that was too heavy for him. She dropped the smelly cloak and dodged nimbly out of his way. The momentum of his swing nearly caught one of the other two guards going after Cainan. He hesitated and she followed with a swift but devastating kick to the groin. "Elf bitch," he groaned, as he fell to his knees. Jaslyn aborted the follow-up knee to his face and instead ran the blade of her dagger across his throat.

She spun to see her partner dueling – with the grace and finesse of a gentleman - the last of their three attackers. Jaslyn rolled her eyes, she had no compunction about fighting dirty. She approached Cainan's assailant from behind and slammed the pommel-end of her dagger into the base of his skull, and he slumped to the ground. Jaslyn checked his pulse and used a set of chains from his own belt to secure him, then wiped the blood on her daggers on his clothes.

"Why thank you, my dear," Cainan said, gracefully shrugging his shoulders to let the heavy and oversized musty coat fall down his left arm and then, tossing his rapier to the now free hand, his right so it pooled at the floor. He flicked off some of the dust from his favoured coat, grimacing a bit at how much had transferred. They turned as one to look to the lift, where the dwarves had been.

Each of the two dwarves were still fighting the two lift guards. From deep in the ravine, they all heard desperate voices calling for reinforcements, that were cut off by the sounds of fighting.

The four combatants hesitated and turned to look over the edge. Then one of the dwarves roared and the clash of steel resumed, the two Dwarves fighting with renewed intensity. Within moments, the two human guards fell.

Cainan watched the end of their fight with his Rapier in hand, but not raised or threatening the dwarves, as he surveyed the situation with Jaslyn.

Jaslyn looked to Cainan. "The enemy of my enemy is my ally?"

"Sounds like a plan, I think the stealth portion of this evening might have passed, and a couple of pissed off dwarves might be just the thing when charging into a mine," Cainan agreed, as the

Dwarves wheeled to continue the fray, only to see Jaslyn and Cainan watching them, distinctly non-threatening with the three dead guards at their feet.

The four of them - the two dwarves, Cainan, and Jaslyn - stared at each other for a long moment. The two dwarves looked at each other, apparently uncertain about whether to attack. "What do you want here," growled one.

Jaslyn usually did her negotiating with her daggers, so she deferred to Cainan, whom she knew to have a clever tongue... in more ways than one.

"We heard some friends and others might be found in these parts, came looking and found these... gentlemen," Cainan sniffed, tapping the leg of the still twitching one he had killed with his sword. "Didn't really want the whole camp descending on us so we dealt with it. Now, we have two dwarves standing between us and the lift to where some of our friends might be, and I find myself asking if we have to fight you too, or could it be that we have common cause tonight?" he asked, outwardly relaxed but coiled and ready to spring if needed.

The dwarf on their left nodded slowly. "Our mistress, second-in-command of the Night's Kiss, went into the mine for a tour as a guest of that Roxa. Rhiannon suspected a trap, and then we guessed something was wrong. She's been down there too long, and we heard sounds of a battle. A battle that has now ended."

"We should have gone with her," muttered the other dwarf.

"Then, are we all agreed that we can work together?" asked Jaslyn. She sheathed her daggers.

"This may be a foolish question to ask a dwarf, but I don't suppose you know if the mechanism for the lift works without one of us staying topside?" Cainan asked, as he reached down to pick up his discarded musty coat and wiped his blade against it before sheathing the sword back at his hip.

The dwarf on the right rolled his eyes and grumbled, "I'm a sailor, not a miner. My cousin builds lifts like this. Something about counter-weights, she told me once. We don't need to leave anyone topside to operate the lift, *but...*"

Jaslyn nodded, understanding. "Someone should stay topside, to keep an eye on all the prisoners. If even one got free, with everyone else stranded down there, they'd control the exit again." She looked uneasily over the edge, she did not like the idea of Cainan going into the mine without her. "It's your friends that might be down there, Cainan. You should go."

Cainan bit back his immediate instinct to argue that; was the danger more prescient here or below? In either case, there was an element of danger, and the danger they knew was *here*, bound and imprisoned as they were, there were still a large number of guards to ruin their evening should someone get out and start letting them take back the lift. She had the right of it - someone had to stay behind, if only to keep lookout and take down anyone who wandered back from patrol or such.

He found himself conflicted - not only by how much he wasn't sure which side to argue, but by how much he wanted to put her in the safer role. Jaslyn was no pushover; hell, she could probably take him in a fight if she had the mind; he'd seen her take down bigger and badder bastards all night long. And he still wanted to be the one standing between her and the more pressing danger.

"... alright," Cainan said, his visage of a carefree duellist dropping for a moment as the concern bled into his voice, making him want to wince. "Just... if an entire army of them *does* happen to show up, don't die for a lift, ok?" he requested,

"You'd better come back up in one piece," said Jaslyn, with a lascivious smirk. "I want another game of wicked grace."

And just like that, the carefree, flirtatious duellist was back as he smirked back.

"Oh, *that's* happening, no question," he purred, as he turned with a flourish towards the lift.

The two dwarves looked at each other, not quite ready to trust the elf and human. The dwarf on the left said, "I'll go. You stay here, and protect our retreat."

Cainan looked from the dwarf that would be his companion, to the dwarf that would stay with Jaslyn. Neither looked any more surly, or indeed more *trustworthy* than any other sailor he had met, and Jaslyn had taken two guards in the time it had taken both of the dwarves to take one - she'd be *fine*. And it was only fair they both have a lookout, he supposed.

"Well, let's get on with it, shall we?" he said, briskly. "My dear, I do hope you appreciate the nice places I take you to, and I'd take it as a kindness if you didn't dance with anyone till I get back," he teased, as he and the rough-looking dwarf stepped onto the lift, the wood creaking as the weight shifted it's position slightly in the shaft.

Cainan took his place to the right and nodded to the dwarf, who closed the door and moved to even out the weight to stop the swinging.

Together, they set about lowering the lift, Cainan catching one last glimpse of Jaslyn through the wooden slats as they descended below ground.

The lift descended slowly, with only a small lantern hanging from the top beam to illuminate what they were doing. Cainan had questions for his new companion but settled for a quick check of his name before they reached the bottom, lest pushing him for too much information reveal a reason to end their budding alliance a little too early.

"Do you have a name?" he asked, quietly so it wouldn't carry down the shaft. It was more to ease the tension than to actually know the man, but it would be nice not to die back to back with someone who didn't even know his name.

"The name's Gresh," said the dwarf, absently, as the faces below came into focus and he searched for Rhiannon.

"Cainan," the human offered back, similarly disinterested in turning this into a deep conversation in any way that wasn't related to the lift reaching the mine.

It seemed to take a short age for the air to change around the lift, becoming more earthy as the dust increased. This was going to just ruin his coat, he knew it. The lift came to a sudden halt as it hit the bottom, and Cainan slid the door open, ready to draw steel and cut down any guards at the lift, Gresh similarly ready to spring. But as his eyes adjusted to the torchlight, he held an arm out to stop Gresh from charging as who came into view was familiar, and clearly not a guard. At least, not a guard for the mine.

"...Martin?" Cainan asked incredulous, looking the man over twice to make sure it was no trick of the light.

## Raised From Perdition

Posted on 12 Apr 2021 @ 9:02pm by [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#)

**1,468 words; about a 7 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 18th - Morning

After dealing with Martin at the lift and directing him to Jaslyn, Cainan started into the mine, leaving the dwarf to his own devices now that they had confirmed the mine was secure. He had expected to need to fight his way through narrow corridors, had even spent time on the way down visualising it, but the fighting was clearly all done. He passed a makeshift infirmary where Kalian and a woman who looked strikingly like Sister Elinowy but in far more revealing clothing were assisting the injured. Cainan's eyes lingered on the good sister for a moment - for the obvious, and then the concern for how she ended up there, before he scanned the room, searching. Not finding either of the faces he was looking for, and seeing the Sister was safe with Kalian, he made his way further down, passing groups of miners assisting the injured, helping them get back to the lift or the makeshift infirmary, as their wounds allowed.

He was a couple of hundred paces into the mine before he found them; both breathing, though Fariweather had obviously taken a proper beating to the head. He'd lost a tooth or two as well, as he grinned dopily at Cainan's appearance. "Alrigh', Cainan?" he spat, wheezing. Where he lay, he was obviously a bit punch-drunk, and Cainan could already tell what had happened; a short way away lay a guard who had been beaten *severely*, beside the door to what looked like a cell, where the obvious tracks of a body being dragged led to Fariweather, who was clearly just coming round.

"Cainan?!" Harlan whirled, looking at him, blinking stupidly. He had clearly been trying to drag his friend to safety after the chaos of the fighting. Cainan let out a sigh of relief at the sight of them, but tried to joke his way passed it as the obvious evidence of what had happened fell into place.

“Let me guess - you started a fight with the first guard, *this one* tried to take the second and you ended up knocking out two idiots and dragging a third?” he asked, as he leant down to help stand Fariweather and take his place on the other side of the man, Harlan taking the other side to share the weight between them. Cainan was no healer, but neither looked too bad, though not all wounds could be seen; though Harlan grinned tiredly back at him, there was a haunted look to the mans eyes as he did it.

“Pretty much,” he admitted, bringing up his friend. He was making an effort to smile, but his heart obviously wasn't in it. His eyes had a strange mix of anger, fear and hope that was difficult to read, or even watch. “I'm assuming the Cap'n... well, we both know he didn't *send* ya, so...”

“No, he didn't send me.” There was a pause, as they both thought around that wording for a moment. “Did help me find you, though,” Cainan added, half-heartedly, but the subtext was plain as day.

“N how long did that take?” Harlan grunted, before spitting into the dirt. “He just watched, Cainan. That cretin killed - *murdered* Jules and he just watched. He kidnapped me n' Felix, and Cap'n just watched. He... Hells, more 'n enough has 'appened as I can't even recall it all. I take it he's off hiding somewhere?” he asked, and spat again. “Know what? Never mind, I don't care. Cassabianca can burn as fars I care, and that bastard aboard n' all.”

Cainan found himself unable to defend Javert, due in no small part to the lack of appropriate words or inclination. While it was true he would have had to keep looking for the mine if Richelieu had not come round the morning before with directions, it was still too little, too late.

“Shoulda stayed with Kanperry; that woman knows the sea, *and* can tell which way the wind's blowing; knew this venture was shady from the off. Shoulda... shoulda listened...” Harlan continued, as they made their way back toward the infirmary. By now, the lift was being loaded with the most injured and raised to the surface, so they waited. Harlan got quiet as they did, shaking slightly; it was only then that Cainan realised the man was crying. Cainan wasn't sure how to deal with that, so he just let him cry; truth be told, he could hardly blame the man.

“Th... Thanks for coming for us, Cainan. I don't - I don't do well in... tight spaces.” His voice cracked, and Cainan gripped the mans should with the arm that was helping support Felix between them.

“We was gonna die down here,” Felix mumbled, starting to come around. He lifted his head as the sound of the creaking mechanism slowly grew louder, and he watched the lift descend towards them, intently. Cainan had taken a fair few hits to the head in his time; he knew that Felix was probably fixed on the lift with tunnel vision from the head injury as he faded in and out of alertness, but suspected it was far more poignant in that moment than any he himself had ever experienced. Felix watched the lift as if it were a descending angel, transfixed by it, and Cainan wondered just how long they had been down here.

Harlan shook as he stepped into the lift; hard enough that Cainan felt it through Felix. Hard enough the lift swayed a little in response. They were silent as the lift doors closed and they ascended into the long darkness, the air quality shifting as they went higher. The darkness held the sobs and sighs of those that had fought for their freedom and were only now, as they finally stopped long enough to just breathe, coming to terms with what they had done, and what this moment in the dark represented; the rest of their lives, and freedom.

As the lift finally crested the lip of the shaft, the light of the early sunrise breached the slats of the wood and bathed them in a sudden warmth against the chill of the dewy morning air. It was as the door opened and they stepped into the light proper that Harlan finally collapsed to his knees, two short steps into the world outside, and openly sobbed, his head held high so all he could see was the sky.

The support from his right side now gone, Felix leaned heavily against Cainan for a moment before he slumped down to comfort Harlan. He awkwardly lifted his arm and heaved it slowly around Harlan's broad shoulders, and looked to the sky as well, before turning his gaze slowly to Cainan.

"First time we've been topside in... hells, I dunno," Felix mumbled, by way of explanation. "We... they had us in that cell when we weren't working..." He closed his eyes, as tears started streaming down his face, too.

Cainan wanted to offer... something, but he was so far from knowing what would help he didn't have a *word* for it. Somehow, sympathy didn't seem enough. Felix didn't seem to mind, though; he had lifted his head as the morning breeze came in from the coast, bringing with it the hint of salt on that wind. "Was forgetting what wind felt like," he mumbled, as he began to sob, smiling, and gripped Harlan harder.

They stayed there for a time, as the Jader Guards worked around them. No one moved the two men or bothered them - at least, not until the lift started coming back up; they just let those who hadn't seen daylight for over a month allow freedom to wash over them, while Cainan stood by, letting them take it in.

After a time, and when the lift began to move again, Cainan saw that they were both seen to by the guards, and listened to their plans. It felt good that he had helped them; he wasn't used to selfless acts, but this... this definitely was worth it.

As the sun began to rise higher in the sky, other miners - other *survivors* took over and made sure Felix and Harlan got some food and water, and promised to help them through whatever debrief the city guards had. After ensuring they had his address and what money he had, Cainan said his goodbyes and joined Jaslyn and the others as they prepared to ride out back to Jader.

**OOC: just finishing Cainan's time in the mine so there's no unresolved threads down there.**



## Fallout

Posted on 17 Apr 2021 @ 1:55pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**3,103 words; about a 16 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Carta Mining Camp

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 18th - dawn

After putting up a decent resistance Martin had eventually given in to Kalian's reasonable argument that he should go topside to get things running smoothly, while they finished evacuating the mine and sending the miners up. It made sense for him to be there to speak to his fellow Guards, he supposed, but his job description usually involved him being the last one out of a dangerous situation, not the first. It felt a bit like running. At least Cainan was down there with them to help clean things up.

"They'll be fine," Sofia said. She hadn't even looked at him but apparently could read his mind with little effort.

"I know." Martin looked up, at the slowly approaching top of the ravine, and beyond at the lightening sky. It would be dawn soon.

Pyrtin and Lirta huddled together, still clearly in shock from their ordeal in the mine. It might be a while before they felt comfortable underground again. If ever.

"Maker, it feels good to have some fresh air," Sofia said quietly, eyes closed, her face offered to the ocean. The wind blowing from the north carried the smell of salt and spray. "I think I'll be sleeping outdoors for a few nights."

"The weather's right for it," Martin said. The summer festival was indeed just coming up. "By the way - I meant to give you this." He handed her the generous purse he had looted earlier in the mine. Sofia looked up at him quizzically when she heard the jingle of coin.

"Shouldn't that be confiscated by the Guard?"

"Hmm," Martin mumbled. "What they don't know can't hurt them. I'm sure you can find a good use for it."

"But..." Sofia glanced at Lirta.

"Take it, please," the young dwarf said quietly. "We owe you that and more."

"What happened wasn't your fault," Sofia said quietly; but she took the purse with no further protest.

The creaking platform finally reached the top, where an unknown elf was waiting. She must be Cainan's friend, the one who'd help him get rid of the guards. She had reddish hair, the shade close to Martin's own if slightly darker, and large almond-shaped green eyes. Although she was short and slim Martin would bet a week's pay that she could teach him a few new tricks. The tell-tale scratches on her leather armour bespoke of more than a few battles fought.

"Hello," He hopped from the platform onto solid ground and offered a hand to the others ; his right hand, as the left was still not fully functional despite Kalian's healing. "You must be Jaslyn, right ? Cainan mentioned your name. Thanks for the help. You saved more than a few lives tonight."

She lent her own steady hand to help the workers off the lift. The condition of most of them – thin, sick, injured - was appalling. "Yes, I'm Jaslyn. A Grey Warden. So, you are one of Cainan's friends." He hadn't offered his name, and she looked him up and down. Probably the city guardsman, Martin. "Looks like you've seen your own share of *helping* this night." She leaned toward the edge, the flickering light of multiple torches now revealed the crowd waiting below. It would be some time before Cainan returned to the top. "We'd better send the lift back down straight away."

"Alright, I'll leave you to it. I have a few things to organize myself. Sofia, can I ask for your assistance ?"

"Yeah, sure." Sofia glanced at Lirta and Pyrtin. "Will you two be alright ?"

"Yes... yes, of course." Lirta stood straighter, though it was clear her fortitude cost her. "We'll be fine. You take care of the others, Sofia. I'm sure they need you more than us."

Pyrtin scratched his beard. "I need to check on the state of my office, and see what Roxa did with the books."

"I will accompany them," said Jaslyn, eager for something useful to do whilst she waited for Cainan to return. Something that didn't involve hauling dead bodies.

"...Alright then," Sofia said with a last uncertain look at her erstwhile bosses.

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Martin and Sofia started organizing the camp, setting up a few beds together for the sick and the wounded and making sure the guards were properly secured. One of them, a burly woman, had nearly managed to untie the rope binding her. Martin regretted not bringing some of the chains from the mine but they wouldn't be keeping the prisoners long enough for it to be an issue. He satisfied himself with a few complicated knots commonly used by the guard, and cleverly located so that the woman would have to literally dislocate her thumbs to even get close to touching them.

"Look, mate, we didn't do anything, Roxa - " one of them tried.

After the night he'd had Martin was sorely tempted to throw a punch but he reigned himself in. "You lot better be quiet," he said in a sinister voice, "or I'm giving you to the miners to do as they please."

He must have been convincing because a few open mouths snapped shut, and the prisoners exchanged worried looks. Martin really hoped he could secure a sentence of hard labour for them. It would be quite fitting.

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The first rays of the sun were just touching the earth when the sounds of a marching group of men and women reached the camp. Martin left Sofia to what she was doing - helping the last miners out and distributing some more food and hot tea - and headed out to meet them. He recognized the uniform before he saw the faces and then it wasn't long before they were within hearing range. And... he winced when he recognized the woman leading them. If *she* had come in person... well, it meant he was in deep, deep trouble.

She stopped in front of him and the guard contingent stopped as one behind her. "Josceran."

"Captain." He saluted sharply, acutely aware of the poor image he presented.

"Well, Josceran, fancy meeting you here. I would never have guessed. I mean, of course none of my men would be *stupid, foolish and dimwitted enough* to take on a full smuggling and mining operation on his own without *reporting to me* first. Don't you think? Or did you think at all?" The captain's hands rested on her hips. She was of a height with him and her slate grey eyes pierced him mercilessly, her tone carrying no humour.

"Hum. I, huh." Martin was pretty sure that any answer would damn him so he opted to close his mouth, after working his jaw for a second or two.

"Of all the absolutely *idiotic, imbecilic* things to do - " the captain was on a roll now, never one to give up a good tongue-lashing. " - never seen such a half-baked, hare-brained scheme - " The men behind her shuffled awkwardly, though a few were clearly biting back sniggers and Martin glowered at them. " - you'll be cleaning latrine and shoveling manure for the weeks to come - no, make that months - until someone does something *more* stupid, so you'll probably still be at it until you retire - "

From the corner of his eyes Martin saw one of his friends approach and felt his cheeks burn in embarrassment. He did not need them to witness that dressing down, though he probably deserved it.

" - cretinously irresponsible to bring civilians into this - beyond obtuse - it beggars belief - " Captain Landry had to pause a second to take a breath. "I'm almost impressed by how inconceivably dumb you've acted today. Truly reaching new heights." She seemed to have reached the end of her

impressive vocabulary, if not of her disapproval. "Well. Consider yourself on probation. Tomorrow at 8 sharp I'll expect you in my office to further discuss suitable discipline for this... incredibly moronic stunt of yours." She took off her helmet, revealing curly black hair tied in a no-nonsense ponytail. Despite the deepening lines at the corner of her eyes and underneath she still looked several years younger than she actually was, with no grey streaking her hair as of yet.

Behind her Audrey shook her head and ran her finger across her throat with an eloquent grimace. Martin made a glum face at her.

"Now. Report." Captain Landry took off her gloves and stuffed them in her helmet, eyes never leaving Martin's face.

"Yes, captain." He'd stood at attention all this time and his spine hurt when he shifted into a stiff at-ease position. "We were investigating rumours of disappearing refugees - "

"And how exactly did civilians come to be involved in that investigation of yours ? So help me, if you try to obfuscate the matter - "

"My friends were with me when we found our first clue - a flyer advertising a job - and they wanted to help. I figured the refugees would more happily speak with them than with me," Martin explained hastily. His face felt red hot. It had made sense back then. Now that he had to defend his actions to a superior, he found that they were a bit harder to justify than he'd initially thought.

He explained quickly how they'd followed the trail, how he'd wanted to investigate further before bringing in reinforcements, and he tried to hold back on his resentment when he matter-of-factly pointed out that he'd brought up the issue of disappearing Fereldans more than once before, only to be summarily dismissed. Captain Landry's gaze glinted dangerously but she let it slide. Martin summed up the rest of his day, making generous use of narrative ellipses when it suited him.

" - and we started organizing the camp to help the miners until they could be brought back to Jader."

Kalian approached soon enough to catch the last part of Martin's captain yelling at him. It was completely unwarranted – Martin was a hero. But Kalian figured that speaking up would only get his friend in more trouble. It would be better for Landry – he recognized the strong and attractive Jader city guard captain – to hear the rescued workers' sing Martin's praises.

"I see. What a fascinating tale." The captain's deadpan tone of voice was not reassuring. "Is that it ?"

Right now was when Martin should have mentioned the presence of a free-roaming apostate to his direct superior. He hesitated. Captain Landry was a good person - he had profound respect for her skill and authority, although his past actions did not exactly reflect that. She would deal with Kalian fairly and make sure he was towed safely to the Chantry.

*But once there... he's too old to adapt well to life in a Circle. And they won't give him too many*

*chances because he's powerful.* And yet, Martin's duty was clear, the path laid out in front of him ; to stray from it now was a hard decision to justify.

Kalian looked at his feet and held his breath. Martin could – probably *should* to avoid getting in more trouble - turn him over as an apostate.

"...no, Captain," Martin said at last. Captain Landry looked him in the eyes, hard, and he held her gaze without flinching. After a minute she nodded.

"Good. Audrey, ride back to town, we're going to need a cart. Make that two. Josceline, take three men, get the prisoners ready for transportation. Gérard, I want a list of names, start taking statements from those who feel up to it. Johann, first aid. Start with Josceran here, he better not bleed out before I'm done with him. Enguerrand, secure the perimeter. Someone find me the mine owners, I want to speak to them."

Kalian exhaled in relief. While he tried to think of something to say to Martin, another guard approached his friend. Kalian hung back, watching and listening.

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The sick were being cared for, food was abundant for all the survivors and the authorities were now taking control of the scene. Sister Elinowy dressed in a ragged blanket walked towards the opening of the camp. It had been a long night. She kept to comforting the wounded and sick, avoiding her companions as they organized the camp. Even for a devoted Daughter of the Chantry the last day had been draining on her in body and soul. She felt the cool breeze of the morning coming in from the sea and washing over her face. A new dawn. The Maker had seen it fit for her to live another day... however she had managed to survive.

She had a duty to perform. While her heart felt heavy and distant, the ways of liturgy still had value. She faced toward the sun, casting off the blanket that covered the shredded remains of her outfit feeling the chill of the morning as it gripped her body. Discomfort was without value. As long practiced she laced each foot firmly onto the ground, shoulder width apart, her arms extended in welcome greeting of the dawn, and she sang.

*Maker, though the darkness comes upon me,  
I shall embrace the Light. I shall weather the storm.  
I shall endure.  
What you have created, no one can tear asunder.*

*Who knows me as You do?  
You have been there since before my first breath.  
You have seen me when no other would recognize my face.  
You composed the cadence of my heart.*

While not the canticle of the day, Trials had always been dear to her heart. Each word ached with the deeper meaning of her perplexed and tormented soul. Her arms slid into the grasping bird form, her legs stepping forward and to the right, one leg lifting in a slow arc. The song and forms were equal parts of a prayer. As she sang she felt the heaviness of her heart lift. There was no turmoil, no regret, there was just the song and the light it brought into her soul.

Several people liberated from the mine stopped and watched in fascination as the tall, poorly clad woman moved through each position with fluidity and grace. If Elinowy was aware of them she did not show it. Her body was a vessel for the song. Her voice carried in hauntingly beautiful tones throughout the camp and into the mine itself.

Morning prayer could last 30 minutes to an hour. For Elinowy it was timeless while also completed too soon. Her hands cupped at her heart as she sang the last notes. The sun had risen well above the horizon, its warmth shining on her face. Her eyes opened, filled with solace. The Maker was with her. She gathered up the blanket and returned to her companions.

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Everyone scattered to carry out their orders. Johann, who was carrying the first aid kit, approached Martin with a bit of a smirk. Clearly he was enjoying himself, as well he might - they'd never really gotten along. But Johann was still a Guard, and professional, so he kept his mirth to himself and soberly asked, "Anything else beside the arm?"

"No," Martin mumbled. "Er, the arm's fine -"

Johann rolled his eyes. "Yeah, right." Without asking for permission he took Martin's arm, firmly but gently enough, eyebrows shooting upwards when he saw the wound underneath the crusty, torn sleeve.

"Told you." Martin pulled Johann's hand off.

"That... looks like an older wound. Nearly healed." Johann blinked, the gears clearly working furiously inside his mind. "But -"

"It is. An older wound. The blood's not mine," Martin said. At least he didn't feel a shred of guilt lying to Johann. "I cut the sleeve by accident when I wiped the blood off my sword." Not entirely convincing, but not wholly unbelievable either, and it wasn't like the jump to *apostate healing* was obvious. "You better help the miners."

Johann sniffed, with a last suspicious look at Martin before he endeavored to do just that.

Kalian watched the other guard *with a first aid kit* walk toward the recovering miners. It was only a matter of time until someone mentioned a mage. Time for a smart apostate to slip away. "I can't believe she yelled at you. You're a hero, Martin. Because of you, these people are free."

Martin snorted and gave Kalian a wan smile. A sleepless night and day of hard labour, not to mention the fighting, had taken its toll on him. "Believe me, Captain Landry is *not* impressed. She's not wrong, you know. I should have gone to her with our findings before we went to meet the recruiters, ask for backup and support. I wanted to get enough evidence to make sure I didn't get fobbed off again... and that nearly got us all killed. So... I guess I'm sorry ?"

Kalian gave him a sheepish smile, and shook his head. "And... and I'm grateful that I'm still free, Martin. I, uh, should be going. I owe you an explanation, but later... if I'm not at the Raven's Roost, my sister will know how to contact me."

Martin met Kalian's eyes, a warm brown in the dim light of the rising sun, and he wondered if this was the last time he saw him. It wasn't too late to arrest him, he supposed. He shook his head, somehow finding it within himself to smile. He hoped Kalian would be there when he visited the Raven... but he wouldn't stop him from leaving. His new friend deserved that much trust from him.

"We do need to have a conversation." He paused. "Sofia said she'd pass the word around to not mention you... but there are a lot of miners, and not all of them answer to her I suppose. And some of the things that happened down here... Well. Should be difficult to identify who did what, anyway. Will you be alright heading back on your own ?"

"Thank you, Martin." Kalian had the sudden urge to embrace his friend, but if one of the workers did out him to the city guard as an apostate, a public display of affection might just get Martin in more trouble. "Don't worry about me, I'll be fine."

"Alright then. Take care of yourself. I'll see you at the Raven."

"See you there." As Kalian turned to walk away, he muttered, "It's the end of the world, all over again."

A few minutes later, a large Raven could be seen circling high above the mining camp, before heading northwest toward Jader.

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## Just Rewards

Posted on 28 Apr 2021 @ 12:04pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**2,065 words; about a 10 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Carta Mining Camp

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 18th – early morning

OOC: After 'Freedom's Consequences'

After Cainan arrived and described the situation at the topside mining camp, the transfer of workers via the lift began immediately. Although he protested, Kalian had insisted that Martin should ascend with the first group, along with Sofia and the rightful mine owners, to maintain order. Martin finally agreed when Cainan mentioned that he and his elven Grey Warden friend had already notified the Jader Guard and expected them to arrive in the morning.

Kalian had remained at the mine level, working with Elinowy to help the wounded and the weak, whilst Sofia's associate Geoff kept an eye on Roxa's captured guards. Kalian made several attempts to catch the Chantry sister's eye, but not surprisingly, she seemed uncomfortable around him, so he tried not to bother her. Everyone had been up through the night and even those who'd not been injured were exhausted.

For the first time Elinowy was feeling very confined inside the mine. As more and more people were taken to the surface, she was having to get closer and closer to Kalian. She prayed the Maker would make some sort of direction known to her. The circle was a life for Mages. They could learn and grow in their studies under the careful eye of the Chantry. As it should be. But at Kalian's age, and that he had learned magic outside the circle, it was unlikely they could do much more for him than keep him confined and possibly docile. He had saved her life and given her this new day. Her future belonged to the Maker, but she was only here because of Kalian. She knew what was right. She knew what she must do.

Just as the sky was beginning to lighten with predawn, Kalian and Elinowy climbed onto the lift, among the last group of people to embark for the surface. He stood right next to the Sister and spoke in a low voice. "Elinowy, I just want you to know that you have a place to stay at the Raven's Roost. Even if..." He swallowed. Although he was confident that if templars came for him he'd simply escape to the forest, that wasn't the life he wanted. "Well, uh, you have to do what you think is right. I understand and so will Tessa."

Elinowy looked for words, they did not come. Kalian and his sister had shown her kindness when she arrived in destitution. The Maker wanted generosity and hospitality from all his children. They lived it. Kalian had to know upon letting her under his roof that she could discover his secret and his life was forfeit. She closed her eyes listening to Kalian. He needed to be part of a circle. Chantry teaching was quite certain on that. But before the time of Andraste, the Maker had given Magic as a gift to mankind, to be used wisely and with restraint. That was the point of the Circle. Even among the occasional circle mage that would visit on tours promoting healing, she had never met one who's motives were so pure. What did the Maker think of such things? The verse of the Chant echoed through her head. Kalian needed correction. There was too much danger to his soul to keep hiding in plain sight. Her head ached with the turmoil of feelings and teachings going through her mind. She looked at Kalian, made momentary contact with his eyes. She smiled grimly. No words.



\*\*\*\*\* In the Mine Owner's Office \*\*\*\*\*

While Cainan's city guard friend took command of the mining camp, securing captured guards and organizing help for the workers, Jaslyn stood guard at the mine owners' office.

Apparently, the office had been taken over and occupied by Roxa. Jaslyn kept the door cracked open for relief from the smell of the two dwarves who had obviously been kept in unsanitary conditions. Both had eaten their fill of fresh cheese and bread they found in a cupboard, and opened their safe to find Roxa's stash of coin.

The young dwarf woman, Lirta, paced around the room, peering into cabinets full of books and alternating between expressions of relief that Roxa had left her research mostly untouched, to disgust at the state of their other, few possessions.

Meanwhile the older dwarf, her father Pyrtin sat at the dwarf-sized desk going over the ledgers, occasionally remarking with approval at Roxa's thorough bookkeeping, while also aghast at the supplies for workers Roxa had considered optional. On the corner of the desk sat the large bag of coin, profits Roxa had squeezed from the mine. That bag of wealth was the main reason Jaslyn stood guard.

Pyrtin finally leaned back in the chair and rubbed his eyes.

"What did you find out?" asked Lirta anxiously.

"I think it'll be possible to get the mine back up and running, *safely* and with a *fairly paid* workforce, with enough profit to finance your project to find Rousten Thaig," said Pyrtin.

Lirta asked in a horse whisper, "But?"

"Who will work for us now after everything Roxa did here?" Pyrtin sighed. "Most of this gold that Roxa intended to keep for herself rightfully belongs to the workers. We need to begin portioning it out."

Tears ran down Lirta's face, but she wiped them away and straightened. "I'll fetch Sofia. She was our foreman, she should be first. And she can spread the word."

Jaslyn stood aside as Lirta left, and shuddered. One day, more likely than not and sooner than later, Jaslyn would die underground. But just now, she wanted a bath, a good night's sleep, and the tumble Cainan had promised her. And not necessarily in that order.

Rhiannon had gone up with the firsts batch of miners when all was set and done. She had sent one of her guards back to her mother to explain what had happened and that she would see if she could salvage a deal with the actual owners of the mine.

Rhi then went about making sure that the miners were comfortable and set with what could be supplied for them. It had taken most of the night and Rhi had taken a small nap before dawn.

She woke and made her way to the office to check on the owners. She came to the door, knocked, then entered when given permission to enter. Stepping in she gave her best warm smile. "Good morning, Lirta, Pyrtin is it?" She gave a nod to the woman standing by the large sack now mostly empty of gold on the desk. "And you as well Jaason?" Rhi moved to stand in front of Pyrtin. "Looks like you had a long night. I had seen the books yesterday. Though Roxa was a butch, she knew how to turn a profit. I know that this is probably too early for this but if you are interested in making a deal for cargo. (pause) Or if you might be interested in a possible silent partner?"

"Jaslyn," she corrected affably. She had stood guard as workers entered the mine office in twos and threes and the mine owners distributed long-overdue wages, until finally the queue outside had dwindled to nothing, whilst Pyrtin and Lirta's bag of gold emptied to perhaps a quarter of where they'd started. Jaslyn had been just about to excuse herself and locate Cainan, when the well-armed silver-haired dwarf entered. She decided to stay and observe.

Lirta glared suspiciously at Rhiannon. "If you saw the books then you know Roxa was incompetent at running a real business. All she knew how to do was exploit desperate folk that only wanted a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, and force them into slavery to cut her overhead. That's not a business turning a profit, that's slaving and thievery."

"All this happened because I was foolish enough to accept Roxa's help," said Pyrtin. "Now, we'll be lucky just to employ enough workers to get the mine running at all."

"You are the warrior who killed Roxa, and we're grateful. But you said yourself you were going to make a deal with her," said Lirta. "You haven't even told us your name. How can we trust you?"

Rhi smiled at Jaslyn. "Now that is a name that I will remember. Quite a beautiful one it is." Her smile turned mischievous.

Rhi stood and listened to Lirta as she talked about Roxa's book keeping. She smiled as the woman went on to explain what she thought of it all. When she was done, and Pyrtin finished, Rhi grinned. A warm and knowing grin. "You are very correct in your assessment of how Roxa was running this place. Also, it is not completely your fault. I have dealt with the likes of her before. Words of honey, said at the right time, can make anyone do just about anything."

Rhi moved so that she could better see the two. "As for making a deal with Roxa? Yes I came here with that intent. I had given her a great deal before we stepped down into the mines. Once down there I knew that there was no way I could go through with it. So I played along, hoping she would take us back up and you could go for help. But you all had other plans, and now we are here." Rhi stepped around to the chair, sat down and looked the two dwarves in their eyes, her tone becoming very businesslike. "Trust is something that is earned. I would say that I have earned a little by ridding

you of that das'tang." (spits on the floor)

"Here is my proposal. I can supply you with enough to restart the mine, get everyone here a living wage and make sure you have the proper guard. Ones that will be loyal to you and those working here. All I ask for in return, 15% of the profits, starting after the first year. If this goes belly up before hand, then I will do what I can to help the workers find jobs elsewhere. This includes you two as well." She paused for a moment to let it all sink in. And when she had seen it did, she smiled. "Oh, yeah. My name. (grin) Rhiannon Cadash. Co-owner of the Night's Kiss and Rhisha Shipping." Rhi knew that most people might not know the Cadash name. She also knew that most dwarves would.

Pyrtin and Lirta exchanged nervous and hopeful looks. Pyrtin said, "My lady, that is a very generous offer."

Lirta pulled a sheet of paper from a drawer and gestured to the inkwell and pen on the desk. "Would you be willing to put that in writing?"

Jaslyn smiled, pleased that something good would come out of all this. Some of the workers that had previously been abused and enslaved by Roxa could find legitimate work here.

Rhiannon grinned when Jaslyn corrected her name. Her attention went back to Pyrtin and Lirta when the two of them agreed that her offer was generous. When Lirta got out parchment and ink Rhi moved forward to the desk. She took the quill and wrote out the terms, exactly as she had stated them, then signed it. She looked at the two and smiled. "When I get back and talk to my mother. For now, (she pulls out a small bag of gems). This should get you started on proper care, food and drink for you and the workers." She stood to head out the door, stopping before she did. "I will need the names of those who did not survive. Please send them to the Night's Kiss as soon as you have them. The help I promised will be here before tomorrow ends. I will be back me at week to check on and see how you all are doing." Turning she made her way out.

"Thank you, thank you, my Lady!" called Pyrtin and Lirta in unison after Rhiannon. After she left, father and daughter opened the bag of gems, then hugged each other.

*Rhisha Shipping*, mused Jaslyn. She might look up Rhiannon in Jader, and offer her thanks. Hahren Liriel would be pleased to hear this news, and she'd pass it around in the alienage. "I'll check in on you from time to time. But for now, I'll take my leave."

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## Welcome back

Posted on 28 Apr 2021 @ 5:00pm by [Rogue Jaslyn & Warrior Martin Josceran & Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage & Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**3,108 words; about a 16 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 18th - Midday

It was an unusual convoy that headed back to Jader in the aftermath of the mine battle. Two big carts carried the miners too weak to walk ; the others followed in a more or less orderly fashion under Captain Landry's watchful eye. Kalian had somehow disappeared - vanished into thin air might be a more accurate description. Cainan, Jaslyn, Elinowy, Martin and Rhiannon had helped load the wounded onto the cart and then had started the long journey back home. Rhiannon and two of her three remaining dwarven guards rode their small horses, with Elinowy on the fourth horse that had belonged to her deceased guard. Cainan and Jaslyn rode the horses they had arrived on.

The sun reached its zenith as they arrived. Captain Landry gave quick orders to take the miners to the Chantry so they could receive some much-needed medical attention before they were escorted back home. Then, turning around, she eyed critically the small group of civilians and her one rogue guard.

"I do not approve of vigilantes," she said, in a quiet but steely voice. "Your actions today had a positive outcome, luckily, but they could have had terrible consequences. I expect more of responsible Jader gentry, Grey Wardens, Chantry sisters..." her hard gaze spared none of them. "...and most of all my own men." Her final look at Martin was positively glacial. "I do not have the authority to punish *most* of you, but I do ask you, should you ever find yourselves in similar circumstances, to report to the guard first -" she glanced at Jaslyn, " - and *not* act on your own. I trust nothing like this will ever happen again."

Jaslyn glanced at Cainan and rolled her eyes. She was barely listening to Landry drone on. She'd had her fill of that particular type of human before she became a Grey Warden. Landry was the kind that took credit for her underlings' hard work then punished them for the remainder of her own ineptitude. The guard captain got caught with her knickers around her ankles for all of Jader to see, and now she was yelling at everyone else, blaming the people who did her job for her.

Cainan chuckled at Jaslyn, audibly enough that he was certain that the guard captain had heard him, but didn't care to look. Expecting *more* of Orlesian gentry...? She was clearly setting herself up for disappointment.

Technically, Martin thought, his friends *had* reported to the Guard - him. He was wise enough not to say that out loud though. At this point there was not much to do but bow his head and take his punishment gracefully.

"However, what's done is done. I will ask you all to give statements, when you feel able but preferably within a day, while the recollection is still fresh in your minds. Until then you are free to go, Monsieur Sauvage, Warden."

Jaslyn had more than enough of the arrogant bully of a city guard captain. "You forget the limitations of your authority, guard captain. I am a Grey Warden, and not your underling. I will make *my* report

to Warden Commander Luca Duclos and Lady Seryl. And you can be certain that I will report, in explicit detail, the utter and complete *incompetence* of the Jader City Guard under your leadership. You spectacularly *failed* to protect and defend the citizens of Jader from torture, enslavement, and exploitation. Look at these people. Look how they suffered because you sat on your arse and ignored the disappearances and abuse going on for weeks right under your indifferent pompous nose, and did *nothing*. These people would still be suffering if not for the heroism of *exactly one* city guard and his friends. And you know it just as well as these poor people."

Jaslyn flicked the reins of her mount and trotted toward the stables.

Cainan watched as Jaslyn lifted up in the stirrups and trotted off, and stared for a moment before sniggering.

"Well put," he added, even though Jaslyn was now well out of earshot. Still in focus, though, as he kept his eyes on her; hells, but the woman could even make storming off seem sexy. He took a sharp intake of breath before continuing. "And - as many of your guards from the docks can attest, any statement I give will be marred by my penchant for extravagant lies and seeing the veins pop as you untangle them," he said, his tone the epitome of noble privilege. He could have stuck his nose in the air, but he felt the tone *implied* nicely enough that it was. "If that sounds like fun for you, feel free to drop by my apartments - but if you do, wear something revealing and bring a bottle of wine; I wouldn't want the neighbours to think I'd gone soft, or... *upstanding*," he finished, with a mock shudder. He flashed her a smirk and heeled into the horse gently to take off to a canter, aiming to catch up with Jaslyn. "Ladies," he said in mock salute as he drifted past the main group of guards, most of whom were notably men.

Captain Landry's expression grew more and more sour as she was snubbed by the Grey Warden and mocked by that womanizing nobleman. She might have pointed out that a Grey Warden's purview was limited to Blights, of which none were expected anytime soon, and nobleman or not this womanizing fop still would have to answer to her in front of the court, if she deemed it necessary. But rather than yell after them in an undignified manner she said nothing. She was not interested in face, or ego, or empty threats ; only in what she could, or could not do. And while the Grey Warden was out of her reach, Monsieur Sauvage would get a visit from her guards whether he liked it or not.

"Now, mademoiselle... Cadash, was it ?" She turned her attention to Rhiannon, taking in her colourful outfit and jewelry. There was no hiding that the young dwarf was not from around here. "I would like to hear more about your involvement in this... misadventure. If you can spare me a moment." Though she remained courteous, it was more an order than an invitation.

Rhiannon had been listening and had been smiling the whole time. She liked to stay quiet when others talked. It is a great way to learn about others. She looked to Captain Landry when the woman asked about her involvement. She gave the Captain a warm somewhat mischievous grin. "Well Captain Landry, I had met these two here, (motions to Elinowy, Martin), on the road when I was on my way to meet with Roxa. I had a business meeting scheduled with the woman. We had discussed

price and she took me on a tour of the facility. I was down in the mines when all hell broke loose. Then Roxa threatened to kill me. I decided that it wasn't my time to return to the stone. So I returned her to the stone." Rhi let out a bit of a wicked laugh. "Anything else you need to know there Mon-Capitan?"

Landry did not look amused. "So you confess to killing Roxa, your former business partner. Did she only *threaten* or did she actually *try* to kill you ?"

The captain stared at Rhiannon as she spoke, taking note of her young age, her colourful clothes and the weapons she carried.

Rhiannon listened quietly as the Captain pretty much accused her of murder. Well manslaughter at the very least. Without missing a beat Rhi shifted on her horse so that she could lift her shirt high enough to show the wounds that Roxa had inflicted. "First of all, my dear Captain. Roxa was not my business partner. She had contacted my mother and myself to see if we could arrange a shipping contract. Our talks had not concluded when everything went down. (pulling her blouse up to show the long slice across her stomach) I would say that I am justified in defending myself against an attacker." She lowered her shirt and smiled brightly at the Captain.

"And what exactly was your business with Roxa ?" Landry pressed. She had not missed the fact that Rhiannon had only turned against Roxa when her own life had been in danger, not because she cared about the miners' plight. She wondered if the young dwarf had been aware all along of Roxa's operation. If so, she was much less innocent than she wanted to appear ; but without proof, there was little Landry could do about it.

Rhi gave a small sigh as they rode along. This woman was starting to ask question that didn't need to be answered. Well not completely anyway. "Like I said before Captain. I came to bargain for a shipping contract. My mother and I own the Night's Kiss. We haul cargo where you want it to go. As long as it is legal and the price is right." She paused for a moment then continued. "Understand Captain. I had no idea as to what this Roxa woman was doing here. As for everything else. The woman must have thought that I was in with the workers, or had decided that my offer wasn't to her liking. Either way, she struck first. I struck last. As for what she was doing. Once I realized what was happening. I had planned on coming straight to the guards , after leaving the mine, to tell them/you what I had seen. (pause) Like any decent person, I couldn't and would not have stood by and let this happen." She smiled warmly at Captain Landry.

Landry did not believe Rhiannon for a second. Roxa had run her little operation for weeks under her nose, without being found out ; she wouldn't trust just anyone. If she'd taken the risk of inviting Rhiannon to see the operation for herself, she must have known she wasn't going to tattle to the law.

Then again, Roxa was dead, so her judgment could be questioned. She'd clearly miscalculated. Even so, this Rhiannon would bear watching.

"I'm pleased to see you're an upstanding citizen," Landry said, without bothering to pretend she actually believed it. Her smile looked like she had recently regurgitated darkspawn blood. "I'm going to ask you to give your testimony, and to not leave town until our enquiry is completed. In the meantime..." she turned to look at the Chantry Sister. She had doubts about her as well, especially since she hadn't been notified of the arrival of any new Sisters in town.

Rhi heard the Captains tone and knew that she didn't completely believe her. It wasn't the first time and wouldn't be the last time that Rhi wouldn't be believed. She gave the Captain a big smile.

"Sister Elinowy, I have sent word to the Chantry of your presence. One of my guards will escort you, so that you may safely arrive." The captain's eye twitched slightly as she stared at Elinowy's outfit. "Someone give the sister a jacket."

Audrey, who was standing nearby, wordlessly shrugged off her jacket and handed it over to Elinowy.

Elinowy took the offered jacket and quickly wrapped it around herself hoping to retain some level of decency in the process. "Bless you Captain. Bringing me to the Chantry is unnecessary. But as you have notified them, I had best check in. Would it be possible to have Constable Josceran escort me? I have benefited from his care these last few days, and would appreciate someone with whom I am familiar escorting me in my current condition," she said with the authority of one established in the Chantry.

Jaslyn had slowed her mount to a walk as she neared the stables and looked over her shoulder at Cainan. "Even with the mine workers freed, I still have a bad feeling about the whole situation," she said without preamble as she swung out of the saddle. "An operation on that scale... *someone* on the city guard *had* to be taking bribes to block any investigation. At the moment, all evidence points to Landry. I'd like to visit with those supposed vigilante friends of yours."

Cainan chuckled at that, seeing as he had only met them from attempting to flirt with the revered sister a couple of days before, and yet now the guard captain would be writing them under 'known associates' in the file he imagined she had on him. "Well, that can be arranged; Kalian's family runs the Raven's Roost, it's one of the bars near the docks district," he added, nodding back to the group. "Though I should probably say I know them only a little, I fear the good Captain overestimates my connection to them," he added. That said, a group willing to dive head first into an illegal mining operation seemed like good friends to have. He clicked the reins and the horse picked up the pace, as the road towards the stable evened out.

Jaslyn followed, walking her mare into the stable to hand off to a groom. "What of your friends, Felix and Harlan? Will they be all right? If there's anything I can do - help confront Richelieu, find Robertson, whatever - I'll be there." Jaslyn fixed him with a sultry smile. "And of course I'll be wanting more games of wicked grace."

Cainan was genuinely touched, before the thought of additional games made him feel decidedly eager to return home. "Oh, I'm *always* up for a game," he replied, remembering their night of play fondly. But he let that sit for a moment and returned to the rest of what she had said. "Felix will be fine, he basically bounces. Always falling around the deck, I'm amazed every time he makes it back to port. Harlan... I don't know. If I'm honest, the wounds will heal but the scars might linger. Harlan has always been one to keep as much sky above him as possible. They were kept down there for... well, long enough that they didn't know how long." He sighed, thinking back to the two men collapsing in the sunlight. They had been horribly pale. "I *will* be going after Robertson. Felix and Harlan... they suffered. But he *murdered* Julanna. And that's a score that needs to be settled."

"Julana's brother lives in the Jader alienage and will want to know what happened to her," said Jaslyn. "You're welcome to go with me when I report to Hahren Liriel. We can call on him together."

The elf turned toward the sound of more horses arriving at the stables, to see the dwarf Rhiannon and her two dwarven guards. As far as Jaslyn knew, the pretty dwarf had been the only one to offer the rightful mine owners any kind practical help with their current predicament. "Rhiannon," Jaslyn called out in welcome. "Cainan, did you meet Rhiannon? Her mother is the captain of the *Night's Kiss*."

Rhi looked over when she got down off her horse to the woman who had mentioned her name. A wide warm smile crossed her face when she saw it was the pretty one who had been in the house with the mine owners. She walked over, with that sea sway in her steps. "Jaslyn." Her tone warm, inviting and suggestive. Just like her smile. She looked to the man who Jaslyn had spoken to. She reached out her hand and smiled. Though this was more businesslike. "Hello Cainan. It is nice to meet you." She eyed him up and down briefly, then gave him a wink. "Very nice."

Cainan gave a mock wave of pshaw, as he returned her appreciative gaze, if only to be polite.

Jaslyn returned the dwarf's flirtatious smirk, then her expression became somber when she saw Rhiannon's two men and their four horses, one riderless. "I understand you lost a man. I offer my deepest condolences to you and his family." The elf looked to Cainan, wondering if he would mention his friends, Felix and Harlan, recovering sailors.

Rhi turned her attention back to Jaslyn when she mentioned Rhi's fallen guard. Her demeanor changed a little as did her tone. "Yes, thank you. He was one of my personal guard. He will be missed. I will have to inform his family. They will be well compensate for their loss." She took another moment before she spoke again. "So I need a drink. Where is a good place." She looks again to Jaslyn.

Cainan stroked the neck of the horse, thinking on her lost man. "I believe some of us will be at the Raven's Roost bar once we get back to town; you and your men would be welcome, I'm sure," he added, looking back over his shoulder. "So you're a sailor? Are you based out of Jader, or just passing through?" he asked, wondering if Harlan and Felix would *want* him to be volunteering them



for a crew they knew nothing about, especially given recent events; they had been taken from their crew, and it had disintegrated as a result. Even worse, their captain, the man who was supposed to have their back, let it happen. He'd have to talk with them, but it was good to get to know this Rhiannon, if only to potentially introduce them later and see if they got on.

Rhi looked to Cainan and gave him a nod. "Yes, a sailor I am. As for being based out of Jader, we are. Sorta. We have our own dock site, warehouse and office, though it has only been a month. My mother and I are expanding from our home base. I just struck a deal with the mine owners today so we now have more of a stake in Jader. I personally plan on staying in port for awhile. This is my first time here. Mother picked me up from home before docking the other day." She sent her two of her guards off along with the extra horse. She looked between Jaslyn and Cainan, "So what does a good looking dwarf have to do to get a drink around here?" This said with a mischievous light hearted tone.

Jaslyn grinned. "We're headed to the Raven's Roost now. Come with us. I think we've all earned a celebratory drink or... several."

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## The Talk

**Posted on 21 May 2021 @ 11:00am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)**

**Edited on on 02 Jul 2021 @ 12:56pm**

**4,047 words; about a 20 minute read**

**Mission:** [Lore's Labour's Lost](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 18th - midday

Martin was all too relieved to escape the scathing eyes of his superior, and grateful to Sister Elinowy for this opportunity to slip away before another tongue-lashing occurred. Captain Landry had a way with words.

The streets of Jader looked inordinately cheerful in the midday sunlight. People were already hanging up decorations and the enticing smell of sweetcakes wafted through the streets, reminding Martin inopportunistly that he hadn't eaten since... was it lunch yesterday? No, actually, it had been breakfast. No wonder he was starving.

If Sister Elinowy was hungry she did not show it. She had gathered the scraps of her shirt under her borrowed vest to protect what she could of her modesty but there was no way of hiding entirely the torn, bloodied garment. Some people stared - some even leered - hastily turning away when Martin glowered at them. He must look like he'd had a really bad day because people cut him a wide berth.

"Are you alright, sister ?" Martin asked, when the silence had dragged on for a bit too long.

While still a stranger to much of Jader, Elinowy could see the streets becoming more familiar looking as they neared the tavern. The onlookers and gawkers and even the decorations for the forthcoming festivities passed unnoticed by her. Her mood becoming darker the nearer to the Raven they came. While much of Jader may now look to them as champions of virtue, she felt defeated. She had no notion of how to deal with Kalian in a way that was just and merciful. She owed him her life. She should seek the counsel of her Sisters, yet she had failed to alert the guard to the presence of an apostate in their community. So was she to add deceiver to the litany of sins growing inside her. The sister turned her head up to look at Martin. "I apologize, there has been much in the last day or two to consider. Thank you for stopping by so I can pick up my robes."

"Oh - yes, of course," Martin said, just a second too late to seem natural. Inside he winced. He wasn't ready to face Kalian yet but when he did, he didn't think they could postpone that little talk for much longer.

Eli looked at Martin quizzically. In all of her confusion, he was also a witness that kept his silence. He alone was a confederate that understood. "Do you think he fears us? He wouldn't even ride with us back into town, to his own home?" she said with deep regret.

"Fear us...?" Martin echoed, surprised. He hadn't really thought of that. The notion of a mage being frightened felt foreign and yet... Elinowy may be right. Kalian had a lot of things to lose - not just for himself, but his family as well. "I don't know. I think he just didn't want to draw more attention to himself." He grimaced. "That's probably for the best considering the reaming we just got. I don't think I want the captain's attention on Kalian." Saying that made him realize just how far he'd got. This was an apostate - an apostate ! - and neither of them had breathed a word of it to the proper authorities. The thought made him dizzy.

What am I doing...? If anyone finds out... pleading ignorance won't get me out of this one.

Martin thought of Gauvain, the way he'd look at him if he knew. And then, unbidden, the image of Kalian replaced him. Battered and tired but still using his magic to help others.

"What about you ?" he asked, stopping to look at Elinowy in the eyes. "Are you afraid of him ?"

The sister stopped thinking about about her feelings on the matter. "...afraid... would not be the correct word. Fearful perhaps, of what is is or could become... but I... trust him. Is that wrong?" she genuinely didn't know the answer to that. Her teachings said yes, but her heart said no. She was seriously torn.

The inn was not exactly on their way to the Chantry, but not an excessively long detour either. It took only a few more minutes (and some more oggling of Elinowy's curvaceous body) until they made it to the Raven's Roost. The intricately carved door looked the same yet, somehow, different. More ominous. The carved birds stared at Martin with their wooden eyes, and he looked away before

knocking firmly on the door.

Elinowy suppressed the urge to run away from the forthcoming confrontation. May Kalian would not be home. Then she merely needed to apologize to his sister for the destruction of her property. Her hands patted the vest over the shredded rags she wore. The walk to the door of the Inn seemed to take an eternity. Elinowy looked sheepishly over to Martin, hoping the guard might take the lead in entering the establishment.

The temptation to turn around was great, and if Elinowy hadn't been there Martin would probably have taken the coward's way out. But she was there, and needed her clothes, and running wouldn't solve this. Only make it worse. Bracing himself, Martin turn the handle.

As Martin and Eliinowy got close to the tavern's front door, they could hear a raised female voice. The precise words were too muffled by solid wooden walls to understand, but the gist was clear. The woman was delivering a brutal litany of reproach and chastisement, that resolved and increased in volume when they opened the outer door.

The woman – now recognizable as Tessa - shouted, "Of all the stupid, idiotic –" something crashed "- you think those people will be grateful for your help? They don't care, and you know it- " Tessa stopped shouting as the tavern's inner door opened and Martin and Elinowy stepped inside.

The Raven's Roost common room was empty of people, except for Kalian, his father, and Tessa. Cook peeked out from the kitchen door. Kalian sat at a table in the middle of the room, a tankard in front of him, still wearing the filthy and blood-spattered clothes from the mine and looking utterly dejected and miserable. Kalian's father was next to him in his wheeled chair, one hand on Kalian's shoulder, the other covering his face – possibly in prayer or hiding tears, or both. Tessa had been pacing next to an over-turned chair, but she stood still, folded her arms, and glared at Kalian's two supposed friends. She called out, "Cook, please bring another tankard of ale and a pot of tea." Tessa sighed then, and added, "And whatever is leftover from breakfast."

Martin felt like an intruder. Kalian looked awful, and he wished there had been time for his family to at least talk it out. Now he regretted not suggesting they get a change of clothes elsewhere for Sister Elinowy, but it was too late, so he met Tessa's glare with as neutral an expression as he could muster. It was awkward, accepting her hospitality, but refusing it would be worse.

"Good morning," he said, feeling the absurdity of the words before he'd finished speaking them. "I apologize for the interruption. Sister Elinowy needs to change, and..." his eyes met Kalian's, or tried to. "...I guess we should talk. If now's a good time."

Elinowy sheepishly follow Martin. "Blessings upon your house." she said uneasily. She felt speechless for words. He lowered her head and approached Tessa, opening the vest revealing the shredded, bloodstained outfit underneath. "I am so sorry..."

Tessa's expression softened immediately both seeing the sister's condition and assuming her

expression of sorrow was for the predicament her brother could be in. "Maker's breath, Elinowy, what a state you're in! Your clothing is washed and waiting for you in my father's room next to the kitchen. Cook is heating bathwater for Kalian, but you shall have it first."

Kalian looked up at his two friends, marginally relieved that they had interrupted Tessa's tirade. Cook brought out a tray with the aforementioned tea and second tankard of ale, along with cold sausage rolls, bread, and cheese. No pain au chocolat.

He sighed, then leaned toward his father, kissed his damp cheek, and whispered, "It'll be all right." Sitting up straight, Kalian said, "Father, Tessa, Cook, will you excuse us?" The three exchanged weighted looks but didn't protest, then headed toward the kitchen, where Kalian had little doubt they'd all be eavesdropping. "Please sit down Elinowy, Martin. I'm ready to have that talk."

Elinowy kept a practiced serene demeanor on her face, inwardly trembling. At least he was ready, she thought. She was nowhere close and rather wished for the bath and her clothes, not knowing if they would still be available after 'the talk'.

It would have been easier if they'd received less of a welcome, Martin thought as he pulled a chair for Sister Elinowy, then took one for himself. If Kalian's family hadn't been so damn nice. The whole rhetoric behind locking mages up was them being a danger to society, but there was no sense of danger there. Instead all Martin could see was a loving, worried family with strong enough ethics not to kick him and the Sister out. They knew either of them could be the arm of the Chantry and yet... he shook his head, willing the turmoil and confusion to go away. The world used to be simpler.

An awkward silence settled between them. Warm sunlight filtered through the windows, lighting up the golden tones of the wooden furniture. There was something cozy and welcoming about this place - not exactly the abode of a sinister apostate.

"I have to admit, you had me completely fooled," Martin said finally. It was a simple statement of fact, devoid of bitterness. "You're good at hiding what you are."

And yet, Kalian had thrown all of that away for the sake of others. That thought kept circling in Martin's head, and intruding where sternness should have.

Elinowy's passive face cracked for a moment into a smile. "Indeed, I felt that Martin was the Apostate." her smile faded immediately after realizing she just name Kalian as the Apostate he was.

Kalian responded with a small, sad smile, and picked up a sausage roll gesturing for Martin and Elinowy to dig in. They must be as hungry as him. He chewed with gusto and washed it down with a gulp of ale.

"It's true, I should have confided in you when we knew the conflict in the mine would become violent." Kalian sighed, ruefully. "I didn't set out to fool either of you. I simply didn't use magic in your presence, just as a responsible swordsman keeps his blade sheathed. But then, I had no choice. My

skills were needed and I had to do the right thing." He couldn't let Elinowy die, and though the outcome had been less certain, Martin might have fallen against the qunari without his help. "I'm the same man, and I think of you both as my friends. Perhaps what has changed is the way you think of me."

Eating sausage rolls seemed a little bit inappropriate while discussing life-changing issues but Martin's stomach reminded him that he hadn't eaten in a day, and the smell of the food was mouth-watering. Allowing himself only a brief sigh of annoyance at Kalian's never-ending kindness, he helped himself to one of the golden, crispy rolls. If Kalian was trying to make them feel bad about possibly turning him in... well, he was succeeding.

"I don't blame you for hiding what you are," Martin said after he'd swallowed a mouthful. "I'd probably have done the same if I was..." he waved his hand vaguely, unable to say the word. He'd heard it spoken too often, with too much hatred, to use it lightly. "It's impressive that you've managed to keep it hidden for so long."

Impressive, and hinted at a high level of control. But the law was the same, regardless. Martin frowned, staring at his half-eaten roll as if he'd find answers there.

"And fortunate, I suppose. For me, anyway. If you hadn't been... a mage..." once again he couldn't bring himself to say apostate, "...this fight would probably have gone very differently. A lot of people would have died. It seems unfair - " Martin cut himself off. He wasn't even sure where he was going with this, or what he wanted to say. It seems unfair that your punishment for saving lives should be life in prison. It was. It was unfair. That thought was like a revelation, but not one that eased Martin's quandary in any way.

Kalian's lips tugged into a sad smile. He wondered if Martin had any idea how condescending he sounded. Fairness. It served the Chantry's interests to promote fear and hatred of all mages and the belief that fairness did not apply to such as him. Was Martin the kind of man who thought for himself and lived by his own principles and by the Maker's grace? Or was he a man controlled by dogma and laws designed to keep the merciless Chantry in power? Kalian expected he was about to find out.

The Sister did not partake of the food but did quietly sip her tea. "... if I had known before that you were a... mage, we would be having a very different conversation. I feel indebted to you and quite grateful, despite ...your mageness." she said awkwardly gathering her thoughts to sounds somewhat coherent. "Chantry teachings are quite clear. Magic is meant to be used under careful scrutiny. Too much power has twisted too many from the path of light. Fearsome powers are meant to be kept in the safety of a Circle. While these institutions were not necessarily ordained by Andraste, they keep to the intent we feel the maker would have wanted. It is a hard life. Not one most would choose. Have you maybe thought of not being magical?" it came out as awkwardly as if sounded, in that she really didn't want to accuse her friend, who had saved her life, of anything wrong, even though she knew the corrupting influence of magic in a person's life.

"Have you ever thought of just being shorter?" asked Kalian, with mild humor. He could see how Elinowy struggled with knowing he was a mage. He hoped that her grounding in the Chant and search for spiritual wisdom could lead her beyond the Chantry's propaganda.

"I am indeed fortunate that I was taught by an extremely skilled and disciplined instructor," said Kalian, responding to Martin's implied question. "My grandmother taught me out of love and a dedication to making certain I had complete control of my magic, so that I can protect myself, my loved ones, and everyone around me. She also taught me, among other things, the Chant of Light."

Kalian responded to Elinowy's statements. "The Chant of Light says that magic must serve people, not rule over them. Nowhere does it say that magic is evil. Nowhere in the Chant of Light does it say that mages must be caged and tortured in servitude to the Chantry. Nowhere does it say that mages must be hated and feared, and denied the shelter of pity and compassion. The Chantry instigated those teachings in service to its own power. The Chantry uses templars to control mages, and uses lyrium to control templars."

The statement stung. She could see how some might see the Chantry's actions like he was saying, but it was all to protect people and the mages themselves. She gently closed her eyes. "Magic is not evil. And the Maker did intend for magic to serve people. Power is the great corrupter. In its balance, Magic is a gift to all, until one uses it for Power. Strength such as the Templars, is wonderful and meant to serve the weak, but when used for power it becomes wrong and unjust. The Chantry is not immune to the influence of power. Without Love and compassion, the Chantry might well be any noble house playing their games. Each blessing must be tempered by control. Sometimes the controls are not just. We live in a world fallen from the Maker's will. So we try to keep the blessings of the maker in check so as not to fall from his grace. Mages have Circles, Templars have Lyrium and the Chantry has Seekers to keep its own passions in balance. None of us are trusted on our own. When we feel we have control we lose it.

Kalian, you know each time you open yourself to the fade, there is the potential for possession. Not all things from beyond the veil are good and you invite them into yourself when you use magic. That is why the Circle protects its own. I only want what is best for you and keeps you safe." She spoke with the sincerity of one who believed what she was saying. "In the end we all have the Chant and its directing us to the Maker." she smiled at Kalian.

Martin listened silently to the theological debate between Sister Elinowy and Kalian. Kalian's view was cynical but not fundamentally incorrect. It was all a bit more complicated than that, of course, but the deeply intricate roots of the Chantry's beliefs and teachings did not change the facts that mages had to live with. Martin's thoughts wandered towards Tevinter. The Templars there had no smiting power, but abominations were dealt with swiftly and efficiently all the same. By mages.

The problem was that, if Martin accepted that Kalian could control himself and not be a danger to others, that would mean opening the door to a lot of uncomfortable thoughts and questions about how truly righteous the Chantry was.

I kind of opened that door years ago, though...

Thinking back, maybe that decision had been made back when he'd left the Order. And when he'd lied to his superior, earlier today. And when he'd come here to talk, rather than with a squad of Templars. A sentimental fool, that's what my father would say. His mother would approve though, if she'd been still alive ; and she knew better than most what life was like for those suspected of apostasy.

"Sister Elinowy," he said, taking advantage of a lull in her conversation with Kalian. "Kalian has managed to keep demons at bay for many years. On his own. I believe he's earned at least the benefit of the doubt. I... for one... believe he is able to keep himself safe without interference from the Chantry." He looked at Kalian. "I was shocked to find out the truth and I'll admit I needed a bit of time to wrap my mind around it. But... you had good reason to keep your secret, yet you gave yourself away for the sake of others. And for my sake, too. So... thank you."

Some years ago Kalian had promised himself that he wouldn't apologize for the way the Maker made him, but to hear Martin thank him and express his willingness to give him the benefit of the doubt, filled the mage with a deep, warm affection. His eyes welled with unshed tears and it was all he could do to control his urge to kiss the man. "Thank you, Martin. I'm sorry if this puts you in a difficult position with the Jader guard. I swear that I will continue to demonstrate your belief in me is not misplaced."

"Elinowy," said Kalian gently, turning to the sister, "I appreciate this is difficult for you as well. But truly, I don't want power. Do you know what I really want? Something much better than power. I want love. A family. But... I know that as an apostate, that is too much to hope for. Now, I'm a part of my sister's family, and a member of my community. In a Circle tower I wouldn't even have the freedom to love another person." He paused and decided not to share that he would die before he went to a mage prison. "I ask that if you decide to turn me in, you warn me first, so that I can prepare myself, and say my goodbyes."

The Chantry sister reached out her arm to touch Kalian's hand. "The Maker wants us to love each other. That is what this life is about. We are to work together to bring glory to the Maker... that would imply that we need to be responsible to one another. To keep each other aligned to the Maker's will." she paused, gathering her thoughts. This was not the way the Chantry taught for handling mages, but this was a man, not just a mage, a man who had saved her life. "If you are willing, I will take it upon myself to meet with you regularly to guide your spiritual journey. Perhaps the close scrutiny of one within the Chantry would suffice. Should a day come where it would be necessary for you to join a circle, I will definitely allow you the time you need to spend with your family." Her pulse accelerated, she was trying to do the will of the Maker in showing mercy. But she was clearly forsaking the edicts of the Chantry council. She was uncertain what to do. She looked kindly into Kalian's eyes, squeezing his hand. "And thank you for my life and your friendship." The sister smiled genuinely at him, but there was a distinct tension in her eyes.

Kalian bowed his head in disappointment and reminded himself that Elinowy couldn't help her

prejudice. Her beliefs were the product of over a thousand years of Chantry hubris and cruelty. She assumed that because she was not a mage and he was, that she was morally superior. That as a Chantry sister she had the right to take control of his life, to decide if he lived or died. But he would not accept captivity, even to one Chantry sister.

He nodded and met Elinowy's gaze. "I will meet with you regularly, if that is what it takes to convince you I'm not a danger to those around me," said Kalian. "I will share my spiritual journey with you, and I equally look forward to you sharing your spiritual journey with me."

If Martin was fully honest with himself, he was a little bit relieved by Sister Elinowy's offer. Not because he didn't trust Kalian, but because it alleviated a little bit his guilt at breaking the very law he was supposed to uphold. Still, he couldn't find it in himself to regret his choice. It felt like the right thing to do.

Does it mean the Chantry is wrong about how it deals with mages ? Tevinter isn't full of abominations... somehow they manage to control it. But... not every mage can be trusted like Kalian.

Out loud he said, "I'm glad we could work things out." He looked at Sister Elinowy and Kalian, the most unlikely of friends - and yet their differences made their strength. "How about we drink to friendship then ? And," he looked at Kalian with an only slightly pained grin, "I promise not to send my Templar friends here anymore."

The sister patted Kalian's arm as she slowly took her hand back. "I pray the Maker may bless us and our journey together. I am hopeful it might be a new ministry for Chantry houses all over Thedas." Elinowy trusted in love and that the Maker would honor this derailment of normal protocols. She cared deeply for Kalian's soul and his aspirations to give to his family and community. She also prayed she was doing the right thing." She took up her teacup and lifted it to Martin's salute. "May the Maker bless us all."

"Thank you, both of you. And my family thanks you to." That had gone better than it might have. Kalian lifted his tankard. "To friends!"

Kalian drained the last of the ale in his tankard just as the Raven's front door opened to reveal Rhiannon, Cainan, and an elf he'd seen at the mine but not spoken to. Saved from additional awkwardness by the arrival of more people.

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