

# Dragon Age: Legacy June 2021 to July 2023

## 2. Summerday La Fête

The city of Jader celebrates the week-long festival of Summerday.

Morning and evening Chantry services. Feasting, drinking, blessings, and dancing around bonfires. It all culminates in a parade through town. Good times. What can go wrong?

### The Gang is All Together Part 1

**Posted on 01 Jun 2021 @ 12:18pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Rogue Harlowe Dulmi](#)**

**2,981 words; about a 15 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 18th – afternoon

OOO: After 'Welcome Back' and 'The Talk'

Jaslyn left the stables south of the Jader town proper accompanied by Cainan and Rhiannon. She was tired after everything they'd been through but definitely in a celebratory mood. Jaslyn knew she should check-in at the Grey Warden compound near the stables, but she wanted that drink.

Rhi had agreed to go along to get a drink. She walked closer to Jaslyn than Cainan. She like the mans look but it was Jaslyn that had caught her eye. The woman was not only sexy but seemed like she would have a good sense of humor.

Cainan needed a drink; he kept his carefree, jovial facade in place so well he almost convinced himself, but deep down, in a part of himself he knew existed but rarely acknowledged, he knew the fallout from the mine would ripple outward into his life for a long time to come. His responsibilities to Felix and Harlan, his responsibilities to Julanna's family... His responsibility towards Javier. He was going to have to do all of it, to at least some degree; these were not the family commitments he was so happy to let slide, or the societal norms he was so happy to remain contrary to. These would be necessary, and that part of him wouldn't stop tugging at him till he had done them.

He noticed the dwarf, pretty as she was in a rough way, maintaining a closer step with Jaslyn. He wasn't a jealous man; far from it, in fact, as he had been more than happy to share lovers in the past, but it was a new development; for once in his life, he decided not to inject himself into a potentially sexy situation.

The three of them passed through the craft guild district, where the hammers of the smith's

apprentices could be heard ringing against anvils, crafters sang call and answer tunes to maintain the rhythm of their looms, and bright just-dying cloth hung to dry. Although Jaslyn had come with Cainan to the Raven's Roost before going to the mine, their visit had been brief. Just long enough for the proprietress to tell them her brother and friends were already at the mine.

As the three passed the craft district Rhi heard the fall of the hammers. It was a noise that every dwarf knew. No matter their chosen life. It was in their bones. The rhythm of the fall, "clang-ping-ping-ping. Clang-ping-ping-ping. Clang-ping-ping-ping." Rhi felt that rhythm in her as she slightly swayed to it as they continued to the Raven's Roost.

She pushed open the tavern's distinctive outer door, carved with the image of a Raven. Then Jaslyn paused, holding the inner door for her two companions. Inside, Cainan's three friends were sitting at a table laden with food that seemed to be leftover from breakfast, she didn't see any other tavern patrons. The three appeared to have been discussing something serious.

Kalian looked up at the new arrivals with a distinctly relieved expression and got to his feet. "Good to see you all. I'll bet you could use a drink."

Cainan grinned, following Jaslyn and Rhiannon in. The subtle scent of wood stained with ale and beer and sweat caught his nose, welcoming him back. Oh yes, he was going to need some drinks. "Three drinks, if you would - as large a tankard as you have, and whatever the ladies are having as well," he added, fully intending to drink the three himself. "These are on me," he added to his companions; he had two sovereigns in his pocket, and he fully intended to burn as much of it on food, booze and other distractions before the end of the day.

"Please do consider me the willing recipient of your generous endowment," said Jaslyn, with a salacious grin for Cainan.

Kalian gave the elf a curious once-over - Tessa had mentioned an elven Grey Warden with Cainan - then he hurried to the kitchen to fetch more ale.

Martin was pleased to see Cainan and Jaslyn ; he hadn't got the chance to thank them for their timely arrival yet, things had been a little bit chaotic at the mine. And Rhiannon's help had come in more than a little bit handy.

"Why don't you all take a seat ?" he said, waving at the empty chairs. His eyes felt gritty with lack of sleep and he still had to escort Elinowy to the Chantry, but he figured they had five minutes to thank their saviours.

Elinowy had remained fairly detached from the clean up at the mine. Her time had been spent on the sick and avoiding Kalian, she had not spoken to Cainan and his... companion. She put down her tea from the toast Martin had offered to their hesitantly proclaimed bonds of friendship. She smiled welcomingly at Cainan and Rhiannon before her eyes drifted onto... the elf. She had been so preoccupied by the ramifications of her talk with Kalian she had not even considered her

appearance. . This was most unbecoming of a devoted sister of the Chantry. She drew one hand over her chest in a vain attempt at modesty. Cainan and... the elf settled into the chairs, leaving Elinowy to sit directly looking at the elf. She turned her head so as not to make eye contact with the creature. "Msr. Sauvage, so good to see you again. We are in your debt for our escape from the mine." she said in greeting. "and to you Mistress Rhiannon. I am glad to see you are unharmed." The look returned from Cainan made her even more self conscious of her appearance. "I... ah... don't believe I was introduced to... your friend." she said courteously, turning her gaze back to the elf. "I am sister Elinowy Ursulas. Forgive my casual appearance."

Kalian returned from the bar with a tray of tankards full of ale, and began silently setting them in front of the new arrivals, plus a second round for Martin and himself.

Rhi had given Kalian and Martin a nod. Sitting with them Rhi got a drink. She sat down next to Jaslyn if she can, if not she will sit across from her. She listened as the Chantry Sister Elinowy thanked Sauvage and her. She raised her drink of ale and smiled warmly at the sister. "Sister please. There is not need of thanks. It was my pleasure to deal with someone who treated others like slaves. Besides, I made a great deal in the end."

Jaslyn smiled gratefully at Martin's invitation, and pulled up a chair ending up between Cainan and Rhiannon, and across the table from Martin and the tall red-headed human woman. In the busy organization of the caravan back to Jader, she had caught everyone's name, but not the dark man serving drinks. "A pleasure to officially meet you, sister Elinowy. My name is Jaslyn." With a sly glance at Cainan, Jaslyn wondered if there was a particular reason for the sister's disapproving expression, and why Elinowy still wore immodest rags... not that Jaslyn could complain about the view. She had the sense that there was... something... between Elinowy and Cainan. And if there was, well... she'd made no exclusive claim to Cainan's charms and with her stiff posture Elinowy looked like she could use the kind of release a man of Cainan's considerable skill could deliver.

"Indeed, Rhiannon here," Jaslyn slapped the dwarf on the back with warm approval, "offered the mine owners the opportunity to get the mine up and running as a *legitimate* business. With workers being paid fair wages, it could make quite a difference to the poor of Jader looking for work. And I've no doubt you'll make a profit as well." Jaslyn raised her tankard to Rhiannon, then drank.

Martin mirrored Jaslyn's toast to Rhiannon. He wasn't quite sure how he felt about the pretty dwarf yet, but when she'd had to make a choice she had sided with them, that counted for something.

"Some steady employment for the refugees would definitely make a difference. And even a poor vein of silverite should yield enough profit to make everyone happy. I think it will benefit Jader as a whole." He looked at Jaslyn. "And we have you to thank for that, as well. I very much appreciate your and Cainan's timely arrival."

Rhi gave Jaslyn a big smile when she slapped her back. Her attention turned to Martin when he spoke up. She raised her glass to both comments and downed her drink. Setting the mug upside down she motioned for the waitress to bring her another one. As she did she grinned. "Tis nothing.

Small vein of silverite or not, it is not so much that I am looking to make a profit. I believe that people should be able to earn a decent living. If the mine dries up then those working will be given a good severance and offers of other employment with either myself, my mother or with someone else."

At the rate his friends were drinking, and with Cainan paying, Kalian and his sister gave up delivering ale in tankards – each of which would need to be washed - and Kalian helped his sister deliver pitchers of ale to their group, so his friends could pour it themselves, and he could stay in his seat long enough to drink too. "That's good to hear, Rhiannon." Kalian himself was planning to stop in to see the pretty dwarf and ask about what she'd said in the mine about working for her.

Cainan had to feel good about that part - less poor people, or rather more money in their hands, was always going to be a good thing. He noticed a cool demeanour from the good sister, but put it down to her less than formal attire and the associated embarrassment therein, and took his seat at their adjacent table. "Yes, thank you Rhiannon - *that* is the best possible outcome for the mine; I had feared it would simply fall into the hands of another gang and the cycle would just repeat," Cainan mused, raising the newly delivered tankard to his new dwarven ... friend? Things had changed so fast in the last few days that he was happy to forgo the usual dance of acquaintance to friend for all present. As it was, some of his oldest friends had recently created a space in his heart that he was happy to fill with new experiences.

Jaslyn nodded to Rhiannon. "Next time you go on out to the mine to check on things, I wouldn't mind going along. I didn't see the mine itself, and I'm curious. Silverite is often used in weapons for fighting darkspawn."

Rhi gave a nod to Cainan. She liked the young man. "I would not have allowed that to happen. I have plans for the mine." She smiled, a bit mischievous though, but a smile none the less. She turned back to Jaslyn. "It would be my pleasure if you were to come along." Her smile warm and inviting. "Silverite is used in weapons against darkspawn. It is expensive to work with. Have to get the right mixture or the weapon is useless."

"Guard Captain Landry," said Jaslyn, addressing Martin, "She's a piece of work. You and your friends exposed what was happening in the mine, and freed all those people. Sure got her knickers in a bit of a suspicious twist. How much trouble are you in?"

"Hmm..." Martin grimaced. "I suppose it depends on your definition of what trouble is. I'll probably pull a few months of unpleasant assignments. Identifying corpses, night patrols in poor districts, you know, the stuff no one wants to do. But I'll live.

"Any chance you could sleep with her?" Cainan asked, bluntly. The looks that elicited caused him to shrug in his own defense, his hands open and facing the ceiling as if to show he had no ulterior motive. "What? Pretty sure she could use it, and might reduce the penalty of... what, doing your job?" Cainan asked, raising an incredulous eyebrow. "Serious question; would she *not* have given the go-ahead for a mission if you *had* brought it to her? With the evidence you would not have been

able to get without going there, I mean. I'm not entirely sure why you'd be in trouble beyond the good Captain just not having the chance to take credit for it."

Martin nearly spat out his beer, and found himself desperately coughing. He thought of the captain more as a mother figure than anything else, and the notion of sleeping with her felt disturbingly incestuous.

"The captain is, hum. Not my type." He admitted. "Anyway, she wasn't wrong. I should have planned for back-up. If you and Jaslyn had not showed up in such a timely manner... we might all be dead." That was a sobering thought. "Think of it this way... I went with a civilian and a Chantry sister, put us all in danger, and did not even had a few friends following us from afar. I should have thought this through better. I don't know if the captain would have approved it if I'd gone to her with what flimsy evidence we had... but she also has to deal with the politics of the job."

The fact was that the captain yelled a lot at Martin... but she also gave him a lot of leeway to do his job as he saw fit. And, while she might ostensibly have him on latrine cleaning duty, she had never penalized him in ways that would truly hurt.

Rhi sat quietly listening to those around her. She sipped at her drink as the conversation continued. Her smile it was getting to be interesting when Cainan commented about Martin sleeping with the captain. It was Martins response that made her laugh. "Oh now that would be a sight to see."

Kalian shook his head. "I heard Landry yelling at Martin, in front of the other guards. That woman is *mean*. I'm surprised she doesn't carry a whip."

"She probably does... at times," said Jaslyn, slyly. "Landry's the type. A politically ambitious dominatrix." She spoke thoughtfully, summing Landry up - at least in her own estimation. She'd write her report to her commander the next morning, after a good night's sleep. And other things... Jaslyn lifted her glass to new friends, and drank.

Martin bit back a smile as he returned the toast. It felt nice to have friends who had his back. The thought startled him ; he hadn't known these people for a very long time, and already he thought of them as friends. Then again... most of them had saved his life at least once already. An auspicious start to any friendship.

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The door to the tavern swings open, revealing a stout dwarven individual of dubious gender, but that's okay; that's just the way they like things to be. They are dressed in a simple leather studded brigandine over a quilted doublet, an undyed and roughspun cloak tossed over their shoulders. This dwarf surveys the Raven's Roost with a blue-eyed squint before their eyes settle upon the bar, and then the table of other patrons occupying the space. Intending to listen, the dwarf climbs up into one of the seats at the bar, and places down a handful of copper. Patrons often offer far more information than bartenders. Patrons, also, were normally drunk. But judging by the one introducing

herself as a Sister, something in them has doubts. They order a bowl of the house soup and a simple drink -- just some watery ale, nothing like home -- but remain otherwise quiet, their face towards their business so the others do not know of their eavesdropping.

After his serious conversation with Elinowy and Martin, Kalian slipped into his usual, gregarious demeanor he used to greet guests. His sister Tessa had served the dwarf already, but Kalian decided to approach them and introduce himself with a sincere, wide-mouthed grin. "Hello there, friend. I don't think I've seen you here before. I'm Kalian."

The dwarf in question casts their gaze up and down the human approaching them, one eyebrow lifted. It would seem this sort of environment is the sort that results in people coming up to complete strangers to ask them questions. As usual, however, Harlowe is unflappable. A small smirk lifts their cheek, pinches it with a dimple. This sort of half-smile was hardly genuine, but Harlowe knows one catches more flies with honey than vinegar -- some less pleasant sorts than others. "Harlowe Dulmi. But you can call me Harlowe, I suppose."

"A pleasure to meet you, Harlowe. I don't recall seeing you here before, are you new to Jader?" asked Kalian with sincere interest. "A group of us are drinking at that table over there, would you like to join us?"

"New indeed," the dwarf replies, taking a sip off the alcohol in front of them. "Just wandered through on the Imperial roads from the east."

They cast their gaze in the direction of the table nearby. While they would have been just fine listening from a distance, perhaps they'd learn more directly nearby. Or less, depending on how caution plays these sorts of individuals. Though, judging how Kailan just up and approached the prickly-looking strange dwarven individual who just wandered in, despite all shadiness to their appearance, they think "caution," for now, is just not in the others' vocabularies.

"Sure. Why not."

Kailan motioned Harlowe toward the tables with Martin, Elinowy, Rhiannon, Cainan, and the elven Grey Warden, and considered how they all might appear to the dwarven newcomer. "We're a friendly lot. Really."

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OOC: Continued in 'The Gang is All Together, Part 2'

## The Gang is All Together Part 2

Posted on 28 Jun 2021 @ 4:08pm by [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#) & [Mage Kalian Winter](#)

**1,401 words; about a 7 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 18th – afternoon

OOC: Continued from 'The Gang is All Together Part 1'

With a pause in the conversation while Kalian went to greet a newcomer to the tavern, Elinowy looked around the table. Two human, a dwarf, and an elf. Curious company, but so it went in cities. Elinowy was feeling a bit self-conscious as her companions picked up their tankards of ale. She was one certainly for a good celebration, but the goings-on of taverns were a bit different than sipping wine with the sisters at the Chantry. And she was a literal bloody mess in clothes that barely hung on to her at this point. Mercifully she felt a touch on her shoulder. She turned to see Tessa leaning over. Elinowy gave her a kind smile as the woman whispered in her ear, "Your bath is ready in the back room. Don't wait too long or it will grow cold."

It was a perfect moment to withdraw from an uncomfortable situation. She gently patted Tessa's hand. "Maker bless you," she said gratefully. Standing from the table she addressed the table. "Forgive me my friends, I need to clean up and get into something more presentable. Please enjoy your drinks. I will return in a bit." She turned and took Tessa's arm as she was guided to the family's private rooms and the awaiting bath.

Jaslyn looked up as the enigmatic redhead left the table, and when Cainan made no move to follow, she grinned. The elf didn't mind sharing the handsome nobleman, but she would also enjoy *having* him to herself later. "I presume you have a bath at your place, Cainan?"

Taking her tone, he leaned forward to leer at her a little bit over his tankard. "Oh, the *biggest* tub with the most wonderful scented oils from around the world. It's so big, you could almost be forgiven for thinking that it was designed for *two* people," he teased, his voice somewhere between innocence and absolute debauchery, though his eyes left no illusion to purity. "I can only imagine the Warden's bathing facilities are somewhat more martial by comparison, so you would *of course* be welcome to visit my bathtub *whenever you like*," he said, invitingly.

"What a thoughtful invitation," Jaslyn returned his lascivious smile. "I imagine that a two-person tub saves on the effort needed to heat water for two bathes. I do look forward to taking you up on your offer, Monsieur Sauvage."

Martin lifted an eyebrow at the obvious flirting. He would be surprised if those two didn't spend the night together. All due credit to their stamina.

"Is that invitation extended to everyone? You might find that bathtub a little bit crowded at the end of the day," he said teasingly. Not that Cainan and Jaslyn needed to worry about him joining them, he was going to collapse in his own bed as soon as Sister Elinowy was safely delivered at the Chantry. "Should I mention it to Captain Landry, since you've taken a liking to her?"

Jaslyn raised an eyebrow at Martin's suggestion. Perhaps the guardsman was not so straight-laced as she had assumed. Or Martin might simply be teasing his friend. "Guest invitations to Cainan's bathtub are of course up to Cainan... and which of his friends are feeling particularly *dirty*."

"I'm fairly consistent - if a guard wants in on my bathtub, they have to turn up with a bottle of wine and wearing something slutty so the neighbours don't think I've gotten boring. I don't mind sharing my bathtub with friends and like-minded individuals; if they also happen to be *dirty*, well... that's just a bonus." Cainan smirked, looking back to Jaslyn, and the obvious layer of dirt that had accumulated on both of them since their assault on the mine; they would *definitely* be needing that bath.

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Kalian had just returned to the table with his friends. "Martin, Cainan, and Rhiannon, this is Harlowe, they are new to Jader." He smiled at the elf sitting between Cainan and Rhiannon. "I don't think we've met. I'm-

Just then Kalian heard Elinowy's voice raised in alarm in the bathing room. Kalian ran to the back of the Raven's Roost to rescue her.

All the talk about baths made Rhi want to take one herself. Elinowy had already left to take one. She had finished her drink and had ordered another one when she heard Elinowy's raised voice. Without hesitation she slipped from her chair and made her way to the back.

Martin hesitated as Kalian and Rhiannon ran off. On one hand he didn't want to leave Elinowy unassisted - especially when she was supposed to be under his responsibility. On the other hand, there were already at least two people looking at her naked body, and he wasn't entirely convinced she'd appreciate a third pair of eyes. The inn was safe... and the Sister more than able to defend herself. Not to mention Kalian's hidden gift should be more than enough to dispose of... whatever it was that had startled Elinowy.

He sat back down, having reflexively stood when he'd heard the scream - a scream of indignation more than fear or pain, and looked at Jaslyn and Cainan.

Cainan looked towards the stairs, where Elinowy had disappeared, but meeting eyes with Martin, he relaxed as there were already two heading in that direction, and he knew all too well what happened when you intruded on a woman's bath without her consent; and Rhiannon seemed ready to dole out that particular punishment if necessary. He kept an ear out, though; any further disturbance after the departure of Kalian and Rhiannon would have him, Martin and Jaslyn heading towards it as well, he knew, and he could tell Martin had come to the same conclusion.

"Kalian can handle this, I think. Anyway, we'll probably need to get going as soon as Sister Elinowy is done with her bath. They'll be expecting us at the Chantry, and I don't think now's a good time to



bring any more attention to us by being late." He looked for Tessa, who was swerving between tables with a heavily-laden tray. "Tessa ? Might I bother you for the tab ?" He gave her a tentative smile.

Kalian would most likely gladly invite them, but Martin had no intention of taking advantage of his kindness. And he wanted Tessa to know that, too.

"Well now, this is a celebration of Kalian and his friends returning home safe," said Tessa, casting a critical eye over the accumulated empty tankards and pitchers Kalian had served. Kalian being a mage wasn't the only reason Tessa was the proprietress of the Raven and not her brother. She didn't want to charge them, but she didn't want Kalian's friends to think they could drink here without paying all the time. "You can pay on your next visit, and bring a few of your guardsman friends."

"When we arrived, Cainan mentioned that he had two royals, and intended to pay," said Jaslyn, outing the nobleman with a grin.

Cainan raised an eyebrow at her, but chuckled, producing the coins from his coat. In truth, he always overpaid on his first visit to an establishment - it kept him from being barred outright just that little bit longer, and in the past had bought some goodwill when the local constabulary had come asking for witnesses. "I absolutely did. Madame," he said, as he offered her the money - an extravagant amount for just some food and drink. "Also, if whatever services the good sister requires could be covered by this, then please feel free to add it to my name," he said, as he handed her the money.

Tessa looked down at the two royals he dropped in her hand. It was far too much, even from a man who could easily afford to throw money away and had a certain reputation among the taverns of Jader. Tempting as it was to accept, she was a woman of principles, and besides, Cainan and his companions had helped her brother. Tessa pocketed one royal and pressed the other back into Cainan's hand. "One royal is far too generous. But I thank you, Monsieur Cainan, and I do hope you will continue to honor us with your patronage in future."

## The Wayward Sister

**Posted on 29 Jun 2021 @ 6:56pm by [Townfolk The Scholar & Warrior Martin Josceran & Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)**

**1,747 words; about a 9 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader Chantry

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 18th – late afternoon

OOC: After 'New Friends and Allies' (after Martin and Elinowy leave the Raven's Roost)

Isouda paced across the chantry vestibule. She'd received the message Guard Captain Landry sent. That troublesome Chantry sister should be here by now. What was keeping her? Luckily Giselle was engaged in other matters, and Isouda could take care of this upstart herself. The days before the week-long Summerday festival were always busy with cleaning and preparations. It was such a nuisance inviting the unwashed masses to daily services. But Giselle insisted on making Chantry teachings accessible to all, even worthless elves.

And now, thanks to the intervention of this new sister and her friends, there would be more Fereldan refugees tracking dirt and stink into the freshly cleaned halls of her chantry. Isouda had heard reports of the red-haired sister's inspirational singing outside the refugee workhouse. Rumors were already beginning to spread about the mine. This was all she needed, an upstart sister charming the revered mother with charitable ideals and faith to worm her way into Isouda's own position.

Elinowy looked upon the columns and walls of the Jader Chantry. It felt odd, she had been living in the streets throughout the country for many weeks, the grand halls of the Chantry were comforting, yet strangely foreign. Her time and her devotion had been her own concern, to be back in the presence of her sisters felt a bit constricting. It amused Elinowy that the humble trappings of the poor now seemed more like home than these hollowed grounds. Her habit was well cared for and clean, although it was growing faded from the exposure to the sun each day. Still there was a regality about the worn garment, humble yet displaying a depth of spirituality for those inclined to notice. Approaching the grand vestibule door, she pulled back her scarlet hood, revealing the elegantly simple dwarven coronet that Rhiannon had braided her hair into at the Inn. She waited on Martin to pull open the great door.

Finally, the chantry doors opened to a beautiful tall woman with red hair wearing an unusual chantry robes, escorted by a city guardsman, one of Landry's men. Isouda schooled her expression into the kind and nurturing countenance of the reverend mother's second in command. "Good day to you. I am elder Isouda Geffroy. And you are?"

Martin winced inwardly when he saw who was greeting them. Elder Isouda hid a viper's heart behind a virtuous demeanour. He'd had dealings with her twice before, and neither of these occurrences had been particularly pleasant. He wasn't sure if he was supposed to linger now that Sister Elinowy was safely within Chantry walls, but he wasn't callous enough to abandon her to the Elder without so much as a warning.

"Elder Isouda, greetings. I am guardsman Josceran, escorting Sister Elinowy as per the Commander's orders. I was told the Reverend Mother was expecting her." He saluted the Elder respectfully. Hopefully he could sneak in a word of warning to Elinowy before he had to take his leave.

"Ah, yes. Guardsman Josceran. Captain Landry mentioned you in her message. How kind of you to volunteer your next day off to help muck out the privies in the chantry dormitory." Isouda smiled benevolently at Martin. In moments like these, she did so enjoy her vocation.

Ah. Clearly the Commander wouldn't forgive him for a while. Martin stretched his lips in a wide grin. "Why, yes, I *love* mucking out privies," he said cheerfully. "Especially with a small brush. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity, Elder." Given a choice he'd rather go down laughing.

Isouda then settled her attention on the supposed sister. "I'm afraid that Revered Mother Giselle has important matters to attend. The Summerday festival begins in only seven days, as I'm sure you know. You have arrived at an opportune time, Elinowy. We will need the help of all who are called to do the Maker's work, to cleanse and prepare the places of worship, and to administer blessings. Lodging in Jader is hard to come by during the festival. But there is a room for the affirmed available, though it is quite simple."

Elinowy bowed her head toward the Elder. "May your voice bring light to all the world." she said in ceremonial greeting. "I thank you for your charity. The Maker brings me where he wills and I am sworn to not rely upon my sisters and the abundance of the Chantry as I discern his path for me. It would be my joy to administer blessings to the poor throughout the festival."

"How very interesting, Sister Elinowy." Isouda kept her eyeroll internal. Another one of those people who actually believed the Maker took a personal interest in their lives. "Perhaps you could tell me all about your, uh, *path* another time. I'll show you to your room for now, and you will be added to the chantry's daily duty roster for the duration of your stay." Best to put this one to work as soon as possible. Though, Isouda considered, perhaps she could make use of a Sister who was both a stranger to Jader, and excessively devout.

Elinowy smiled kindly at the Elder. "The Maker bless you sister but I have promised Grand Cleric Callista that I may not take shelter within the Chantry walls until my sojourn is complete. I will gladly help with the festivities in Andraste's name. And I hope my presence might be a blessing upon all our consecrated community here in Jadar, as I am a stranger. I did meet your Reverent Mother Giselle at a conclave in Val Royeaux a few years back. I would most like to speak with her when she is available.

"Bless you, Guardsman Josceran. Please convey my thanks to Captain Landry," said Isouda, dismissing the man with barely a glance.

Well, that was a dismissal if he'd ever heard one. Martin glanced uncertainly at Sister Elinowy, reluctant to leave her alone but unable to come up with a good reason to stay. He also did not want to give the Elder any reason to think Elinowy was anything less than respectable.

"Elder," he gave her a respectful nod. "Sister Elinowy. If you ever need further assistance from the Guard, please do not hesitate to call upon us."

Elinowy put her hand on Martin's sleeve. "Thank you dear Martin, may the Maker bless you and your kinfolk. I will be fine on my own."

Isouda recovered from her momentary surprise. This Sister Elinowy was both acquainted with

Giselle, and had dealings with Grand Cleric Callista? Is that why she arrogantly asserted that her mere presence in Jader was a blessing? She might be crazy or a liar. But if she was telling the truth about her connections, she was a danger to Isouda's position. Or, she considered deviously, this sister could be useful for furthering Isouda's own ambitious plans.

"I regret the other sisters will not benefit from your inspirational company in the chantry's admittedly humble dormitory," said Isouda. "Perhaps you would care to join me for tea after chantry services on Sunday?"

Elinowy smiled genuinely back at the Elder. "It would be a blessing to me to take Tea with you this Sunday. Thank you." she said with all modesty and respect.

Isouda gave the sister a practiced benevolent smile. "I will convey your request for an audience to the Revered Mother. It was a pleasure to meet you, Sister Elinowy. I do look forward to your assistance in ministering to our flock in Jader." She bowed to the strange sister and her lingering guardsman escort, a polite dismissal.

"May the Maker bless your voice to all his flock." Elinowy said in a traditional parting.

As the Elder withdrew, Elinowy turned back to Martin. "So where do your duties take you now good guardsman?"

Martin hesitated. He had honestly assumed Elinowy would be staying at the Chantry, and her refusal to do so left him perplexed. The streets of Jader were more or less safe, but rather less than more at night, especially in the poorer districts. A lone woman, especially one carrying no weapons and cutting so striking a figure as Elinowy, may not be safe.

"I was going to head home, get some sleep. I'm dead on my feet. You must be too, after the night we've had. Do you..." he wondered how to phrase that delicately. "...do you have anywhere to go? If not I'm sure I can convince my landlord to let you stay in my room for a couple of days."

I fear I have no place to lay my head, but it is not right for me to impose myself upon your hospitality. I am certain the Maker will provide an adequate place for me to rest. I have grown accustomed to sleeping on the ground the last few months, and anywhere will be more comfortable than that mine." she said smiling kindly.

Typical Elinowy. Martin was not quite sure what to make of this. She would refuse the shelter of the Chantry, and turn down Martin's offer, and... what? Sleep in the street? Martin was not keen to find a report tomorrow about a Chantry sister who'd gotten mugged, or worse. Especially after the ordeal they'd just been through together.

"Sister, allow me to insist." He looked at her, his usual smile gone and his expression serious. "The Maker helps those who help themselves. Allow me to be His hand and to offer you a suitable place at my home. My landlord will not object. If you won't accept free lodgings, you might consider

tutoring my landlord's children - he'll be more than happy for such a deal."

The Chantry sister thought for a moment. She was not supposed to take the simple paths, the Master always required faith and dedication, but her needs were being provided right in front of her by a devout man that she could trust. Her eyes closed for a moment as she said a short word of praise to the Maker. "Considering the Festival is upon us, it would be wrong of me to take the place a weary pilgrim would need for a bed. I accept your offer of hospitality. I insist on teaching your landlords children. The Maker would not want me not doing my part. Thank you Martin. I am truly grateful."

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## Ulterior Motives

Posted on 10 Jul 2021 @ 1:25pm by [Townfolk The Scholar](#)

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

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader chantry garden

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 21th, night

The chantry gardens were deserted, the hardworking affirmed had long since eaten the evening meal, attended Vespers, and retired. One of Thedas' moons was about to dip beneath the horizon, and it would be an hour before the other moon rose. The only source of light was the torch Chantry Elder Isouda had left in the sconce by the gate. In the exceptional dark quiet with only the rustle of spring leaves in the breeze and the occasional night-bird call, Isouda lounged on a garden bench and breathed in the refreshing night air. Casually, she watched for the expected approach of a man she'd utilized in past situations, her ears straining for any tale-tell sound.

A knife at her throat was Isouda's first warning she was not alone. Any other Chantry sister might be terrified to find herself in this circumstance, but Isouda only laughed – while remaining perfectly still to avoid an injury she didn't want to explain to Revered Mother Giselle. "Bless you, my child."

The knife withdrew with a disgusted huff, and Isouda patted the bench next to her. Gerlach Robertson had not responded to her summons himself, but sent his most irritating second - a young Antivan man. "Have a seat, Carlos. I was expecting Gerlach."

Carlos Acerbi joined the Chantry Elder as directed, but rather than sit up straight and show deference, he stretched languidly across the rest of the bench, his knee pressed against her thigh. The dagger remained in his hand unsheathed, and he made the motions of cleaning his nails with the tip, though he couldn't possibly see them in the dark. "Monsieur Robertson does not jump to the beck and call of anyone. What do you want?"

Isouda resisted the urge to move away from his insolent invasion of her personal space. "I require seven cases of wine to be picked up from a certain dealer in Val Royeaux, and delivered to a particular wine seller's port warehouse in Jader under lock and key. It must arrive before the third day of the festival, the day of indulgence. The wine must not be opened or consumed by anyone before then." She took purse and a slip of paper with the particulars from a pocket and handed it to him.

Carlos tucked the heavy purse into a breast pocket and glanced at the paper, chuckling softly. It was no wonder Gerlach accepted business from this Chantry sister. He finally sheathed the dagger, and to amuse himself rested one arm along the back of the bench behind Isouda - like a lover plotting a stealthy embrace. "*Ma chère*, I shall bring your request to Gerlach, but you give him rather short notice."

Isouda stiffened at his gesture. "Has Robertson lost control of the Cassabianca?"

"Not at all, but certain recent events have caused my boss to conduct business with more caution. However..." Carlos abruptly lost interest in his game of amorous advances and stood, then paced across the path in front of the garden bench, thinking. "I believe we may subcontract this work to another ship. Fast, with an impeccable reputation."

Isouda frowned. "As I said, the wine must not be-"

"-Opened or consumed. Yes, I understand. If the *Night's Kiss* accepts the contract, the crew will uphold the requirements." Carlos rubbed his hands together. "Gerlach is going to like this."

"Excellent," said Isouda imperiously. "And, you may tell Gerlach Robertson that-" Isouda stopped speaking mid-sentence. Carlos was gone.

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## A time to cleanse

Posted on 18 Jul 2021 @ 5:44pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Townsfolk Dominic Lesprin](#)

Edited on on 18 Jul 2021 @ 5:53pm

4,268 words; about a 21 minute read

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Private Bathroom Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Interspersed with 'The Gangs All Here'

Elinowy followed Tessa into the back room. A modest but more than adequate bathing tub had been moved into the room. Steam rose from the tub and the room scented of spices and flowers. Compared to how she had spent the last two days, it looked and smelled heavenly.

"I emptied the contents of your pockets before having your garments cleaned." Tessa gestured to a table near the bathtub, with Elinowy's bright red chantry robes neatly folded next to a wooden box, a bar of scented soap, a comb, and a big folded towel.

The Sister turned to Tessa. "Thank you for your generosity and kindness. I pray I have not brought misfortune on your family. Your brother... his... gifts... put me in an unorthodox position. I told your brother that I will personally oversee his spiritual journey as he draws nearer to the maker. If all stays on a benevolent path, I see no reason to inform the local Chantry or Templars of his status. It seemed the loving thing to do, as the maker would have it." she said, still not certain if she was deceiving herself that she could deflect the seductive allure of magic."

"Thank you," said Tessa, because gratitude was what Elinowy expected. She wondered if serial murderers, like the chantry, expected the people they didn't kill to thank them for their benevolence. But, it seemed that her brother had said and done what he had to, to remain both free and a member of the Jader community. Tessa had been afraid Kalian would self-banish to the forest like their grandmother. "You've had a difficult time, sister. I'm certain the mine workers are grateful for your intervention. Greed is the source of great evil."

Elinowy's reflection in a nearby mirror caught her attention. She moved a hand through her long red hair and shook her head. 'Oh dear, I am certainly a fright." her hand slide across the shredded blouse that stubbornly clung to her. "I do apologize. I believe I owe you a set of clothes. I shall repay you as soon as I am able. There was violence..." she stated, not fully wanting to come to terms with the pain and carnage she had witnessed in the last day.

"Kalian told me what happened in the mine, though of course he didn't have time for detailed description. Please don't worry about the borrowed clothes, they weren't much more than rags to begin with," said Tessa. "Just drop them on the floor. I'll leave you to your bath whilst it's still hot."

"Thank you." Elinowy exclaimed as Tessa backed out of the room closing the door behind her. The sister turned and looked at herself in the mirror. Her red hair was matted and did not have its usual fiery radiance and luster. Pride was certainly not a desirable trait in the Chantry, but Elinowy did take a certain joy in her appearance harkening unto the immolation of Andraste. She took a deep breath and prepared to get the filth of the last several days off of her. Her discernment journey left little time for luxuries like a hot bath. She had kept herself generally clean using streams and ponds as she came upon them, but it was a secondary concern to seeking out the poor that she might bless in some fashion.

The borrowed blouse mostly disintegrated as she tried to remove it from her body. She winced looking at the shredded blood soaked garment. Ruined as it was she carefully folded its remains and placed it down on a chair. The pants were easier to remove intact. She folded them in a similar

manner and set them atop the blouse. She look again at herself in the mirror. It was a rare thing to look upon her own body. Her hips and thighs curiously less discolored by the dirt and mess of the week. The stark paleness of her skin certainly stood out. On her stomach she could clearly see the arcane symbols and imagery the High Seeker had ordered stenciled upon her. She felt that it besmirched the natural beauty of the maker's creation with it's lyrium laced elven glyphs, but she was assured that it was required in her ascendancy to Seeker and would benefit her in the future.

She turned away looking now upon the steam rising from the bath and the scented soaps. Defiled her body might be, but she was as the Maker made her, perfect and wonderful. She lifted her leg and felt the embrace of the warm waters in the tub. Another step and she lowered herself into the soothing waters. She didnt want to think of the layer of filth that was lifting form her body. She was determined to get lost in the moment of feeling calm, safe and comfortable. Her eyes closed she breathed deeply of the spiced aroma letting the terror of the previous day flow into the bath. Feeling her body start to relax, she took a deep breath and submerged herself in the waters to clean her hair.

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A pressing need forced Dominic to look up from the recipe he had been working on. He blinked and rubbed his eyes, then rolled his shoulders, groaning as the knotted muscles relaxed. His glasses slid down his nose and he pushed them back up impatiently, glancing down at the neat cursive writing that covered his journal's pages. He'd been studying this recipe for a while and couldn't wait to actually try to brew it, but he knew better than do it inside an inn. Despite its beneficial uses, dragonwort smelled notoriously bad and he didn't want to get kicked out (again). After being on the road for so many days he'd rather enjoy the luxury of a soft bed and fresh food.

In the meantime he really needed to find the privy. With a sigh he dropped his quill and closed his journal, and ventured out of his room. The tap room downstairs looked quite lively despite the relatively early hour. No, actually it was closer to lunch by now, Dominic realized. He'd been working a while. He glanced around, vaguely hoping to find some sort of sign. There was a wooden door behind the bar. That must be it. He wished he could ask someone but by the time they understood his broken Orlesian, and assuming he managed to understand the answer... well, he probably couldn't hold it in that long.

Unobtrusively he pushed the door and walked through. It was darker in there, and the atmosphere was moist. Dominic sighed in annoyance when his glasses steamed up and he plucked them off his nose, squinting around in the hope of finding the damned privy.

From the wash tub in the center of the room, a head emerged inhaling deeply. Her eyes still closed she felt the water draining from her hair down her shoulder. She pushed her legs against the side of the tub and lifted her chest of the bath, enjoying the sensations of cool air moving across her finally clean flesh.

The sound of water made Dominic's eyes snap in that direction. He squinted through the steam at



the human shape that was emerging from... a... bathtub ? Well, presumably there must be a toilet nearby then. This was a little bit awkward, but hopefully this fellow could point him in the right direction. He cleared his throat and tried to conjure up his best Orlesian.

"Sorry. Er. I look for... need room ?" As he spoke he approached the tub, and then stopped dead in his tracks when he realized that the gentleman he'd been talking to was not a gentleman at all. Without thinking he wiped his glasses and perched them back on his nose. Not only was this not a man, it was a... *remarkably* well endowed woman.

Her eyes snapped open at the sound of a man's voice, but took a moment to focus through the water and steam. No just a man, an unknown man. Her arm quickly crossed her breast to supply some cover, the water sadly was not so sudsy as she might have hoped. She turned on her side with her back to the man, exposing her derriere to him, but that was the lesser of evils at the moment. "What are you doing in here?! Get out! I will call the Guard. They are just in the other room, and they know me!" she called out, her arm reaching out of the tub to the towel that hung nearby. Grasping the soft fabric she pulled it into the bath and quickly draped it over herself.

Why the woman sounded so upset, Dominic couldn't fathom. There certainly wasn't anything objectionable with her body, as far as he could tell. Unless she had an embarrassing birth mark somewhere. Either way, she was speaking much too rapidly for him to make any sense of what she was saying.

"Is good," he rushed to say, having no desire to offend her. "You, er. Is looking good. No need..." No need to be emKalian Rhi ed, he wanted to say, but couldn't remember the words. He spread his hands apologetically. "Can you show me... private room ?" He couldn't remember the word for *privy* either.

Elinowy stood up in the bath wrapping the waterlogged towel around her and holding it closed across her chest. She gasped a little at the man's stumbling statement. "By the Maker, whatever your perceived notions are, we are not going to a private room and I am not a Harlot!" her words began to ring with righteous indignation and likely could be heard beyond the small room. She paused for a moment gathering her thoughts. The man had not made any aggressive moves, but she did move into ready position one, her feet squarely beneath her shoulders and her arms held as to move defensively or offensively as necessary. Still this was not necessarily a violence situation. She looked at the man as he struggled to keep his spectacles from steaming up. "Perhaps you are confused. This was a private room of the Inn Owner. If you turn and leave, I will cause no harm to you." her voice softening from the embarrassed anger she had lashed out with. The Maker wanted compassion, especially in the face of humility. She could think of few things more humbling than being caught naked and exposed. But this was where the Maker would teach her. "How may I help you sir?" she said calmly.

Again the woman spoke so quickly that the words merged together into an unintelligible string of foreign sounds. Dominic caught a few words - "private room", "harlot" and "harm" - and he found himself thoroughly confused by the woman's sudden change of demeanour. He blinked at her and

pushed his glasses back up again, unsure how to extract himself from this awkward situation. Next time he'd just go out and find a tree suitable for the purpose. Should he take her up on her offer ? She looked fine but Dominic was not profoundly interested in matters of the flesh, and also he did not have money to spare on such frivolities. He tried to think of a way to tell her politely that he would pass this time.

Kalian burst into the mist-enshrouded room. "Hey! What do you think you're doing in here? Can't you see the lady is trying to take a-" Kalian stuttered to speechlessness when he saw Elinowy, in all her naked, barely-covered glory. He gasped, "Holy Andraste."

Dominic blinked at the newcomer and hoped fervently that this was not a jealous suitor or anything of the sort. The dark-skinned man did not have the appearance of a warrior, but that didn't mean he couldn't pack a mean punch.

"Sorry," he said, grasping for words. "Lady... show me private room to relieve need ?"

The shock of the stranger's sudden appearance and her embarrassment at her state of undress had started to subside as she looked to the challenges that the Maker presented her with. She held up her hand towards Kalian, "...It is... fine... this... gentleman is apparently in... need." her eyes focused closely on the man's features and movements, his growing anxiety of the situation assured her that his intent was not as forward as his words. She drew closer to Kalian. "I think perhaps he is a foreigner, or the Maker blessed his parents with a unique child for their care. She stepped toward the man her arms moving in slow forward gestures as she spoke very slowly and clearly. "You... are... safe... here. Please... tell.. me.. your... name... that.. we... might... help... you. What...do... you... need?"

Dominic tried not to sigh. He was a foreigner, not touched in the head. But at least now the red-haired lady spoke slowly enough for him to follow. He wondered if pointing to his crotch might be misinterpreted.

"I need..." he started laboriously, but before he could expand on exactly what he needed, a dwarf came in. Who didn't seem to have any issue ogling the naked lady.

Rhi had followed Kalian to the back. She came in just moments behind Kalian to see a man with steamed up glasses, Kalian and Elinowy. Her sword had been partially pulled, and stayed that way as her eyes found the gorgeous red haired woman standing in the bath, barely covered. Rhiannan had seen beautiful women before but none like this cloister sister. She was so taken off guard that Rhi had not even heard Elinowy talking to the man. So when the words found their way through the fog in Rhi's head, she shook it slightly and then her attention shifted back to the man. Her hand on her sword's hilt, eyes piercing this man's almost to his soul.

Kalian recovered somewhat from his shock. The soaking-wet towel left little to the imagination, and *Andraste's holy knickers*, what he imagined... Kalian became suddenly aware that his trousers were uncomfortably tight, just as the man's and Elinowy's words sank into the head on his

shoulders.

"Oh. I get it." Kalian reluctantly turned away from the bathtub and casually – he hoped – adjusted his trousers. He spoke slowly to the bespectacled and befuddled man. "Are you looking for the privy, sir? Right this way. This is a common misunderstanding." Not *that* common really, Kalian was trying to be polite. He beckoned for the man to follow.

The dark-skinned man looked oddly uncomfortable but Dominic only felt abject gratitude as he was - finally - given the opportunity to escape this awkward situation, and most importantly, to empty his bladder.

"Thank you," he said, gathering the scraps of his dignity. "Yes. Privy is word I look for. Sorry," he nodded at the lady. "I not mean interrupt your pleasure time." He paused, frowned, nearly certain he'd gotten one of the words wrong. "Hum. Leisure time?" He shrugged apologetically, a gesture he'd had many opportunities to practice in his travels. He glanced at the dwarf, whose hand rested not-so-casually on the hilt of her sword, and swiftly followed the dark-skinned man.

As Kalian left the room headed for the Inn's back door - where this guest would find the outhouse - he called over his shoulder to Elinowy and Rhiannon. "I'll be back shortly with a dry towel." And since there were now two pretty women in the bathing room, he added, "Two dry towels."

Rhi watched as the man stumbled over his words as he left the room with Kalian. As he paused by her, Rhi relaxed a bit seeing that he was not threat to Elinowy nor herself. As the two men left she heard Kalian call back about two pretty women and two towels. She grinned and laughed as she called back. "Extra fluffy, if you please."

She turned back to Elinowy, letting go of her sword hilt, and smiled. At was a genuine warm smile. Though there was concern in her eyes as she approached the tub. "Are you alright sister? Elinowy?"

Watching the intruder follow Kalian out of the room, Elinowy considered the truth of what the Maker was teaching her today. Even at her most vulnerable, there were often other reasons for why people behaved as they did. The strange man had meant her no harm. And her freinds had rushed to protect her. She looked up at Rhiannon. "I was just a bit startled. One does not usually expect a man with them when they are taking a bath." She smiled sweetly to Rhiannon. "Thank you for coming to check on me. Thank the Maker it was all just a misunderstanding." Taking the lower hem of the soaked bath towel around her, she started to wring it out into the bath tub. She had made a bit of a mess with water all over the floor. She looked around for a mop or another towel to start cleaning up the floor, not noticing how the young dwarf was looking at her.

Rhiannon gave the sister a warm smile. "Misunderstanding. It happens." She looked around and found a towel, picked it up and started to mop up the floor. All the while batting her eyes at Elinowy. "Elinowy, do not worry, finish your bath the beautiful."

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"Thank you," Dominic said quietly after they'd exited the bathroom. "I, hum, not want start problem. *Proshu proshcheniya.*"

He really hoped he wasn't going to get kicked out. It wouldn't be the first time, and at least this time it was summer, but he'd really like to enjoy clean sheets a few more nights. The sheets were clean, without bed bugs, and even smelled of lavender. This was comparatively one of the nicer places where he'd stayed in a long time.

Kalian couldn't understand the last thing the man said, but his apologetic demeanor came through loud and clear. "My name is Kalian." He opened the tavern's back door and held it open for the other man, pointed to his chest, and repeated, "Kalian." Then he pointed to the outhouse across the small courtyard.

"Thank you," Dominic said again. Hopefully, once his business was done, he could go back to his room to work on his new recipe, and not have to interact with living creatures again until dinner. One could only hope. He gave Kalian a slightly tense smile, as he was truly reaching the end of his ability to hold, and hurried across the courtyard.

Kalian watched for a moment to make sure Dominic was headed in the right direction, reflecting that he wouldn't actually mind if more of the Raven's guests circumvented the chamber pots in their rooms. Then he ducked into the storage room and collected two towels from the linen closet.

Returning to the door to the utility room – currently being used for bathing – Kalian knocked. "Uh. Elinowy and Rhiannon? Here are your towels..."

Rhi opened the door, she gave Kalian a mischievous grin. "Why thank you for the towels." As she slowly closed the door she gave him a wink and blew him a kiss.

Kalian blinked as the pretty dwarf took the towels from him and shut the door. The view he had been hoping for replaced by a wooden barrier. *Maker's breath.*

Elinowy wanted to thank Kalian for coming to her rescue and bringing towels, but just like that the door was shut and Rhi the dwarf had taken the towels. Elinowy smiled sweetly at the dwarf. "Thank you. I think I have cleansed myself enough. I need to get changed and rejoin the others." She reached out to take one of the clean warm towels, and unfastened the soaking one draped around her. It fell to the floor allowing Rhiannon to look upon the intricate eldritch tattoo emblazoned upon her stomach and lower abdomen. She wrapped herself in the clean towel and briefly looked at her self in the nearby mirror. "A bit more respectable now." Her hand moved through the wet tangle of red hair on her head. She looked at the dwarf. "Are you by chance skilled at making braids? Something simple for my presentation to the local Revered Mother?"

Rhi watched in silence as the red haired sister stepped out of the bath, let the wet towel drop as she

took a new warm towel to wrap around herself. She noticed the beautiful tattoo across the woman's stomach and lower abdomen. Her eyes twinkled in the candle light as she moved to stand behind the woman as she sat at the table with the mirror.

When Elinowy asked if she knew how to do braids Rhi gave a nod. "Yes sister, I do." Her voice was low with a bedroom tone to it. She took the brush, slowly, gently started to brush Elinowy's hair. As she did she started the braid. As she worked she spoke quietly. "Your tattoo. It is very beautiful. I have never seen anything like it before. Does it have a meaning?"

The gentle tugs on her scalp hearkened back to her days as a child in the orphanage when the Chantry sisters would pull a stiff comb through the tangle mass of hair on their heads. Braids had been a means of keeping one self tidy for inspection by the sisters and putting the tugging off for another day or two. The dwarf's hands were a luxury. She closed her eyes allowing herself to feel the kind touches. She smiled.

"I am afraid I do not know exactly the significance of the glyph. The Grand Cleric ordered it put upon me as I entered my time of discernment. I presume it is some form of Ward of Protection. I neither speak elf nor am skilled in the mystic arts so as to know their meaning. But I am meant to present it to those in authority of the Chantry if detained or questioned."

She felt the dwarf interweaving her hair. "Thank you for this kindness. If I am to meet with the local Revered Mother, I want to present a kindly appearance. Some of the order find a necessity for that. At least Tessa cleaned my robes. It will be good to get back into them again, I can't walk about in a towel everywhere I go." she laughed.

Rhi listened quietly as Elinowy told her what she knew of her tattoo. Her mind lost in the intricacies of the tattoo and Elinowy's voice. Gods this woman was beautiful, Rhi thought. When Elinowy spoke of showing it if she was detained or questioned, Rhi spoke. "A symbol of importance. Allowing you passage or giving you authority to do something. Or over others. Interesting. Those are the possibilities. I have a tattoo that allows me safe passage among certain groups, authority over others groups and equal footing with the rest. It is two roses and a set of owl eyes with the beak." She took a breath and let it out slowly then continued. "I may show it to you someday. This said with both a bit of laughter and a hint of sadness. She leaned back and smiled at the braid she had done. "All done Elinowy. You look beautiful." Her voice was low, held a bit of sadness. Though Elinowy had only known Rhi a very short bit of time, there was a definite shift in the dwarf woman's demeanor.

Elinowy gave a wide smile to Rhi. "You are kind. We are all beautiful children of the Maker." she responded with practiced but sincere humility. She looked on her visage in the mirror, pleased with the wrapped braid that rested on her head like a bejeweled diadem. "It looks perfect. Maker bless you."

She stepped back and smiled at Elinowy. That change in Rhiannon's demeanor was gone and the dwarf's seeming mischievousness and flirty nature was back. With a wink she handed Elinowy the other towel. "I must say that I did a great job. Course when you have such gorgeous hair to work

with." She shifted from one foot to the other. "Is there anything else that you would like me to do for you?"

Bowing her head slightly she smiled back at the dwarf. "You have been very helpful. Thank you. I just need to get back into my proper clothes." she stated, releasing the towel with one hand and placing it on the chair as she picked her folded robes up and reeled out her formal Chantry habit. "I hope that you will let me repay your kindness in the near future." she stated kindly as she stepped into the habit and pulled it up over her shoulders. The scarlet robes were simple but looked regal on the young woman. She pulled up the lightweight hood and allowed it to rest the flame red corona of braids on her head. Elinowy looked at herself in her full robes and let out a long exhale. "It's good to be back." she stated, turning back to Rhi, the robes flowing in her wake. "Shall we rejoin our companions?"

Rhi watched as Elinowy got dressed and finished getting ready. She was a beautiful woman. In all of the travels Rhiannon has had, she had never seen a more beautiful woman. When Elinowy was done and asked if she was ready to join the others, Rhi gave a nod. "Ye.....yes. We should rejoin our companions." This said as she moved to the door to open it. Blushing.

## Staff for Hire

Posted on 20 Jul 2021 @ 5:46pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#)

**1,904 words; about a 10 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader Waterfront

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 22nd

It had been four days since Kalian and his new friends returned from the mine. Kalian spent the first day two days recovering from the lack of sleep, hard work, and battle, plus a hangover from their return celebration. His recovery had been slowed by Tessa's insistence that he maintain his work schedule at the Raven.

Kalian stopped by the bakery, then made his way to the waterfront district of Jader at mid-morning. The area could be a dangerous place at night, populated by drunk itinerant sailors, but of a morning it was not an unpleasant place to wander. The fishing boats were still selling their catch at the west end of the wharf, and a clean salty breeze blew in from the bay, ruffling his cape and unruly mop of curls.

He wasn't certain where to find Rhiannon's office, so he looked for the *Night's Kiss*, still in port. Kalian stood on the dock at the end of the ship's gangplank, the still-warm bag from the bakery in hand and his staff strapped to his back, and called to a young, bearded dwarf on deck - the first person he saw. "Hallo there. I'm looking for Lady Rhiannon Cadash. Is she on board?"

The young dwarf looked over the railing when he heard someone calling for Rhiannon. "Oy, you looking for the First? (pause) Just a sec." He turned and moved out of sight. A few moments later Rhi poked her head over the railing. Her smile warm and yet had a bit of mischief to it. "Sagh (friend) Kalian. Please, come aboard. I was just thinking of you this morning. Was wondering if you were going to come talk to me, or if I would have to come find you."

"Well, here I am," Kalian called back, sweeping his arms out in a ta-da gesture, the bag of baked goodies in one hand. He hurried up the gangplank and knelt in front of her so that his head was below hers. "At your service, my lady."

She gave Kalian a hug when he stepped aboard. "Come, walk with me." She started towards the bow.

Kalian followed. He was no expert on ships, but the workmanship on the Night's Kiss was unmistakable. Crewmembers went about their business, mostly dwarves, checking ropes, maintaining the sails, it was a fascinating sight. "Your ship is amazing."

Rhi glanced up at Kalian and grinned. "Why thank you. She is the best ship that sails these waters."

"Do you like baked treats? With Jader getting ready for Summerday, the bakeries are already making festival specialties." Kalian handed her the warm bag.

Rhiannon tilted her head slightly at Kalian when he asked if she liked baked treats as he handed her the warm bag. Taking it she opened it and could smell the cinnamon rolls. "Now Kalian, you should know that most women loves baked treats. Me more than most." She chuckles as she pulls out one of the small bite sized rolls. Popping it her mouth she chewed slowly, savoring every bite. When she finished she licked her fingers as she spoke. "So, I had told you that I might have some employment for someone of your talents." She stopped at the bow of the ship and eat another roll. "Since you are here, I can only assume that you might be interested in said employment."

"I would have come just to see you," said Kalian with a warm smile and only partly distracted by the sight of the pretty dwarf licking her fingers. He scanned the deck, wondering if Rhiannon might have a jealous paramour on the ship, or what her mother might think of her daughter fraternizing with a human. "But I am interested in what kind of employment you might have in mind. I'll need to be careful about utilizing certain talents. Not many people in Jader are as open-minded as you when it comes to the arcane."

Rhiannon noticed Kalian watching her lick her fingers. She gave him a quick wink. "Careful is my middle name." She grinned as she popped the last of her sweet in her mouth. She moved to the side of the ship that faced away from the dock, leaned against the rail and took a deep breath.

"Mmmmmmm, the salt air makes me feel alive. (she peers at the water) So, to business." Rhi glanced over at Kalian. "This is what I have, as far as openings. One is here on the ship. You could use your talents to speed up the ship with a bit of a gust of wind. Help defend the ship if needs be.

Also help heal those that might get sick or hurt. Or, (pause) we have a spot that I think would be perfect for you. It may not sound exciting but it is a very important job. Someone with your talents would make a great look out and protector. I am sure that you know who to look for when you are out and about. You could use, say a small spell to let the others know that they will have company. And if needs be to knock out those who might try to interrupt our business."

"If I'm working with you, that will be exciting enough." Kalian grinned at Rhiannon. "May I apply for the job of lookout and protector? I'm not opposed to leaving Jader on short trips, but, well... I have family here and I figure it's only a matter of time until I get caught and have to leave permanently." What he would do then, Kalian was not sure. But his years spent training with his grandmother had convinced him a life hidden and alone in the wilds outside Jader was not for him. He liked the company of interesting people too much. Kalian noticed how the sunlight caught the silver highlights in Rhiannon's hair, and how her crimson eyes sparkled. "Would I be protecting you, or someone else? I'm not so sure you need a protector. I've seen how well you can handle a sword."

Rhiannon glanced up to Kalian when he asked who he would be protecting. Her eyes sparkled like rubies in the sunlight as a slow mischievous grin crossed her face. "You want to be my protector?" Her voice was light yet had a sexiness, come get me tone. Before Kalian could answer, she continued with a bit of a giggle. "Yes, you would be protecting myself, and whatever merchandise that I might have." She turned to look up at Kalian and smiled. It was warm, whimsical, mischievous and mysterious all at once. He could see in her eyes both the businesswoman who was looking for a bodyguard. The woman who looked at him as not a conquest but a man who she could become close with. And someone who cared not that he was a mage. She looked at him as a friend and possibly more. She opened her palm and spit in it, stuck it out. "So do we have an accord?"

Kalian did not miss the flirtatious lilt to Rhiannon's tone, or that suggestive smile. He admired her curvy and small yet perfectly proportioned dwarf form, but reminded himself that in the short time he'd known her, Rhiannon had flirted with most everyone she met – her prerogative, naturally. He followed her lead and spit into his open palm and took her offered hand. And then, because it felt uncomfortable to tower over her in that moment, he bent down on one knee so that he was looking up into her face. "Yes, my Lady Rhiannon. We have an accord."

Rhi was a little surprised when Kalian spit in his own hand and shook hers. Yet what almost put her off guard was when he shifted, went down on one knee to be on her level. She blinked a couple of times, for she was momentarily speechless. She looked into this young human's eyes and found that if she wasn't careful, she could get lost in them. When her words finally came back to her she smiled. "Good, good. (reluctantly letting go of his hand) Well, when can you start?"

So close to the pretty dwarf, her scent brought to mind the lingering ozone of an ocean storm, with a top note of sugar from the treats he'd brought her. Kalian had never bedded a dwarf, but held in the depths of her crimson gaze, his mind strayed to imagining the ways in which human and dwarf could fit together. Huskily, he replied, "When do you *want* me, my lady?"

Rhiannon caught his tone and gave him a sly grin. Kalian was still on his knee when she reached out



and gave him a playful shove in his shoulder. Not enough to push him over but enough to let him know that she knows he is there. Looking him in his eyes, that mischievous grin crosses her face, "I have a meeting tonight with one of my mothers friends. Neither I nor my mother trust them. They don't trust us either. So bodyguards are a must."

With that she turns to star back towards the gangplank. As she does she walks slowly enough to sway her hips. Over her shoulder she says, "You ready to *watch* my back?"

Rhiannon's playful shove wasn't enough to knock him over, but it did put him off balance, and her explicit invitation to ogle her shapely backside was distraction enough that Kalian teetered and fell back. With a long and hearty laugh at himself, Kalian regained his feet and brushed himself off. Still chuckling as she escorted him to the gangplank, he paused before disembarking and said in a low voice, "My *staff* is ready when you want it, my lady. Shall I return at dusk?"

Rhi looked over her shoulder to see that Kalian fell back on his ass. She left out a little giggle. Like that of someone who is why about letting someone know that they like them. Looking at him almost shyly as he get up.

As Kalian approached, Rhi batted her eyes when he inferred that his *staff* was ready for her. Her trademark mischievous grin flashed across her face as her crimson red eyes sparkled in the sunlight. Giving her the look of a predator sizing up her prey. "My oh my, if I do declare. Such a gentleman. Letting me know that his *staff* is ready when I am in need." She reached out and traced her fingers along his arm to his hand. Her voice lowered a little as she looked up at him. "I hope that you and your *staff* are willing to be up all night. It may take awhile for the negotiations." She took a step back and smiled. "8 tonight." she said as she turned and headed across the deck.

His arm and hand tingling where she had just touched him, Kalian watched Rhiannon's retreat rendered completely speechless. Off to his right a couple of deck hands sniggered at him, and Kalian had to remind himself to shut his mouth, and to wait until his quick retreat along the docks took him out of sight before adjusting his suddenly ill-fitting trousers. *Wow*.

Kalian just hoped he could make a good impression on Rhiannon's mother when he met her.

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## Last day of school

Posted on 26 Jul 2021 @ 4:52pm by [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Mage Kalian Winter](#)

**3,506 words; about a 18 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 24th

One of the advantages of late shifts was that Martin had a lot more free time during the day. Of course the late shifts were a punishment, but it was in his nature to look at a cup half full. After spending most of the morning in bed and catching up on sleep he'd enjoyed a late breakfast and a bath, the latter a dire necessity considering that he'd spent half of the past night trudging through the worst alleys of the alienage after a pickpocket. Whom he hadn't caught. Not his finest moment, he had to admit. The rest of the night had been spent cleaning one of the cells after a drunkard locked up to sleep it off had emptied their stomach all over. Well. Not just their stomach.

All in all a normal day. Since the mine incident a few days prior captain Landry had not hidden her displeasure, which meant if there was something unpleasant that needed doing, Martin's name would come up.

He'd go see Patrick tonight, see if he could get anything from him about the pickpocket. More than just a good informant, Patrick was also a friend ; he wouldn't let him down. The pickpocket incidents were on the rise, and Martin was fairly certain he had a good description of the culprit after interrogating several victims.

When the Chantry bell tolled four times, Martin headed out to go and pick up Fey and Arran. Raoul had a lot of work preparing for Summerday and was working late, so he'd offered to escort them home for their last day of school. Not that the Chantry school was very far, or the streets very dangerous in plain daylight, but the children were still very young. Plus Martin enjoyed the opportunity to send a few warning glares at the other children and parents, some of whom he occasionally wished he could lock up for aggravated bigotry.

Jader was preparing for Summerday, most of the streets decorated with flower garlands and colourful cloth. The smell of freshly-baked gingerbread filled the air, bringing a festive atmosphere to Jader. The people milling about in the street looked happy and cheerful, waving at each other, pausing a moment to chat before going on with their business. Martin kept an eye out for pickpockets and thieves, out of habit, but they were most active nearer dusk, when it was easier to vanish in the shadows of an alley. And anyway, he reminded himself firmly, he was *not* on duty.

The children came out of the school in a disorderly and giggling stampede just as Martin reached the Chantry grounds. He spotted Fey and Arran easily - they always stayed away from the main group. They saw him too, and came running to hug him.

"Last full day of school for a week, I hope you're not too sad," Martin said teasingly. "How did it go ?"

Fey shrugged, her smile wavering. Arran was enough of a chatterbox for the two of them though, and started telling Martin about the verse of the Chant they had been studying in the afternoon.

"...blessed are the... the..." he faltered on the complicated word. "the pisskeepers."

Martin somehow swallowed back a snicker and wondered what sort of face Sister Bénédicte had made when Arran had come up with this particular gem. Even Fey's smile returned.

"Well done," Martin said gravely as Arran looked up proudly. "You can recite it for your dad tonight, he'll be very proud."

"I study well too !" Fey said. "I know all the Canticle of Exaltations !"

"Then you can show us tonight, too. But beware ! I, Ser Martin, know the Chant better than any of you ! Any mistake shall be punished with..." he let the threat hang ominously for a heartbeat, "...tickling !"

Between two fits of giggles the children took his hand, one on each side, so they could walk home.

It was a beautiful spring day in Jader. Rain had washed the streets the night before, but now the sky was clear, and the air was crisp and clean. Kalian's entire extended family was engaged in preparations for the festival, cleaning and airing out the Inn. Kalian had earned a break, and volunteered to meet his niece to celebrate the last day of school before the holiday. He planned to take Iris to the bakery for a treat, or sometimes she wanted to go to the harbor and watch the sea gulls.

He arrived at the chantry school just after the chantry bell tolled four times. Children ran across the schoolyard, laughing and calling. And there was Iris, picking bright yellow dandelions next to the stairs leading up to the front door. Kalian crouched next to her. "Picking Summerday flowers already?"

"They're pretty." Iris tucked the three flowers she'd picked into Kalian's hair then burst into giggles. "Now you are pretty!"

Kalian grinned back. "What shall we do this afternoon, Iris?" Then he saw Martin, with two elf children, and waved.

"Your friend is with Fey and Arran," said Iris, recognizing Martin. Then she ran toward her two friends.

Kalian followed. "Hey Martin," he said, catching up and taking in the curious sight of Martin with two elven children. "You are full of surprises, my friend."

Martin turned around, surprised to be addressed by name, and smiled when he recognized Kalian. Arran and Fey were smiling awkwardly at the young girl who'd ran towards them, apparently happy to see her. She must be one of the few who actually was nice to them - unsurprising if she was from Kalian's family. Arran immediately started chatting happily but after one look at Kalian - an unknown adult - Fey stuck close to Martin and grabbed his hand, half-hiding behind his leg and self-consciously arranging her hair to make sure her ears were hidden.

"And you," Martin returned as his smile reached his eyes. "A father, so young? I didn't realize."

Kalian shook his head. A family of his own was unlikely, as Martin knew. "You remember my niece, Iris, right? She saw us off when we left to get jobs at the mine. She's the one who decided my fake name should be Korbyn. You know, like the Raven's Roost." Before Martin could dwell on any other possible meanings he added, "Iris mentioned there were two elven children at school. Are Arran and Fey yours?" He wondered if Martin was in a relationship with the children's parent.

Now that Kalian had pointed it out Martin remembered the little girl, who was now looking while Arran drew stick figures in the dust and chatted happily about the day's lesson.

"No, they're my landlord's children. Although I like to call myself an honorary uncle." He put a comforting hand on Fey's head and she relaxed a little bit, although she didn't let go of his leg. "I've known them since - " since Raoul had brought them home, lost and terrified. " - since they were very little. They mentioned Iris, too. They get along well, I think. Say, I was just about to treat the children to some gingerbread, would you like to come along? I think they are serving mulled wine and beer, too." He lifted his eyebrows in a beseeching invitation.

"Sounds perfect to me," answered Kalian. This was an unexpected aspect of his new friendship with Martin. They were both uncles, both with paternal inclinations. Kalian spoke to his niece, "What do you think, Iris, shall we join Arran and Fey and their Uncle Martin for some gingerbread?"

Iris took Arran's hand and they both stood up. "Yes! Yes, please." She grinned at Fey and reached for her hand too.

Hearing Kalian refer to him as Uncle made Martin feel a little bit funny, the warm and fuzzy kind of funny. Arran's happy squeal and Fey's shy smile made it all even fuzzier.

"Great! Let's go then."

Arran and Iris set off together, babbling confidentially. Fey grabbed Martin's hand and followed, peering curiously at Kalian through her long bangs. More booths were being set up in the streets but Martin already knew where he was taking them; Raphaëlle's, the best pastries and gingerbread in Jader. She was setting up her own booth near the main square when he'd walked past on his way to the Chantry, she should be about ready to serve customers by now.

"By the way, Fey, this is Kalian. You remember his name? I mentioned him before."

Fey nodded shyly. "The nice man who helped you save the poor people?"

"Right." Martin smiled at her, then a little self-consciously at Kalian. "Sorry, I couldn't hide your heroics. My landlord is very impressed with you. If you ever need carpenter work you should go see him, he'll give you a good deal."

"It is an honor to meet you, Fey," said Kalian, giving her the most grand bow he could manage whilst still walking. He recalled that Iris had described other children getting angry at the *uppity* elves, scoring better on class assignments. "I have it on good authority that you are a particularly clever and brave young lady."

"A carpenter, huh? I'll have a word with Tessa, see if there's anything she needs done at the Raven." Kalian's curiosity was piqued now, he wasn't aware of any elven carpenters in Jader. "I hope your Uncle Martin told you that he was the biggest hero of all of us. He did the right thing even though he got yelled at for it in the end. That was pretty brave." Kalian winked at Martin.

Summerday preparations were in full swing, with carts and booths springing up like mushrooms after a summer rain. One booth caught Kalian's attention. "Are we headed to Raphaëlle's? I'll say this for you, Martin. You know the best place to go for pastries."

Martin smiled, pleased to see how good Kalian was with the children. "Well, I've lived here for almost ten years, I have sampled all of the local bakeries. In the name of, hum, research, obviously. That cinnamon roll they make..." he sighed wistfully.

They had walked past a flower booth, another one where they sold wooden toys, and finally reached Raphaëlle's. Her shop was in a nearby side-street but she knew how to do good business and always had a booth in the street during the summerday festivities. Raphaëlle herself was a thirty-something woman, with long brown hair usually gathered in a long braid, still youthful-looking and always smiling. Rumour had it that she had renounced a title and a wealthy suitor to open her bakery, but that was only one of the stories she told and no one knew which version was closest to the truth - if any were truthful at all.

She saw Martin and waved at him. "Fair day !"

"And to you ! I bring three famished children, Raphaëlle, pray tell me you can do something for these poor souls !"

Her eyes crinkled into a smile when she saw Fey's hopeful eyes as she peered from behind Martin's leg, and how Arran excitedly bounced on the tip of his toes to catch a look at the pastries.

"The chokolatines are just out of the oven, how does that sound ?" She directed the question at Arran, who nodded vigorously. "No need to ask what you want, Martin, I already know. And you, messire ?" Raphaëlle looked quizzically at Kalian.

"A good day to you, Raphaëlle. I would love a crepe, please." She was making crepes fresh at her booth. A baker's oven was a complicated, finely crafted, and enormous tool, and maintaining a brick oven's even and correct temperature was as important as flour and butter to the finished product. "And my niece..." Kalian picked up Iris so that she could see the tray of treats that one of the baker's apprentices had just delivered to the booth from the baker's ovens.

"I want chocolaines like Arran," announced Iris imperiously, then wriggled out of Kalian's arms.

"I'll have a mulled wine with the crepe, Raphaëlle, and fruit juice if you have it for the children." He put appropriate coins on the counter for his and Iris' food and the juice, plus a little extra for the baker's trouble.

Whilst Raphaëlle prepared their order, Kalian gestured to one of the few outdoor tables, just being vacated by satiated patrons. "Shall we sit?"

"Let's," Martin said. Arran and Iris scampered ahead while Fey still stuck close to Martin. Her curiosity was beginning to beat her shyness however, and she now looked at Kalian with interest.

The heavy wooden table was lined by two benches, with enough space for all of them to sit comfortably. The children's feet did not reach the ground and Arran started swinging his legs while humming the chant. He grinned at Iris and started making funny faces at her, in a clear attempt to make her smile. He always loved to fool around, and his cheeky smile was so adorable that he often got away with it.

"Do you often do the school run?" Martin asked. "I don't remember seeing you before, but..." maybe that was because Arran and Fey always stayed away from the others.

"Most days Tessa or Ben collects Iris from school, and they can't linger. I'm usually working at the Raven, getting ready for the evening crowd," said Kalian.

Iris made faces back at Arran, and the two embarked on a game to out-do each other.

Kalian watched the children while contemplating the consequences of confiding in Martin. "The four of us – me, Tessa, Ben and my father - had a long talk. They're going to train someone to take over some of my duties at the Raven."

"If you've been in Jader for ten years, then you know things got bad during the Blight, so close to the Ferelden border. Then, I was able to use my abilities to help people, and things were so chaotic nobody who might turn me in noticed. At the mine, I remembered how satisfying it was to help people, to do the right thing." Kalian regarded his friend with an apologetic smile. "Templars will come for me sooner or later, so I want to make the most of the time I have until then."

Martin's eyes, which had drifted towards the children, snapped back to Kalian. He was surprised at the casual mention of Kalian's... situation and instinctively, he glanced around them to check if anyone was within hearing range. But the people in the street were much too busy preparing for the summerday festivities to pay them any attention.

"You managed to... blend in for many years," Martin said. "There is no reason to think you couldn't do so for a long time yet." Part of him was sorry at the thought of potentially losing his friend, but he

was also worried at the thought of Kalian using his magic more and more... with all the dangers that entailed. And yet, he couldn't pretend he didn't understand how Kalian felt. Like a bird in a cage, probably. "I suppose it's wise to be ready for all contingencies though."

Raphaëlle approached cheerfully to serve them the still-hot pastries, Kalian's mulled wine and Martin's warm cider. The children squealed in excitement and dug in voraciously, the funny-face competition forgotten for now.

"You know... I'm originally from the north-east. Right up at the border with Tevinter and Nevarra. The Vints are... well, they're what they are. But it's a safe place, for someone of your persuasion. At least for a while. I can..." he grimaced, not quite able to believe what he was about to admit to. "If you ever need a safe haven, I could write you a letter of introduction. I have... family in Tevinter."

Kalian was momentarily speechless. "That's very kind of you, Martin. Tevinter, though... I wouldn't fit in there, either. They have an approach to, uh... things of a certain persuasion... that're worse than here but in the opposite extreme." There was more he'd like to say Martin on this subject, but not in front of the children – or in this relatively public place.

He smiled indulgently at Iris, Fey, and Arran, each of whom was enthusiastically becoming a cheerful, sticky mess. "So, Martin. You're from the far northeast, eh? What brought you so far south?" He sipped his delicious spiced cider.

That question was more loaded than Kalian probably realized. Martin fought the sudden urge to confide in him. Kalian would understand his circumstances better than most, by virtue of his own secrets, but that was not the sort of conversation he wanted to have in public, let alone in front of the children. Although they did not seem to be paying attention, Martin knew that young ears could be attentive to adult matters.

"I came down here for my training," he said. Which was the truth, if not all of it. "I was sent to the Chantry when I was eleven, and when I was sixteen they assigned me to Jader. I've been here ever since. When I left the Order, I was lucky enough to find a job in the city guard." He paused, thoughtful, as he sipped his cider. "Haven't been back home in years." Not since his mother had passed. He pushed the somber thought away, keen to keep this conversation light-hearted. "But I really like it here, I have a good job, a lot of friends, two honorary niece and nephew, and the best spicy cider this side of the waking sea." He raised his glass in a silent toast.

Kalian lifted his mug of mulled wine and supplied a toast, "To good drinks and good friends, the family we're born into and the family we find." Kalian drained the last mouthful of wine and gave his cup an appreciatively disappointed look.

The children were getting restless, having consumed every sweet morsel. "We should do this again sometime," said Kalian, imagining a quieter place for conversation with space for the children to run. "Maybe take the children on a picnic."

"That would be nice," Martin agreed, with a regretful look at his now empty mug of cider. "I'm sure Fey and Arran would love it. They don't..." have a lot of friends, he almost said but didn't. He didn't want to make the children's situation look pitiful. "...often get the chance to have a day out," he finished instead. "Whenever you're free, let me know. I have..." he grimaced slightly, "...lots of night shifts these days."

Kalian's expression betrayed, he thought, concern and amusement in equal parts.

"It's not so bad," he amended quickly. "I don't really mind it. It's nice to have free time during the day."

Kalian's eyebrows knit together thoughtfully. "You take your position on the guard and responsibility to Jader's citizens to heart. You're a good man, Martin. Fair and open-minded. Jader could use more guards like you. Have you ever thought about going for a promotion to guard captain?"

Martin's smile turned wry. "Can't say I haven't. I don't have the experience and seniority to seriously go for it just yet, though. In a couple of years, maybe. If I don't get sacked by then," he snorted. "I like to think I could make a difference... but sometimes I wonder if any of us ever do. Life just seems to go on regardless, doesn't it? Still. If we don't try then what's left to live for?"

The apostate leaned back in his chair and smiled contentedly. "Is it so bad to live our lives *trying* to make a difference? Enjoying what we have now – good food, good drink, and good company, whilst doing what we can to make Thedas a better place for their future." His nod took in the three children, who were fidgeting, ready to be going.

Kalian got to his feet, "The festival starts tomorrow. Will I see you at the Summerday pole ceremony?"

"Most likely." Martin followed suit, gesturing to Fey and Arran to join him. "And Raoul will be there too. Maybe we can have a bite before or afterwards, or a drink? But no need to decide now, we'll see about that tomorrow." He smiled at Kalian, then Iris. "Say hi to your mother for me, will you? Fey, Arran, say goodbye."

Fey waved a hand but stayed close to Martin. More boisterously, Arran waved both of his with a big smile.

"I will, Uncle Martin," said Iris with a big, sticky grin. She waved at her two friends, and then with the unselfconscious affection of a four year old, she threw her arms around Arran and hugged him, and kissed Fey on the cheek. "Good bye!"

Kalian chuckled and added his own wave to Fey and Arran. "A pleasure to meet you, Arran and Fey. We'll see you soon." He turned his gaze to Martin. "Always up for a bite or a drink, anytime, my friend."



## New Friends and Allies

Posted on 26 Jul 2021 @ 7:06pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**1,051 words; about a 5 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 18th – afternoon

OOC: Continued from 'The Gang is All Together Part 2'

Cainan turned to Harlowe, taking a moment to gauge them; *them*, because it was not so easy to make an identification of gender, which was a little unusual in Jader, and even less common in Orlais as a whole. Also unusual for a dwarf, where the curves would normally give the women away regardless of what they wore. For someone who took pride in being able to read people and size them up, Cainan found himself at a loss to quantify the person before him. *Intriguing.*

"So, Harlowe - what brings you to Jader?" Cainan asked, taking a sip of his drink but listening out in case there was more trouble upstairs.

The dwarf knows that look. *What are you?* is not a question many are bold enough to ask to their face, and those who are bold enough are normally stupid enough to earn the knife they get pressed to their face. In terms of this human, however, he seems to have head enough on his shoulders to *not ask*. The same smile tugs at their lips. They don't take a seat, not quite yet, and they rock to one side, taking in everyone, the way individuals dart off to the rescue of some lady...

And they shrug. "The road," comes their deadpan quip. "Passing through -- be it work or a place to stay the night 'til I have my feet better under me, I don't mind. Just bailed on my last mercenary company, really. I feel it's a... personal obligation, really, to behave as an independent contractor for a time, y'know?"

Cainan nodded, having had periods of time like that to reflect on himself, and he raised his tankard as a sign of understanding.

"You worked for a mercenary company? What kind of work do you do, Harlowe?" asked Jaslyn, leaning toward the dwarf. Then because not everyone was willing to answer prying questions, she added, "If you feel like sharing. If not, fanciful lies are always entertaining."

Looking a bit crestfallen, Kalian returned to the common room to join his friends, after having pointed the bespectacled foreigner to the outhouse, and delivering fresh towels to Elinowy but

leaving Rhiannon to administer them. He caught Harlowe's last comment as he grabbed an empty tankard on the table and poured the last of a pitcher into it.

Cainan eyed the returning barman and sized the look on his face, the signs of moisture on his clothes. "Well, what's that look for?" Cainan asked, almost inspecting the man now.

"A missed opportunity, I suppose," replied Kalian to the nobleman, wistfully, imagining Elinowy and Rhiannon together in the tub, and himself holding the towels. To Martin he added, "Elinowy's fine. Just startled during her bath by a lost lodger. Rhiannon is, uh, helping her dry off." His gaze fell to the pretty elf, a Grey Warden by the insignia she wore. "I don't believe we've officially met. I'm Kalian."

"Jaslyn." She gave Kalian a nod and curious, searching look. Hahren Liriel had spoken to Jaslyn of this family, a cautionary tale about an elf who wasted her potential by joining with a human. And yet that elf had managed to pass on respect for elves to her human children, Tessa and Kalian. These were good people. "A pleasure to meet you."

Kalian turned his attention to the blue-eyed dwarf. "My humblest apologies, Harlowe, for inviting you to join us then abandoning you." Taking in Martin, Cainan, Jaslyn, and Harlowe, he asked, "What did I miss?"

Jaslyn lifted her mug to Harlowe. "I had just – quite rudely I admit - asked our new associate to tell us about their recent employment... or tell an interesting lie."

"I'll admit I'm interested as well," Martin said. His curiosity was motivated by more than the mystery of the unusual dwarf person who'd joined them. If there was an idle mercenary company close by who'd just concluded their last employment... well, idle mercenaries tended to be at the heart of most tavern brawls. Those, and bored noblemen. "May I ask what company you served with, and whether they're likely to grace our town with a visit ?"

Rhi followed Elinowy out of the bath area and headed straight for the bar. She smacked her hand on the bar till the bar tender came over. She smiled, gave him a wink and handed him 10 gold. "Dwarven ale for everyone at that table over there. I will take mine now handsome." She gave him another wink. After she was handed her mug of ale she turned and made her way to the table.

As she approached she noticed another dwarf. This dwarf was dressed so as to not guess who they might be. For Rhi this meant two things. One, this dwarf was a private person Two, in Rhiannon's line of business this one was one to watch. Right now though, this was a time to celebrate. She made her way to the dwarf, dropped the mug of ale she had for herself, in front of the dwarf. She then grabbed a chair and sat down. "So what did I miss?"

Jaslyn opened her mouth to repeat, once again, the group's anticipation of Harlowe's story – real or made up – about his recent employment. But it seemed the blue-eyed dwarf wished to take advantage of the interruption and remain mysterious. Jaslyn respected their preference. Besides, she observed that Rhiannon's stop at the bar had resulted in a large imposing human headed their

way with what appeared to be a tray of full mugs. She grinned at Rhiannon. "You haven't missed anything, I think we were waiting for you!"

The Chantry sister quietly entered the main room of the tavern, once more clad in her scarlet robes and her flame red hair braided up into an elegant looking crown atop her head. She was impossible to miss as she crossed the room. She maneuvered around the table to the end near Martin giving a respectful smile to all she passed... even the elf. She leaned in close to Martin. "I am so sorry to interrupt, but we should be going to the Chantry before the Revered Mother grows concerned of my absence."

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## Friends, Lovers, and Enemies

Posted on 31 Jul 2021 @ 1:59pm by [Rogue Jaslyn](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#)

**3,143 words; about a 16 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Cainan's home / alienage

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 21st, morning

Jaslyn lay sprawled across Cainan's bed, naked, panting to regain her breath. "What was I saying before that last, uh... *spectacular* interruption? Oh yes." Jaslyn sat up in the bed and regarded her bedpartner with a mock-sowl. "Cainan, as much as I would enjoy spending another two days and nights naked with you in your apartment, I can't put off visiting the alienage any longer. Hahren Liriel will be expecting me. And I should think Julanna's family will be expecting both of us."

Cainan breathed deeply, wanting to preserve the post-coital moment for just a little longer, but he knew it was futile. She was right, of course - he had been putting it off, mainly because this wasn't something he was *good* at. Consoling someone, sincerity; these weren't his natural skills; he was gifted in only very narrow, mainly physical endeavours, and when presented with the need for these more empathetic pursuits, he apparently resorted to procrastination through what he was good at. But he had run out of interruptions and postponements - it was time.

He rolled over and snaked an arm around her waist, pulling her close.

"Yeah, I know," he sighed, his fingers caressing the small of her back. "I... am not good at it. You should know that ahead of time, I haven't the faintest idea of what to say. How do you tell someone that their daughter is dead?" he asked, sincerely hoping there was a simple answer.

Jaslyn barely resisted the lure of Cainan's embrace. The man was *skilled*, with nearly as much stamina as a Grey Warden. "You certainly are good at some things." She kissed him on the cheek in

a way that would have been chaste if they were not both naked and only moments ago engaged in some very not-chaste activities, then wriggled off the bed. "Julanna's family already suspected she was dead. We are only giving them confirmation and closure. Just recognize there is nothing you can say that will ease their grief. The best you can do is share what you remember about her. Tell them how she made the lives of her shipmates better. Tell them how she influenced you."

Cainan listened to her speak, the soothing sound of her voice adding to his resolve. After bathing, Cainan found himself wearing his least flamboyant ensemble; there was no need to peacock about *today*.

When they were ready, they stepped outside into the sunshine; it was a far nicer day than it had any right to be, and the preparations for the Summerday festival didn't help to make the journey to the Alienage any more somber, as people scurried with decorations, ingredients and flowers, eager in anticipation of the week-long festivities. Cainan himself would normally be looking forward to it, as well, and maybe tomorrow he would; he particularly enjoyed the third day, where indulgence was not only tolerated but encouraged, and the streets were filled with drinking, eating, flirting and the inevitable steps before retiring with a stranger (or indeed, someone familiar) to indulge in some more carnal passions.

"Have you ever celebrated Summerday, Jaslyn?" he asked, making conversation for the first time since leaving the apartments.

"Since I came to Jader as a Grey Warden, yes," said Jaslyn as they made their way through the streets of Jader. "Summerday is celebrated in Val Royeaux of course, but I was a servant then, and for servants and most elves it is not a celebration. My favorite day of the festival was Fasting day, when our masters slept off their hangovers and left us alone to prepare the last day's feast. I enjoy the festivities now, in Jader, though I do keep a watchful eye for those not so lucky."

She stopped at a bakery cart and bought two of the seasonal sweet-bread rolls cleverly molded into phallic shapes and handed one to Cainan. She gave him a sly smile, then bit into the end of her breakfast. "Of course, I do expect to be drinking, partying, and indulging in a bit of debauchery. After all, we must take our Andrastian duties seriously. Have you made particular plans for any the days of the festival?"

Cainan pondered the ramifications of listing what he hoped to achieve with their trysts over the next few days; just how *much* he was planning to break the days of fasting and quiet contemplation, and focus only on the days of debauchery and excess... but decided on a more conservative approach. No need to pursue her doggedly when she was a willing participant, and it would be presumptuous to assume she did not have other plans.

"Oh, sexy hijinks, plenty of wine, and some good food, but nothing that one might call *firm* plans," he replied, vaguely.

Jaslyn chuckled appreciatively. "It seems unlikely, but should we both find ourselves desiring of -

but lacking - a bedpartner, I propose that we agree to, uh... come... to each other's aid?"

Cainan smiled at that, and the possibilities therein. "Oh, I'd hate to think that the event would pass without being memorable... and if there's one thing I can say about our time together so far, it has been... *memorable*," he said, huskily. "If you somehow find yourself without the company you deserve, I will of course be available," he added, though in truth he hoped to be more than a backup plan.

"If you like we could make that a plan." Jaslyn looked up into his handsome face and smiled, then looked away. In many ways Cainan was the perfect for-now partner for her - a nobleman and a hedonist coming to terms with the realization he had a conscience. She needn't worry that their mutual entertainment would lead to him getting attached to someone like her, an elf and a Grey Warden guaranteed to die young and childless.

They walked for another ten minutes, as the shops slowly but noticeably changed to reflect the poorer residents in this part of the city. Gone were the stores containing curiosities and artisanal crafts from around the world, having given way to the more pragmatic food sellers, and then again to the markets that sold meats that were still mysterious, but not because of the parts of Thedas they had once called home. As even these fell away, they found themselves at the boundary of the Jader Alienage. An old guard post was still erected, more of a hut by the main gate. The buildings around the alienage naturally formed a wall so there were set points of entry and exit; all the better to pen them in should an uprising or protest occur. But such things were becoming a thing of the past; at least, for the worst of it; the guard post was little more than a hut now, with no occupants; Empress Celene had made some substantial moves to improve the lot of Elves living in her cities, though it would still illicit humour or anger to use the word 'Equal' to describe the current situation. There was no mistake that Elves were still in need of their Alienage, if only because there was safety in numbers. But with that safety came the cost of isolation, and the promise that their status as second class citizens could only continue, if with less restrictions than before.

Cainan slowed as they came to the gate, and looked at Jaslyn, troubled. "I'm ashamed to say that from here... I do not know the way," he admitted, unsure of how that might reflect on him. He was not keen on highlighting the differences between them, though he was of course acutely aware that he had been born with tremendous privilege, even by Orlesian standards, and that she had once been a servant to the very same type of privilege. But she was not like other women as a direct result; noblewomen were boring, common women were fun, if often a bit dull; she was an experience he could not compare to much, and one he didn't want to push away.

Nobles all knew how to *reach* the Alienage, but only a few knew where they were going once inside, and most of those only for fairly nefarious reasons that he would likely cut a man for, given the opportunity; for while there was indeed safety in numbers for the elves, there was only so much, and there were always men of power willing to exert that privilege without challenge on those that couldn't expect the privilege to decline. While it was not something so brazenly handled since Celene's rise to power, Cainan could not pretend that he had not encountered those that spoke of such things, and could not be offended when some of the elves ushered their women or children

into the safety of their homes at his approach.

Jaslyn paused for a moment, and faced him. "I'll lead the way, we'll be fine. You should know that an elf bedding a human is strongly frowned upon, so you and I should try not to advertise what we've been doing for the last two days." She winked playfully but continued in a serious tone. "You may be called *shem*. I may be insulted for being with you. If that happens, please allow me to defend my own honor."

Cainan nodded, as he unconsciously stepped a bit farther from her so that a casual observer would not assume their carnal past time. In truth, he didn't care if anyone knew; he liked being scandalous, though he did not like the idea of Jaslyn being ostracized on his account; particularly when he had already been party to enough harm in her life.

"I will do my best to let you fight your own battles," he joked; it was funny to him, because he was fairly sure she could take him in a straight fight if she really wanted to. He'd seen her fight; he was good, but she was... something else. He supposed that was what set wardens apart from the rest of society; in truth, he was more than happy to watch her take some idiot apart if it came to that; him stepping in would be a *mercy*.

"We should visit Hahren Liriel first, to show proper respect. She'll either tell us where to find Julanna's family or invite them to meet us in her home." Jaslyn straightened and lifted her chin, ready to enter the alienage.

Cainan cleared his throat and did the same, supposing that Hahren Liriel must be what the elves he knew referred to an elder, though he actually didn't know what that meant beyond being old. He felt less than prepared; he was not the sort to go to the alienage and strut about to antagonise the elves, like *some* rich idiots, but now that he was here he couldn't help but feel like he was having the same effect on the people as they passed. He wondered if falling a step behind Jaslyn would show deference or respect, but supposed it might look more like he was following her. He opted to stay by her side, at a respectful distance; Maker, but he felt uncomfortable not being here for shallow purposes.

Jaslyn walked side-by-side with Cainan along the main path through the alienage. The nobleman's presence made her more aware than usual of her fellow elves' poverty, but she also found herself noticing the positives – they took care of the little they had. Children wore clothing worn and patched, and yet the children were clean and not too thin. Liriel was a strong and unifying force here.

Finally, they arrived at the Hahren's door, and Jaslyn looked to Cainan prepared to knock. "Ready?"

"Honestly?" he asked, a bit nervous; more so than if he was meeting any human. It wasn't concern for his own safety that bothered him; Cainan was scrappy, happy to throw down or draw blades as needed and for less than most men, but that was when he was in a tavern, or when dealing with a brigand on the streets - a predator. The difference was plain; there weren't any predators here, only victims. He desperately didn't want to get into a fight with people who were just clinging to survival,

and rightly saw him as a representative of everything that made their lives miserable.

He nodded, to show he was ready, and watched her knock on the door.

There was a long pause before the door opened, wider than Cainan had expected. When the old woman saw who was at her door, she looked with distrust at Cainan to Jaslyn, with confusion. Cainan expected the best thing would be to let Jaslyn handle the introductions and go from there, so he inclined his head with what he hoped conveyed the respect he supposed someone of her position expected and deserved. Hells, he wouldn't know how to handle an honoured elder in his *own* society, let alone that of the alienage. In the world of diplomacy he was practically a stumbling imbecile.

The elder elven woman who met them at the door would not have stood out in a crowd. Her white hair was swept up into a neat bun, and she wore no jewelry, save for a simple gold ring and a leather cord around her neck supporting a pendant hidden beneath her simple tunic. She was wrapped in the regal robes of grace born of maintaining and protecting her community in the face of adversity. In many ways she was the very personification of elvhenan persistence in a world ruled by humans.

Liriel took both of Jaslyn's hands in hers briefly in greeting, then stepped back from the door. "Come in, children. You took your time coming to see me, Jaslyn." Liriel's gaze settled disapprovingly on Cainan, as though the hahren knew what had been occupying Jaslyn's time.

Jaslyn winced at being called *children* with Cainan, rather than *da'len* – an unsubtle reminder that he was *shemlin*. Considering Liriel's network of spies, she probably did know what Jaslyn and Cainan had been up to, just as she would have known the moment she and Cainan entered the alienage.

Inside, the room was larger than one might expect in an alienage, with chairs stacked to one side, a table, and a chalkboard on the wall suggested this was either a classroom, a meeting place, or both. Liriel led them through a curtained doorway to a smaller, cozy room with one plush chair, a desk, a full-to-bursting bookcase and three stackable chairs like the ones in the larger room. Another door led to the rest of Liriel's personal quarters.

Liriel sat in the plush chair and gestured impatiently. "Well, go on then, Jaslyn. Introduce me to your *ara'alas* friend." [OOC: *ara'alas* = dirty desire]

Heat rose up Jaslyn's neck and flushed her cheeks, but she sat on one of the chairs with unflustered dignity and indicated to Cainan that he should do the same. "Hahren Liriel, may I present Monsieur Cainan Sauvage. He played a critical role in my investigation into Julanna's disappearance. He was a friend - *falon* - to her aboard the *Cassabianca*."

Cainan bowed his head respectfully to the elder, but clenched his jaw a bit at her comment. Cainan didn't speak elvish – he knew a couple of the words used by elves to swear at humans, and perhaps a few used by elven women mid-coitus, but otherwise he was ignorant of the language. But Cainan was Orlesian, and all Orlesian's were well versed in subtext, and veiled insults. It was in the shift of

the woman's eyes, the creeping blush in Jaslyn's neck, and the way she addressed him and Jaslyn as if they were equals; he had expected the cool reception for himself, but it bothered him that it had been extended to her.

But he held himself in check; this was *her* domain - he was an interloper; and any action he took would reflect on Jaslyn. So he sat, as he was directed, and said simply, "Thank you for your hospitality."

Liriel settled into her own chair, elbows on the armrests and her fingers steepled together. The hahren's wrinkled and blue-veined hands, though still strong, were far more revealing of her age than her face. Liriel's gaze settled heavily on Cainan, eyes narrowed, as though waiting for him to say more.

Her impatience barely contained, Jaslyn waited for Liriel's response. Bringing Cainan with her to speak with Julanna's family was the right thing to do, she knew it. And despite Liriel's disapproval of Jaslyn's choice of bed partner, the hahren knew well enough that Jaslyn had the best interests of the alienage's residents at heart.

Cainan wondered if he should have stayed away, but it was too late for second thoughts now. Jaslyn had said it was important for him to be here, so he was. And Julanna deserved... Something from him. He wasn't sure exactly what, but she *deserved* better than she had gotten.

Cainan let Jaslyn continue without further interruption.

Jaslyn continued, despite Liriel's failure to acknowledge Cainan's introduction. "Hahren, it is with deep sadness that we must inform you that Julanna is dead."

"I've heard." Liriel waved her hands dismissively, then dropped them to her armrests and leaned toward Cainan. "Julanna had a pet name for you, I believe. What was it?"

Cainan looked at the old woman, unsure how much she knew of him already. Julanna *had* used a pet name for him; 'my Wolf'. He hadn't told anyone that, so she could only have heard it from Julanna herself, or through Julanna's family. He was somewhat ashamed to think she had spoken of him to her family to the extent that he was known by his pet name to those he had never met, but he had never told his of any of the Cassabianca's crew. Then again, he knew she would understand; he and his family had a different dynamic than she did with hers, and she had been well aware of his borderline disdain for the opinion of his parents.

"She called me 'mon Loup'," he replied, softly, though he did not break eye contact. He remembered the name fondly.

Hahren Liriel leaned back in her chair. The corners of her mouth stretched into a smile that reached her eyes and both accentuated her wrinkles and made her look younger. "Monsieur Cainan Sauvage is a stranger, but *le Loup du Val Royeaux* is a welcome friend to Julanna's family. I shall send for her brother."



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## Help wanted

Posted on 10 Aug 2021 @ 5:29pm by [Townsfolk Dominic Lesprin](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#)

**2,208 words; about a 11 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 20th

Dominic diced his gardenia flowers with intense focus. With Summerday approaching he had all but given up on research and focused instead on restocking his most popular products. Perfumes were always a bestseller, so he was brewing a few of his best recipes. The warm weather allowed him to work outside, rather than stink up the Raven's Roost, so he'd set up a work station by his cart. People cast curious looks his way as they walked past but he barely noticed any of them, too focused on his batch of white flower scent. The water finally started boiling in the bottom of his small copper cauldron and he tossed in the diced flowers, stirring once before he returned to his ingredients.

It was a familiar recipe he was making, one he'd made a thousand times, but he still paused to think about the next step. He never made twice the exact same fragrance, always varying a little in his choice of ingredients. This time he wanted to go for something a little more fresh and woody, not so heady and floral. *Pine. Definitely pine.* He tossed in a branch of pine then paused again to think. He wanted something a bit deeper, stronger, to bring the scent together. Once the first whiff of white flower had come, he needed something enticing to be there, with a lingering aftersmell to keep people intrigued. He reached for his pouch of dried lily flowers, clicking his tongue when he realized he was fresh out of them.

*Damn. Knew I should have collected more.* There was no way he could leave his brewing to go ingredient hunting though. He had too much work to do, and being unfamiliar with the area, would probably get lost before he found what he was looking for. Dominic sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. He had left a note on the Chantry notice board, but so far he'd had no luck. He came to wonder if his job advertisement had been explicit enough. Well, he'd go and check it again later. In the meantime... he reached for the chrysanthemum, his last one, and started carefully separating the petals.

As he began to toss the chrysanthemum petals in the water, a shadow fell over his work station. Dominic didn't look up, too busy adding his petals one after the other to his mixture.

"Yes ?" he said impatiently, barely remembering to use Orlesian. He was already going over the next

steps in his head. Boil until there was nearly no water left, then add alcohol... preferably grain white alcohol, if he had any left.

Rhiannon had been out to the market area browsing for nothing really. She had just wanted to get off the ship for a bit. It was when she had turned to head towards the Raven's Roost that a scent caught her attention. The smell of white flower, pine and chrysanthemum. It was a very pleasant smell. Not too overpowering yet strong enough to take notice.

Following her nose she made her way to find a man outside the Raven's Roost, standing next to a cart with a small fire and a copper cauldron with a bit of steam rising from it. "That is quite a pleasant scent. What do you call it?"

He only caught a word or two, but enough to get the gist of the question. The dwarf lady - she looked like a lady, anyway - was asking for the name of the perfume. Dominic pushed back his irritation at being interrupted. A potential customer had to be treated with basic courtesy, at least.

"Hum." He pushed up his glasses. "White Flower perfume. Number 3." He had fifteen different recipes that involved white flowers, in varying quantities and forcefulness. More than once he'd been told they would sell better if he gave them more poetic names, such as "Romantic Night" or "Moonlight Kiss", but the concept baffled him. The scent was the same regardless, and it was infinitely easier for him to remember the recipes if he kept things straightforward. "Not finished. You want, come back, hum..." what was tomorrow in Orlesian again? "After night. Or, I have others, if you want."

He pointed to the small perfume bottles on display. They were arranged by theme; floral, woody, citrus and exotic. The latter category included everything that didn't fit in the first three, such as musk, various kinds of resins, a few berries he'd been experimenting with, an extract of seaweed, and even a somewhat surprising fungus earthy inspired scent, that was one of his favorites but oddly enough did not seem to attract the attention of many customers.

Rhiannon listened as the human told her to come back tomorrow if she wanted the one he was making. Though his words were a bit peculiar, it made her smile. She shifted over to look at the other perfumes he had out. Rhi looked them over and picked out a woody one. Taking out the stopper she took in the scent. A deep cherry wood came through with a hint of a crispness. Green apple. Setting this one aside she picked up one of the exotic ones. She took the stopper out and took in the scent of this one as well. A agarwood musk with a hint of jasmine and an underlining tree note as well. She stopped this back up like the other one, took both to the human and smiled as she set them down. "I will take these two now and the one that you are creating, when it is done tomorrow, as well. How much is it going to be sir?"

Ah, a customer who knew what they wanted, rather than tinkering about for hours and trying every single fragrance. Dominic's strained smile grew less impersonal and a bit warmer.

"Is 12 coppers for this," he pointed to the red cherry bottle, "and 15 this one," he pointed to the other

one. "25 coppers total." Numbers were something he was comfortable with in any language. "White flower is..." he tried to remember how to say *cheaper* then gave up with a mental shrug. "10 coppers."

Rhiannon listened as the man told her the price. She noticed that his smile warmed a little. Rhi dug in her pouch, pulled out two gold. As she did she spoke. "I must say, i was expecting to pay a little more for such quality." She smiled as she placed the gold on the table, then spoke again. "Have you never.... (pause) I am so sorry. I have not introduced myself. I am Rhiannon Cadash. May I have the pleasure of knowing to whom I am doing business with?"

What was it with people, that the moment Dominic said three words in their language they assumed he was fluent and flooded him with long, complicated sentences ? He stared at the dwarf, trying to piece together the stream of sounds she had just uttered, aware that he probably looked quite vacant. He'd caught her name at least ; Rhiannon. Presumably she wanted his in return, if she'd introduced herself.

"Dominic," he said, hoping he wasn't making a fool of himself. "Lesprin." He offered his hand, trying to look silently affable. "I, huh, make... brews ? Potions. Anything you need, I make." So long as she said it slowly enough, anyway.

Rhiannon smiled as the man told her his name. She could see that he didn't speak fluent dwarf. So she switched to common when she continued. "Dominic. Like it. Strong name." She shifted a little to make sure that she could look directly at him. "Brews, potions, perfumes. Sounds like. You are very skilled." She paused for a moment then continued. "I have a proposal for you. If you are interested in hearing me out."

Oh, thank everything that was holy, she was actually speaking slowly enough for him to understand... well, as much as he was ever going to. Dominic nodded as he parsed what she wanted from him.

"Yes. Commission. I listen."

He knew a wide array of recipes, and felt reasonably confident he could make whatever the lady wanted. Within reason. There was always the odd customer with ridiculous expectations, or absurdly vague requests. "Make a perfume that smells like morning dew," or "I want a potion that will make me lucky !" or the ever-dreaded "I'm looking to buy a love potion." But the dwarf lady looked like a serious customer.

Rhi got the impression that he thought she was going to ask for a specific potion or perfume. Her customary mischievous grin crossed her face, she would get to that later. Right now she had other plans.

Rhi shifted so that she and Dominic could talk somewhat privately. "Yes, a potion would be nice, but not right now. What I would like to know is if you would like to have a place where you could

create to your hearts content. Make what you would like. Have a small staff, that you would train, to gather the supplies you need. Does this interest you Dominic?"

Dominic felt immediately wary. If something looked too good to be true, it usually was. He spared the lady dwarf another look, assessing her. Her clothes, revealing as they were, looked well made and expensive. Overall she looked like she had money - but appearances were deceiving. More importantly, he wasn't sure he trusted someone who'd offer such a job to a virtual stranger, without so much as an interview. Either this was a con, or she was recruiting for something not quite legal.

"Can you..." he paused, gathering his thoughts. "Give more information ? What would job include ?"

Rhiannon liked this human. Straight to the point. "Straight to the point. Very well. This is what I am thinking. We set you up in a small shop next to our warehouse. You have a permanent place for your customers to come to. There would be no overhead because you would be working for me. What we would expect in return, the occasional specialty potion and perfume as well." She smiled. "If you would like I could show you the space."

Dominic frowned, biting his lips as he mulled over the offer. Setting up a shop was what he'd always wanted, but... it was too neat. Too easy. Maybe it was just a trap, to make him leave his wares unattended while an accomplice helped themselves. Or maybe this lady dwarf was involved in shadier business still than he'd imagined. Either way, he wasn't sure he wanted anything to do with her.

But... what if it was a real offer ? Maybe Jader was just that desperate for potion brewers. He hadn't seen anyone else selling perfumes and potions around here. Yet.

"Can't now. I must watch customers. No, attend. Attend customers. But later, after I close, I can take look around." Dominic sighed inwardly. He just *knew* he was probably setting himself up for disappointment, if not worse, but the temptation was too great. Just in case it was for real. "But I want more detail," he added. "What you want from me. How much I pay for shop." There was no way in Thedas they wouldn't charge him *something* for the space, a percentage of his earnings at the very least, if not a flat rate. "And what happen if you or I break contract."

Rhi listened as Dominic voiced his concerns. All of which were legitimate. When he was done she gave a nod. "I understand your concern. I would be as well, if I was in your shoes. (pause) Come to the docks later today. Look for the Night's Kiss and ask for me. I can show you the space and we can go over the details in a more private setting. How does this sound Master Dominic?"

Like a knife between the ribs and a robbery waiting to happen, Dominic thought but did not say. He wasn't completely decided yet. Still, he figured he could ask around before heading for the meeting. If he heard anything bad about the Night's Kiss, he could always just not show up. Well, assuming he managed to get the information he needed with his poor grasp of the local language.

"Talk more, fine," he said reluctantly. "I go, uh, ask for Rhiannon. At nightfall. Night's Kiss."

Dominic watched in mild astonishment and a small measure of horror as Rhiannon spat in her hand and offered it to him. He stared at the wet palm and tried to look less disgusted than he felt. She looked like she actually expected him to touch it.

He didn't want to offend her though. Spirits knew what sort of thugs she might have at her command. Hesitantly he offered her a little wave, hoping that would be enough to distract her from the spit-lathered handshake.

Rhiannon gave Dominic a smile when he waved instead of shaking her hand. "I am looking forward to seeing you later Master Dominic." With that she will take the perfume and head back to the ship.

Dominic watched her leave with her purchase, still of two minds about the whole thing. This had been a strange encounter.

## Pole Dancing

**Posted on 17 Sep 2021 @ 5:51pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)**

**4,550 words; about a 23 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader Chantry Courtyard

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th – first day of festival

The streets of Jader were alive with festival revelers, adorned in bright shades of yellow, orange, and red, with occasional splashes of cooler colors, especially green. Kalian liked to imagine the first day of the Summerday festival turning the city into a living flower garden. He let the tide of people carry him past vendor stands and the wafting scent of baked sweets, roasting meat and other enticing aromas, to their mutual destination, the chantry courtyard where the Summerday pole had been erected that morning in preparation.

Kalian had gotten a later start than he'd expected, Tessa had given him a long list of chores, but now that he had finished, he was free of responsibility until the next day at least. All of the rooms at the Raven's Roost were taken, and Kalian had even cleared out his own room so Tessa could place paying lodgers there. He'd be sleeping on the floor of his father's room that night, unless his evening took an unexpectedly interesting turn. This was Summerday festival, after all.

He made his way to the chantry buildings and came to a stop along the low fence to scan for familiar faces. A circular space had cleared around the pole, and a rainbow of long ribbons fluttered in the wind from the top. As Kalian watched, the dancers – human men and women wearing yellow

garlands – gathered around the pole whilst two chantry sister directed them to catch the ribbons and arrange themselves.

"Up !" Arran tugged insistently at Martin's arm.

"Arran - " Raoul sighed. He didn't like indulging them too much but wasn't very good at saying no, Martin had come to realize.

"It's fine," he said. "I don't mind."

"Yes !" Arran nearly bounced with excitement while his sister rolled her eyes.

Martin lifted Arran up and over his head so the little boy could sit on his shoulders. Arran didn't like crowds. Neither did Fey, but she was too old at six years old to ask to be carried - though no doubt Raoul would pick her up if the crowd got too dense. Arran settled, hands on Martin's hair, squealing in excitement at being higher than everyone else.

"Now let's go or we'll miss the start of the ceremony," Raoul said, taking Fey's hand in his own, large and callused fingers.

The weather was perfect this year, not like two summers ago when it had been grey and windy. There was a cheerful atmosphere in the streets as people milled about, looked at the colourful booths and stopped to exchange greetings with friends and neighbours. Most were headed towards the Chantry to witness the pole ceremony. As they walked along Martin waved at the two guards standing by the Chantry, who waved back to him. This kind of crowds were perfect for pickpockets and no doubts there would be one or three at work today. Martin found his eyes drifting through the crowd, looking for the tell-tale signs - someone bumping into people, hands hovering too close to the merchant's booths.

He didn't see pickpockets but he did catch a familiar face not far from the dancers' pole.

"There's Kalian ! Come on Raoul, I'll introduce you."

Raoul turned around to look at Kalian. "Your new friend from the tavern ? The one who helped with the mine business ?"

"More than helped," Martin admitted, rubbing at his arm where the fading scar still ached sometimes. "He's a good man. I think you'll like him."

Raoul grunted noncommittally but made a friendly enough face as they got nearer to Kalian.

Kalian saw Martin approach with little Arran on his shoulders, accompanied by a human man holding Fey's hand. He shaded his eyes and looked up at the elven boy. "Arran! Maker's breath, how did you grow so tall so fast?" Then he pretended that he'd only just noticed Martin. "Oh, I see! Martin gave you a boost. Good to see you, my friend."

"I'm the most tallest," Arran declared proudly. "I'm taller than you and taller than Fey and - "

" - and I think you just became smaller," Martin declared, lifting the little boy so he could let him slide down to the ground, much to his dismay. "Say, do I smell biscuits ?"

The strategic redirection worked and Arran started looking around for the theoretical biscuits. There was no shortage of booths selling them. Martin kept an eye on him but redirected most of his attention to Kalian.

"Good to see you too. Kalian, this is Raoul, Arran and Fey's father."

The first thing Kalian noticed about Raoul was that he was not elven, like his children. He managed not to hesitate for more than a couple of seconds before saying, "It is a great pleasure to meet you, Raoul. I understand you're a carpenter. A pleasure to see you again, serah Fey," said Kalian with a bow for Fey. "Iris is around here somewhere with her father."

Fey looked torn between her desire to look for Iris, and her fear of the crowd. She clutched nervously at Raoul's hand while she looked around to see if she could spot her friend.

"That I am," Raoul acknowledged, rubbing Fey's shoulder to reassure her that he was there. "If you need any carpentry done, I'll be happy to help. I understand that you saved me the hassle of having to look for a new lodger." He gave Martin a disillusioned look. "This one's barely housetrained as it is but I got used to him."

"Thanks," Martin said drolly. "I think."

Kalian saw Elinowy then. The striking redheaded and – he reminded himself - *chaste* sister stood out in any crowd, and seemed to be the center of attention of a group of children.

Sister Elinowy smiled to herself as the circle of dancers moved into their positions. The spectacle and revelry of Summerday was always cheering to her. While she was not one to engage in the pole dance, being that she held no ambitions of interpersonal intimacy, but she loved the look in the eyes of young couple as they circled and circumnavigated themselves around the pole, positioning themselves to end up bound to the pole with the one that held their affections. It was a beautiful symbol of the Maker's love for Andraste and for all his children.

She stood off to the side of the pole circle, tending to many of the smaller children that mimicked their elder siblings in the dance. She had two boys hanging to the skirts of her robe, making her the great pole of the Maker's love. She turned with them slowly as they played. As her skirts began to bind up she bent low to the boys, giving them a twinkling smile and held a closed fist above them. They both watched and knew she had something special for them. "Gimme! Gimme! I mean please Sister." Elinowy smiled widely, "Very good, the Maker wants all his children to be good little gentlemen."

"Even the girls?" one of the boy asked.

She giggled. "Yes even the girls. Go and be kind to your mothers and sisters." She opened her hand producing tiny satchels of tied paper. She put two in each boys hand. "These are the tears of Andraste, use them to show love to those around you." The boys grabbed the tiny clusters. It took all of three steps for one to throw a satchel at the other. The tiny paperwraps impacted the young boy with a loud "Crack!" as the little packages exploded harmlessly on the child. Older children and some adults let out the customary cheer as Andraste's fiery love made its appearance.

Other children ran up to the tall sister, their hands out hoping to receive a similar boon from her. She produced a large handful of the tears she had been up half the night making, and handed them to the children. A staccato of pops ran up and down the street. This was good the sister thought.

Rhiannon woke early, she had stayed behind while her mother had gone to get the wine. She had been staying in their warehouse, keeping an eye on the goods that were being stored till they were paid by the buyers. Today though was a special day. Summerday. It had been quite a few years since she had been to a Summerday festival. Especially the first day. She didn't want to miss anything.

She rushed getting ready, having taken a bath the night before, brushing her hair out then putting up in a braided ponytail. Throwing her clothes on and stomping her feet in her boots, she quickly buckles on her rapier, dabbing a little perfume on and out the door she ran.

Making her way along the streets she watched as the revelry was evident. The people laughing, singing and dancing in the streets. The children playing games, which brought a smile to her face. As she passed a few, who looked more destitute, she would toss a few silver their way.

Rhi made her way towards the chantry, only stopping to get a breakfast pie at one of the outside vendors. Once done she continued on her way. She only stopped when she came upon Kalian. Oh the young man who she found very attractive. He made her have butterflies in her insides. He was the reason for the perfume. She stood just far enough away to watch him. He was with Martin who had a young boy on his shoulders. There was another man with a young girl next to him. Rhi



eventually made her way to the group. "Findal findar (blessing, good fortune) to you all, this morning" Rhi gave a nod to Martin, the kids and the man, her eyes lingering on Kalian, who she gave a warm smile to.

Kalian grinned at the sight of Rhiannon approaching, and made a low sweeping bow, so that it was not quite awkward when he took her hand briefly and kissed it. "A good day to you, Rhiannon, you're looking lovely," he said with a flirtatious wink. She smelled good to.

Rhiannon smiled warmly as Kalian bowed, reached for her hand and kissed it. "Why thank you Kalian. You are looking as handsome as ever." As she held onto Kalian's hand after his kiss.

"Rhiannon, may I introduce Raoul and his children, Arran and Fey. Raoul, this is Rhiannon Cadash, second in command of the *Night's Kiss*."

Rhi gave Martin a smile and a nod, then turned her attention to Raoul and his kids. "It is a pleasure to meet you Raoul." She looked to both children and grinned. "Master Arran and Mistress Fey. I see that you both are ready for the day. What do you two plan on doing first?"

"Find biscuits," Arran said, pointing excitedly at a booth not far that boasted a superb pile of spicy shortbreads, right out of the oven judging by the smell that wafted enticingly towards them.

Fey said nothing, half-hiding behind Raoul's leg. She wasn't very good with new people and she was having to deal with a fair number of them today. But she did look at Rhiannon with intense curiosity ; most definitely, the dwarf's appearance was unusual, even in a port city such as Jader.

"What about you ?" Martin asked. Privately he wondered how long Rhiannon was planning on staying. It was unusual for sailors and their ships to stick around for very long. Not that he objected to her presence, after the help she'd leant them, but he couldn't help but feel there was more to her than met the eye.

Rhiannon gave Martin a smile and glanced at Kalian before looking back to Martin. "I would like to find some food and then go and try the games. Afterwards maybe go get my fortune read." She looked to the two kids, then to Raoul, the kids father. She pulled out a small pouch from somewhere and handed it to Raoul. "Now before you say anything, this is something that my house does when we are present on the first day of the Summerday festival. It is our tradition." (the small pouch holds 1 gold piece and three silver)

Raoul stared at the pouch, completely taken aback, then back at Rhiannon and frowned.

"It's very generous of you, Serah," he said stiffly, "but we do not need nor want charity. I suggest you make a donation to the Chantry instead."

Rhiannon shook her head a little. It took her a few seconds to understand what he meant. "It is not charity. It is a gift. It is for your to do with as you please. If you think it should go to charity, then do

so. Just understand that I gave it to you because I like your family. That is it."

With Rhiannon's hand still in his, warmth crept up Kalian's neck to his cheeks. The day was already taking a promising turn. He waved at Elinowy, wondering if she would join them, and noticed that the Summerday dancers were looking much more organized. The ribbons had been untangled and each dancer held one ribbon each.

A staccato of little pops and bangs suddenly erupted around their group as small children darted through the crowd making their way towards the pole to watch the dance. Shortly thereafter the tall scarlet visage of Sister Elinowy made her way to Kalian and Martin. A gentle smile was on her face as several small children tugged at her robes to try to gain more surprises. She relented and handed out a few satchels that promptly exploded at Kalian's feet. She approached noticing Kalian's hand in Rhi's. Her smile sagged a little but she quickly recovered. The strange pangs of jealousy were turned to a quiet prayer of blessing she said on the couple's behalf. The Maker was the only one for her heart. Her eyes still met with Kalian's and she paused. "Blessing of the Maker and his beloved upon this Summersday," she said warmly as she approached.

Rhi noticed the blush rise in his cheeks. This brought a wicked smile across her face. It switched to a warm and caring one. Holding Kalian's hand felt good. She gave him a wink.

She turned when she heard the approach of Elinowy. "Blessing of the Maker to you as well Sister Elinowy." Rhi responded, giving Elinowy a small bow. "How have you been?"

The tiny explosions made Martin jump, hand darting to the sword that was very much not hanging at his waist, much to his chagrin. By then he'd realized the noise was harmless and he forced himself to relax. There came Sister Elinowy. He shouldn't be surprised she was accompanied by a flurry of children ; she seemed to connect easily with them.

"Sister Elinowy," Martin said impulsively. "Will you share a dance with me ?" he gestured at the many people already dancing around the pole, some with ribbons, some not.

The request seemed to catch the sister off guard. She looked at Martin, a slight flush appearing on her cheeks even with the abundance of refracted red from her cowl. "I... thank you for your kind offer. The pole dance is a ritual for those eligible of serving their lives together. The ribbons reflect how our lives are intertwined with our community and specifically with our betrothed. All human love radiates from the central pole, which represents the foundation of the Maker's affection for humanity as seen in his beloved."

Her sudden sermonizing began to attract the attention of revelers nearby. Some stood fixated on the words of the sister as she exposed the love of the maker. She suddenly became aware that a small gathering was indeed listening in. Her voice projected more and she emphasized gestures with her hands as she spoke.

"The longer they dance the closer to the Maker and to one another they all come. Until at the end we

are bound to one another and the maker, together. Just as we on this journey of life find our selves as we explore the deeper mysteries of the Maker's love. May we all reflect upon these truths as the young people dance."

Elinowy stopped and motioned to the crowd that they should move along with the Maker's Blessing. She then turned back to Martin, Kalian and Rhiannon. "I apologize, I did not mean to submit you all to an additional sermon to those already being offered up this day." She put her hand on Martin's arm. "Thank you again for your offer, but this is a rite that is not meant for me. The Maker has my love. Find someone to share the dance with that you can explore its deeper meanings with." Looking at the children on Martin's shoulders, "Of course it would be right to instruct your young charges on the dance of love." she gave the children a smile.

Well, that was a serious case of misunderstanding, Martin thought. He'd only meant to offer a casual dance by the pole, like many indulged in, he *really* hadn't meant to propose marriage. He wasn't even sure how Sister Elinowy had reached that conclusion - had he seemed like he was courting her? He hadn't thought that he was. Although the Sister was striking, his interests lay elsewhere.

Explaining that in front of a crowd wasn't ideal though. He'd have to clear it up later with Sister Elinowy, and hope the whole thing did not leave too much awkwardness between them. In the meantime, all he could do was take the rejection gracefully. Which was made a bit harder by the number of people gawking.

"Of course, Sister. I appreciate your forbearance." He gave her an easy-going smile, and hoped to the Maker the onlookers would clear the area soon.

Kalian grinned widely at Elinowy and Martin and laughed out loud, heartily enjoying the unexpected awkward turn their conversation had taken. *The dance of love* - sounded like a euphemism to him. Kalian had not missed the way the people around them hung on Elinowy's words. "I suppose there are variations in the way Summerday is celebrated in other places. But let us hope that each of us who so desires will find a dance partner." He gave Rhiannon a sly wink.

Rhi chuckled at the confusion between Martin and Elinowy. It was funny to see Martin blush. Though what caught her attention was Kalians response. She looked to him and did not miss the sly wink he gave her. Still looking at him she spoke. "Not all dwarva celebrate Summerday. Those that do, tend to have their own ways of celebrating, though they are similar to how the humans do. We do not have a pole dance. The young who would like to marry must prove their love by defeating their rival and knocking them out." She paused to let that sink in for Kalian. Then grinned. "Though I think that Someone who is looking for a dance partner, might be able to find one. If they ask the right way." This last was said with as much innuendo.

"My lady Rhiannon," Kalian began, then leaned down to whisper in Rhi's ear so that only she could hear. "Inviting you to engage with me in a dance is only the beginning of what I wish to do with my tongue."

Rhi gave Kalian a mischievous grin. "Well, we shall start with the dance and see where it goes from there." Her tone was flirty as she gave him a wink.

The Dalish had their own way of celebrating Summerday. She has never been in a city when the festival was being celebrated. This would be her first time. She made her way into the city early from the woods outside. Kit looked upon the citizens of Jader with a polite amusement.

Kit was making her way to the chantry because she had heard that is where the festival would begin. It did not take her long to find it, she followed most of the festival goers. Since they were heading there themselves. It was early when she arrived. Standing off aways she watched as the Sisters helped those that were to dance, position them. She watched as a young man arrived, followed by another young man she had seen before. He was a guardsman. There was a few moments then another approached. A dwarf female. She didn't look like your typical dwarf. More athletic. She also looked like she could take care of herself.

Kit shifted a little as those coming to watch the beginning of the festival. Slipping a bit more into the shadows. Her hand gripping her 'bow' a little tighter.

Jaslyn observed the Summerday pole-dance crowd from the fringes and thought of her parents in Val Royeaux, endlessly working to facilitate their lord and lady's Summerday celebrations. She observed few elves in the courtyard. As she'd told Cainan, even in Jader, Summerday was no holiday for most of the city's elves. So she was surprised and intrigued to see an elf – Dalish no less – watching the festivities from the shadow of the chantry building. Jaslyn decided to introduce herself.

"Andaran atish'an," she said as she got closer, recalling a Dalish greeting, though she may have mispronounced it. "My name is Jaslyn."

Kithris barely heard the elf woman approach. Still she was a little surprised that the woman talked to her. Kit was even more surprised that she knew the Dalish greeting. Kit looked over, gave a slight nod and a small grin. "Aneth ara atish'an Jaslyn. I am Kithris Sabrae." Kit gave Jaslyn a small bow."

"A pleasure to meet you," said Jaslyn. She was quiet for a few moments, watching the humans around the Summerday pole catching the long, wide ribbons, and untangling them under the direction of two Chantry sisters. "What brings you to Jader?"

Kithris looked back towards the group she had been watching. The three human males, two young children and a female dwarf. She watched a small group of children run by, throwing poppers that made snapping sounds when they hit the ground. This brought a small frown to her face. Shems.

It was when a Chantry Sister approached the small group, accompanied by and other small group of children, did Kit answer Jaslyn. "Was on my way home. Haven't been in a few years. Came here to trade some pelts. Met an old friend, he asked for some help, so I stayed." Kit turned from watching the small group to look at Jaslyn. "So what brings you here?" Her tone was pretty neutral, though held some curiosity.

Jaslyn hesitated briefly, surprised to find the prospect of telling a Dalish elf about her background was mildly embarrassing. "I was born in Val Royeaux, where I was a servant in a human household until four years ago when I became the scapegoat in a nobleman's murder. Whilst waiting for the gallows, a Grey Warden recruited me and sent me to Jader for training and to cross into Ferelden to fight the darkspawn horde. Except the border was closed and the Hero of Ferelden ended the Blight without the Orlesian Grey Wardens." She shrugged. "I'm still here."

Kithris listened quietly as Jaslyn spoke of where she came from and that she had become a Grey Warden. When Jaslyn spoke of being accused of murder, Kit raised an eyebrow. This was something that she would expect from Shems, when dealing with city Elf's. What really grabbed her attention was the mention of being a Grey Warden. She had never seen one, let alone talked with one.

"I would expect nothing less from Shems when they are dealing with city elves." She paused and her tone is mostly neutral with a bit of anger. Her tone then switched to one of curiosity. "You are a Grey Warden? (steps forward a little and looks at Jaslyn a bit closer) You are not what I would expect a Grey Warden to look like."

Jaslyn smiled. "Now I'm curious about what were you expecting. Grey Wardens kill darkspawn, but anyone with skill and a stout heart can do that. Within our ranks, we are all equal – elf, human, dwarf. It's not a life I would have chosen if the alternative hadn't been death. And yet, I live. These days the darkspawn are mostly quiet above ground. Occasionally I take work from the hahren of the Jader city elves. Sometimes mercenary work."

The crowd moved back slightly from the Summerday Pole as the rite began. Official dancers had formed two concentric circles around the pole and began moving, one circle clockwise and the other widdershins. The bright rainbow of ribbons glittered and waved as the dancers weaved in and out around each other. The crowd clapped and cheered encouragement. A few people, inspired by the joyous spectacle, or perhaps simply early indulgers in Summerday libations, danced alone or in pairs outside the pole's circle.

As the ribbons were woven around the pole, they got shorter and shorter. The dancers themselves were brought closer together, accompanied by laughter and more cheering until all of the dancers stopped and bound close to each other by the ritual and by their reluctance to let go their ribbons.

Revered Mother Giselle appeared then, and a hush fell upon the crowd - everyone in the courtyard bowed their heads in respect. Responsible in many ways for saving Jader from disease and famine during the Blight, Giselle was wildly popular with the local people.

Sister Elinowy clapped with the music as the participants circled the pole. She gave warm smiles to everyone enjoying in the festivities. Her thoughts went to the play she would be overseeing later that afternoon where a young girl coming of age would play the part of Andraste as the Maker proclaimed his selection of her as his spouse. Elinowy had played the part herself when she was younger in Chantry School. She had a special fondness for the play. The festival really was for the young as they celebrated human love as a symbol of the divine grace of the Maker. She smiled as the dance ended and the Revered Mother stood. She turned to her companions and hushed them so Giselle's speech could be heard.

Giselle spoke with a strong low voice, full of warmth and fondness for her flock. "Blessings on all of the Maker's children as we begin the week of Summerfest celebrations. Do remember that all are welcome at each day's worship, and I look forward to seeing you there, one and all. Enjoy the festival."

Elinowy clapped respectfully as the Revered Mother called the Festival open. Elinowy had met Giselle several years ago at a Chantry conclave. The older woman was a great example of the faith and Elinowy found her very inspiring.

With that, Giselle greeted the dancers, who approached her in pairs. She tied a symbolic ribbon around the clasped hands of each couple. The ritual was complete. As people milled about in their revelry, Giselle mingled with individuals in the crowd. An observant person might notice two or three templars nearby, keeping an eye on her.

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## Kithris's First Visit

Posted on 17 Sep 2021 @ 6:50pm by [Townfolk The Scholar](#) & [Rogue Blaine Aries](#) & [Mage Kithris Sabrae](#)

**2,230 words; about a 11 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Outside of Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 20th – midday

Kithris had been on her own for the past three years. She had left her clan after an argument with the Keeper, about her training. It was foolish yet Kit couldn't bring herself to admit that the Keeper was right. Pride and stubbornness were just a couple of her flaws. Being on her own these past three years have shown her just how many flaws she really had.

Though Kit has been on her own, she still did her best to keep up on her training. Not having someone to show her how to cast things made it very tough. As tough as it had been Kit was able to learn how to shape change. Just one form only, which is a fox form. She also continued to practice her Knight Enchanter magic. She had only learned Spirit Blade before left the clan.

Her wanderings had taken her to into Ferelden for a couple of years. She had found a nice area outside of Amaranthine. She would sell or trade the furs from the animals she trapped to the locals for some goods and a bit of coin. After a couple of years, Kit made a decision that she knows will change her life. Whether for the good or bad, she didn't know. She just knew that it had to be done. Packing up what little she had, Kit left Amaranthine and headed out to find her clan. To apologize, not only to her Keeper but to the clan itself.

It was during her journey back to her clan, Kit found herself near Jader, a port city on the Waking Sea. She had done some trapping, collected a few furs, decided to trade for a new dagger and maybe some coin as well. By the time she enters the city it is close to mid-day.

Blaine sat at a table in a corner of a tavern with his feet on the table. He has his hands behind his head. His hood is up, talking to someone.

Not too far into the city Kit had stopped at a small trade stand. She struck a bargain then headed out to find a weapons shop. She kept her hood up to cover her ears though if anyone really looked they would know she was an elf. Not wanting to be teased or attacked Kit walked a little quicker than normal and kept to herself. Which caused the problem of finding a shop that sells weapons a bit harder.

It was close to a half an hour of searching when she finally decided to stop and ask someone for directions. She stood off the side of the road and looked for anyone who she felt wouldn't just spit in her face. It was while she was looking that she spotted someone who caused her to take a double take. Shifting so as to get a better look, Kit took a few steps towards the man. His light blue eyes were barely visible from under his hood, as she made her way to him.

Once she was close enough to confirm her suspicions, she pulled one side of her hood back slightly to show her ear before she pulled it back in place. In a low soft musical voice she asked her question. "Blaine Aries? Is that you?"

Inside the tavern, Blaine orders himself some more drinks. He keeps his feet on the table despite some dirty looks he has been given by the bartender and waitress. He just smirks at them. He still has his hood on to conceal his ears. He gets weird looks by the other patrons because of his Vallaslin. He just winks at them as they pass by not saying anything.

The man she thought was Blaine looked at her and then kept walking. Kit shook her head, of course it wouldn't be him. Why would he be here. Kit moved on. She decided to get off the street for a minute. Spotting a tavern close by, Kit made her way there. Stepping in it took a moment for her eyes to adjust. It took her a couple of seconds to grab a seat at one of the empty tables. Putting 3

silver on the table she waited for the waitress to come by. While waiting Kit looked over who was in the tavern. Out of the few patrons only one looked a bit out of place. Only because he had his feet up on the table in the corner.

Blaine looks over in Kit's direction. His hood covering most of his face. You can somewhat see his eyes. He then turns his gaze to the waitress that brings him his ale. "Thank ye, lass." He says with a deep voice. He takes a sip of his drink and looks back at her. He notices that there is something about her that is familiar. He doesn't move from his current position.

Kit ordered an ale and some food when the waitress passed by. The woman took the silver and nodded her head. Her attention was drawn back to the man with his feet up when he spoke. That voice, she knew that voice. Yet how could it be him.

He removes his hood since everyone can tell he is an elf. He smirks over at Kit and waves. "Ello, love. Good to see you still in one piece." He smiles. His feet still on the table. He takes a sip of his drink still looking at Kit.

Kit tilted her head slightly as her attention was already drawn to the man, her eyes widened slightly, as he lowered his hood. It was him. That same smirk, and same accent hasn't changed. She stood, her face not showing any emotion, as she made her way to the table Blaine was at. She stood for a moment, her greenish gold eyes seemed to flash in anger for a split second. Just as quickly as that flash of anger shown in her eyes, a warmth of love and caring brightened her face as she smiled and pushed his boots off the table. "Vhenan. Garas quenathra?" (Heart. Why are you here?)

He chuckles. "You haven't changed, vhenan. I'm here on business." He smiles warmly. "I missed you da'len." He says lovingly. "Garas quenathra?" He looks into her eyes. His eyes filled with warmth and love. "It is really good to see you, vhenan."

Kit gave Blaine a wicked grin when he called her little one. "Little one? Not sure you still have that right, Mir Fen." Her tone was one of anger yet her eyes held laughter. "It is good to see you as well." Sitting she made sure that she had a sight line to the door. Her tone shifted to a more serious note. "As to what I am doing here? (pause, lowers her eyes slightly) I am.... I am heading home. I need to make amends. (pause, looks up) I stopped here in Jader to sell some furs, get a new knife, some food and have a warm bed for a few nights before I head back out."

It was then that the waitress came back with Kit's ale. Kit gave a nod and smile. "Thank you." She took a drink, then looked to Blaine. "So what business do you have here in Jader?"

He chuckles at her reaction knowing it would cause that expression. He smiles at her. "It has been awhile. I haven't been home in ages. Bad memories that I wish to not relive." He sighs and takes a sip of his drink. "So much has changed since you have seen me. I'm here to learn some things about my past." He says vaguely knowing some people might be listening to him.

Kit grins. "Alright, keep it to yourself." Her tone says she understands. "Home was different when



you left. It is part of why I left you know. It wasn't the same." She takes another drink of her ale. "You know you owe me an explanation. Not so much of a word before you left." He could hear the slight heartache in her voice.

He looks at the floor. "I left when my parents were murdered. I couldn't stand being there in a place that caused me to relive that pain." She could probably hear the pain in his voice. "I just had to leave. If I didn't..." he sighs trying not to cry. "I didn't want to leave you behind, vhenan. I had to for my own sanity because I couldn't be there any longer. It caused me too much pain." He tries to grab her hand across the table. "I'm here now."

Kit listened as Blaine explained why he left. She knew what had happened to his parents. She had also known that it had caused a lot of pain for him. She immediately took his hand in hers when he reached across the table. She shifted her seat to be closer to him as she squeezed his hand. "Vhenan, mir vhenan." Her voice soft, full of care, as she places her free arm under his to pull him closer. "You could have told me how much pain you were in. I would have left with you."

He smiles weakly at her. "I didn't want to remove you from your life there. I didn't feel like I could do that to you. I didn't want to be selfish. However, I do wish I did sometimes. You were one of the few things that brought me happiness after all of that happened." He shifts his body to be closer to her. He whispers "The reason I'm here is to learn information about my parent's killers." He locks his fingers with hers.

"Oh mir vhenan." Her voice soft and low for his ears only. "You would have not taken me away from that life. I would have walked with you, side by side. (pause as her tone grew playfully angry) Besides, when have you ever been able to stop me from doing something that I want to do." She gave him a small playful shove as she snuggled a bit closer.

He chuckles and playfully shoves her back. He wraps an arm around her. "You have a good case." He chuckles. "Well, now we're together again. I can go back with you if you wish for me to. I have missed being at your side, vhenan."

Kit shifted so that she was more comfortable. Her eyes shifted to the waitress when she brought over the good and set it down. "Thank you." Her tone light and pleasant. She reached out and took a piece of deer and took a bite. As she ate, Kit listened as Blaine told her that he would go home with her. This warmed her heart, though she shook her head. "No vhenan, I will stay here with you. We will find those responsible for what they did. Make them pay with their lives. Slowly." Her voice went from heartfelt care to a heartfelt revenge.

He smirks. "So protective." He says playfully. "Aye, they will pay." His eyes growing dangerous just as his lips curl into an evil grin. "I have learned many tricks just for that very thing. They will die slowly." He orders himself some food. Once he gets his food he eats it pretty fast. "Are you sure this is what you want?"

Kit looked to Blaine with a little confusion. "Yes vhenan. This is what I want. (pause) Yes they will

play." Her tone was one of love yet held a bite of harshness. It changed to a light heartedness with that elven musical tone quickly. "Besides, someone has to protect you." She laughed.

The food came and Kit shifted so that she could eat. As she did she will look around to see you might be in the tavern watching them.

He smiles. "As you wish, vhenan." He leans back in his chair and takes a sip of his drink. He looks around noticing he is being stared at. He tips his cup towards the people who are staring at him to signal Kit he is being watched. "Oh you wound me!" He says in mock hurt. He chuckles looking at her with a smile.

Kit ate and chuckled at Blaine at his mocking wounded humor. "I wound you? Such a strong warrior to be wounded so easily." She laughed.

After a moment she looked at Blaine, her tone low and serious. "Have you many leads?"

He laughs. He shakes his head. "No, not really. I have been trying to eavesdrop in taverns to gather some information. I have ideas where they could be hiding." His tone serious.

Kit gave him a slight shake of her head. She understood his probable reluctance to ask questions. Especially in any human dominate city. Eavesdropping would normally be the preferred way, yet she knew Blaine, eavesdropping would only last for so long. With her help, she might be able to get some answers a little easier. "Alright, well lets take the rest of the day and you can show me where you think they may be hiding. Then I might be able to find some one who would be willing to answer some questions."

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## Business and Wine

Posted on 21 Sep 2021 @ 12:09pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#)

**3,775 words; about a 19 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader Waterfront

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 22nd - night

Though Rhiannon had bid him arrive at eight to accompany her and her mother to a secret meeting, Kalian had arrived an hour early and perched on the roof of a waterfront warehouse with a broad view of the dock area surrounding Rhiannon's ship. In the form of a crow he watched for anyone else surveilling the *Night's Kiss*, but nothing unusual caught his attention.

Kalian took advantage of his covert arrival to appear at the dock next to the *Night's Kiss* gang plank in human form, wearing a dark cloak and his staff strapped to his back, exactly on time. As the chantry's bell carried through Jader's night air, he counted the bells and waited for Rhiannon and her mother.

Rhi looked to her mother, as she stood by the door leading into the Captain's cabin aboard the *Night Kiss*. "I know you know this Gerlach, still it has been quite awhile since he has asked for you. (pause) I just want to be careful."

Rhi's mother chuckled. "Yes daul (daughter). We will be careful. Besides we will have your "friend" with us tonight. If he is as good as you say, then we have nothing to worry about."

Rhi heard her mothers reference to "friend" and shook her head slightly. "Maamr. (mother). He is an empl..." Her tone held a bit of embarrassment and shyness.

"Rhiannon, I am your mother and I know you. You like him. Don't deny it daughter. (pause) I am happy for you." Her tone was warm. She stood up from her desk, rolled up the papers she had been working on, put them in a case and headed for the door. "Lets go." As she moved passed Rhi, stopping briefly to give her daughter a warm smile.

Rhi gave her mother a warm smile in return as she followed her mother from the below deck to the main deck. As the two made their way off the ship, down the dock to the main land the chantry bells rang out. Rhi spotted Kalian waiting for them at the end of the dock.

As they approached, Rhi raised her hand slightly to let Kalian know that they had seen him. "Evening Kali.....Master Winter." Her tone was business yet there was a hint of shyness in it as well. Continuing on, "This is my mother Captain Jessamir Cadash of the *Night Kiss*."

Jessamir stood next to her daughter. Kalian could definitely tell that they were related. Jessamir stood at the same height as Rhi and the two looked almost exactly alike. The only two notable differences were, Jessamir's hair was white instead of silver/black. And her eyes were a deep blue instead of crimson.

Jessamir extended her hand to Kalian. "It is a pleasure to meet one of my daughters friends. She has told me of your exploits at the mine. I find it very interesting." She gives Kalian the same mischievous grin that Rhi has.

"My ladies Cadash." Kalian took Jessamir's hand firmly in his and bowed deeply, then rose and released her hand. He gave Rhiannon a flirtatious wink before addressing Jessamir with sincere respect. "It is a great pleasure to meet the mother of a woman I hold in high esteem, serah. If I may be so bold, I can see where Rhiannon gets her beauty, and it's my guess her deadly skill and cunning as well."

Jessamir smiled at Kalian as he gave her several compliments. She kept her head just a tad bit

longer than normal. As she did she continued to look at him as she spoke to Rhi. "Oh daughter, you have caught you a live one here." She left to of Kalias hand and started to walk.

Rhiannon looked at Kalian, shaking her head slightly as he was giving compliments to her as well as her mother. She was lucky that it was dark enough out so that Kalian did not see her blush at her mothers comment.

Kalian followed along behind the two dwarven women. He managed to keep his eyes off Rhiannon's shapely backside and continue scanning the area around them only by reminding himself why he was there. Finally, they came to a stop at the street entrance to a well-kept warehouse at the west end of the wharf district, nearest the hightown area.

The upscale nature of the warehouse surprised Kalian. He was expecting something shady and clandestine, but it seemed whoever the dangerous business associates Jessamir and Rhiannon were meeting, also had legitimate business concerns in Jader. Or they were paying very large bribes.

As they approached the warehouse, Jessamir and Rhiannon were quiet as they walked. Even for dwarves the two were quite stealthy. Jessamir made a motion to come to a stop, not to far from the warehouse. She shifted so that anyone looking from the warehouse area would have a harder time seeing them. Her voice was soft yet had an authority about it. "Be very alert Kalian. Master Gerlach has been known to have a few surprises up his sleeves."

Kalian nodded, eyebrows knit together and his focus now solidly on the safety of the two women rather than Rhiannon's personal charms. Though he was not skilled in stealth, he had a lithe build and could usually avoid falling or tripping. The light leather armor he wore under his cloak had been a gift from his grandmother and though worn, fit him well.

The side door – made of thick, solid hardwood – stood ajar. Kalian presumed it led to the warehouse's business offices. It wasn't until they got closer, he noticed a figure on the door's inner side just before the door swung open and a large human man with close-cropped dark hair, wearing chain mail and a sheathed longsword at his side, gestured for them to come in. "Robertson's lieutenant Acerbi is waiting for you." His voice was gravely and uninterested, as though he was only repeating something he'd been told to say.

As the group made their way to te meeting, Jessamir seemed to slowly became an old woman. She developed a slight limp, her walk became slower, her eyes mere slits as she reached out to take Rhi's arm. When the warehouse came into view both Jessamir and Rhiannon moved with a slow purpose to the side door. The two had noticed that it was ajar, which was expected. The man who opened the door was someone that neither Jessamir nor Rhiannon knew. Rhi gave Kalian a slight raise to her chin, when they passed by the man, as they entered.

Beyond the door the business office was not a separate room, but a desk, bookshelf and cabinets situated in the nearest corner of the open warehouse. Neat stacks of crates lined an open area.

Plenty of places for onlookers or even snipers to be hiding.

A young human man, well dressed in medium leather armor with daggers at his side and his pale hair swept back in a ponytail, sat on top of the desk in a relaxed pose. But as if responding to some silent cue, he got to his feet and executed a deep bow with a flourish. "Thank you for coming, my lady Jessamir Cadash. My name is Carlos Acerbi, humble second to Monsieur Gerlach Robertson." His accent was Antivan.

Jessamir moved slowly, like any old woman, to stand just off to the right side of Carlos. Her eyes squinty she looked just to the right of Carlos gave a slight nod when he introduced himself. The she spoke. "Acerbi, seen before. Master Robertson.....much samryn (trustworthy) you. You.....bargain for him." Her speech was slow, broken. "Roth (speak) your.....terms."

Rhiannon had made her way in, guiding her mother to stand where she was. Patting her mothers arm, leaning in to make sure was alright on her own. Jessamir gave a slight nod. She then back away to her mothers left. Looking to Kalian she made sure he understood to protect her mother at all costs. She then began to scan the warehouse for anything that she might consider a threat.

Jessamir's old-woman act surprised Kalian, and he guessed it wouldn't work on someone who already knew her. Someone like Robertson, whoever he was, but Robertson wasn't here. Kalian played along, taking up a protective position a staff-length away on Jessamir's right, opposite her daughter. He caught Rhiannon's look and gave the slightest of nods, reminding himself that Rhiannon was quite capable of looking after herself and Rhi would be safer not worried about her mother.

"Straight to the point," said Carlos, leaning against the edge of the desk. "No useless flowery speeches and posturing. Gerlach did say I would enjoy working with dwarves. Very well. Monsieur Robertson wishes for you to transport a shipment of wine from Val Royeaux to Jader. It must remain under lock and key and arrive before the third day of the festival. I'm sure you can handle it, the *Night's Kiss* is known for speed and reliability."

Jessamir shifted slightly, as if she was having a hard time standing. Rhi took a step forward as if to help. Jessamir raised her hand and waved her off. "I fine daul. (daughter)" Her tone was harsh. She coughed a little then continued. "Acerbi. Master Robertson make ah..... how you say.....ilith, deal. Wine for feste... party. City of xunder. (secrets) Wear masks. 3 day of party. By 28 day." She took a breath as if all this talking was taking a bite of a toll on her. "Can do. Talk payment, hurnden. Special trip. Higher rates."

Rhiannon stepped back when her mother scolded her. She let a flash of embarrassment cross her face before returning to her stoic stature. This was done so that Carlos might think that Rhi is not as dangerous as she looks. She continued to watch the shadows for anything out of the ordinary. Eyes passing over Kalian, making sure he was watching her mother.

Carlos regarded Jessamir Cadash with some consternation. Why hadn't Gerlach mentioned that

she was elderly and infirm? And the daughter... quite pretty, but now that Carlos saw her in person, he thought the rumors about her killing Roxa must be overstated. And the man with them... unimpressive as a fighter, though perhaps that pretty-boy was along for the women's entertainment later.

Standing from his leaning position against the desk, Carlos walked around to the other side and opened a drawer. He lifted out a sheet of paper he placed on the desk, followed by a heavy bag of coin plopped on top. "One hundred royals, half now, half on your return. The instructions are there – the address of the new wine seller in Val Royeaux. Notify them you have arrived and the wine will be delivered to your ship. The wine must not be opened or consumed by anyone. Once you return to Jader, the wine will be stored in this warehouse."

Kalian kept his focus on Jessamir, eyes darting to the shadowed areas of the warehouse. As business deals went, so far this seemed tame. And yet, he couldn't shake the feeling that a wrong move could escalate things fast.

Rhi watched closely as Carlos stood up straight and moved to behind the desk. Her hand slid to her dagger though she did not pull it. When Carlos pulled the bag of gold out, Rhi let a hint of a smile flash across her face. Her eyes then traveled to the paper he placed next to the bag. Without speaking to her mother Rhi said. "Half now, half upon completion. (pause) Step back please. Seven feet." She will wait till Carlos moves back before he mother steps up to the desk.

Jessamir watched as Carlos placed the bag of gold and paper on the desk. At this she turns towards to look in the direction of the desk. As if the noise is the reason why she did. When Carlos moves back she waits for a few moments before she moves up to the desk.

Slowly, with the slight limp, Jessamir made her way to the desk. Placing one hand down as if to steady herself, she reached for the paper. Pick it up she held it up and close as if to read it. Though her eyes peered over the paper to watch Carlos. "This place, pick up. Should no problem. (pause, coughs, takes a breath) Leave morning." She folds the paper and stuff it in hers pouch. Then reached for the bag.

Carlos had stepped back from the desk to accommodate the elder Cadash's wishes. He grinned broadly as Jessamir took up the bag of gold. "Monsieur Robertson would have taken care of this errand himself, but he and the *Cassabianca* are... otherwise engaged." In truth, that little fiasco at the silverite mine had adversely impacted Gerlach's plans. Now, blowback from this job for Isouda would hit the *Night's Kiss* instead. "I shall look forward to your return from Val Royeaux, my lady Cadash." Carlos grinned.

While Kalian was still on alert, he was also confused. Potential violence had been averted, so far, though his uneasy feeling persisted. What if Jessamir had refused the deal, would they simply leave? He didn't know much about business transactions between ship captains and their clients, though he was looking forward to asking Rhiannon if this was normal... among other alone-time topics. With effort, Kalian kept his attention on the current situation, and waited for Jessamir or

Rhiannon to indicate it was time to leave.

Rhiannon noticed at the same time Jessamir did, the grin that crossed Carlos's face, when Jessamir took the bag of gold. Rhi's eyes flashed bright crimson as both daggers that slid from the hidden sheaths on her wrists to her hands. As she moved with a quickness that no one expects a dwarf to have. Rhi was around desk, one dagger ready to throw, the other ready to stab.

Jessamir was no slouch, just as quick, if not quicker than her daughter, she had her own daggers in hand. One ready to throw, the other ready to stab. Her violet colored eyes shown with distrust. Without looking at Kalian, Jessamir spoke. "Jaa, to my back." This was said with no urgency though it was a command. She just hoped Kalian understood it was him she was talking to.

Rhi let a mischievously wicked grin crossed her face as she looked at Carlos. Crimson eyes focused on his eyes as she spoke. "I am not sure what to think of you. This seems like a proper arrangement, yet when the gold was picked up, there was a jargh grin that crossed your face. Now this could mean one of two things. Either you are an jargh, and know no better. Or you are a calass, untrustworthy person." She shifted slightly, making sure he noticed it, so that she could not just cover him but anyone else that might be there. "You tell me, which one are you. An jargh, or a calass."

Kalian responded to Jessamir's command without hesitation. He drew his staff and cast barrier on Jessamir, Rhiannon, and himself as he moved closer to Rhiannon's mother. At the same time, he heard a rustling and shifting from behind crates, and saw two crossbow bolts pointed at them, from two directions in the room. The guard from the door stepped inside also, his sword drawn. Kalian was pretty sure that if it came to it, his barrier could deflect a crossbow bolt.

Carlos shrugged casually, though nervous sweat trickled down his back, and silently he thanked the Maker he'd listened when Gerlach said the two dwarves were dangerous. "Considering this change in circumstance, perhaps I am a fool for offering this opportunity to you, my lady."

Kalian spoke up then, about a strange detail the Antivan had mentioned. "Please excuse my ignorance, Monsieur Acerbi, but I would like to ask... Would it not be standard practice to sample the wine to verify its quality?"

Carlos' attention shifted to the human... an apostate, it would seem. *interesting*. "The quality of the wine is without question, and it is quite simply too expensive to be wasted." His attention returned to Jessamir. "My ladies Cadash, if you aren't interested in this job, then leave the gold and walk away. I'll find another ship."

Both Rhi and Jessamir listened to as Carlos spoke. Then Kalian asked a question. It was a good question, and in most cases the wine would be tested before transport. Still it wasn't the issue. It was his grin that bothered both Dwarven women.

"It is not the task that bothers myself or my mother. It is the way you grinned when she took the

money. Something struck me that there is more to this than a simple pick up and delivery." She again shifted slightly to make sure that her knife would find purchase if she threw it. Her tone was cold and filled with a questioning demand. "So is there more to this transaction? If so tell us now. If not, then convince us so."

Jessamir held her daggers in ready, yet made sure to make sure that Carlos and the other one, see her glancing at the bag of gold.

The grin on Carlos' face was gone, replaced by a frown and not a small amount of fear. "When Monsieur Robertson directed me to arrange for this pickup and delivery, he asked for the *Night's Kiss* specifically. If you accept the job, then my boss will be pleased, and I won't have to waste time finding another ship. It was my understanding you are legitimate businesswomen. Is this how you usually conduct business – by threatening your clients because you don't like them to smile?" Carlos gave a dramatic huff, trying to pretend he wasn't afraid.

Kalian was confused by this turn of events. If this Antivan man hadn't been surrounded by guards, would Rhiannon and her mother just kill him and take the gold? Even though it looked that way... No. He was sure Rhiannon wouldn't do that. He thought of another question that might shed light on the situation. "Who ordered the wine? Who is it for?"

Carlos' gaze shifted once again to the apostate, and for a moment he considered lying, then decided there was no downside in telling the truth. "The Chantry. The wine is to be stored here in the warehouse and served at the Summerday feast in honor of the Revered Mother."

Rhi glances at her mother then back to Carlos. A wicked smile crossed her face as both her and her mother lowered their daggers. Jessamir bent down and picked up the bag of gold.

"Alright. Our business here is done. Let Master Robertson know that the Night's Kiss will get the job done." Putting her daggers away, loosely, so if she does need them they are readily available. She then reaches into one of her pouches and pulls out her flask, opens it, takes a swig and puts it on the table. "You have barak. backbone. That is good. Had to make sure you were not trying play us." She motions to the flask. "Come, drink." She glances at Kalian though, hoping he understood to stay alert.

Kalian relaxed slightly at Jessamir's pronouncement, but if anything he was more alert and aware of his surroundings. One of the crossbowmen hissed an exhale, and the other shifted his stance and rolled his shoulders.

Carlos regarded the flask with trepidation. He'd forgotten this custom that some dwarves and a few humans indulged in – a show of trust and sealing a deal, as he recalled. He picked up the flask and steeled himself to taste something awful. He tipped back the flask and took an obligatory sip, then tipped it back again for a swig. "Huh. Not bad. A pleasure doing business with you, my ladies," said Carlos, placing the flask back on the table.



Kalian glanced first at Jessamir, then Rhiannon, and raised an eyebrow as if to ask, *time to go?*.

Rhi gave Carlos a grin. "Yes, it is a pleasure doing business with you as well." She replied as she took her flask back. She seen Kalian give her that look. She gave him a slight nod. "Mother, I say that we go so you can set sail within the hour."

Jessamir had taken a drink out of her own flask when Carlos took his swig from Rhi's. "Yes daughter. We will go." She looked to Carlos and gave him a nod before she turned to leave.

Kalian recast his energy barrier around Rhiannon, Jessamir, and himself as they moved toward the exit. He walked backwards, careful not to trip, until he was sure they were out of the crossbowmen's line-of-sight, then hurried to follow the two women through the outer door.

Jessamir followed Rhi out the door, as she did she stayed close to Kalian. Once outside she made sure that the gold was stashed away, looked to Rhi then to Kalian. "I still do not like this but an agreement is on agreement. The Cadash and the Night's Kiss always honor their agreements." As her eyes focused on Kalian she gave him a wicked grin. He could see where Rhi gets hers from. "You did good. My daughter made an excellent choice." She gave Kalian a quick look up and down. "Very good choice." Her tone was excited and had a hint of sultriness in it.

Rhi lead the way out. Once clear of the area she looked at both her mother and Kalian. She grinned at her mothers compliment. She gave a nod of satisfaction then gave Kalian a very warm and wicked grin. "Yes, you did great in there." She moved to walk close to Kalian. Her hand reaching out to take his. She looked to her mother and gave a nod. "Once you are safe aboard mother, Kalian and I...." She glanced at Kalian and gave him a wink.

Kalian squirmed slightly under Jessamir's appraising gaze. She was a beautiful woman, an inheritance she had obviously shared with her lovely daughter. But she was Rhiannon's *mother*, and it was a little disconcerting. Luckily for him, it seemed that Jessamir approved of him, and even approved of certain... recreational activities... he hoped to indulge in with her daughter. Kalian grinned back at Rhiannon and squeezed her hand. "I am at your service, my lady."

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OOC: jargh - idiot, joker; calass - thief, miscreant, untrustworthy person

## Tu Falon (to make friends)

Posted on 27 Sep 2021 @ 8:28pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Rogue Blaine Aries](#)

**1,674 words; about a 8 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

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

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 19th – midday

**Tags:** New friends!

OOC: this is the day after 'New Friends and Allies'

Kalian had a good night's sleep, but he was still tired from the ordeal at the mine. And yet, his sister Tessa insisted he needed to keep up with his duties at the Raven's roost. The Summerday festival would start in only a few more days, and every corner of the tavern – from the open main-room, to the kitchen, utility room, and his father's bedroom in the back, to his room and the guest rooms upstairs - needed to be scrubbed thoroughly before Summerday decorating could begin and their rooms filled up with guests.

Well-hidden in plain sight as he was, Kalian still worried that someone at the mine had turned him in, so when the tavern's front door opened he cast a nervous glance in that direction.

Blaine walks in to the tavern. He looks around and finds a spot in a corner. He walks over to the table. Once he is seated he throws his left leg over the armrest leaving his right foot on the ground. Once he is settled he slouches a little on his seat. He raises his hand to get the waitress' attention.

Kalian gave the elf a friendly smile, and despite him waving at Tessa, he went on over to the elf's table. "Good day, friend. Are you hungry? Thirsty? The ale is good, and so is today's stew. What can I get you?"

The elf orders something to drink and eat from a long morning of hunting. Once his food arrives he begins to eat it like a starved man.

Kalian lingered at the elf's table as he ate with impressive gusto. "It's not too busy, mind if I join you in a drink?"

He smiles. "Aneth ara." He says with a deep voice for an elf. He motions to the empty chair in front of him. "I can always use the company." He takes a sip of his ale.

Kalian grinned back. He didn't know many Dalish words, but he knew *aneth ara* was a friendly greeting. "One moment." He stepped back over to the bar and returned with a second empty tankard and a pitcher of ale to share. Kalian took a seat across from the elf and filled his mug, then turned the pitcher's handle toward his company, indicating the elf could serve himself. "My name is Kalian Winter. Do you mind sharing your name?"

He takes the pitcher and pours himself some more ale. He smiles at Kalian. "I'm Blaine." He slouches in his chair and puts a foot up on the chair. Trying to get comfortable. His limbs are much longer than your average elf. He begins to hum a little to himself in a baritone voice.

"Good to meet you, Blaine," said Kalian. He raised his mug to the elf, then drank deeply. Blaine's face was decorated with distinctive facial tattoos, in an interesting pattern. His grandmother had

told him the tattoos meant something important, but he wasn't sure if it was polite to ask. "You're Dalish, right? What brings you into the city of Jader?"

"Aye, good to meet you too." He looks Kalian up and down like he is sizing him up. He takes another sip. "Aye, I'm Dalish. I'm just traveling and decided to stop here for some drinks and to rest." He gives him a small smile.

"I am surely glad you stopped by," said Kalian, amiably. "This tavern belongs to my family, my sister runs it." He lifted his mug to Tessa, who was frowning at him in a way that said she knew he was procrastinating his current assigned task – emptying the chamber pots upstairs. "Are you staying in Jader for long? The Summerday festival will be starting in just a few days."

He smiles at him. He then looks at Tessa as Kalian lifted his mug to her. He smirks as he looks back at Kalian. "She seems upset with you." He chuckles. "Nice to meet you, love." He says returning his gaze to Tessa. He takes another sip of his ale. His hood covering most of his face. Kalian may notice his black nail polish on his fingernails. "I'm unsure how long I'm staying. This town seems nice though."

Kalian scanned the tavern to see if Tessa's husband was within earshot, but Ben was still in the kitchen, helping Cook.

Tessa approached the cheeky elf sitting at the table with her brother. "The name is Tessa, ser, not love," she said firmly but with good humor. Turning her attention to her brother, she said with a sweet sisterly smile, "When you've finished that ale, Kalian, I expect you to finish your chores. Those chamber pots won't empty themselves."

He looks at Tessa. He smirks and winks at her. "Sorry, lass." He chuckles.

*She just had to mention chamber pots.* Kalian groaned. Well, it was a good thing Kalian was only trying to make friends with Blaine and not trying to chat him up. Kalian smiled sheepishly as Tessa walked away and replied to Blaine's observation. "Jader is my home, and I'm happy living here. But it's not perfect. Jader got an influx of refugees from Ferelden during the Blight, and many of them still live in a slum. The elves that live in the city... well honestly they live a hard life." Kalian considered telling Blaine his mother had been an elf, but he figured that wouldn't help Blaine's opinion of his family.

He takes a sip of his ale. He turns his gaze to Kalian. "Looks like you're needed." He says playfully. "I've never have been in one place for too longer. Never had a place I called home." Be shrugs. He then smiles showing his perfect white teeth. "It's not a bad place."

"The Raven's Roost *is* a great place," said Kalian, with a bit of pride in what his father, then his sister had made of the place. "I have lived here most of my life, although I spent a few years of my youth living in the forest southwest of Jader, with my grandmother." It had been several months since he'd seen his grandmother, she was about due for a visit. "If you're planning to be here during the

Summerday festival, I recommend finding a place to stay early, lodging fills up."

He smiles. "Aye, it is. I have spent most of my time traveling since I left my home in the Brecilian Forest. I will definitely keep that in mind! Thank you! You all seem nice here compared to what I'm use to." He sighs

"The Brecillian forest, that's uh..." Kalian rubbed his chin, his tone conveyed thoughtful curiosity. "In south-eastern Ferelden, yeah? You've come a fair distance, then. What's it like, traveling so far from home? Must get lonely, being away from you family." Kalian's question stemmed not just from interest in this intriguing elven man, but in concern for his own possible future, roaming on his own.

Nods. "Aye. I have been traveling most of my life so it doesn't really bother me." He smiles. "Only family I have is two siblings. They do sometimes come with me if it isn't too dangerous for them."

"Well, Blaine, if you find yourself in need of help while you're in Jader, there's folks you can turn to. Hahren Liriel in the alienage, she's.... not too fond of humans, and understandably so." *Not even her cousin's human children*, thought Kalian with a grimace. "And I have a friend in the Jader Guard, Martin Josceran. Human, a good and fair man. We've a new patron, an elven Grey Warden named Jaslyn. If you're here at the Raven about the same time, I'll introduce you. And there's me, I'm a helpful sort." Kalian smiled and tipped back his mug, finishing it off, then checked to see if his sister was watching.

"Thank you for those tips! I really appreciate it." He smiles warmly. "Have you and your family always worked this tavern?" He asks curiously. "I think it is lovely that you and your sister work together. I miss my siblings greatly. We do write often though."

Kalian looked across the room to where Tessa lingered outside the kitchen kissing her husband Ben, with baby Gabriel held between them. He smiled, wistful for the kind of family life his sister enjoyed but he would never have. "My grandfather bought the tavern at the end of the Hundred Days Cough plague - came to Jader from Rivain. It's my sister who runs the tavern now, really. My father still helps out."

Rubbing his stubbled chin thoughtfully, Kalian said, "I'm thinkin' if my grandmother doesn't visit during the festival as she usually does, I may hike out to the southeastern forest and check on her." Kalian lifted a speculative eyebrow, wondering if Blaine knew anything about Dalish clans in the area. "Do you have any tips for a human like me, wandering in the woods?"

"The forests are beautiful. I hope you get the chance to see them." He smiles. "I suggest not going to the clans. They hate outsiders. Sometimes they can even hate other Dalish that aren't apart of their clan. Also try to be as quiet as possible so you don't alert animals like bears and wolves. Stay on your guard as well."

"Healthy wolves and bears are mostly predictable, you don't hurt or threaten them, they leave you alone. People... are far more complicated." Kalian smiled at his own vast understatement. "But you,

Blaine... You're Dalish. And you seem, uh," Kalian searched for a word that wouldn't sound insensitive, "remarkably tolerant of humans, and this mostly-human town."

Kalian tipped back the last of his beer. "Well, I'd better get to emptying those chamber pots. It was a true pleasure to chat with you Blaine. I hope to see you again while you're in Jader."

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## Cui Bono

Posted on 09 Nov 2021 @ 6:37pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#)

**3,175 words; about a 16 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th

Once the opening ceremony had concluded, people began to celebrate in earnest. A small group of bards started playing a lively tune by the pole, so that those who wished could keep dancing. Maybe they'd be the ones tying the ribbon next year. Mother Giselle was going from person to person, greeting them and giving blessings in equal measure. Martin noticed Gauvain standing nearby, far enough to not intimidate people but close enough to intervene should there be any threat. Best not bother him while he was on official duty.

"I think the children are getting hungry," Raoul said. "Should we have something to eat?"

"Sure," Martin said. "Tell you what, you find somewhere to sit and I'll go buy the food."

"I wouldn't mind a snack... and a drink," said Kalian. He looked to Rhiannon. "Will you accompany Martin and I?"

Rhiannon listened as the group talked about getting food and drink. She gave a smile to the kids then looked to Kalian. "I am famished." She took Kalias hand and started to go look for food.

There were a lot of booths selling food and the lines were only getting longer. One booth sold Fereldan spicy stew in hollowed out loaves of bread ; another had waffles and pastries, a third a choice of Rivaini appetizers. Jader was a port city, after all. A dwarf sold dwarven biscuits shaped like gems with colourful icing and beer pies, and a little further, two elves manned a booth with Dalish specialties. Several booths also sold beer, wine and cider, hot or cold, with or without spices.

"So many choices," declared Kalian, grinning at Rhiannon and Martin. "It's a good thing the festival lasts for seven days, so we can sample everything."

Before Martin had time to ponder the many choices available his attention was drawn by a man, stumbling out of the privy with bulging eyes and a panicked look on his face. Maybe he was just horrified at the state of the temporary privy erected at the edge of the Chantry buildings, but somehow Martin didn't think so.

"*Help !*" The man mouthed, looking around desperately, but he seemed to be so shocked that his voice didn't rise above the general noise and chatter.

"Ser ?" Martin strode over to him. "Is everything alright ?"

The man - he recognized him as Jerard, the Miller - looked intensely relieved when he saw Martin's uniform. Although he wasn't on duty until later he was wearing it as he wouldn't have time to head home to change before the start of his shift.

"Thank the Maker ! You - I - They - " Jerard stammered, then soundlessly pointed at the privy.

Kalian wrinkled his nose and followed Martin toward the privy and the man calling for help. His first thought was that Martin should let a guardsman on duty handle this drunkard, and his second thought was that on the first day of the festival the privy less likely to be unpleasant than on the last. But then he recognized the miller, an upright and generally sober man who was unlikely to demand attention for something of his own making in a privy. With a glance at Martin and Rhiannon, Kalian ventured past the Miller, and looked inside.

A person slumped in front of the privy seat in the recognizable position of someone who had passed out during the act of vomiting. "Looks like the poor sod started over-indulging early this Summerday festival," Kalian observed.

Rhi was with Kalian and Martin as they were discussing what food to her. Everything sounded good to her. She had been pretty quiet since they had went to get food for them, the kids and Raoul. She had been about to give her opinion about what to get, when a man came from the privy area and started to talk to Martin.

Apparently Martin knew the man so he followed him back to the privies. It was there that they found a man slumped in one of the privies. Rhi had seen drunks before and had also seen dead bodies. This was not a drunk. She took a step closer to Martin and spoke quietly. "This is no drunk." She looked to the man who brought them here. "He needs to stay calm. (pause) I can take care of him if you want to deal with this."

At first the scene did look like a drunkard passed out in an embarrassing position ; but the unnatural stillness of the body made something unpleasant churn in Martin's stomach. Rhiannon's words crystallized his uneasy feeling into a more concrete conclusion. *Damn. The day had started so well.*

"Don't," he replied to Rhiannon's offer, uncertain what exactly she meant by 'taking care of him'. "I'll handle this."

The person in the privy was human, with thinning straight dark hair pulled back in a ponytail, like many on the Jader chantry grounds he was dressed like a citizen of moderate means. Kalian had seen plenty of drunks before, and on taking a closer look he knew Rhiannon was right. He pressed the fingers of one hand to the man's throat. His skin was cool to the touch, but not completely cold. "No pulse," he said as he attempted to apply healing magic, but it was like trying to pour water into a sealed-shut container. "Definitely dead, but not for long. I don't see any wounds. Who is he?"

Jerard, the Miller swayed and then sank to the ground right where he was standing. "His name is Arnould Rigal. I just met him earlier today."

Rhiannon stood aside to let Kalian look over the body. He confirmed that the man was dead and had not been for long. She looked to Jerard when He said the mans name. Stepping over to him, "You have any idea what might have happened?"

"I don't know what happened," said Jerard. "We were watching the opening ceremony together, and planned to, uh... continue celebrating back at my place. I offered to show him the mill. We were drinking. He bought a bottle of wine from some elves. I don't like wine, I had beer from one of the vendor stalls. Then suddenly Arnould clutched his stomach and ran to the privies. I waited a bit, but when he didn't come back I went to check on him."

Rhi listened as Jerard told them what he knew. The mention of elves and wine drew her attention. She looked to Martin. "Being festival, I am sure that wine is being sold by quite a few. Still, it is quite a coincidence that as soon as he drank it, he runs to the privy, then dies."

"Could be the wine, could be anything else," Martin observed. He knelt by the side of the body to take a closer look.

It was still warm, a clear indication that the death was quite recent. The mess - and the smell - suggested that whatever had killed Arnould, it had definitely involved the content of his bowels. His clothing suggested he was middle class, and his hands - callused and thick, with a number of scars - suggested he was some kind of artisan. A mason or carpenter would be Martin's guess, or maybe a smith. In his mid-to-late thirties, he didn't look sickly, the vomiting and dying aside. Unlikely to be a disease then. Upon closer inspection, Martin noticed specks of white foam on the man's lips.

"What else did you have, aside from the wine and beer ?" he asked, turning back to look at Jerard.

"Huh..." Jerard blinked, clearly still in shock. "Meat pies."

"Both of you ate the same thing ?"

"Yes."

That didn't prove anything - meat pies from the same vendor could have different ingredients, and one of them could have had spoilt ingredients. But the wine did seem like a more likely culprit.

"Where's the empty bottle ?"

"He... he threw it away. I can show you where."

"What about the elves who sold the wine ? Where were they, what did they look like ?"

"They didn't have a proper stall," Jerard said. "They were going around the crowd with their bottles, selling by the glass. I didn't really look at them. I think one of them had long brown hair, braided, and a blue shirt. That's all I remember."

Rhiannon gave Jerard a nod when he said that he could show them where the bottle was thrown away. "Of we can find the bottle, I might be able to tell if it was poisoned." She looked to both Martin and Kalian, her eyes glittered in the sunlight as she lowered her voice. "I've dealt with things like that before."

Kalian had moved away from the cooling body, and knelt next to the miller, putting a supportive hand on the poor man's shoulder whilst Martin went into full-investigation mode. At the mention of wine, he caught Rhiannon's gaze. Could it be the wine the *Night's Kiss* brought back from Val Royeaux? "Martin, I think we should – discretely - call over another guardsman to take care of the body, and then – if Jerard feels up to it – try to find that bottle."

"Dealt" with things like that before ? Martin had always known that Rhiannon was involved in shady activities - the way they had met made it hard to ignore - but poison and potential murder were a notch above what he'd expected. And, if Rhiannon had been the perpetrator rather than the victim of such, that made her... well. Probably someone a guard should not be associating with.

Possibly someone he ought to investigate.

Perhaps even someone he might have to arrest someday.

Pushing back those uneasy thoughts he tried to focus back on the task at hand. Right now it did not matter where Rhiannon got her expertise, only that she was willing to use it to help them untangle a man's death.

"We may need an alchemist or potionmaker's help to identify the poison, if this is indeed poison," he said to Rhiannon. "But any insight you can share is more than welcome." A glance at Jerard revealed that the man looked shaken but no longer like he was about to faint on the spot. "Do you feel able to show us now ?"



The miller nodded, and Kalian helped him to his feet just as a Guardswoman appeared, he recognized her as the one who had taken custody of that robber, the evening he'd met Martin.

Rhi caught Kalias glance and shifted closer to him as he was helping Jerard up. She looked up at the miller, tilted her head slightly, "Alright. Let's see if we can find the bottle. Lead the way."

"A moment," said Kalian. They couldn't just leave Martin with a dead body. He wanted to watch what happened with the guardswoman. The way certain members of the guard operated, if he and Rhiannon walked away with Jerard now they might be accused of the crime.

"A good Summerday to you, Martin," Audrey was saying as she approached. "Here you are again, working on your time off, taking care of drunks..." She got a better look at the man and gasped. "He's dead."

"Quite dead," Martin confirmed. He hesitated momentarily. Ordinarily he'd have asked her for help, rather than civilians. But Kalian's gifts, and Rhiannon's expertise, were invaluable and they would be hard-pressed to make use of either within sight of another guard. "It looks like it just happened. We may have a lead but we need to follow it now. Can I leave the crime scene in your care?"

"We may have a lead?" Audrey repeated somewhat caustically, glancing pointedly at Kalian and Rhiannon, an eyebrow arched.

Martin tried not to grimace. After the stunt he'd already pulled, insisting on working with civilians was going to land him in trouble. Well. More trouble. He couldn't see a way out of it though, not if he wanted to find out why Arnould was dead. "I'll explain," he said. Or he'd try, anyway, without betraying his friends' confidence in the process. "Please, Audrey."

"You better have a really good explanation," she muttered. "And the next round of beers is on you."

"Thanks." Martin gave her a tense smile, then looked at his friends and Jerard. "Let's go." Before Audrey changed her mind.

With the on-duty guard now in charge of the body, Kalian nodded to Rhiannon and Martin. To the miller, he said, "Try to remember where Arnould threw the bottle."

Jerard walked on his own for the most part, leaning only slightly on Kalian as he wove among stalls and booths, until the miller came to a stop next to a booth selling ribbons and a stall selling paper bound into blank books. "There," he said, and pointed to the narrow space between, where trash was already starting to accumulate.

As expected during a festival day, trash was easy to come by. The space between stalls was littered with dirty wrappers, bits and pieces of half-eaten food, a torn ribbon, and several bottles. Martin came closer and had to squeeze himself between the booths to pick up the bottles. The owner of the ribbon stall looked like he was about to protest but after a look at Martin's uniform thought

better of it.

"Guard business, don't mind me," Martin said, and he stepped back with his prize.

He showed Jerard what he had found ; three bottles, one made of ceramic, one made of green glass, the last made of clear glass, all with slightly different shapes. "Which one was it ?"

"This one," Jerard pointed to the ceramic bottle without hesitation. It looked the fanciest, with a sticker depicting a woman with long hair that turns into a river of wine and traces of wax where a seal used to be.

Kalian took the bottle, careful not to spill any remaining contents, and examined it closely. "I don't recall this vintner's design on the label, though Ben, my brother-in-law might." He looked to Rhiannon and raised an eyebrow as he handed it to her. Could this wine bottle be part of the shipment the *Night's Kiss* transported from Val Royeaux? As far as he knew, Jessamir had delivered a sealed crate to Robertson's warehouse.

Rhiannon had nodded and waited till the new guard had come and taken over at the scene. Once they were set she followed along to the spot where the miller remembered. It didn't take long for Martin to find the bottle. Rhi looked at over once Kalian had taken it. Keeping her face straight, her mind though ran through the possibility that it might be from the cases that her mother had just come back with. She glanced at Kalian and had a feeling that he might be thinking the same thing.

"We could show this bottle around, warn anyone else who bought some, and find the people who sold it to Arnould," said Kalian, thoughtfully. "And we could find a master potioner, in case there's enough left in the bottle to identify what killed him." He rubbed the stubble on his chin, wasn't that odd fellow who couldn't find the privy a potioner?

"If we walk around telling people there are poisoned drinks being sold there will be a panic," Martin said. "There are young children and older people here. I don't want to risk a stampede. We need to do this discreetly. Let's look for the elves Jerard described, and keep an eye out for anyone holding a bottle like this one. That's our priority, we'll have time to identify the poison later."

If they split up they'd cover more ground, but if they saw the suspects they would need help to capture them. The guard had specific strategies for this sort of things, but none Rhiannon and Kalian would be familiar with.

"We need to stay within sight of one another," Martin said finally. "Let's comb through the square, see if we can spot either the two elves or some of the bottles."

Rhiannon looked at Kalian and then to Martin. "I agree. Split up but stay insight of each other." She moved to stand next to Kalian, looked up at him, smiled, motioned for him to lean down. Once he did she kissed him and the hugged him, whispering in his ear that they need to talk.

Kalian did not need much encouragement at all to lean down for a kiss from Rhiannon. He nodded in response to her question, then he knelt on one knee and kissed her again more thoroughly, temporarily forgetting that Martin and others might be watching, before he finally stood, a grin on his face.

Rhi almost forgot what she had just said to Kalian as he kisses her. Oh did that man know how to kiss. Course she was no innocent herself. She gave as good as she got. When they parted, Rhi looked at Kalian, her eyes sparkling crimson as a wicked mischievous grin crossed her face. Followed by what Kalian might consider a blush.

Those intelligent eyes, that pretty pink blush, those luscious curves... *Maker's breath*, he was a lucky man. Kalian surreptitiously adjusted his trousers and turned his attention away from activities he hoped to engage in with Rhi later, to protecting his town and the task before them.

"What about me?" asked Jerard. This Summerday festival had started out so well, he and Arnould should be back at his place doing what those two were, but now... the miller needed a stiff drink, a good night's sleep, and a diversion at the brothel... and not necessarily in that order.

It was probably best for Jerard not to be alone right now, Martin thought. Shock could do funny things to people, he'd witnessed it more times than he cared to.

"I want you to return to Audrey - the guard we left in charge at the privy. She'll tell you what to do, alright?" Jerard looked a little bit grey in the face at the thought of returning where the body was, and Martin softened his voice. "You don't need to go inside. Just stay outside and do what the guardswoman tells you."

"What about the... those who did this..."

"We'll catch them," Martin promised. "You can leave it to us."

"And stop anyone else from getting sick," added Kalian.

"Alright. Good. They should pay," the miller mumbled. He was twisting his own fingers so hard it had to hurt. The shock was just setting in.

Rhi moved to stand near Jerard. She looked up at him and smiled. She reached in her pouch and pulled out her small flask. She handed it to Jerard, "Here, take it. Small sips to calm your nerves. Make sure that you stay with the guard ok. I will check in on your in a bit ok"

"Thank you, serah," said Jerard, accepting the flask. "Very kind of you. I, uh, I'll go back to that guardswoman now."

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## Three Andrastians

Posted on 17 Nov 2021 @ 11:16am by [Townfolk The Scholar](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**1,063 words; about a 5 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader Chantry Courtyard

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th – after Summerday opening ceremony

OOC: After Post "Pole Dancing"

The first day of the Summerday Festival always held such promise, thought Giselle as she mingled with the members of the Jader community. She had kept her invocation short, after all, mortals must satisfy the needs of the flesh before they could concentrate on spiritual needs. The joy of the holiday was complimented by the energy of the dancers and the smells of baked treats and roasting meat. The Maker would be pleased.

Isouda had tried to talk Giselle into allowing her to give the invocation, and now hovered nearby. Giselle was discreetly trailed by three templar guards, and though she appreciated their good intentions, she felt their protection was unnecessary. Giselle always sought the good in every member of her flock - rich or poor, longtime Jader residents or passers-through, human, elf and dwarf, all were the Maker's children. She greeted and blessed everyone she saw in equal measure, until her gaze fell upon the tall flame-haired visiting sister who had created such a stir among the Jader Chantry.

As the milling crowd engaged in their revelry, the Revered Mother approached Elinowy. She smiled warmly and reached out to take the young sister's hands in hers. "Welcome to Jader, my dear. I've heard a great deal about you, sister Elinowy. Now that I see you in person, I think we may have met before?"

The festival was moving along well, everyone was enjoying themselves and the roasting meats. Elinowy saw Mother Giselle's outstretched hands and quickly grabbed them and pulled the older woman's hands over her own heart. "Blessings to you Revered Mother. May you sing the Maker's praise all your days. Indeed we met several years ago at a conclave outside ValRoyeaux. You had just finished giving an exegesis on the universality of the Canticle of Exultations and our shared answer to the maker in Andraste's response. It was most inspiring. I was representing my Chantry in Bete Noire. We had tea and spent the evening speculating on how to increase outreach to the communities within our influence. It was a blessed event." the flame haired sister stated with genuine affection.

From a short distance away, Elder Isouda schooled her features into her usual fake smile, internally seething at the way Giselle lavished time and attention on that upstart sister.

"Oh! But of course," exclaimed Giselle warmly, still clasping Elinowy's hands fondly. Then her warm smile changed to curious concern. "You have traveled far from the Bete Noire Chantry, Sister Elinowy, and I have heard tales of the brave Chantry sister with red hair, liberator of the enslaved, inspiration to the downtrodden, and favored by the people and the Maker. I am unsurprised to find you are one in the same."

Elinowy bowed her head. "I am merely a devoted servant of the Maker. The heroism attributed to me is due to the others of my party. I merely sang the words of light in places of great darkness. Nothing any other sister would not do." she stated humbly.

From behind Giselle's back, Isouda scowled at Elinowy. That flame-haired upstart was well on her way to undermining Isouda's plans to take Giselle's place. There was no way she was going allow this heartfelt reunion to go on. Isouda stepped forward. "Revered Mother, I'm afraid I must remind you that many other members of your flock await your blessings."

Giselle nodded serenely. "Of course, duty awaits. My dear Elinowy, it would please me if you would soon join me for tea."

Elinowy smiled. "Of course Mother Giselle, it would be my honor to join you. Thank you. Blessing on your duties today, the festival is lovely."

"Andraste's blessings on you, child." For a moment, Giselle hesitated as though she might say something else, but she looked at Isouda and gave Elinowy a farewell nod before turning her attention to a pair of finely-dressed nobles.

As the Revered Mother took her leave, Elinowy turned to Elder Isouda. "How may I further serve the Chantry today? I am happy to give blessings to the people, but do you have everything in hand that you need for the day?"

Isouda just managed to contain her frown of annoyance. "How thoughtful of you to offer, but I can assure you that today's celebration has been carefully planned." She paused to consider how best to make use of Elinowy whilst keeping her away from Giselle, though she would prefer to either discredit the upstart sister or eliminate Elinowy altogether.

"As you may know, the fourth day of the Summerday festival is Blessing Day. Being new to Jader, you may not be aware that the Chantry flock here includes a number of outlying settlements and farms. Many of the Jader sisters must travel far to perform blessings, and those remaining in Jader are quite overtaxed, looking after the Chantry's flock in the city." Isouda tapped her chin, as though thinking it over, then adopted fake beneficent smile. "Your ample good cheer and musical blessings are needed in the alienage tomorrow. If you aren't too fatigued. I understand you've been keeping house for two men."

Elinowy caught the jab from the Elder throwing her mind off her dislike of being assigned to the Alienage. Giving Isouda a broad smile she replied. "Thank you, I have been tasked with the

instruction of their young children in exchange for room and board. The Maker will certainly bless their generosity, it is a great kindness as my oath to the Grand Cleric has deprived me of keeping fellowship with you here at the Chantry. I have so missed the support of others in my order since I have been in Jader. The Maker will put everything right in the end. I will look forward to bringing the Chant of Light to the darkness of the Alienage tomorrow." She managed to keep a straight face that might make one believe she meant it.

Isouda barely contained her frown at the mention of the Grand Cleric. Indeed, a sister whom Mother Giselle was so clearly fond of, with personal connections to his Grace, was a danger to her plans. "Thank you, Sister. I am sure the elves will appreciate your ministry. Today, do enjoy the festival." Isouda nodded her head in dismissal, then turned to rejoin the templars following Giselle at a less than subtle distance.

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## Cainan With A Cause

Posted on 03 Dec 2021 @ 8:11am by [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#)

Edited on on 03 Dec 2021 @ 2:52pm

**1,091 words; about a 5 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th

**OOO: Just trying to get back in the swing of things, sorry for being gone for so long.**

Cainan watched as the woman entered the bar, slid through the celebrating crowd and come to sit on the settee across from Cainan. The Petit Garçon Batteur was one of the more upmarket wine bars on the lower west of Jader's town centre – the sort of place respectable people would go to live life just a *bit* on the edge, but not leave any of the comforts of higher society behind.

But in this case it was quite the opposite; Karoline liked to pretend to be high society, while not being far from the squalor and dank of downtown – the bridge between both worlds that she navigated with ease. High society tolerated her in dresses and corsets because she could get things and know things that were inaccessible to the 'legitimate' channels they needed to skirt; the underbelly tolerated her for the same reasons, and she stayed in the middle, facilitating each side using the other, and making a good amount of profit from both.

She had worn the lower cut blouse he liked, framed with the type of corset that was in fashion right now; in many ways, she was the exact opposite side of the same coin that Cainan was; he lived between the worlds of higher and lower society because it was fun, she did it because it was how

she survived.

She looked at him for a moment; dark, flowing hair that he knew was a fashionable wig left curls of 'hair' framing her bosom, the red velveteen of her gown highlighting her pale complexion. She was playing with him already, he knew – the fake beauty spot, pretending to be out of breath so her chest heaved, and the way she perched on the edge of the seat, so she teetered towards him; they had both played these games before, and under other circumstances, he would have been happy to indulge; though only as practice. Karoline and Cainan had danced that tune before, as well; though never as anything more than a bit of fun.

Something in the way he wasn't leaning in caught her interest, but also caused a flash of subtle disappointment. With a final look at his eyes, she stopped pretending and leaned back, all business. It was impressive how with just a change of posture she was able to change the perception from sultry high society to fashionable business-woman.

"Well, here I was thinking this was a... social call," she said, pouring a glass of wine from the decanter and leaning back to appraise him. "Not to say I'm disappointed for the work, but you could have mentioned before I made the effort," she chided, though they both knew she would have anyway; Karoline was not dressed if she wasn't *dressed*.

"I did use your work contacts," he reminded her, raising his glass to say 'cheers'. "No offense intended," he added, though they also both knew that wasn't an issue; Karoline would accept a lot of shit with the prospect of gold in mind, and she knew that if he were reaching out for business, she'd at least be getting paid; Cainan came from money, and was happy to spend it.

"You did, but a girl can dream." She sighed, in mock dramatics, before appraising him again. "Something's different about you," she stated, drinking a sip of her wine. Cainan had the feeling he was being weighed for auction under her gaze; she had that effect.

"Different?" he asked.

"Yes," she said slowly, eyes roving as if looking for the offending article that had changed. "You're not as aloof as you usually are."

"Oh?" he asked again, letting this play out. She had been 'fashionably late' for this meeting, and he was going to miss some of the celebrations as a result. He was going to miss some of *Jaslyn* as a result.

"Yes, your posture... it's..." she read him a bit, her face growing serious. "Someone's pissed you off." She observed him for a moment longer. "And it's not a small matter," she stated. He nodded his agreement, and slid her a piece of paper.

"This is the name I have, the details I need," he said, tapping the folded parchment. "He killed someone. Runs in some bad circles," he said, keeping his fingers on the paper, and letting the note

hang in the air. She needed to know this would be dangerous work, if she didn't take the proper precautions. "I need to know where he is, where he'll be going – anything that might help me... repay him the debt I owe."

Karoline looked at the paper, licking her lips. She was making calculations in her head. Finding information was her business, and he knew she was up to the task of working with information that might involve the carta, or other such organisations. He also knew how much she *charged* for such services. A lot of subtext transferred between them in the look she gave him. Without words, they reached an agreement as to how far she should go, and how much he would pay. Surprise flashed in her eyes, but it settled and she reached for the paper, sliding it into her cleavage without looking at it.

"Well... Cainan with a cause. This should be... *interesting*," she smirked, sipping more of her wine. She paused as if considering, but this was merely a formality. "...Alright, I never could say no to that pretty face of yours. But you're going to owe me. Something... big." She winked, but despite the innuendo, Cainan knew she was referring to the size of the coin purse he'd be giving her when all was said and done.

They managed a little more preamble, a little more meaningless flirtation – Karoline knew somehow there wasn't any real point in it, that Cainan wasn't up for entertaining such dalliances. He told himself that it was due to the nature of his request, due to having a business arrangement, and did his best to ignore the small voice at the back of his head that kept whispering a different reason for his reluctance to spend an afternoon taking Karoline out of her pretty dress.

It was afternoon when he began making his way back to the celebrations, looking for Jaslyn.

## The Knives Have Ears

Posted on 07 Dec 2021 @ 7:04pm by [Rogue Jaslyn](#) & [Mage Kithris Sabrae](#)

**1,958 words; about a 10 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader Chantry Courtyard

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th – after Summerday opening ceremony

OOO: Continued from Post "Pole Dancing"

Jaslyn and Kithris' conversation in the shadow of the chantry building was interrupted by the Summerday festival opening ceremony. This was Jaslyn's fourth Summerday in Jader. The first had been eye-opening - as a city elf in Val Royeaux she had never experienced anything like it. Here in Jader, surrounded by her new Grey Warden brethren, she had reveled in the festival, even marred as



it was then by the looming Blight across the border in Ferelden. Her second Summerday Festival in Jader was overshadowed by widespread famine and disease, the city overrun by Ferelden refugees. With the Blight ended, most of her fellow Orlesian Grey Wardens had relocated to Val Royeaux, but Jaslyn had stayed to do what she could for the elves of Jader, her new home.

Whilst the kindly old Revered Mother gave her speech, Jaslyn scanned the crowd for Cainan, but if he was there she didn't see him. When the speech ended, Jaslyn returned to her conversation with Kithris. "Your friend you mentioned, the one that needs help... I'd like to meet him if he's here."

Kithris listened as the Revered Mother had given her speech for the opening ceremony for Summerday. She had heard the Chantry speeches before though this one had sounded different. When it was done Kit watched the gold woman make her way through the crowds.

A few moments later she was brought back when Jaslyn asked her if Blaine needed help. She looked back to Jaslyn tilted her head slightly. "I am not sure if her would be willing to accept the help. It would be nice to have the help. Especially since I have no idea where to start." She took a quick glance to see if Blaine was around.

Jaslyn scanned the crowd. Another Dalish elf would stand out at a Chantry celebration. Two female elves, one Dalish and one a Warden, both armed... they attracted covert glances as it was. "We'll look for him, but we can enjoy what the festival offers together, if you'd care to accompany me. I've a human friend whom I anticipate meeting here at some point." Jaslyn surveyed the crowd looking for Cainan's handsome face.

Kithris finished looking for Blaine and turned her attention back to Jaslyn. She gave a quick glance around at the festival and gave a nod. "That sounds like fun. I am a bit hungry." She started to head towards the nearest food vendor. As she did she spoke. "Blaine did this often when we were kids. He would take off for days at a time. One day he didn't come back. (pause with a small sigh) I was surprised to see him here." She looked to Jaslyn, "So, a human friend. Interesting." Her eyes shown with humor as her lips turned to a grin.

"I will hope that Blaine appears so I can meet him," said Jaslyn, returning Kithris' grin for a moment before her features became more serious. She had already put Cainan through Hahren Liriel's disapproval, and she wasn't going to do that to him again. "The truth is, Cainan is more than a friend. He's frequently my lover. I don't usually share my personal business, and being a Gray Warden means I can't have children anyway. Just letting you know in case you or your friend have a problem with elves who fraternize with humans.

Kithris listened as Jaslyn explained her relationship with this Cainan. As she did, Kit gave her a big smile. "Myself, I have not problem with it. There are some humans that I have found very attractive. Blaine though, he is.....well.....he has his preferences. He has delt with humans when it has been a necessity. (pause as she looks around again) I get the feeling that you might not have to worry about him though. If he has not come to me by now, he has probably left." Her smile turned to a small frown. She had found her love and he left her again. Her hand glowed slightly, briefly, then stopped.

Kit didn't realize it had happened. She looked to Jaslyn, "Well let us find this Cainan. Maybe he has a friend."

"If Cainan is here, I've no doubt he'll find us," said Jaslyn. She pretended not to have seen Kithris' hand glow. *Interesting.* Well, a Dalish mage at a Chantry festival could have no better escort than a Grey Warden, if they ran into trouble with templars, Jaslyn would claim she was a recruit. "For now, let's see what this festival has to offer. I'd like to buy a drink, and then peruse what's on offer to trade in the craft guild tents."

Kithris grinned. "Drinks then shopping. This I can get behind."

Jaslyn led the way toward a section of booths near the edge of the festival area, with more elven and dwarven food and drink merchants. Kithris and Jaslyn were stopped by a group of three elven youths.

One of them, tall with short dark hair and probably the oldest, addressed Kithris. "Madam Dalish, you appear to have discerning tastes. I have two bottles left of an exclusive wine, imported from Val Royeaux. Sixty Crowns for one bottle, or both for one Royal."

Kithris seen the youths approaching and slowed. She looked to Jaslyn then back to the three. "Sixty crowns for one bottle." She looked the bottle over looked back to Jaslyn. "What do you think?"

What Jaslyn thought was that this group of teens was headed for trouble. She regarded the youths closely, all of them were wearing similar blue shirts. Two looked like brothers, both with long brown hair, one braided. The other two were girls, one could be the sister of the dark-haired leader, and the other had short red hair. She examined both of the other ceramic bottles – the seals were intact and on the label was a human woman with long red-purple hair that looked like flowing wine. She'd seen something like it – maybe - when she'd been a servant. "For a good vintage from a prestigious winery in Val Royeaux, that's a good price. But... you don't look like wine merchants."

The dark-haired leader shrugged. "Our last two bottles. Your loss. Someone else will buy them." He held out his hand for either the bottles or the coin.

Kithris tilted her head slightly at Jaslyn's knowledge of the wine. She wasn't a big wine person herself, her teacher was one and had a small collection of bottles. She had looked at them once but it wasn't something that had caught her interest.

Jaslyn sighed and held out a royal. The youth took it with a wide grin and the gang of elven youths scampered away, laughing. Turning to Kithris, she said, "Those youngsters probably stole these bottles, I bought them so they wouldn't get in trouble with the humans. I'll turn these over to Hahren Liriel in the morning, and she'll deal with them."

She put the two bottles in her rucksack. Jaslyn said, "Do you fancy a beer? Or do you prefer wine... from a reputable source?"

Kithris was about to agree to purchase the wine when Jaslyn did. She watched at the group, after taking the Royal, walked away seemingly happy. Jaslyn put the bottles away as she explained why she had bought them. "They probably did. I agree that it would not be good for them to get caught with them. Do not need to have any problems if it can be avoided." She nodded.

As they continued to walk, Jaslyn asked if she preferred beer or wine. This made Kit smile. "Well beer of course. (laugh and smile) Wine has never sat well within me. Haven't found one that I like." She looked to Jaslyn and smiled, "Point me in the right direction and the first round is on me."

"It would be my pleasure," said Jaslyn enthusiastically, pleased her new friend understood about the elven youths. She pointed to a banner hanging from an otherwise nondescript stall. "Jader has a new elven brewmaster who makes a good brew. She's only been at it a couple years, and truth is, her first few batches were not consistent – high quality supplies aren't always available to elves. But lately her results have been excellent, and I hear she's debuting a new recipe at the festival. I'd sure like to try it before she runs out."

Kithris listened as Jaslyn talked about the elf woman who started making her own brew. "It sounds like we have a place to start." She smiled as she headed towards the stall Jaslyn had pointed out. "A new recipe you say. I will need to try this new recipe. See how it compares to what we Dalish brew." She looked to Jaslyn. "Have you ever had mosswine?"

"Moss wine? As in, wine made from moss?" Jaslyn shook her head. "Never tasted it, but I'll try just about any fermented drink once. Do *you* like Mosswine?" They arrived at the beer stall, and Jaslyn leaned against the make-shift bar, and addressed one of the three elves behind it. "Two tankards of your Summerday brew."

One of the elves drew two tankards and set them on the bar. Jaslyn took a deep pull from the tankard, enjoying the delicious slightly bitter nut-brown brew. "It's good."

Kithris gave Jaslyn a smile when she ordered. Taking the tankard, Kit took a hefty swig. The bitter nut-brown was just enough to linger lightly, perfectly. "Very nice." as she took in the scent of the brew. "I am sure that there are some of the clan near here. They might have some, though it won't be from my clan. Darshee our potion maker, knows how to take the oakmoss and make a very smooth yet wicked wine. It is a dark green in color and a little thick. But does it taste good." She took another good swig from the tankard. Afterwards she looked around at those walking by and the other revelers. "So should we go looking for your Cainan?"

Jaslyn looked around for him again, - she was beginning to worry about Cainan. It really was unlike him to miss a party of this scale. Plus, she had indulged in the expectation that he'd want to continue their amorous activities. It was foolish of her, really. He was free to bed anyone he wished. "He's a grown man and a free agent. Cainan could be tied to some beautiful noblewoman's bedpost. We may not see him tonight." Jaslyn shrugged. "Is your clan far away from here? I'd like to try that oakmoss wine and meet your potion maker. To Darshee." She raised her tankard and drank a

salute.

Kithris took her own tankard and drank a salute to Darshee. When she was done she shook her head to Jaslyn's question. "I was actually on my way back to my clan. Well looking for it anyway. Before I left we would camp near the Frostback and Sulcher's Pass at this time of year. I am not sure if they are there." She took the last swallow of her drink, set the tankard down and looked at Jaslyn. "I had originally planned to only stay for the one night and head out this morning. But running into Blaine, plans changed. He has run off. (her hand glows slightly again. she seems not to notice) I have made a new friend." She smiles at Jaslyn, "So, if you would like to meet my clans potion maker, we set out to find her. If you have a better idea, I am willing to stick around."

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OOC: Continued in post "The Rogue Less Traveled"

## Dawn of Summerday Eve

Posted on 12 Dec 2021 @ 12:24pm by [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

Edited on on 12 Dec 2021 @ 4:42pm

**2,439 words; about a 12 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Martin's apartment

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 19th – Next morning after visit to Chantry

The first rays of morning broke the horizon. Upon the roof of Guard Josceran's apartment, the ritual began again. Each foot was placed with intent, shoulder's width apart. The strength of her arms pressed her palms together, building in tension as she waited for this moment. Her hair set ablaze in that first burst of sun. She listened to her breathing, she felt her heart race, counting each beat as she began....

"Then did I see the world spread before me,  
Sky-reaching mountains arrayed as a crown,  
Kingdoms like jewels, glistening gemstones  
Strung 'cross the earth as a necklace of pearl.  
"All this is yours," spake the World-Maker.  
"Join Me in heaven and sorrow no more."

"World-making Glory," I cried out in sorrow,  
"How shall your children apology make?  
We have forgotten, in ignorance stumbling,  
Only a Light in this darken'd time breaks.

Call to Your children, teach us Your greatness.  
What has been forgotten has not yet been lost."

As she greeted the day proudly singing of the Maker's love for his bride, she moved through the practiced 21 forms, twisting, shifting and rolling her arms and legs in rhythmic liturgy to the Chant that left her lips. 'Twas the eve of Summerday. The faithful of the town would be about adorning their homes with garlands of flowers, scented pasteries and spiritual gifts to honor the earthly bride of the Maker. While not as important in Chantry's calendar as the immolation and sacrifice of the bride, it was uniquely beautiful giving honor unto earthly love as much as that of the maker. It perhaps explained why the general populace embraced this more superficial of holidays. Sister Elinowy looked over the Jader skyline as the morning broke. The Maker loved all these people, the Anderfels, Antiva, Ferelden Nevarra, even the mages of Tevinter and of course blessed Orlais. Each was called to extend the chant to the ends of the earth. Why should not those called by the maker not rejoice in the simple comforts of hearth and home the festival emphasized.

Upon resting after her morning devotion, the scarlet haired sister prayed for all the people of Thedas. Today may be the day they truly learn to love one another. It was her duty to help them see this. She reentered the home where she had been given shelter for the night and if the Maker permitted thorough out the Festival. She checked the kettle she had started heating in the hearth before ascending to the roof. She scooped in several spoonfuls of the ground beans that would make the guardsman's coffee. The pungent spiced aroma began to fill the house.

Sister Elinowy's devotions were enough to rouse a light sleeper like Martin. He groaned, rolled around, but couldn't drift back to sleep, although he'd pulled another late shift and only caught a few hours of sleep. The pale golden light of dawn filtered through the ill-fitting shutters, reminding him that the day had already started. He kept meaning to ask Raoul to fix those but always forgot.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee was finally enough to convince him to give up on sleep for now. He stood, splashed some water on his face and pulled on a fresh shirt. The children were still sleeping so he crossed the corridor silently, deftly avoiding the creaky spot by Raoul's door, and made his way down to the kitchen where Elinowy was making breakfast.

"Good morning, Sister. If that coffee tastes as good as it smells, I may have to ask you to stay longer."

The tall Chantry sister smiled. "It is the least I can do for your kindness of allowing me shelter in your home. I should warn you, the sisters back home banned me from making coffee in the mornings. Apparently it is not advisable to make something you do not consume. Something about being so thick you could chew it. I hope it is at least palatable to you." she said giving a modest bow.

"I'm sure it can't be quite that..." Martin trailed off as he caught a glance of the coffee, which did look a very deep shade of black. "...bad. Uh, what do you usually have for breakfast? We have half a loaf from yesterday, jam and butter."

As he spoke he rummaged in a cupboard to bring out two wooden plates, a butter knife and two black ceramic cups that he placed on the table, then unwrapped the bread from the clean cloth it was stored in. Two pots followed, one full of honey, the other of sugar. The butter was stored in a small covered dish, as was the jam. Martin helped himself to the coffee then looked questioningly at Elinowy.

"What would you like to drink ? I think we may have some lime-tree flowers somewhere if you'd care for an infusion." Neither he nor Raoul really drank anything other than coffee, but they kept the lime-tree around in case someone got sick.

As he waited for Elinowy's answer Martin took a sip from his cup. The bitterness of the overly-strong coffee did not catch him completely unaware thanks to Elinowy's warning and he put the cup back down to discreetly add a spoonful of sugar. Or two.

The flame haired sister held her hand up politely, "Thank you. I enjoy lime a great deal, however I made some tea earlier. It's remarkable what you can find freely growing even in a city. I used to have an extensive garden back in Bete Noire with an amazing variety of herbs from all over Thedas." she turned toward the small window as her thought turned to home. "The Maker provides." she said with a serene but sad face.

The sister looked... nostalgic ? No, it was more than that. Her tone and expression bespoke of loss and longing. Those were feelings Martin was better acquainted with than he would prefer.

"Bête Noire," he said carefully. "Is that where you're from ?" He made sure to keep his tone light and the question open, so that the sister could choose to either share or deflect.

With a bit more sugar to squash the bitterness his coffee was actually drinkable, albeit much stronger than his usual. Martin took another sip, without taking his eyes off Elinowy.

Her face with a practiced placidity Elinowy looked at Martin. "...Yes. Home. It seems so distant now. Another life almost. Until about ten years ago, I had never been anywhere else. Now my life is always something new and unfamiliar." she managed a bleak smile. "The path of the Maker can take you many places one never imagined going. I expected to live my life with my gardens, my research and caring for my community. Now I am drinking tea with the guard in Jader. But this life is a blessing too, even if it feels untethered. A path is always best seen behind you I suppose."

She lifted her tea cup and took a sip, lowering it to where her eyes intersected Martin's own gaze. "And what of you? You were a Templar in the order and now you fight to get the respect of your superiors. Your life has taken some turns too it seems."

Martin hadn't seen that line of inquiry coming, although he should have in retrospect. It had been a long time since anyone had asked - he'd steadily refused to answer any questions when his friends had come, one after the other, hoping to get him to return to the fold. It didn't feel like this was Sister Elinowy's intention though.

And in fact, she hadn't asked. She'd made a statement, leaving it up to him to comment or change the subject. That kindness was nothing surprising coming from her.

"You're right," Martin agreed. "Although becoming a Templar was never my decision. It was..." he hesitated. "...my family's wish. Oh, I liked it well enough. Loved it, even. The camaraderie, the training, having a higher purpose. In the end, however, I realized it wasn't the right calling for me." He shrugged. "I wish it had been but you don't really get to decide those things, do you? It's just the way it happens. The Maker's will, maybe? My family didn't really understand, though. That's one of the reasons I stayed here, rather than go back north..." He trailed off. He hadn't meant to share that much, but there was something about Sister Elinowy that invited confidences.

Elinowy smiled at Martin, nodding slightly as she sipped her tea. "I would think you would be an excellent soldier of Andraste. It is the order's loss that you were called elsewhere. I wanted to be a sister from the time I was a child, but I still recall the weight of my consecration rite. To cast your fate upon what to many people seems unknowable requires courage and a healthy amount of faith." she paused looking into her teacup, her eyes closing in reflection. "And here I am again, following a path that I have no confidence outside of faith will lead to anything of meaning. I find the Maker's sense of humor is the most manifest attribute of his will."

She thought introspectively again. "Forgive me, I am sermonizing you on my own discernments. What lays ahead for you this fine eve of Summersday?"

It must be nice, to be so certain in one's calling, and in the Maker's will. Martin had made the choice that was right for him, but at times he wondered if he hadn't been selfish in so doing. No, he knew he had been. He just couldn't have gone on to become a Templar, after... he chased the unbidden memory from his mind.

"I don't really have any plans," he replied to the Sister. "Aside from doing my shift as usual. I might put in some overtime today, Summerday is always a busy time for the Guard as you can imagine. Hopefully that will put me in a better stead with the Captain. I'll need to do the rounds in the Alienage anyway, and that always takes a bit longer."

It took longer in part because he always took the time to speak to some of the residents of the alienage. Getting to know them was an ongoing process, even after years on the job, but it had been immensely helpful in the past. It was a mutually beneficial situation, in which he occasionally looked the other way on lesser misdemeanours, but knew he could get honest testimonies about more serious crime; of which the elves were the victims as often as the perpetrators, if not more.

"Just another day on the job." she said nodding kindly. "Be careful around all those elves, you never know what they could be up to." she stated solemnly. "I have a day of preparing for tomorrow's festivities. The elder had wanted me to give blessing around town. I am happy to do that, but I would like to make things a little more special for those enjoying the festival, especially the children. I'm going to make some surprises for them. I need to find some cleaning solutions and fairly potent

alcohol spirit and a silver button if you have any. It won't make a big mess, I can mix it up here in the kitchen."

Well, that was unexpected. So the Sister was a bit of an alchemist on top of everything else? Go figure, Martin thought, amused. He'd certainly not make hasty judgements about people in the near future, especially Chantry Sisters.

"The cleaning solutions are in that cupboard," he said, pointing to the piece of furniture in question. "And I'm sure I can dig out some cheap brandy. But I'm afraid we're short on the silver buttons. I have a couple of spare copper ones, if that'd help...?"

The Chantry sister began to look about the pantry as Martin had indicated. "No, I'm afraid only silver will do, the copper doesn't react the same way, it won't ignite properly. But not to worry, the Maker will provide." she said having no real idea where she would come across a small silver button, expensive as they might be, they were no uncommon. She had not been able to work with reagents during most of her time away from Bette Noire, it felt good to indulge herself in a little alchemy again. This was just a harmless trinket for the children she was working on, but the thrill of crafting was still there.

Elinowy selected a few bottles of spirits that were in the cupboard, uncorking and sniffing each to find the most potent mix of alcohol. "Do you find working with the creatures of the Alienage rewarding? I would be personally terrified, of course knowing the Maker would do with me as he desired, but isn't it dangerous? Even for a man of the Guard?"

*Creatures*? Martin knew that Elinowy wasn't overly fond of elves but that was pushing it a little bit... wasn't it? He eyed her cautiously. She didn't look like she was joking.

"Well... I suppose, yes. But dangerous is kind of in the job description." Martin shrugged then smiled. "I'm not sure it's more dangerous than being a beautiful red-haired Chantry sister alone late at night arresting would-be muggers." He paused, wondered if he really should stick his nose in this specific issue, but he couldn't not say anything. "Sister, forgive me if I'm overstepping, but... can I ask why you hold such a negative view of elves?"

Elinowy paused for a moment and looked thoughtfully at Martin. "I suppose I do. Forgive me. I have just had very unpleasant experiences with elves in the past. They have been quick to lie and faster to be up to some type of mischief. I remind myself that their race bound themselves to magic and turn away from Andraste and the Chant to follow pagan deities." she said placing the supplies for her crafting project down on the table and quickly cleaning her hands on a dish towel. "I do understand there can be good elves, but I just have not met one. Thieves and predators on the unwary and innocent. They have been unreliable and dangerous. I would never mean one harm, but I do watch my step around the Dales."

Picking up her ingredients, the Chantry sister spun about to place the goods down on the nearby



table. "I will get to my work. I pray your day passes without great danger for you. I will try to have something edible come dinner." she stated cheerfully.

## In Vino Veritas

Posted on 18 Dec 2021 @ 10:30pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**2,658 words; about a 13 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th

OOC: Continued from post 'Cui Bono'

The Chantry grounds were full of people moving around in groups and in pairs, wearing their brightly colored best clothes, wandering among festival stalls that sprawled down the streets. Kalian said, "There are so many people. Like Martin said, we can't go around saying there are poison drinks, we will cause a panic. But we also can't go around saying there are elves selling poisoned wine - that could result in an alienage massacre." His elven mother had told him stories. "We can show the bottle around, tell folks we want to buy more of it. That way if we find someone that bought some, we get it out of the hands of potential victims. Plus, once word gets around, the sellers might come to us."

Rhi listened to Kalian as he laid out his thoughts. "I agree. Asking around to see if we can buy more, should bring those selling it to us." She looks to Martin. "Unless you have another idea, that might work?"

That wasn't the worst idea Martin had ever heard. He certainly couldn't come up with anything better.

"Sounds reasonable to me," he said. "Let's do it."

Martin had the bottle in hand, but Kalian was pretty sure he could describe it. Keeping Rhiannon and Martin in sight, he approached a small group of humans, two women and a man drinking from wine bottles, but not the ones he was looking for. "Good day to you," he said, with all of his well-practiced charm, "I'm looking for a couple of elves selling wine. The label on the bottles show a woman with long hair designed to look like a river of wine, and the bottles are ceramic. The wine is overpriced," he added to discourage them from buying any. "But I'd like to buy more anyway."

"I'll share the rest of this bottle with you," said one of the women, eying Kalian with a lascivious grin, inspiring a round of hearty laughter from her companions. The man said, "We haven't seen anyone

selling wine like that, but we have plenty. You're welcome to join us for a foursome."

Kalian barely stopped himself from rolling his eyes. He'd forgotten what festival revelers were like sometimes, and after all, he had plans with Rhiannon to look forward to. "No, thank you, serah. But if you see someone with a bottle like I described, I'd appreciate it if you would send them my way." As the three walked away, Kalian wondered if Rhiannon and Martin were having any luck as he angled to intercept another group.

Martin looked around, just in case he saw someone puking their guts out. Not that this would be an uncommon sight on a festival day, but maybe less common at such an early hour in the afternoon. No such luck though, at least not in his direct vicinity.

"Excuse me," he said to an elven woman, who had long blond hair and was wearing a bright shawl around her shoulders. "I'm looking for two elves selling wine like this," he pointed at the bottle. "Have you seen them?"

Her eyes drifted to his uniform and he saw the flash of distrust there, not unusual in elves. They had cause to be wary, unfortunately.

"No, I haven't," she said after a second.

"Oh," he said, making a disappointed face. "That's too bad, I was hoping to buy a few bottles for a party later. But thanks anyway."

He moved on to the next person, a burly human with a paunch and ruddy cheeks suggesting he regularly indulged in libations.

"Beg your pardon, I'm looking for wine, same as this?" he held the bottle. "Two elves are selling it but I can't find them again, and I wanted to buy more."

"Baah," the man snorted, "you truly must be desperate if you resort to buying wine from bloody knife-ears! My mother-in-law sells fine wine, she has a stall over there, you'll find everything you need there!"

"Thanks," Martin said frostily. At least he knew where *not* to buy his wine.

After interrogating what felt like half the population of Jader, he finally struck gold. There was a woman on the edge of the crowd, bent over; as Martin approached she proceeded to noisily discharge the contents of her stomach (mostly liquid) on the ground.

"Littering waste in a public location, especially during festival, is a finable offense," Martin said amiably. It was even true, although the sort of law nobody cared about. It was a convenient excuse to lock up people too drunk to stand though.

The woman glanced at him, her face pale and sweaty, and made a rude gesture at him.

Kalian's inquiries had resulted in two more salacious invitations, four recommendations for alternative drink, and one threat from a jealous husband who assumed he had untoward intentions. But, no one who knew anything about the suspicious wine. Kalian had begun to wonder if it was indeed the wine that had caused that man Arnould's demise. He saw Martin bestowing his guardsman charm on a sick woman, and rejoined him.

Rhiannon watched those women who made salacious invitations carefully but the man who threatened Kalian got a crimson eyed death stare. She watched the man closely as both Kalian and herself made their way along.

"Good day, serah," said Kalian. "Apologies for disturbing you while you're sick. By chance, did you drink wine that came from a bottle like the one my guardsman friend is holding?" If so, he figured expelling it from her stomach was the healthiest thing she could be doing just then.

With one more heave, the last of the contents of the woman's stomach were expelled and she stood up. She wiped her mouth with her handkerchief, still pale and a little bit shaky. Her brown hair was tied in a very long braid and she wore modest, practical clothes in tones of hay and beige. An artisan perhaps, or a farmer. Martin glanced at the handkerchief. White stains, just like the foam on Arnould's mouth.

"Bottle's here." She kicked at it on the ground and the bottle toppled over, fortunately it was sealed shut. "You're welcome to it, I only had a cup or two, watered down even, and that shit made me feel like the worst hangover of my life. Damn. Guardsman?" She looked at Martin, taking in his uniform. "I want to put in a formal complaint against the bastard who sold me that swill. I want my money back."

"Right. Of course. Hum. First however, what is your name?"

"Emilie Gerfaut. I own L'Oliverie."

Martin nodded, familiar with the name. It was a small but fancy shop that sold mostly perfumed soaps, candles and a few beauty products.

"And can you describe the person who sold you the wine?"

"Sure can. Two elves. One had long braided hair, brown, dressed in blue. The other was blond, short hair, brown eyes, with a grey tunic. Damn, I bet they're running an illegal distillery business or something of the kind. I thought it was safe because the bottle looked fancy, but..." she shook her head, clearly shaken by the whole experience.

"Any idea where they went?"

"Not really. They're probably still selling their poison, or back at the alienage I imagine." Emilie shook her head with a disgusted expression. "I won't get my money back, will I?"

Rhi made her way, with Kalian over to a woman who was throwing up. She listened as Kalian asked about her possibly being sick from wine. As the woman finished, straightened up, wiped her mouth and proceeded to explain what had happened to her, Rhi picked up the bottle that the woman had kicked. Looking at over, she pulled the stopper and took a sniff.

This woman, Emilie Gerfaut, owned the L'Oliverie. If she made the perfumes herself, she probably had a highly developed sense of smell, thought Kalian as he watched Rhi sniff the wine. Kalian was tempted to try to smell the wine himself, even though he didn't know anything about poison. Just now all he could smell was the sour stink of vomit.

Kalian rested a hand on the woman's shoulder, a consoling gesture, and surreptitiously sent a gentle healing spell into her body. "I doubt you'll get your money back, serah, but thank the Maker you expelled the drink from your stomach."

"I do feel much better." She pointedly glared at Kalian's hand and stepped away from him. "I should have known better than to buy anything from elves."

Emilie turned away just as they all heard Elinowy's distinctively beautiful singing voice, from the direction of the privies.

Rhi stoppered the bottle and looked to Martin and Kalian. "I do not smell anything, which is as I suspected. Any good poisoner would not use something that could be smelled by those he or she wished to poison. Especially if it was to be drunk. If there was a smell then it might not have gotten drunk."

"Right," Martin agreed. "But that doesn't prove the wine is poisoned. It could just be really bad moonshine. Illegal, and dangerous, but accidental rather than malicious. And I honestly can't imagine what the point of selling poisoned wine would be."

Unless that was a ploy thought up by a sick mind. It wouldn't be the first time such things happened. While many outlaws were motivated by desperation or greed, some were just plain malevolent. Still, selling poisoned wine seemed oddly random ; usually murderers targeted specific people. Martin thought for a moment.

"Do you know of any way of proving for sure whether the wine is poisoned?" he asked Rhiannon. He didn't ask Kalian ; to the best of his knowledge there were no such spells.

Rhiannon shook her head slightly. "I do not have a way to check with me. I could send for what I need if you would like. Or I could give it a quick taste and see what happens."

"Maker above, no !" Martin exclaimed, startled and slightly alarmed that she would suggest such a

thing. It seemed an extremely cavalier and glib way to treat one's own life. "Send for whatever you need, or give me a list and I'll see if it can be found quickly, but no one is drinking that wine."

"No!" blurted Kalian, at the same time as Martin's emphatic no. He was relieved but not surprised by Martin's reaction. No way would he let Rhiannon or anyone take a chance like that. "There's a potion master staying at the Raven – Dominic Lesprin – probably has the right materials. He has a stall here... somewhere."

Jerard staggered back toward the privies, taking small sips from the flask that pretty dwarf had given him. Best spirits he could remember drinking, smooth and rich, burned all the way down in the best possible way to his stomach. He waved when he saw that nice guardswoman, talking to another guard. What was her name? Jerard called out, "Guardswoman Audrey?" He said, "Martin sent me back to find you." Then he saw a big body-shaped bundle on the ground.

*Maker's Breath!* Audrey had almost convinced Johann to help her carry the body back to the Guard Station without asking too many questions, before the miller - Jerard - interrupted their conversation and mentioned Martin.

Jerard sucked the last drops from the flask, then noticed the large body-shaped bundle on the ground, wrapped in what appeared to be a flowered tablecloth. "Is that... is that Arnould?" He broke down and began to cry.

As her long crimson robes billowed behind her, Sister Elinowy was caught up in thoughts of her odd encounter with Elder Isouda. Each woman was blessed for dedicating her life to the will of the Maker. Still there were some that either out of personality quirks or course ambition were difficult to deal with and keep a joyful heart. Isouda seemed to gather dark clouds about her when she entered a chamber. Elinowy was saying a prayer for the elder when the sounds of weeping reached her ears. Praise the Maker, comforting the Poor in spirit would be just the thing she needed to shake off her negative thoughts of a Chantry sister.

She put a practiced kindly smile on her face and approached the man, her arms open in embrace. "My dear brother, what distresses you so?" she asked, her eyes quickly taking in the scene. The Guards and the covered body made this case fairly obvious.

"Oh Sister," groaned Jerard. He wiped his face with his sleeve. "My, uh, companion died suddenly. I showed that guardsman – Martin – where Arnould threw the bottle he was drinking from. And now he and his two friends, a Rivaini-looking man and a dwarf, are investigating."

Elinowy held the man as he sobbed. "I am sorry to hear of the loss of your friend. Our Maker is no stranger to the distress of the suffering of those he loves. In our loss we share in the suffering of Andraste, and through our compassion assure ourselves of coming to the Maker."

She tapped on Jerard's shoulders, opened her mouth and began to sing.

"My Maker, know my heart:  
Take from me a life of sorrow.  
Lift me from a world of pain.  
Judge me worthy of Your endless pride.

My Creator, judge me whole:  
Find me well within Your grace.  
Touch me with fire that I be cleansed.  
Tell me I have sung to Your approval.

O Maker, hear my cry:  
Seat me by Your side in death.  
Make me one within Your glory.  
And let the world once more see Your favor.

For You are the fire at the heart of the world,  
And comfort is only Yours to give. "

Johann and Audrey were just preparing to pick up the body, but Johann paused and looked hard at Audrey. "What is Martin up to now?" he asked rhetorically, but picked up the body nonetheless. They couldn't leave it here in the middle of the festival.

Elinowy was mid-song when they got there. Kalian thought poor Jerard looked... better. Less like a man in shock. Elinowy's singing had that effect on people, and despite the disturbing turn of the festival, Kalian smiled.

Rhi listened as Elinowy sang. Not only was she beautiful, her voice was as well. She glanced towards Jerard and gave a nod. "Flask do you good?"

"Y-yes," Jerard said. He still looked shaken and pale, but a bit steadier. "Thank you." He glanced at the body, who mercifully had been covered, then looked away.

Johann and Audrey had been on their way out but stopped when they spotted Martin. Or rather, Johann stopped and Audrey had no choice but to do the same. He looked like he wanted to ask more than a few questions ; his eyes went from Martin to Kalian and Rhiannon, narrowing as he noticed the empty wine bottle Martin still held.

"What exactly is going on here ?"

That was all Martin could do not to wince. There went his resolve to keep his head down and not get noticed. "I'll report all of my findings in due course," he said, holding Johann's eyes. "Completely

and thoroughly."

Johann hesitated, clearly tempted to drop the body he was carrying and demand answers, here and now. But the longer they dallied, the more likely it was someone would notice a corpse being carried in the middle of Summerday festivities, and that in turn would cause a right mess. Besides, he wouldn't want to air the Guard's disagreements or lack of cohesion in public, or at least Martin was counting on that.

"I'll make a preliminary report to the Captain," was all Johann said in the end.

"Thanks", Martin said, though what he really thought was much less appreciative.

This whole thing was looking more and more like a disaster.

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## Wine, Danger, and Song

Posted on 04 Feb 2022 @ 3:14pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**2,594 words; about a 13 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th

OOO: Continued from post "In Vino Veritas"

Here they were again, thought Kalian. Martin, Elinowy, Rhiannon, and himself, in the thick of it. Except this time, instead of being stuck in a silverite mine with a bunch of enslaved miners, they were standing in the middle of a huge Chantry party, near the privies. And this time Martin was getting chewed out by other guardsmen *before* they saved the day. Well, Kalian hoped that'd be the outcome.

Whilst Martin talked to the other two guards, Kalian knelt next to Rhiannon, put an arm around her waist, and whispered into her ear. "I think we need to sneak into that warehouse tonight, and see if these wine bottles were part of the shipment the *Night's Kiss* transported for Carlos Acerbi. And, uh... I think we ought to mention it to Martin and Elinowy. What do you think?"

Rhiannon felt Kalian's arm slip around her waist. It felt comfortable. His breath against her ear as he whispered brought a smile to her face. She gave a small nod as she turned enough to whisper back. "I think that we should as well. As for letting Martin and Elinowy know, I would suggest we be careful in how it is approached. Yes they should know but not here."

Kalian nodded gravely. "You're right, of course. It's probably just a coincidence, but it would sooth my conscience to be sure."

Whilst the guards and their helpers were busy, Jerard took Elinowy's hand. "Thank you, Sister, for the comfort of your words and song." His speech was only slightly slurred, and *Holy Andraste*, that flaming red hair, those lovely blue eyes... usually Jerard would not be so bold as to proposition a Chantry sister, but the liquor the dwarf had given him had a bolstering effect, and it was Summerday festival after all. "Perhaps you would accompany me back to my home, and uh, console me there?"

Elinowy gave the poor man a kindly smile and a light embrace. "Seek the Maker's blessings. The Chantry is always open to all who need comfort. I will mention you in my prayers in the fading of the day's light. Peace with you my brother.". she said as she broke the embrace and held the man's forearms compassionately. Giving him another smile, she walked over to join her companions.

Once Martin and Elinowy were both free to converse privately, Kalian held Rhiannon's hand, and addressed Martin and Elinowy with his voice pitched only to be heard by their group of four. "Rhiannon and I have some information that may or may not be related to these bottles of wine." Since it involved the *Night's Kiss*, Kalian left it to Rhiannon to explain.

Rhi looked to Kalian then to both Martin and Elinowy. She motioned to move more off to the side away from others who could over hear. Once there she spoke softly. "My mother was contracted to pick up a few cases of wine from Val Royal and bring them here just before the festivities."

"Not that there's necessarily a connection," added Kalian, reluctant to suggest Rhiannon's people might be doing anything illegal. "Many merchants and other people in Jader would be ordering special shipments of wine for the festivities. All the same, Rhi and I think we should verify those aren't the same wine bottles."

Well, that was so flimsy a lead as to be almost meaningless. As Kalian had pointed out, wine shipments for the summerday festival were hardly out of the ordinary. On the other hand... Rhiannon had dropped enough hints about her activities as to suggest they were not always in perfect compliance with the law. Someone who hired her crew might do so because they trusted she would be discreet about it... but that still wasn't much to go on.

"Can't hurt to check, I suppose." Martin paused, thoughtful. "Actually, I might ask the harbourmaster for a list of all the wine shipments that came in recently. That should include a specific list of the contents of each shipment."

A human woman in the crowd caught Kalian's attention, not because she was tall, blonde, and beautiful, but because her gaze was fixed on Martin and himself with an expression of recognition and she was headed toward them. Kalian recalled meeting her for the first time at the Jader orphanage – both of them had been helping out there during the Blight when the city struggled to handle the surge of Fereldan refugees. "Katya! It's good to see you."



The warrior smiled. "Hello Kalian! Martin! How are you? It's been a while Kalian! How are you? Enjoying the Summerday Fete?" The tall blonde regarded her friend. Well since Katya was an orphan herself and had grown up in the orphanage, it was a pleasure to help the kids. Kalian had made a favorable impression on both Katya and Miss Caroline the woman who ran the orphanage.

Kalian raised an eyebrow at Martin, unaware that he also knew Katya, but given her history with the Jader guard, it wasn't that surprising. Kalian said, "Katya, I'd like you to meet Rhiannon and Elinowy," and gestured to each of the women in turn.

Katya bowed, "Ladies, a pleasure! Any friend of Kalian is a friend of mine."

Rhi looked the tall blonde up and down. She could definitely tell that she was a warrior. Rhi watched this Katya closely as the woman she had approached and how she talked to Kalian. Not sure what to think when Katya bowed, it was when the woman that any friend of Kalian is a friend of hers, Rhi relaxed a little. Rhi was about to respond when she heard a commotion over where the guards had gone with the body.

The scarlet clad sister bowed her head in greeting. "A friend of Kalian is indeed a friend of mine. May the Maker's grace be upon you. I am Sister Elinowy Ursulas."

Martin glanced at the newcomer. She looked vaguely familiar, but it wasn't until Kalian called her name that he remembered meeting her at the orphanage. Katya something or other, he couldn't remember if she'd ever shared her last name, but he did remember her as a reliable and hard worker.

"Greetings Katya, I - " he didn't get the chance to finish his sentence.

Before introductions were completed, they were interrupted by a commotion in the direction the two guards had gone with the body.

The crowd was abruptly stilled by the booming voice of Guard Captain Landry, disrupting all conversations in their vicinity. "Guardsmen Josceran, report!" Kalian turned with the others to watch her approach.

In a glacial tone Kalian might have sworn left frost on his eyebrows, the woman spoke to Martin, "I see you failed to learn your lesson, Guardsman Josceran. Once again I find you conducting guard business by conspiring with vigilantes. The same miscreants you associated with the last time you were in dereliction of duty." She glared at Martin's companions in turn - the Chantry sister, the supposed dwarven businesswoman, and... she didn't recognize the dark-skinned human, but he fit the description given by some witnesses from the mine. Her eyes narrowed to see the tall blonde guard-turned-mercenary. "You four, mind yourselves or I'll have you thrown in jail. Martin, return to the guard station with me. Immediately." She gestured for Martin to precede her, leaving him no choice but to comply.

Rhi had watched as the Captain of the guard came into view. The woman was definitely one that you could not miss. Not only was she an imposing individual, her voice carried. What irritated Rhi the most though was how she looked at the four of them. With Rhi this response came naturally. "Oh, aye captain."

"Good to see you too Captain!" Katya said sarcastically.

Kalian watched his friend's exit worriedly. If he didn't know better, he might think all this attention Landry gave Martin suggested she had taken a special interest in him. "Uh, that can't be good."

"It isn't! People wonder why I left the guard! That woman and I use the term quite loosely in the Captain's case, has no sense of humor whatsoever. I swear she lives to make other people's lives miserable! She has no idea what being a woman means. None at all! She seems to think she has to be like a man to be captain of the guard." Katya said. "So Kalian, what is going on?"

Rhi shook her head slightly as Martin headed off with the Captain. She heard Katya's opinion on the woman and gave a nod. "I know how and have dealt with women like her. Though I do not think that it would help Martin if I were to get involved." There was a slight pause as a very mischievous grin crossed her face, her crimson eyes shown brightly as she let out a rough giggle. "No, I will leave at alone."

Katya smiled. "I have a feeling we are going to get along rather well Rhiannon! Yes, better to leave it alone at this point! I do not envy Martin though!"

Answering Katya's question, Kalian said, "What is going on here is that a man died, probably from drinking poisoned wine. His friend said he bought it from some elves wandering around the festival. We found a second bottle - the label is distinctive - but it only made the woman who drank from it sick, seems that she didn't drink enough to kill her."

Rhi looked up at Kalian and gave a nod. "If it is one of the poisons that I know of, then she should count herself lucky that all that happened was her getting sick."

Elinowy listened carefully to the discussion of her companions and the guard. She had not witnessed anything they reported, but if someone, elves, were passing tainted wine at the Festival of Andraste's beautification before the Maker, it needed to be stopped to protect the innocent and the honor of Andraste.

Kalian looked in the direction Martin and Landry had gone. "I'm sure he'll be all right. Probably the worst Landry can do to Martin is fire him." Trouble was, Kalian knew how important the Jader Guard was to Martin, that would be an awful outcome for Kalian's friend. "I don't think we're going to find any more of those wine bottles among the Summerday revelers today. And if we're seen going around asking about them, that could get Martin in more trouble."

He looked at each of the three women as if to ask *what shall we do now?*

"Well at least she didn't die. Still, did the woman say where she got the bottle from?" Katya said.

"True, she didn't die. As sick as she got though, she probably felt like she was going to." This said with a bit of a giggle. Looking to Kalian, Rhi gave a nod. "I agree. We should let the guard handle it from here. Though I ever happen to come across any of it, we should procure the bottle as quickly as possible." Her tone was of one stating a forgone conclusion.

"Certainly we do not wish to cause more trouble for Martin, but it is our imperative to protect the innocent. If some diabolical Dalish plot is afoot, we need to bring it to light. We succeeded in undoing the powers of greed and evil before, I feel the Maker would bless our continuing that mission." Elinowy responded, looking at her companions.

"I agree with Elinowy! I don't want to cause trouble for Martin either. He's a good guy. However, I feel we must look into this. I believe the poisoning is intentional and we have a duty to stop it before they strike again!" Katya said.

Kalian regarded Elinowy with a worried frown. Raising accusations toward the elven population among an inebriated throng of mostly humans was exactly the sort of thinking that could initiate a slaughter in the alienage. "Martin rightly decided we must not incite a panic by raising a public outcry. There are two victims - the miller's companion for the evening, and the perfumer. The poisonings seem random to me. Plus, Martin, Rhiannon, and I have been looking for more bottles of the stuff, and so far-

A young human man barged into their mist then, dressed in the modest clothing of a junior craftsman, a fancy sword at his side. Kalian guessed him to be apprenticed to one of the skilled smiths in town. The man drank from one of the notorious wine bottles in his left hand, tipped back to drain the last drops. Another of the bottles was grasped in his right hand - still corked. The smith's apprentice appeared perfectly healthy, though drunk. He swallowed and said, "Heard you was lookin' ta buy a bottle of this wine. Don't blame ya, tis good stuff. You want this other bottle, it'll cost ya two crowns."

Rhi gave Kalian a nod. "No trouble for Martin." She was about to continue a young man came into their mists. He was holding two of the bottles that they were looking for. One was full and the other it seemed he was just emptying. She looked at the others when then to the man. "Two crowns you say. I think I can handle that." She digs out two crowns. She holds out her hand for the bottle as she has the two crowns in her other. "Bottle first, then the crowns." She gave the man a warm yet confident no nonsense smile.

Katya smiled. Rhiannon beat her to the punch so to speak. She was going to pay the man but Rhi did it first. She liked the dwarven Woman. Kalian had assembled a good team of friends. She was looking forward to getting to know them better and going on this adventure with them. She wanted to know what was going on. She had a strong suspicion this poisoning was deliberate, but they

couldn't say for sure right now.

"That inflated price better include the empty bottle," added Kalian. A bottle that clearly was *not* poisoned could also be a valuable clue. "Who sold you this wine?"

The young man handed the unopened bottle to Rhiannon and held out his hand for the two crowns. Then he pushed the empty bottle toward Kalian and shrugged. "Some elves. Didn't introduce themselves. I uh... heard them talking to a pair of elf women, selling the last two bottles. So that right there is the last bottle. Hope you enjoy it."

Kalian watched the man walk away, then regarded the three women. "I think we should go to the Raven's Roost, have a beer, and figure out what to do next." His gaze lingered on Rhiannon and he gave her a regretful smile. It seemed the romantic evening he'd been planning would be delayed, at least temporarily.

Rhi had noticed Kalias look of regret. She shook her head slightly as if to say, no not regrets. Her warm yet some how very mischievous smile said as much. "Two the Roost it is." She moved to take Kalias hand in hers, "It shouldn't take long to favored it what our next move is." She squeezes his hand as she looks up at Kalian. Her eyes sparkling red in the sun light. "There is plenty of time."

"Well, since you twisted my arm. Let's go!" Katya said with a big grin

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## Under false pretenses

Posted on 18 Feb 2022 @ 3:29pm by [Warrior Martin Josceran](#)

Edited on on 18 Feb 2022 @ 3:31pm

**936 words; about a 5 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th

OOC: Continued from post "Wine, Danger, and Song"

Martin followed Captain Landry back to the station, stolidly ignoring the compassionate winces or mocking snickers of his fellow guards. He worried about leaving Kalian and the others to deal with this situation on their own, even though he knew they could take care of themselves. Hopefully, he could catch up with them before too long.

Without so much as slowing down her stride Captain Landry led him through the station all the way

to her office, slamming the door behind her once Martin had entered ; she gave all the signs of being in a foul mood. Yet, as soon as the door was closed, the thunderous expression on her face smoothed to a more contained, neutral look. She walked around her desk, sat on her chair, joined her fingers beneath her chin and looked at Martin.

"Report," she commanded, her voice quiet and contained.

"Yes ser. It all started when Jerard Miller called for help - " Martin recounted the events of the early afternoon, stressing that Kalian's presence and subsequent assistance had been a simple fluke, and somehow failing to mention Rhiannon's imprudent confessions about the nature of her occupation. The captain's sudden change in demeanour left him only slightly unnerved, for it was not the first time he witnessed her subverting people's expectations.

Captain Landry listened to his report without interrupting, thoughtful and quiet, showing no sign of her earlier fury.

"Are you certain the wine was poisoned ?" she asked after a moment.

Martin hesitated briefly. "No. But the death is suspicious."

"What could possibly be the point of selling poisoned wine to random strangers ? If it's an assassination attempt, it's sloppy. If it's wanton murder, it's certainly not a method of killing that I've encountered before." Landry paused. "Were any of the victims elves ?"

"The two we identified were human but there may have been more."

"So it could be a case of Dalish elves striking a blow against humans."

"Only if they're very dumb," Martin said, unconvinced. "They would not be doing their cause any good."

"Revenge does not always make sense," Landry said, shrugging. "But it may also be a red herring. Either way, if there's poisoned wine being sold in Jader, we need to stop it sooner rather than later. If word gets out about this, the consequences may be grave."

"I agree," Martin said. He was about to ask for permission to resume his investigation when Landry spoke again.

"I want you to continue your investigation."

"Ser, I would like to ask for permission to - what ?"

A thin smile appeared on Landry's face. "I don't want anyone to know what you're doing. If whoever is behind this knows we're on their tracks they'll try harder to cover it up , hopefully that little show I

gave them will convince them they're safe. Officially you're suspended from your duties. Unofficially, you'll continue to investigate and report directly to me your findings. Questions ?"

Martin needed a brief moment to gather his thoughts. "I assume this means I won't get any back-up from the other guards."

"You won't, unless you absolutely require the manpower, in which case you ought to report to me first."

"Then may I... accept less conventional assistance ?"

Landry stared at him, hard, for a moment then snorted and waved a hand. "I'm not interested in this kind of details. But do remember that whoever is or gets involved is putting their lives at risk."

"I know that," Martin said quietly. The thought bothered him greatly, but as Landry had pointed out - Kalian and Rhiannon already were involved. "I'll get back to work then."

Landry waved a dismissive hand. "Do try to look appropriately chastised."

Martin saluted and turned around. As he reached the door, Landry's voice came from behind.

"Martin."

He paused, without turning back.

"Your stunt at the mine was brave but careless. You got lucky. The thing with luck is, it runs out sooner or later. I hope you remember that."

Martin hesitated. The captain wasn't wrong. "I'll be careful," he said, and walked out.

He ignored the covert glances and mutters of his fellow guardsmen as he left the station. He was usually on Landry's good side ; no doubt some were enjoying his assumed fall from grace. He was glad to leave the pretenses and political games to Landry though. Maybe he should reconsider vying for her job.

The street right outside the station was empty and silent ; most people were attending the festival. Martin thought about heading back to the Chantry but he doubted if Kalian and the others would still be there. Knowing them, there was no way they'd left the investigation alone. More likely they were still looking for a trail to follow. After a brief hesitation he turned and headed over to the Raven's Roost. Even if his friends weren't there, Kalian's sister may have an idea where to find him.

Kalian's sister... was she a mage too, Martin found himself wondering as he walked. He'd heard often enough that magic abilities were passed through blood. What about his niece ? The thought was unsettling. The idea of herding a little girl to the nearest Circle... he grimaced and shook his

head grimly. This was neither here nor there ; he had an investigation to lead, this was not the right time to get distracted, especially by flights of fancy that had no ground in reality.

First, the Roost, he decided. Then, failing a better lead, the docks. His next step now clearly defined, he pushed open the door to the Raven's Roost.

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## Hoppy-ness is Never Overrated

**Posted on 19 Mar 2022 @ 4:47pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)**

**Edited on on 19 Mar 2022 @ 4:50pm**

**2,874 words; about a 14 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th, evening

OOO: Continued from post "Wine, Danger, and Song"

Having decided to go to the Raven's Roost where they could find a quiet place to talk and drink good beer, Kalian, Rhiannon, Elinowy, and Katya left the Chantry grounds. The further they walked along the road toward Kalian's family's tavern, the fewer revelers and vendor stalls they passed. Kalian was first to reach the outer front door with a raven carved on it in relief, and he held the door open for his friends.

The Raven's common room was unusually empty of patrons, with everyone in town carousing the festival for food, beverages, and friendly company. A welcoming fire burned in the hearth as always. Rarer still for early evening, the floors had been swept and mopped, the tables cleaned, and the chairs placed in orderly fashion around them. Cook - a middle-aged woman with straight salt-and-pepper hair escaping from her head wrap and skin as dark as Kalian's - sat at the table closest to the kitchens with an Antivan-looking woman of similar age, the two of them playing cards, drinking from tankards, and speaking in Antivan.

Rhi had not been to the Raven's Roost yet. She had seen it shortly after she had arrived in Jadar. It had looked like a nice place. So when she walked in she could see that it was a pleasant place. Knowing the time she figured that it should be a little busier, though with the celebration she understood why it wasn't. What did catch her eyes were the the two women playing cards. The one woman looked like she could be related to Kalian.

The scarlet haired Chantry sister looked around the inside of the Roost. It was odd how the Maker

continued to bring her to this place. Not long ago she had been trying to help beggars out on the streets, now she had eaten slept and bathed in this little public house. Curious thought Elinowy. The Maker certainly kept her life interesting.

She smiled pleasantly at the two women sitting at the table raising her hand in a gesture to bless them. "The grace of the Maker be upon your both."

Kalian made introductions. "You've probably seen my friends here before, but well... this is Rhiannon, Elinowy, and Katya," he said, gesturing to each in turn. "And this is, uh..." Kalian had to stop and recall Cook's given name. "This is Ragenhild, but everyone here at the Raven just calls her Cook, and her wife Lucia."

"If your name was Ragenhild, whaRhi u'd prefer to be called Cook too," responded the older woman a jovial Rivaini accent. "Why aren't you youngsters at the festivities?"

"Oh I know these two quite well. We move in some of the same circles." Katya said with a big smile. Of course the same circles being the lesbian community "And I do come to the raven often. One of my favorite places. Ladies good to see you again as always."

"We, uh, just wanted a quiet place to talk," said Kalian, answering Cook's question.

Cook smiled an acknowledgement to Katya, and raised an eyebrow at Kalian. "Talk?" she repeated skeptically, regarding Rhiannon and Elinowy. She made no move to get up and offer refreshments to Kalian's guests, that was his responsibility. "Go ahead, don't mind us."

"I've been trying to coax these two to come to work for Miss Caroline in the Orphanage but no luck so far!" Katya said.

"I don't know what the Raven would do without Cook," said Kalian. Lucia was a craftswoman, and he was pretty sure some of her apprentices came from Miss Caroline's. "Elinowy might be interested in helping at the Orphanage, though."

Rhi gave a nod to Cook and Lucia. She kept quite while Kalian and Katya talked. It was always good to listen before you spoke. This way you know what you were talking about. Her mother had taught her this from a young age. Once the introductions had been made and Kalian and Katya were done, Rhi stepped forward a little. With a small flourishing bow she gave Cook and Lucia a warm smile. "I am Rhiannon Cadash, daughter of Jessamir Cadash Captain of the Night's Kiss. It is a pleasure to meet you."

"A pleasure," said Cook, looking rather intensely at Rhiannon. So *this* was the young woman who had captured Kalian's fancy.

In Lucia nodded graciously. "Well met. All of you."



Elinowy bowed respectfully to the two women. "I am a humble servant of the Maker, Sister Elinowy Ursulas."

Before Kalian could suggest they all sit across the room while he fetched a round of ale, the front door opened again, and Martin stood framed in the entrance.

"Well! Looks like you survived the wrath of the captain! C'mon and join us Martin! We are going to try to figure out all this over drinks!" Katya said

Relieved to find his friends here, Martin smiled as he approached. He'd been worried they might already have gone to chase up some trail or other, which would have made catching up with them a struggle. Of course they were more than capable of defending themselves, but that didn't ease the worry.

"I'm glad to find you all here." Thankfully the room was empty of patrons but Martin still did not feel entirely comfortable sharing what had happened in Landry's office in front of so many. "The captain was... not pleased, but we can worry about that later. Where are you at ? I was thinking we should be looking at the docks to track down where the shipment of wine came from, who bought it and who was handling it."

"Well, that my friend is one of the things we must discuss. I think your idea has a lot of merit and might be a good place to start. However where on the docks do you suggest we start looking?" Katya said.

"Our first stop should be the dock master," Martin replied without hesitation. "He should have a registry of all the inbound and outbound shipments. We can find out which ship was carrying the wine, and who it was for, and who had access to it. That should narrow it down a fair deal, especially as we know two of the people involved were elves."

Elinowy gave an unconscious shudder at the mentioning of the elves. She smiled a greeting at Martin. "That sounds like a proper line of inquiry. I would be pleased to provide an assistance I am able."

Rhi gave another smile to Cook and the other woman before she moved to the table that Kalian had gestured to. When Martin showed up, Rhi was glad that he had survived the wrath of the Captain. The short time she had been in Jader, it was clear the the Captain was someone you had to tiptoe around. Which for Rhi was a challenge. Rhi had been thinking this when she heard Martin talk about the issue it hand. She looked up at Martin and spoke quietly. "I can answer some of your questions. Let us sit first."

She could ? Martin furrowed his brow as he followed Rhiannon's guidance to sit. She was a sailor, he was suddenly reminded. It was no stretch of the imagination to assume that she knew about other sailors and their cargo. Still, something about this made him feel uneasy, he just couldn't pinpoint what exactly.

Elinowy stood back from the table allowing the others to seat themselves first. She would of course be happy to settle next to whomever still had an open space next to them, or even to stand as the others ate and discussed.

While his friends sat down at a table across the room from Lucia and Cook, Kalian headed for the kitchen to fetch drinks and something to eat, since the group's plans to buy festival fare had been preempted by a corpse and a search for wine bottles.

Rhi sat and made sure that there was a place for Kalian to sit next to her when he came back with the drink and food. Once settled she looked to Martin. "I can tell you where it came from, who delivered the wine, where it is, and who part of it was delivered to. (pause) I want to wait till Kalian comes back before I continue."

Martin narrowed his eyes, his feeling of uneasiness increasing tenfold. He hadn't known Rhiannon long but this skittishness did not seem like her. Was she involved in some way? Maybe whoever had carried the wine was a friend of hers. Either way he could tell that pressing her would not speed up the matter so he merely nodded and waited patiently for Kalian to return.

Katya was very curious now. How did Rhiannon know all this? And how long has she known it? Well they would find out as soon as Kalian returned.

Kalian emerged from the kitchen carrying a serving platter with bread, soft cheese, and sliced lamb meat. He placed it on the table in front of his friends, gave Rhiannon a saucy wink, then went to the bar and was back a few minutes later with a tray holding five empty tankards and three pitchers full of beer that he placed on the table next to the tray of food.

He took the chair Rhiannon has saved for him and began filling the tankards. "Martin," said Kalian, "Did they tell you we found two more bottles? One unopened and one empty." He pulled the empty one from his pocket and put it on the table. "A human man said he drank this whole bottle, and he was perfectly fit, if a little drunk."

"No we haven't. Rhiannon here says she knows all about it! Ok Rhiannon, spill! What do you know? I am dying of curiosity!" Katya said

*Rhiannon said she knows all about it?* Kalian looked sharply at Katya, then to Rhiannon. He *thought* all he and Rhi had was conjecture until they could sneak into the warehouse and verify it was the same wine the *Night's Kiss* transported. What had he missed?

Two more bottles? Now that was interesting. The full one might be analyzed to identify the toxic agent - hadn't Kalian mentioned that a man in the market might be able to help with that? But the *what* was less important than the *why*. Martin looked at the empty bottle, brow furrowed as he considered. If someone drank it and was fine, that meant...

"Either those two bottles are from two different shipments, or only some of the bottles are poisoned," he concluded out loud, gaze shifting to Rhiannon. Whatever she knew, it was another piece of the puzzle they needed to get the full picture.

"Rhiannon has the unopened bottle we just bought, and the half-full bottle that made the perfumer sick. Martin, you still have the first empty bottle, the one we think poisoned the man we found dead in a privy, right? Let's put them all on the table and make sure they're the same," said Kalian.

"Sounds good," Martin agreed. He lifted the bottle, which he had held onto all through his *talk* with the captain, and put it on the table alongside the other two. They looked identical, the intricate, beautiful label a sure sign of authenticity. Martin brushed it with his fingers.

"I've heard of this vintage. Their label is hand-drawn by select artists, to guarantee the authenticity of their bottles. The corks are covered in wax for the same reason, so that people can't just refill empty bottles with cheap wine and sell them for the price of the real stuff. As far as I can tell these bottles are either authentic, or the work of a talented forger - but I can't imagine one such would want to draw attention to their business, lucrative as it must be."

"Well, it does seem the poisonings were intentional. However, the motive is unclear.

Elinowy looked at the assembled bottles carefully. They were exquisitely crafted vessels. "One does not sell spirits such as this idly by at a festival booth. This is the wine of the wealthy and discerning of palates. How would elves come upon these let alone be circulating it in the streets. It is most suspect." the sister interjected.

Kalian picked up the two empty ceramic bottles, the one that seemed to have killed the miller's friend, and bottle consumed by a drunk but otherwise healthy man. The bottles were identical, and the labels both pictured a human woman with long red-purple hair drawn to look like wine flowing into a cup. As he looked more closely, he noticed a subtle difference. "These labels. This one - drunk by a man with no ill effects - the eyes aren't colored in. This other one - that likely poisoned the miller's friend - the eyes are shaded blue." He picked up the half-full bottle that made the perfumer sick, and the unopened bottle. "Blue eyes on these bottles too."

Upon closer examination Kalian was right. Martin had not paid attention to the subtle difference because he was looking for signs of forgery, and the eye colour looked more like an accident - or a child playing with pencils - than any attempt at deceit.

Rhi listened quietly as Kalian, Martin looked over the bottles and Elinowy questioned why such an expensive wine was being sold at a stand and how did the Elves get ahold of it. She had a thought.

"An attempt to distinguish between poisoned and non-poisoned bottles?" he asked out loud, testing the words to see if they made sense. "But why poison some of the bottles and not others? Why poison any of them in the first place?" He shook his head in frustration. Usually motives were easier to puzzle out. Greed, fear and lust were the most common reasons to commit crime. But this

poisoned wine business made no sense at all, unless it was the work of a lunatic.

Rhi had placed the unopened bottle up on the table once everyone has sat. She listened quietly as the group discussed all that they knew and found the distinguishing mark on the bottles. After a few more moments she spoke. "It is possible that the elves had no idea that the wine was poisoned. The possible reason for the poison and to distinguish the bottles was to make sure that the elves only received the poisoned ones to sell. This way it would draw attention away from those who poisoned the wine. I would say that they have a specific target in mind. And when the poisonings and death at the fair are blamed on the elves then they would also be blamed for the death of the real perpetrators target."

"A few days ago, I accompanied Rhiannon and her mother to a meeting with a man named Carlos Acerbi who hired the *Night's Kiss* to transport a crate of wine from Val Royeaux to Jader. Of course, in preparation for the festival, merchants bringing in wine and, uh..." Kalian grimaced guiltily in Martin's direction, "getting creative with customs fees... is not unusual. But, the whole arrangement seemed, well... *off* somehow." Kalian looked to Rhiannon to elaborate.

"Yes, we transported the wine. We never looked at the bottles. (pause) Professional curtsy." She looked to Martin when she said this.

"The wine crate *should* still be in Acerbi's warehouse. I propose that Rhiannon, Martin, and I go check out the warehouse, while Elinowy and Katya find Dominic, the potion master, and ask him to identify the poison. He's staying here at the Raven's Roost and has a cart at the festival. Elinowy and Rhiannon met Dominic the other day... the man with glasses looking for the privy." Kalian blushed, recalling the bath incident.

"Oh!" Elinowy responded reflexively, recalling the embarrassing incident. "Oh.... Alright, I suppose we should meet in a more proper setting." She turned and looked to Katya. "It would be a blessing to have you as a companion. I have some experience with potions, I can determine this man's competence. As I recall he doesn't speak well."

Rhi looked to Kalian when he mentioned the potion maker. She had not even realized it was the same person she had bought perfume from. She decided to keep quite on the fact that she had offered him a job.

Well, the arrangement made sense, even if Martin was loathe to involve yet more civilians in this whole thing. At least getting the potion master to work on the poison should involve no immediate danger, and going to the warehouse... he hesitated. While most smugglers did not turn to violence as their first choice, their trade usually meant they were able and willing to wield a sword. Especially smugglers who were potentially responsible for poisoning several people.

But this was exactly why he had to investigate, and why he couldn't afford to refuse help when it was freely given.

"Let's go then."

Rhi gave a nod to both Kalian and Martin. "Ready when you are."

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## The Rogues Less Traveled

Posted on 29 Mar 2022 @ 7:39am by [Rogue Jaslyn](#) & [Rogue Cainan Sauvage](#) & [Mage Kithris Sabrae](#)

Edited on on 29 Mar 2022 @ 7:41am

**874 words; about a 4 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader Summerday Festival

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th - late afternoon

OOO: After post "The Knives Have Ears"

Summerday Festival celebrations were in full swing. Jaslyn and Kithris loitered outside a beer stall in an outer section of the festival area, populated mainly by elven and dwarven vendors. Jaslyn was enjoying her tankard of beer, as well as the company of her new, Dalish friend. Although there were a few humans about, the crowd in this area tended toward non-human. Jaslyn even spotted a qunari mercenary.

Jaslyn thought over Kithris' offer to accompany her as she searched for her clan. She'd met a couple Dalish elves, and had concluded that just like all groups and races of people, there were good and bad. Still, a whole clan of elves fiercely committed to never submitting to humans peaked her curiosity. "Meeting your potion master, finding your clan... that is a tempting adventure." She found herself wondering what Cainan would think, if he'd be interested in going with them.

Kithris gave Jaslyn a nod and a smile. ""It would be my pleasure to introduce you to my clan."

As if thinking about him had somehow conjured him into the crowd, Jaslyn caught sight of Cainan's tall, handsome form. "There is Cainan now," she said to her new friend, not bothering to hide her delight. He was not, as she had casually suggested, in bed with some human noblewoman. Jaslyn waved at him with unabashed enthusiasm.

Kithris was about to suggest that they gather a few things then head out when Jaslyn became excited. She looked around quickly, then spotted a man approaching. It could only be Cainan. As Cainan came close, Kithris shifted slightly and gave the man a warm smile.

"Ah, there you are!" Cainan said, dancing out of the way of a hurrying couple of lowborn teenagers, off to find a bale of hay to explore behind. He moved gracefully as he slipped out of their way and then back into Jaslyn's arms. He had not meant to be so forward, though he did feel a bit of a flutter in his stomach to see her again - he wasn't so used to that, but it was nice... "I hope you've had a chance to enjoy some of the festivities without me?" he asked, looking to her for a moment longer than was strictly necessary, before he looked to the woman next to Jaslyn. "Oh, I apologise - I'm Cainan Sauvage, a pleasure," he said, stepping back and bowing a little in greeting.

Kit watched Cainan as he approached, moved gracefully around a couple of teenagers and found his way into Jaslyn's arms. She could see that he was smitten with her. So when he finally turned to her bowed a little as he introduced himself, Kit gave a small nod. "No need to apologize. It is my pleasure to meet you. You can call me Kithris." She smiled. "We have only just started to enjoy the festivities. Do you have something in mind?"

Cainan's embrace sent a shiver of desire down Jaslyn's spine, but she managed to restrain herself from kissing him right then and there. Now that Cainan was here she could look forward to the delicious anticipation of delayed gratification followed by intense indulgence. She grinned and tried not to think how her life was forfeit to the Gray Wardens and she should not allow herself to feel this way about one person. And yet, didn't she deserve a little affection and happiness whilst she was still alive to appreciate it? "The ale here is delicious, but no doubt there are plenty of other distractions and diversions at the festival, just waiting for us to discover them."

Kit could sense Jaslyn's feelings towards Cainan. He seemed likeable enough and was quite handsome for a human. She gave Jaslyn a smile and a slight nod before turning her attention to Cainan. "So, do you perhaps have a brother? Or maybe know someone who might be interested in having a bit of fun?" Her tone was playful with curiosity layered in.

"I rather imagine Cainan can think of *someone* interested in a bit of fun." Jaslyn caught the man's gaze with raised eyebrow and ran her tongue over her lower lip to let him know that she would approve of anything he suggested. Inviting one of his friends to join them, or even sharing Cainan himself between her and Kithris.

Kit looked to both Jaslyn and Cainan for a brief moment before she glanced around then back. "Well, you can figure it out as we walk. My feet are getting itchy to move." She made an exaggerated wiggle of both her feet. "See, look they want to move." This said with a giggle. Then looked directly at Cainan. "So, someone with dark hair, a tuft of a beard. He has to have some hair in his chest. Strong to. Has to have some good endurance." Her eyes seemed to glow with a green fire as she described her thoughts on who she wanted. "Not a young man though. Someone who understands what a woman wants and needs." Her smile became very mischievous.

"Well then," said Jaslyn, linking arms with Kithris and Cainan, "Let's see what diversions our feet take us to."

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## The truth comes out

Posted on 15 Apr 2022 @ 4:13pm by [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Mage Kalian Winter](#)

**1,854 words; about a 9 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader - the Orphanage

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 26, morning

OOC: Following the night of wine investigation

It was the day after the wine investigation. Katya and Kalian at the Ravens Roost trying to figure out what to do next. The town was abuzz and old man Charbonnet had finally died. It was the talk of the town. Now Katya, well she figured good riddance! They never liked Katya and she never liked them either.

One of the children from the orphanage came in and spoke to Katya. "Katya, Miss Caroline wants you to come to the orphanage right away. She said to bring Kalian too." the boy said.

Katya looked over at Kalian and back to the boy, "Is she alright? Is miss Caroline hurt?"

"No she just said for you to come right away!"

Katya was worried. "Kalian do you mind coming with me? Now I'm worried."

"Absolutely, of course I will come," said Kalian. He was pretty sure Miss Caroline was all right, otherwise the child would have been distraught. All of the children at the orphanage loved Caroline, she was a truly good person who did right by the youngsters in her care. He got to his feet and said, "Let's go."

The two of them and the child made their way through town, quiet now in the morning with the festival revelers sleeping off their indulgences of the previous night. Here and there were elves pushing wheelbarrows of trash, cleaning up after the previous night's celebration and preparing for that night's continuation. They left the mess and street vendors behind as they made their way through hightown to the orphanage's unlikely location – a well-kept mansion.

When they entered the place Miss Caroline was there to greet them. "I'm glad you came Dear heart. I. Well I need to tell you some things privately. Kalian, could you please watch the children.." she leaned in close, "Katya may need a friend to talk to after we finish. I'm not sure how she will take what I have to tell her."

Kalian looked from Miss Caroline to Katya, worried. He had gathered that Caroline was estranged

from her father. Even still, the death of a family member affected people in different ways. For someone as kind and compassionate as Miss Caroline, she might regret that the possibility of reconciliation was gone forever. But just now it seemed Caroline was concerned for Katya. "Of course, Miss Caroline. I'll be out in the play yard."

He gripped Katya's shoulder reassuringly, then headed to the grassy area out back where he expected most of the children to be at this time of day.

"Come dear heart. We have much to discuss." she took katya into her office. "Please dear, sit down." she motioned to a couch that was more than big enough for both of them. Caroline sat down besides Katya. "I always told you that when the time is right, I would tell you who your birth mother is."

Katya caught her breath in anticipation. "Does that mean..."

Caroline nodded, "Yes, now I can tell you who your birth mother is." Caroline took a breath. "All I ask is that you hear me out and try not to think too harshly of me."

"OK." she trusted Miss Caroline.

She took another deep breath in. "I am you birth mother, Katya. I wanted to tell you for so long but because of a deal I was forced to strike with your grandfather, The one you know as old man Charbonnet!"

Katya felt like she had been struck by a wall. Miss Caroline was a Charbonnet and more importantly she was her birth mother.

Miss Caroline continues, "It all started when I met your father. Oh you remind me of him so much Katya dear. His name was Tomas. He was a warrior, much like you. He had a big heart and oh was he ever handsome. I fell rather quickly. He was loving and gentle, especially with the children. That was one of the things that I loved about him." she paused. "Unfortunately, I was a Charbonnet and my father made clear his objections to our relationship. Father always was very controlling. However I was always different. I didn't look down on people like the rest of the family. I loved Thomas and we ran off together in defiance of my father. We married. Father disowned me. We were happy for two, almost three years. Then he was killed in battle. The money we had was not enough as I was pregnant with you my darling. Plus Tomas and I had started the orphanage.

I had to crawl back to my father. He supported me and the orphanage on one condition. I had to keep it from you that you were my daughter. I had to treat you like the other orphans. At least until he died. I hate to say it but there were times when I hated that man. Now he is gone. I was surprised when I shed tears over his death. Despite it all he was still my father."

Katya was trying to take all this in. It was a lot to take in. All her life she had wondered who her birth mother was and now to find out she was right there all the time but just couldn't say. Part of her was angry and part of her was happy to finally know.



"I know it's a lot to take in. Why don't you talk to Kalian. He's a good friend and it may help to talk to a friend right now."

Katya nodded and the pair headed out.

"Kalian, I think Katya could use someone to talk to right now. I'll watch the kids. You two talk." Caroline said.

Katya nodded and the pair walked outside into the fresh air.

As they walked, Katya related the whole story to him. "I don't know what to think Kalian. "I love her but part of me is mad she didn't tell me."

Kalian listened quietly while Katya spoke, then stopped walking to face her. "Oh, Katya. I'm so sorry, this must be such a shock." He paused, thinking about his own family. "The thing about families is, they're messy. A family isn't just about being related by blood. Family is the people you love and who love you, no matter what. Of course you are angry with Miss Caroline for not telling you. But you'll be able to forgive her eventually. In every way that matters, she has *always* been your mother. You love her, and she loves you."

"Yeah, I know you're right Kalian! All my life, I'd hoped she could be my mother and now I find out she is! I'm mad for her not telling me but I understand why! It's just a lot to take in all at once! I know what a wonderful person she is but..aaggh! I hate all these feelings! So hard to sort everything out!"

"I have always considered this place my home and the other kids my family. I guess that's truer now more than ever! It weird I choose my real last name without knowing it! I just did it to spite the brats who teased us. I guess that means they're my cousins. Eww! Now that's a distasteful thought!"

"It must have been so difficult for Miss... for your mother to keep your true identity secret, to wait until her father died to tell you." Kalian was quiet a moment, imagining. He was surprised Caroline hadn't told Katya when she was old enough to keep a secret. But one slip might have put the whole orphanage at risk. "Now that she can publicly acknowledge you as her daughter, I suppose that means she will want you to inherit the orphanage someday, to keep it out of your cousin's hands and maybe to continue her work with the orphans." Kalian looked into his friend's face. It was one thing for Katya to be Miss Caroline's dedicated helper, it was another thing to take on Miss Caroline's vocation as her own. "How do you feel about that?"

"Honestly, I don't like to think about her not being here, but if something were to happen to her, I would be happy to take over. This is my home. That has not changed. Better me than somebody who didn't care. I like being a warrior, but this place means so much to my mother and me. It would break my heart if anything happened to it! I guess I really am my mother's daughter."

"In her own way, your mother *is* a warrior, so I think you take after her," said Kalian with a broad smile. He thought of his own mother, and how much he missed her. But at least he still had his father, and his sister, her husband, and their new baby. "Now you know who your father was. Did your mother say anything about his family? Are *his* parents still alive? Did he have siblings?"

"I didn't ask. I could barely think after she told me she was my mother. I probably should ask her. I guess we have a lot to talk about. At least she has always been a part of my life. I almost feel like we are getting to know each other all over again!"

"I imagine there are many aspects of your parentage that you'll need to adjust to. Your relationship to the rest of your mother's family, your position among the nobility of Jader, and such. I'm sure Miss Caroline has already considered every implication, and she will help you navigate the changes without forcing you into anything you don't want or aren't ready for. You know you can always talk to me." Kalian held out his arms, offering a brotherly hug.

She embraced her friend. "Thank you Kalian, for being my friend and being here for me. Huh, me, nobility? Now that's funny!"

"You'll be the same person," said Kalian confidently. "Plus, if your change in status gives you better position in Jader, or access to the ears of people in power, I know you'll use whatever influence you have to make Jader a better place."

"Thanks! Yeah knowing my mother, she has it all worked out. So that said, guess I'd better go tell Mom I do love her and accept her. I hope you will stay for dinner Kalian. You are always welcome here."

"Thanks, Katya. Miss Caroline is like an aunt to me, and I know I'm always welcome here," said Kalian as he walked Katya back to her mother. "But, it's the second day of the festival, and I have some other, uh... friends to check-in with." He blushed slightly, thinking of Rhiannon.

"Ohh I get it! Uh huh!" She said with a grin. "Ok then go back to Rhiannon. Thanks again for being there for me. I have things to do here, so I'll see you when I see you my friend." With that she turned and went to her mother whom she hugged as Caroline held her daughter close.

## The whereabouts of suspicious wares

Posted on 29 Jul 2022 @ 6:21pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#)

**3,445 words; about a 17 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader Waterfront

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th, night

OOC: Continued from post "Hoppy-ness is Never Overrated"

The three friends, Kalian, Rhiannon, and Martin, had left the boisterous noise and revelry of the Summerday Festival behind them. A gentle salt breeze blew in from the bay and the Jader docks were quieter than usual, just a few sailors going about the routine business of maintaining their ships and minimal guards patrolling the warehouses.

As they walked along with Rhiannon leading the way, Kalian's gaze was drawn to the mesmerizing sway of her hips and shapely backside. The romantic interlude he'd had planned for this evening would have to wait a little longer.

Martin glanced at Kalian. He'd expected to see the worry he felt mirrored in his friend's eyes but instead Kalian was staring at... Martin's eyebrows shot up. Best hope Rhiannon didn't notice - although she might enjoy the attention. Kalian was a handsome man, and that was the least of his qualities. Still, they had a job to do and needed to stay focused.

"Any idea whether the warehouse will be empty?" he asked, returning to more practical matters. "And how many men this Acerbi fellow might have under his command?"

The name Acerbi was unknown to Martin, which in and of itself was intriguing because he knew the names of most of the major players in the Jader streets. Either this was a newcomer, or an alias for a known criminal, or someone insignificant enough to not have come yet to the attention of the Guard.

Martin's question interrupted Kalian's ogling and he turned his attention to Martin and answered the question. "Acerbi claimed he was second to someone named Gerlach Robertson who wished to hire the *Night's Kiss* because she is known for speed and reliability." Kalian looked at Rhiannon, the name Robertson had meant something to Jessamir, and she might have some idea how many men Acerbi commanded. "I don't think the warehouse will be empty, probably at least a couple guards on hand. It *looked* like a completely legitimate warehouse, not that I'm an expert."

Rhi had been very clear when the group had been talking that neither her mother, her or her crew knew that the wine had been poisoned. They just picked it up and delivered it to the warehouse. When the talking was done she agreed with Kalian that the two of them and Martin should go and check out the warehouse.

As they walked, Rhi took point. It had not dawned on her till they had been walking for a bit that Kalian was quiet. A bit too quiet. This brought a smile to her face as she figured that Kalian was watching her walk. Figuring this she decided to give him a show. Each step gave a little more sway in her hips.

When Martin asked a few questions she heard Kalian answer. She slowed a little then spoke. "Acerbi has roughly 20 men at his disposal. As for Gerlach, he is a bit bigger fish. My mother has had dealings with him before. Though she has never trusted him." She paused for a moment then continued. "The warehouse should have at least two guards but more likely has four. There are a few ways to get into any warehouse. As for this one, I think the best way is to just walk in. If someone comes to talk with us then we deal with that when that time comes."

Gerlach Robertson ? Now there was a name Martin had heard before, and his expression hardened. Although they'd never manage to get anything tangible on him his name had come up more than once. There was no doubt he was making money from smuggling and fencing stolen goods but that was only the least of it - his name had also come up in relation to gambling and there were rumors he groomed street orphans to get them to steal and pickpocket for him, amongst other things. Unfortunately he was exceptionally good at covering his tracks.

But maybe his lieutenant wouldn't be.

"Are you sure just walking in is the best bet ?" Martin asked tightly. "Maybe we should try to sneak in. If Robertson is involved we don't want him to know we're onto him."

Kalian regarded the two warriors speculatively. Both were well suited – in ways that he personally found rather attractive – to wielding serious weapons and wearing armor, plus accustomed to meeting an enemy head-on. Definitely could pull off a surprise attack. But sneaking in undetected, that would be more difficult. Kalian knew he personally lacked any skill with moving around unseen... *as a person*.

"There is, uh, something I can do," said Kalian, throwing a somewhat sheepish grimace Martin's way. "I could go in and look, check how many guards are on duty and where they're stationed, and report back. I may be seen, but they won't, uh, notice me."

Rhi shrugged her shoulders at the comment about not wanting Roberts to know that they may be on to him. She was not one to back away from any kind of altercation. Though her interest was peeked when Kalian indicated that he might have a way to go in without being seen. "You have roused my curiosity darlin." Her tone said she was very curious.

Martin furrowed his brow. How many secrets did Kalian keep ? The thought that he trusted them enough to reveal it - while not under threat of death - was both worrisome and humbling. The tension in Kalian's shoulders suggested that this was important, though what could be more important than his apostasy, Martin couldn't fathom.

"I will have to show you." They had almost reached the warehouse, and Kalian motioned them into a dark alleyway. He took a deep breath. What he was about to reveal to Martin and Rhiannon was his greatest secret as an apostate. It was the ability that made him confident he could escape a Circle prison, although if templars knew about it, he had no doubt he'd be made tranquil so that he would never escape.

"Wait here. I'll be back in a few minutes." Kalian checked again to make sure they were unobserved, then reached for the fade. A moment later, where he had been standing, a raven was in his place. He spread his wings and burst into the air, a dark shadow that disappeared into the night.

Following Kalian into the dark alleyway, Rhi shifted so that she could see back the way they came. After making sure that they were alone she turned to look up at Kalian. "Alright darlin, show us." Her tone was hushed.

When Kalian shifted to a Raven, Rhi was speechless. She had heard that some mages could shape shift, though she had never thought that she would ever witness it. When Kalian flew off she turned to Martin. "Did you know?"

Martin's breath stuck in his throat when he saw the bird. If he hadn't witnessed it he probably wouldn't have believed it. While shapeshifting wasn't unheard of in Circles, it was fairly rare, and those mages who could do it were watched closely. Especially a bird or other such animal, who could so easily leave the Circle without being spotted. Kalian would be hard to catch by Templars, even though they did have tactics for this kind of situations.

The look of utter astonishment he directed at Rhiannon probably answered her question before he put it in words.

"No. I didn't." He suspected no one did, outside of Kalian's direct family.

Rhi seen the look on Martin's face. Her obviously didn't know. She moved closer to him and gave him a playful shove.

About fifteen minutes after he took flight, the raven returned and landed on Rhiannon's shoulder. He rubbed his black-feathered head against the dwarf's cheek affectionately, then hopped to the ground. A moment later, Kalian was standing between Martin and Rhiannon.

Rhi watched as the raven that was Kalian fly down and land in her shoulder. The black feathered head felt so soft as he rubbed her cheek. Her eyes lit up and a warm smile crossed her face as she watched Kalian jumped down and shifted back.

"The inside of the warehouse is much the same as it was a week ago. There are no guards inside, not even the archer positions from last time, and Acerbi isn't there now either. But there are three guards at the main entrance, and two at the side door." Kalian looked from Martin to Rhiannon and back to Martin. "I'm thinking we create a distraction and sneak in."

"What kind of distraction?" Martin asked. Being too obvious about this could - would - get them all killed.

Addressing Martin, Kalian said, "You could distract the two guards at the side entrance. Maybe say

you're looking for a suspect that ran that way... engage them in conversation, threaten, flatter, whatever works. Meanwhile, I'll fly in and crack open the door from the inside and Rhi can sneak in." He looked to Rhiannon to see if she concurred.

Rhi gave Kalian a nod.

"And then how would I catch up with you?" Martin asked. "I can't... do what you can." He didn't find it in him to say it out loud. "And if they see a guardsman, even if I make it look casual, they're going to be on their guard. We could do it the other way around. Distract them, say you're looking for the harbourmaster, or that you're running after a thief...? Do you think you could pull that off?" Putting Kalian on the spotlight like this wasn't great but this situation was one where they'd all be in danger regardless.

Martin was right, and Kalian knew it. His own plan meant Martin would remain outside while he and Rhiannon searched inside. Whatever they found, especially if it was something incriminating, it'd be best if someone with the credibility and authority of a city guardsman was with them. "You're right. I'll be the distraction." He pauses to consider. "I have an idea about what to do. The two of you get into position, and I'll approach them from the other direction."

Martin reached out for Kalian's arm. "Be careful. I don't think these people would be worried about dumping one more body in the Waking sea."

Kalian may be a mage, but a knife between the ribs would kill a mage as surely as a guardsman.

Rhiannon looked to Kalian. Her eyes flared with a crimson light at the thought of someone throwing Kalian into the Waking Sea. "Yes darlin, be careful. Understand."

Kalian unbuttoned his tunic to the navel and approached the two guards with a slow, staggering gait. He was going for the old lost, drunk, and looking for companionship ruse. He recognized one of the two women as off-duty city guard. Both were armed with swords, and a loaded crossbow lay on the ground beside them. "Good eev-nun." Kalian slurred his words. "Bee-yoo-tee-fol ladies such as yo-selves... what-ir-ya doin' alone out here? How-ja like some com-pan-ee?" Kalian made a couple suggestive hip movements and attempted a lewd grin.

The guardswoman regarded him suspiciously, but the other woman got close and grabbed his backside. Kalian started to reach for the woman but grabbed the coin purse on her belt instead, yanked it free, and took off running away towards the docks. A crossbow bolt whizzed past his head, accompanied by the shouting and swearing of both women. One of them yelled *stop thief!* He dropped the coinpurse near the harbormaster's office, and its owner stopped to recover it, but the guardswoman was still chasing him when he turned the corner into a blind alley. When she got there, Kalian was gone.

Kalian's impersonation of a leery drunkard was cringe-inducingly convincing. Clearly he'd seen more than a few of those at the Raven's Roost, and he'd probably been instrumental in kicking them out too.

His impersonation of a common cutpurse was disturbingly accurate, too, but Martin shelved that thought aside as soon as the guardswomen set off in pursuit. Damn, that crossbow shot had looked like a close call. Motioning for Rhiannon to follow, Martin hurried ahead to the door of the warehouse. The distraction had bought them a couple of minutes but he wouldn't rely on it.

The door didn't budge when he pushed it and he hesitated. He *might* be able to break the lock but the guardswomen were wont to notice, and it would make a lot of noise. Yeah, maybe they should have thought this through a little bit better.

Rhiannon gave Martin a mischievous grin as she moved in front of him. Pulling out a small rolled leather pouch, unlaced it and pulled out two strong but thin pieces of metal. One straight and the other with a small hook on the end. Putting the rest back in her pouch as she started her work. Her voice low, "Up, down, lock it then pop it." The tell tale sound of the lock popping from getting picked can be heard by Rhi and Martin, as she looks to him.

"Right," Martin said. He should have known. Rhiannon was not exactly the law-abiding type but it made it easier on him to pretend not to notice.

He unsheathed his sword and stood guard while she worked, just in case the guardswomen returned before Rhiannon was done. He could actually hear them, a couple of streets away, still chasing Kalian. The growing vulgarity of their invectives suggested the frustration of this endeavor.

A clicking sound and satisfied grunt made him turn, to find the door open and Rhiannon already inside. Martin followed suit and close the door behind them, squinting in the absolute, inky darkness of the warehouse.

"Better be careful," he said in a hushed whisper. "I'm not putting it past them to have set traps in there."

Rhiannon gives a slight nod as she heard Martin close the door. Letting her eyes adjust. She slowly made her way to the crates and desk, scanning the area for anything that looked out of the ordinary from the last time she was here.

A raven glided down to them from the rafters, and landed on the floor between Rhiannon and Martin. A moment later, Kalian stood next to them, panting and rebuttoning his tunic. In a hushed voice he said, "Well, that was, uh..." *Scary? Dangerous? Close?* He tried to be nonchalant. "Exhilarating. Martin, I recognized one of those women – she's a city guard."

"A city guard ?" Martin tensed. His mind went through a list of his female colleagues, wondering which one was selling them out. He wasn't on friendly terms with all of them, but that was still a far cry from expecting to be stabbed in the back. "Can you give me a quick description... no, never mind, we'll talk about this when we're out of there."

The group did a quick sweep of the warehouse, checking for traps and guards Kalian might have missed.

The three searched Carlos Acerbi's desk, where he held his meeting with Rhiannon, her mother, and Kalian a week ago. Inside the desk was a modest bag of coins and a ledger that, to Rhiannon's businesswoman's eyes, appeared to record perfectly legitimate warehouse transactions. The wine shipment handled by the *Night's Kiss* was not included. Otherwise they found nothing else of interest in the desk. The three were on the verge of giving up the search when Rhiannon's clever fingers found a trigger.

A secret door opened in the wall, revealing a small room beyond.

*A secret door. How very theatrical.* Martin ventured forward, one step at a time, eyes opened for traps, but there didn't seem to be any. Overconfidence maybe, or just a path well trodden where traps would seem more bother than they were worth.

The secret room was small, more a closet than a room really, lined with shelves. On the top shelf there was a thick wad of parchment. The middle shelf contained small leather pouches, apparently filled to bulging. Next to those were pieces of jewelry, some small and some of consequence, apparently made of silver and gold and set with various sorts of stones. All of them looked quite expensive. Martin took in the whole thing with a guard's eye ; it certainly looked like a stash, and one that would put many a fence to shame.

That was not all, far from it. Below the gold and jewelry, the next shelf contained a pile of weapons that looked crude but serviceable ; plain iron, leather-wrapped hilts, decent edge from what Martin could see. They looked like the sort of weapons that would be army standard issue, or similar quality. He wondered if they'd been stolen, or "diverted" from army stashes, or if they'd just been mass-produced by a reasonably skillful blacksmith.

Finally, on the bottom shelf, lay a ledger. It looked thick, leatherbound, made of yellowed parchment, and had clearly seen a great deal of use.

Martin ignored the weapons, gold and jewelry, and went straight for the letter on the top shelf. Tense, with the vague sensation that he wouldn't like what he was going to find out, he started reading.

Rhi stood looking at the shelves, well the ones that she could readily see. The pouches that were filled what she assumed was gold and silver and the jewelry. Her smile grew to a wicked mischievous grin. It was an automatic reflex as her arm raised as her hand reached out and



stuffed two of the pouches in her satchel and put on three rings. She then looked down at the weapons on the next shelf, shook her head and then it the bottom shelf. Spotting the ledger, she grabbed it and handed it to Kalian. "Alright, we need to get out of here now. (looked up it Martin) No time to read it here. Lets go."

While Martin and Rhiannon searched the secret closet, Kalian went to the door and listened. The two guards had returned to their post, he could hear the two women complaining to each other about the would-be thief that got away. He returned to the secret closet just as Rhiannon was saying they had to go now. Kalian stared at the bags of coins for a moment. In normal circumstances, he would never think of taking coins that weren't his. In a whisper he mused, "Is it stealing if I steal from a criminal?" Then he pocketed three bags.

"The guards are back in position, so how about this," said Kalian. "You two hide by the door. I'll open the door, get their attention, then run back in. They will run in after me, probably, and I'll head for the stairs and do my disappearing act on the second floor. Meanwhile, you exit through the door. Head for the Raven's Roost, and I'll catch you up. Unless one of you has another idea...?"

Martin bit his lip. He really wanted to have a better idea ; he wasn't happy with Kalian continually putting himself in the line of fire just because of his... particular abilities. The idea was to not draw attention to the fact that an apostate was hiding in plain sight. If the whiff of a rumour came to the ears of the local Circle that would cause a very awkward, very dangerous and very complicated situation for all of them, starting with Kalian himself, who had the most to lose.

"How about we go to the first floor and look for a window ?" he suggested. "A one-story drop is feasible. They'll just think they left it open and forgot to lock it."

Rhi did not like the idea of Kalian putting himself in many more danger but the idea of dropping one story was not on here lists of thigs to do. She looked to Martin, "For you it might not to bad." She looked down at her legs then back to Martin.

"Let's look for a window on the first floor, and then decide if it'll work," said Kalian.

Martin, Kalian, and Rhiannon *did* find a window on the first floor that was obscured from the outside by lumber debris - the likely entry-point for the elven wine-thieves. Martin and Kalian moved an empty crate under the window and helped Rhiannon climb up. Kalian slipped out first, then Martin lowered Rhiannon into Kalian's waiting arms, and Martin followed.

The three strolled back toward the Raven's Roost, careful not to attract attention from the warehouse guards.

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## The enigma of the inebriant

Posted on 29 Jul 2022 @ 6:25pm by [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Townfolk Dominic Lesprin](#)

Edited on on 29 Jul 2022 @ 6:25pm

**2,029 words; about a 10 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Jader Market

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th evening

This day had brought in amazing business and Dominic was in an absurdly good mood. He'd sold many of his wares, in fact he was regretting not making more perfumes. He was already out of stock on several scents. He hummed happily to himself while he mentally made a list of the ingredients he was going to need to brew more. Jader was the right place to restock on more exotic ingredients, being a port city. He could even perhaps brew some new combinations. While sticking to known recipes felt like a visit to a dear old friend, there was nothing more exhilarating than creating new brews, especially cordials or stimulants.

The approach of new customers made Dominic look up and he squinted at them through his glasses. One of the two he recognized immediately ; her long, flaming red hair was hard to forget, especially given the attire - or lack thereof - she had been in when they had met. This time she was more modestly dressed. Her friend he did not know, or at least he didn't recognize her, but then he had no memory for faces.

"Yes ? Can I help ?" He tried to look at least a little welcoming. While he was not much of a people person, he did make an effort to not send his customers running.

"I am Katya Charbonet! This is my companion Elinowy. We are here to inquire about a couple bottles of wine. Two particular bottles to be precise!" Katya said.

The scarlet clad sister stepped in from the side between the two. "We have seen each other before." Her icy blue eyes gave him a stern look that while emotionless, was quite menacing coming from a Chantry sister. "You were recommended as a man who know may know the nature of exotic botanicals. It is our hope you might identify the composition of substances that may be in these bottles."

Dominic's squint tightened. The first woman sounded entirely too chipper, and the second woman's coldness stood out in stark contrast. He turned his gaze to the bottles of wine. The nature of the query presented to him was not entirely clear, beyond the fact that they were offering him a drink. He wished his orlesian was better. He'd never stayed long enough to really work on it. Whilst his phenomenal memory helped, his utter lack of interest in other people's conversation didn't.

"I have glass," he offered, and he rummaged in the appropriate box to fish out a couple of slightly banged up and tarnished tin goblets. He certainly wouldn't refuse a free drink.

As Elinowy watched the potion master her thoughts moved from the embarrassment of knowing this man had seen her naked to focusing on the current situation as the man started indicating he wanted a drink. She quickly slapped her hand down his arm as he drew forth the goblets. She had to pick her words carefully. "No.... drink... bad..." she said starting to pantomime choking on a drink. "two... men... die... drink .. bottle..." she continued feining fainting and pointing to the wine bottles Katya carried. "You tell why?" she asked slowly.

"Perhaps I can help. Two of these bottles were poisoned and we are trying to track down the poisoners! We are trying to find out where these bottles came from and who you sold them to." Katya said. She spoke the same language he did so that should help with the communication issue.

"Huh... what ?" Dominic uttered, nonplussed and vaguely worried.

He wasn't quite sure how he'd gone from being offered a drink to being accused of killing someone. He hadn't caught everything the woman said - his antivan was only marginally better than his orlesian - but he'd gotten the distinct impression that the redhead had mentioned someone dying. He blinked at the bottle and tried to remember when was the last time he'd sold poison. Back in Lydes, there was that man who'd said something about a vermin infestation... He looked at the two women and really hoped he wasn't going to get run out of town this time.

"I, huh, not kill... no person," he finally managed. He spoke slowly and with some effort, raking his brain to find the words he needed. Maybe learning to speak foreign languages better would be a worthwhile endeavor after all.

This was not going the way Katya had imagined. She hadn't anticipated the language barrier. Katya nodded. "Yes, we know. Who bought them? is this a bottle you sold?" She wasn't sure what else to do. Maybe they needed to get someone who could translate for them. "Elinowy, do you know anyone who could translate for us? I don't think we are getting very far without one."

Elinowy shook her scarlet head. "I've met this one before, he speaks a most peculiar tongue. and seems to understand little of the dominant languages of the realm." she turned back to Dominic, speaking slowly as if to a child. "Wine make man sick... die. \*cough cough\* need you... find poison... in bottle." she said strongly indicating the bottle Katya held. "Understand?"

Dominic sighed heavily. Selling perfumes and potions here in Jader during this festival was supposed to be simple. Just tell his customers the price and take their coin. When the festival was over perhaps he'd have the time and funds to hire a tutor to help him with his Orlesian.

But after what happened in Lydes, he did know the word *poison* along with the word *antidote*. Dominic adjusted his glasses and regarded the bottle and the two women distastefully. "You want, huh... *more* poison? Same as, huh... on wine?" He shook his head emphatically. "No. I no make poison."

Katya shook her head. "No we want to know where the bottle came from. We are not asking you to make more poison." she looked over at Elinowy. Granted, Elinowy was very beautiful but right now, Katya was feeling the frustration of not communicating with this guy.

She prayed the Maker would open the man's ears to understand they were trying to keep something bad from happening to others, not inflict pain on others. She hoped her Chantry habit would be enough to convey the innocence and sincerity of their inquiry. Elinowy gave the potion master a kind smile filled with righteous benevolence. She again spoke as slowly as possible with large hand gestures. "We... not hurt anyone.... want to know... what poison... in bottle. Make antidote please."

Dominic frowned at the fair-haired warrior, who repeated the word *poison*, and seemed to be asking where she could buy more if not from him. But then the red-haired woman wearing atypical chantry robes mentioned *antidote*.

"Antidote?" he repeated. Dominic's eyebrows knit together, thinking over the conversation. Finally, it dawned on him. The wine was poisoned, someone had died from drinking it, and these two wanted an antidote. Which probably meant more poisoned wine was in circulation. He swore under his breath in his native language, he had so many questions he could not ask!

"I make antidote. Yes." Of course, it would be easy if the two women knew what the poison was, but it seemed they did not, and figuring it out was the complicated part. He made several calculations in his head. He had the reagents, equipment, and compounds that were needed. It was an interesting challenge, but one he felt confident he was up to. To give the project the attention it needed, he would have to hire someone to help mind his stall. "Cost ten crowns, three now, seven on delivery. Antidote ready, huh, not tomorrow. Morning after." He reached out his hand to take the bottle.

Katya handed him the bottle. She was relieved he finally got the message. She looked at Elinowy with a look of relief on her face.

Elinowy gave Katya a kindly smile, before allowing her practiced tranquil face to relax a little. She nodded to the potion master as he took the wine bottle. "You.... save many ... lives... Antidote. Can... we get.... anything for you... help? she asked, not knowing what the man would take her comments as, but trying to give helpful looking gestures as she spoke.

The greater part of Dominic's brain was focused on how he was going to get started on the poison analysis, and he replied distractedly.

"I need place to work. Quiet. With good... wind ?" *Ventilation* was the word he was really looking for, blasted Orlesian language. "Wind for bad smoke. No people." And preferably fireproof but communicating that was going to be tricky.

He was going to have to pack up for the day, but he'd had some good business already and the fee was worth it. For tomorrow though he'd have to find someone to mind his stall. The thought

propelled a deep sigh out of his mouth. To find someone trustworthy by tomorrow morning was going to be tricky. Maybe on the Chantry board...?

"Ok wind...ventilation. Yes Ok, I'm sure we can find a good spot for you to work. Elinowy, anyplace spring to mind?" Katya said.

Elinowy thought for a moment. "I am new to Jader, I know few places at this point. I am sure we can ask the Chantry for some room, although they are quite busy with the Festival. There is also the Raven's Roost. They have been very generous giving space to me the last few days." she said then turned toward Dominic. "The Maker will provide... a place for you to work." she said giving adequate pantomime to denote the sanctimony of her statement. She turned back to Katya. "I am happy to inquire on behalf of the Chantry to anyplace you think might be adequate."

While the two ladies spoke, Dominic began packing up his wares. He couldn't leave them unattended and there wasn't time to hire an assistant now, so he'd just call it a day. In truth researching new brews was what he loved doing most - significantly more than attending customers - and the appeal of a decent challenge could not be ignored.

The boxes of perfumes and other brews were stacked neatly in his cart. It didn't take long because they were always presented in their boxes, so all he had to do was stack the boxes in his cart and make sure they were stable enough to prevent any breakage.

"Show way to me ?"

"GO ahead Elinowy. Let's take him to the Raven's Roost. They should be able to find a place for him to work." Katya said.

"I certainly shall." the sister replied back starting out walking ahead of the Cart in the direction of the Roost.

Dominic drove his cart back to the inn with the two women. He wasn't sure this was the best place to be dissolving poisons, what with the innocent bystanders staying nearby, but he was happy to let Elinowy and Katya take responsibility for that part of the operation. Half of his mind was already otherwise occupied, thinking up different tests to rule out various poisons. What a fun challenge this was going to be !

"Need, hum, open space," he said. "Wind ?" *Ventilation* was the word he was looking for. "Place for fire. And quiet."

"I will check with Tessa if she has proper space for our purposes." Elinowy replied. She wan't sure what the family had in available space, but she knew her laboratory back at the Chantry had been

packed into very limited space, except when she needed space for blasting tests, then the yard by the laundry was quite usable. The Roost was just an Inn, but Dominic's experiments shouldn't need to explode... or would they?

Absolute silence while working was a bliss rarely achieved, but that wouldn't prevent Dominic searching for it, although he would tolerate a decent bard singing in the background if they absolutely must.

Katya motioned for Dominic to follow them as she led them over to the Ravens roost. They had a place that would suit Dominic she felt would fit his needs.

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## A Cunning Plan

Posted on 23 Aug 2022 @ 11:30am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**2,792 words; about a 14 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 25th, night

With baby Gabriel in his sling and Iris skipping along beside her overloaded with sugary treats, Tessa had left her husband and father at the festival engaged in a lively discussion with Ben's cousin about the merits of hops grown in the northern region of Nevarra. The sun had set but the festival was still in full swing. She had plenty of time to get Iris settled in bed before the Raven's lodgers returned to their rooms for the night.

Tessa pushed open the front door of the Raven's Roost and greeted Cook and Lucia. Iris chattered to them about the festival while Tessa nursed Gabriel, and soon Iris had wound down and fallen asleep in Lucia's lap. That was when Cook and Lucia told her what they'd overheard about what her brother Kalian and his friends were up to. By the time Dominic, Elinowy, and Katya returned to the Raven's Roost, Tessa had sent Cook and Lucia home, Iris and Gabriel were asleep in their grandfather's room on the first floor, and Tessa was waiting when the door opened.

The scarlet clad sister entered first, her face in a welcoming smile, that certainly bode trouble. "Tessa, the Maker's blessing upon you and your house. We have uncovered a plot at the festival that requires your boarder Dominic to perform some tests. He needs space for his studies in relative quiet if you have anywhere that would be suitable, with a fire nearby."

"There's a fenced-in garden behind the tavern, Dominic can work out there," said Tessa. Just when she was about to ask after Kalian, the door opened again.

Kalian walked in first with a broad smile on his face, then held the door for Rhiannon and Martin. The smile fell when he saw Tessa with her arms folded and giving him that *we're gonna talk about this later* look. "Tessa, my friends and I need a place to talk privately," said Kalian. Even though the tavern appeared empty, anyone could walk through the door at any time. "We'll use the cottage if that's all right."

Rhi followed Kalian in and gave a nod and a warm smile to Tessa. She hoped that the two of them would get the chance soon to talk. For now she followed Kalian out to the cottage.

The nervous agitation Elinowy felt when Kalian was near began to well up. She reminded herself they were all here to do the Maker's work for the good of the people of Jader, even the dwarven woman that kept along with Kalian. Elinowy liked Rhiannon but something about the two of them as a couple rubbed the sister was wrong. Certainly inter species relations were not unusual in Jader and not even condemned, except maybe with elves, which only made sense, but this was different. The sister strove to drive the thoughts from her mind and gave a smile and a slight wave to Kalian... and Rhiannon.

Katya saw that look. She knew it meant Tessa was mad at Kalian. "Hello Tessa! It's good to see you again. " If Tessa wasn't married, Katya would go for her in a heartbeat!

Rhi gave Elinowy a warm smile at the woman's wave. A touch of blush rising in her cheeks. Even though she was with Kalian, she could appreciate beauty. And by the Maker, the sister was definitely that.

"Hello," Martin said, a little self-conscious. He knew that since they'd met Kalian had been dragged into a number of unsavoury adventures and that Tessa must worry about him. And he, Martin, was largely responsible for that. He hoped Tessa did not think too badly of him for accepting help, when it was so sorely needed.

Tessa's scowl for her brother, which was more about worry for him than actual disapproval, softened when she was greeted by his friends. For all Kalian's foolhardy poking around in things that were beyond his responsibility, he had good judgement when it came to his friends. And from what Cook and Lucia said, this was important. "Welcome. You can all speak privately in my home."

It was the first time Martin saw the Raven's backyard. It was small but pleasant, a few abandoned toys in the grass suggesting that it was often used as a playground for the children.

Elinowy made herself useful by collecting the discarded toys in the area that Dominic had been directed to set up. She was intrigued to see the master potion maker at work. While only a hobby, she was no novice to the brewing of potions, but this man, odd as he was, did it as a vocation. She was most interested and gravitated to where he began setting up his work.

Dominic, who had been mostly ignoring everyone else, identified a suitable spot for his work and started setting up his supplies. There was coal in a bronze dish, made especially to contain the fire needed to heat his preparations. Upon it sat a small cauldron, too small for his usual preparations but perfect to adjust the heat on smaller experiments. Then a number of base ingredients, pure alcohol, a thin white cloth used as a filter. The first thing Dominic did was pour a measure of the wine in his cauldron and stoke his fire to reach a soft boil. Another measure of the wine he set in a small glass decanted and left it to rest ; he would examine the deposits, once they rested at the bottom. As he worked he waved the onlookers away.

"Not get close," he said testily. Didn't these fools know better than to inhale potentially poisonous fumes ? He himself tied a cloth around his mouth and nose, as a small measure of protection.

Elinowy drew her scarlet hood across her face. She knew the protocols for safely handling volital substances. Nothing looked explosive, but there were other dangers. He quickly prodded her away from his work area along with the others.

Rhi watched as Dominic prepared for the work he was about to do. She herself has done this before, both producing potions, of various types and analyzing as well. She also knew that she was not as proficient as Dominic was at potions. So when he said and motioned to stop back, Rhi did not hesitate.

Kalian led them the short distance to the cottage. It had been his childhood home with Tessa and their parents, before that fateful incident with a chevalier left his mother dead, his father permanently disabled, and himself revealed to have magic. Now Tessa lived here with her husband and two children.

Thus shooed by Dominic, the rest of them retired to the cottage. Like the main body of the tavern, it had a pleasant cosy feeling to it, with clearly a woman's touch in the decoration and set-up of the furniture. A large, rustic table occupied a large part of the living room and that is where they sat to discuss their findings.

Meanwhile Martin had begun reading the letter they had retrieved from the warehouse. The handwriting was rough, he noted ; the quill had pierced the paper and dripped ink several times, suggesting whoever had written that was not a cleric. A look at the signature confirmed it - Carlos Acerbi. The name of Roberton's second in command, according to Kalian and Rhiannon.

The letter complained about thieves having broken in the warehouse. The irony made Martin snort - thieves being robbed. What was Jader coming to. The rest of the letter however wiped all trace of amusement from his face.

*"...despite this drawback there are enough blue-eyed bottles left to serve your purpose. I wouldn't worry about the thieves - they will take care of themselves when they try to enjoy their unearned spoils. As such, I await your further wishes on this matter, so that we may conclude this business to*



*our mutual satisfaction."*

On the other side of the paper another short message was scrawled, clearly not from the same hand. This one was clearly trained in calligraphy, with firm, elegantly scribed letters slightly slanted to the right.

*"Deliver the remaining bottles immediately."* The laconic message bore no signature. The top of the letter had been torn off though, suggesting that at least one of the two people involved in this damning correspondence was clever enough not to leave their names on it.

Clever and educated. That pointed directly to either the Chantry or the nobility. Neither option was very palatable. *To serve your purpose*, the letter had said - what purpose could that be ?

Elinowy had found a comfortable looking chair to settle in as Martin read his findings. Her face was not amused. Someone with power was planning something truly evil for the citizens of Jader. She should really report this to the Chantry, Revered Mother Giselle would know what to make of it.

"OK so where do we go from here?" Katya asked. "We got the bottles and our guest is figuring out the poison. The problem is we don't know have any idea who is behind this." She sighed. She wished she had a girlfriend to be with, to talk things over with. Perhaps someday.

Rhiannon moved to sit next to Kalian then started to fiddled with one of the rings she had procured as Martin began to read. A beautiful crimson colored ruby, marquis cut, with two small pearls at each point in a gold setting.

When both Martin and Katya, Rhi looked to everyone, stopping at Martin. "If Dominic proves that the bottles are poisoned, then we have no other choice but to take it to the guard. (looks to Katya) As for who is truly behind it, that is something that can be worked out. We do know that Carlos Acerbi is involved." She paused, then looked back at Martin. "To find out what Carlos knows, may require a bit of.....(pause) Let's just say, a firm talking to, away from prying eyes. (pause) Hypothetically speaking of course."

Kalian looked up from the ledger, his eyebrows knit together with worry. "I'm not so sure it's a good idea to take this matter to the city guard." He gave Martin an apologetic shrug and pointed to entries in the ledger. "I see at least three names here in Acerbi's ledger that I recognize as city guards. Moonlighting as warehouse guards is probably not completely illegal, but... it's suspicious. And Captain Landry is on his payroll too. A large weekly sum." Although he had not been there when the guard captain threatened to punish them all for saving the refugee miners, he had wondered what Landry had to gain by doing nothing to stop the refugees being exploited. "If we report this to the city guard, we might well be the ones thrown in jail, while innocent people are poisoned."

"I agree with Kalian. I don't trust the city guard," said Katya.

Rhi had known cities where the city guard were on the take, in one way shape or form. She had not

been in Jadar long enough to really know how corrupt Jadar might be. She had heard from her mother though she always wanted to confirm for herself. "Well, I for one do not want to become a resident of the local establishments barred apartments."

Kalian put his arm around Rhiannon's shoulders and gave her a hug. "Let's not forget we have one city guardsman here with us that we know we can trust." He nodded to Martin. "As a whole, the guard are good people. But with the Summerday Festival in full swing, drink flowing and all, the city guard is stretched thin. I'm sure Martin has a good idea of who we can trust, who is beyond reproach." He looked down at the ledger again, and then at Martin. "Where these particular guardsmen are assigned for their duty shifts could be a clue."

Though she really liked Kalian the feeling she got when he put his arm around shoulders, something changed. For that moment, his concern, made her heart skip a beat. She felt the heat of a blush cross her face and her crimson eyes seemed to flash red. For the first time in a very long time she had trouble speaking. "Ye.....y.....yes. I can trust Martin with my life." Those there could hear the complete honesty in her voice.

That ledger and what it implied about Captain Landry and some of his fellow guardsmen was hard to absorb and difficult to believe. Sure, the city guard was not perfect, but if Landry and that handful of guards had betrayed the city's trust, then Martin would do whatever it took to purge the criminals and recover the Jader City Guard's integrity.

"It must be just a few bad apples. I will find out which patrols the guardsmen listed in the ledger are assigned to, and I'll speak with a few guards I know well and trust," said Martin.

Kalian rubbed his stubbled chin thoughtfully. "It's a Jader traditional for the revered mother to host a large banquet on the third day of the Summerday festival, when we celebrate the Maker's abundance. What if someone is planning to serve the wine then?"

"That concerns me to no end. If the wine they served is poisoned then many would get sick. Some might even die! Perhaps even the reverend Mother herself. If anything happened to her,.. well we just can let it! The reverend Mother is too important. Perhaps we should warn her of the possibility of being poisoned!" Katya said.

"I agree with Katya. The reverend mother should be warned." Rhiannon paused for a moment then continued. "What if we exchange the poisoned ones for non poisoned ones and mark them as of they were."

"If we could verify the wine has been moved to the chantry wine cellar, that would be confirmation that Mother Giselle could be the target. Exchanging the poisoned bottles and warning Mother Giselle would be the ideal solution," said Kalian. "But if Revered Mother Giselle is the target, then who is her would-be murderer? Everyone in Jader loves Mother Giselle after everything she did for the city during the Blight. Who stands to gain by her death?"

"Kalian, I have lived here all my life and I know I love Mother Giselle very much! However I know some people don't like what she did during the blight and even Mother Giselle has enemies. Profit? well many might profit by having someone they can control in Mother Giselle's place. The next in line to be Reverend Mother is Isouda. Elinowy, what do you know of Isouda? Could she be involved in poisoning Mother Giselle?" Katya asked.

Elinowy covered her mouth with her hands. "Surely no! All sister's have a sworn duty to protect each other and our community. Elder Isouda has been gruff the few times I have met her, and perhaps has tried to manipulate events to make those she does not agree with look unfavorable, but poison! A Revered Mother?! It's unheard of," she said with great dramatic flair, although the more she thought about some of the sisters in the upper echelons of the Chantry, she had to consider it could be a possibility. "I mean, Mother Giselle is very beloved locally, but perhaps not as much in Val Royeaux, they tend to play in politics more than piety. Elder Isouda seems to have ambitions, which may be natural to any, but she is very driven. Do you think she could turn on her appointed Mother?" she said both shocked and horrified at the real potential of it.

"Yes I do. I don't trust her. She is too ambitious. The fact is we don't know who we can trust other than Mother Giselle. We have to save her! I don't trust Isouda!" Katya said.

Rhi listened to the others, when Katya was done Rhi gave a wicked smile. "Well. She could have an.....(pause, wicked grin) I can get a few of my crew to watch her. They would be very discreet."

"That's a good idea Rhi, discreetly watching Isouda. What we have here so far is suspicion and circumstantial evidence. I'm worried that if we confront Isouda directly, she'll have us arrested, then try some other approach." Kalian was quiet for a moment, looking at each of his friends in turn. "Dominic will have all day tomorrow to make antidote for the poison. Then I think the day after each of us should attend the banquet separately, so we're spread out around the space, and even if one or two of us can't get in, we can still stop whatever happens."

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## Revered and Wicked Day of Indulgence

Posted on 21 Sep 2022 @ 5:19pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**5,295 words; about a 26 minute read**

**Mission:** [Summerday La Fête](#)

**Location:** Chantry - main building & gardens

**Timeline:** Cloudreach 27th, midday

Chantry Elder Isouda surveyed the chantry gardens, and the banquet table that had been set up to accommodate Giselle's banquet guests. The walled gardens were a place for quiet reflection, normally open anytime to the people of Jader, but today the three garden entrances – one that led to the Templar barracks, one that led to the kitchen and chantry sisters' dormitory, and one that opened from the chantry hall itself – were each guarded by four sentries. Two Templars Isouda had selected herself, and two city guardsmen assigned by Landry at each point of entry.

Guests entered the garden through the chantry building, where Giselle herself – protected by Guard Captain Landry and the Night Captain - welcomed nobles, wealthy traders, and well-known craftsmen as they arrived. Isouda watched the steady stream of servants going in and out of the dormitory gate, carrying platters of food and preparing the table. She tapped a chantry sister's shoulder, one who was personally loyal to her. "It's time. Bring out the celebration wine from the reserved cellar."

*Soon*, thought Isouda as the sister hurried off to do her bidding. *Soon* Giselle would give the toast, all would drink, and by evening Isouda would be Jader's revered mother.

Despite the best efforts of Kalian and his friends to access the wine cellar, it had been heavily guarded by Templars – a situation that was in itself extremely suspicious. Meanwhile, Elinowy's best efforts to speak with Mother Giselle had been thwarted at every turn by Elder Isouda. Kalian and his friends had plenty of circumstantial evidence that could have been presented to the City Guard Captain Landry, *if* they didn't suspect she was in on it too.

Kalian *did* consider shape shifting to sneak into the banquet but discarded the idea immediately. Too many templars around for that. Plus, after sneaking into Acerbi's warehouse, someone might put two and two together. So, Kalian utilized his utterly boring and ordinary kitchen skills. He showed up in the very, *very* early morning hours and joined the servants preparing food for the banquet. He tried not to yawn as he carried a tray of fresh spring greens from the chantry kitchen to the buffet table in the garden and queued with other servants waiting for a chantry sister to point out where it should be placed. Guests had started to arrive, and he took a moment to look around for his friends before he was shooed back to the kitchen for another tray.

Mother Giselle greeted each of the arrivals, welcoming them to the traditional Chantry banquet on the third day of the Summerday festival. She dearly wished she had time to chat with each member of her flock and had considered making the event a more casual occasion with a buffet served all day. But Isouda had insisted on maintaining the tradition of a formal banquet, along with the tradition of Giselle's two formal protectors - the Knight Captain on one side and the Guard Captain

on the other. Giselle sighed. *Perhaps next year.*

Katya entered through the front. She was well known at the chantry and generally well-liked there. She was on alert. Someone was out to murder the reverend mother and she and her comrades were there to stop it. She kept her eyes out. Still she always looked forward to seeing the reverend mother. She was a devout follower of Andraste and the reverend mother had shown such kindness to the people. She was so inspiring and kind. The thought of someone wanting to kill her made Katya very angry!

Mother Giselle gave young Katya Charbonnet an encouraging smile, thinking what a shame it was the old Charbonnet patriarch had not acknowledged his granddaughter when he was alive.

She smiled back at the Rev Mother. She was always so kind to Katya and her smile filled Katya with Warmth. She was a genuine treasure.

The Chantry was adorned in festive decorations, with choral ensembles made up of sisters every several yards. They sang together of a beloved passage from Apotheosis 1. The festive introduction filled the great hall as guests and dignitaries pressed forward to be greeted by the Rev Mother. The song called out to Elinowy til her spirit could take it no longer. She joined in the majestic chorus echoing throughout the halls.

"Glory! Glory! Glory! Hail to the Maker  
Most High! Hail to Andraste, Prophet, and liberator,  
Light of the world! Look upon our work, O Maker, and rejoice!" she sang.

Within the rapture of the song, it took some time for Elinowy to notice the crowd of people observing her vocalizations. At a natural pause, she broke off to let the assembled Choirs do their work for the evening. The scarlet clad sister looked equally red in her face. It was a song and service to the Maker, but it was not her place to draw away from the offerings of her sisters. She smiled warmly at those around her and moved towards the door. She had a mission, to keep Rev Mother Giselle safe and if necessary keep Elder Isouda away from her. She was determined to do the best she could with the Maker's blessing.

When Giselle saw the young Mother of Bete Noir Chantry arrive, she grinned widely. "Sister Elinowy! I am so pleased you have come. Truly, you must join me for tea, next week when the festival is over. For today, I wish for you to sit at the head table with me so we can chat."

That would be ideal, thought Elinowy, being adjacent to the Rev Mother would give her a close eye on all goings on and a good position to defend Giselle as necessary. "It would be an honor most Rev Mother. I am humbled by your kindness...."

"Mother Giselle," interrupted Captain Landry. She scowled at Elinowy and stepped between the red-haired sister and the Revered Mother, recalling this woman was one of Martin Josceran's troublesome associates. "Mother, you must recall that seats have been assigned at your table. I am to sit on your right, and Elder Isouda on your left."

Giselle focused her steely gaze on the Guard Captain, but before she could speak the Knight Captain, an older man who felt far more at home sweating in a training yard than at a formal occasion spoke up. "Sister Elinowy, please take my seat on the other side of Elder Isouda, and I will sit with my fellow templars. I insist."

This was not perfect but would still keep Elinowy at the head table where she might be able to defend Mother Giselle. And a proximity to Elder Isouda might give her the opportunity to prove her innocence or guilt. The Maker would provide.

She bowed her head to the Knight Captain. "You bless me with your generosity. May the Maker bless you and keep you in his favor," she said making the motions of the blessing upon the man's forehead and chest.

Bowing his head in return, the Knight Captain grinned at the young Chantry sister. "It is my pleasure, Sister Elinowy." Then he gave an apologetic shrug of his shield arm to Giselle, his long-time friend, and in a stage-whisper confided, "I always feel out of place at the head table, anyway."

Rhiannon had talked with her mother that morning. She had explained to her everything that the group had figured out. Her mother listened quietly till she was done. It was then that Rhi's mother handed them invitation to the dinner that night to her daughter. Explaining that she would represent her and the company.

With this in hand, Rhi had made sure she wore her best outfit with a large pirate hat with dark red lace and black feather, black and red dress, dark red overcoat, a black lace choker with rubies, and black leather boots. Once dressed and properly perfumed she made her way to the dinner.

As she entered, she immediately started to see who was all there. Seeing Mother Giselle greeting everyone, Rhi had planned to say something, though could see that the Mother was not taking the time to have any conversations. She quickly made her greetings to Mother Giselle then made her way in and started to mingle and look for Kalian.

Kalian exited the chantry kitchen with a group of servants carrying trays of the last course to set on the tables - spiced baked apples. Banquet guests were already starting to take their seats. Although wine glasses had been set out with the place settings, so far nothing had been said to the kitchen

servants about serving the wine, and the wine cellar door was guarded by two templars.

When Kalian saw Rhiannon, he almost dropped his tray. Somehow he managed to place it on a table without spilling it, and ignore the real servant chastising him for putting it in the wrong place.

He dropped to one knee before Rhiannon, took her hand, and kissed it. "You look radiant, my lady."

Rhiannon was taken by surprise when Kalian dropped to one knee and kissed her hand. She hid it outwardly though he could see it in her eyes. He could also see how much she enjoyed it. Her tone was one of mischief with a hint of, wait till later. "Why thank you very much young man. A woman always likes to hear how radiant they look." She lets Kalian hold her hand a little longer than would normally be appropriate before she slowly pulls away.

From behind him, someone cleared their throat, and someone else made a disparaging remark about servants knowing their place. Kalian abruptly remembered that he was supposed to be disguised as a servant and they had an important mission to accomplish. He got to his feet and winked. "Please excuse my impertinence."

Rhiannon gave him a wicked smile and spoke loud enough for those around could hear. "No, no, not at all my dear. It is a pleasure to see that someone knows beauty when they see it." She makes her way past Kalian, giving him a wink as she does.

Kalian did his best to appear repentant and bowed his head, but still managed to track the sway of Rhiannon's hips before returning to his duties.

He took his place, standing with a row of servants near the gate that lead to the Chantry Kitchens. Elinowy caught his eye - tall and lithe, an untouchable beauty, she had managed to get a seat at the main table, with Elder Isouda between her and Mother Giselle, and Captain Landry on Giselle's right. Katya, always lovely and strong, had finally taken her place as a noblewoman of Jader. Rhiannon, already a prestigious merchant, managed to fill that outfit in the most intriguing ways... *keep your head in the game*, he reminded himself. Each of them had taken strategic positions. Only Martin was absent, and Kalian wondered if perhaps his efforts to enlist loyal members of the city guard had gotten him caught.

From the chantry kitchens, two templars pulled a hand-cart laden with wine bottles. Just the bottle necks showed above the casings, but Kalian recognized the unique ceramic make. Some of the servants started to move forward to serve the wine, but they were shoed back and chantry sisters took up the bottles to serve it personally. One, whom Kalian had seen speaking to Isouda, picked up two bottles and headed to Giselle's table, but Kalian was too far away to see if the woman on the labels had painted-blue eyes.

There was no place card with the name *Katya Charbonnet* at the table Katya had shared in previous years.

"Huh! That's strange! Where is my nameplate?"

"You are Katya Charbonnet, Caroline's daughter, are you not?" said a regal middle-aged woman in a stylish blue gown, the upper half of her face obscured by a formal Orlesion mask. "Your place card is right here, I requested that you be seated next to me, dear. I don't believe we've met. I am Lady Seryl." She gave Katya a warm, friendly smile.

"Lady Seryl! Wow! Yes, I am Miss Caroline's daughter. It's a pleasure!"

A Chantry sister appeared between Katya and Lady Seryl as Mother Giselle gave her invocation, and filled each of their wine glasses. As she poured, the bottle's label displaying a woman with eyes painted blue, was clearly visible.

A well-dressed, handsome blonde dwarf with a long beard in two neat braids greeted Rhiannon with a bow. "My lady, I am Jerrick Saelac, Master Blacksmith. At your service. By any chance, might you be related to Jessamir Cadash, Captain of the Night's Kiss?"

As Rhi turned to look for her seat she seen a well dressed dwarf approach. He was a handsome one he was. Blonde with braids in his beard. Oh, the beard, that was something. The things she could do with that beard. Coming back to her senses when she heard the dwarf speak, she quickly tried to replay what he said. With a brief nod Rhi replied. "Yes, Kvinn (lady) Cadash is my mother. I am her daughter Rhiannon Crimsonheart Cadash. At your service." She an incline if her head.

"Well then, I am a lucky man indeed! Your place card is right next to mine." He pulled out a chair at one end of the head table, one that had been designed to accommodate dwarves at tables designed for humans. The place card read *Jessamir Cadash*. Jerrick gallantly offered her his hand for assistance climbing onto the chair. From the attire of nearby guests and snippets of their conversations, this section of the table was occupied by merchants.

Rhiannon gave Jerrick a warm smile as she excepted his hand. "No my good sir. It is I that is the lucky one. If it was not for a previous engagement that my mother could not reschedule, I would not be here sitting next to someone with a most luxurious beard."

"By the stone, my lady, if I may be so bold... You are even more beautiful than your mother, and I'd wager you're as good or better a sailor and warrior." Jerrick's warm smile held both business interest



and personal attraction. "I would be honored indeed for you to stop by my shop. We could discuss our mutual interests in Jader."

With the compliment Rhi gave Jerrik a warm smile. "More beautiful in my own way, that I can agree on. As for being a better sailor and warrior. I would say that I am a close second." She reached out and took her glass of water and took a sip. "As the night continues my lord, we can discuss our mutual interests." The last word spoken with a bit of mischief.

Two Chantry sisters appeared next to them at the table with familiar wine bottles. They filled Rhiannon and Jerrik's wine glasses from plain-label bottles. A human merchant woman on Rhi's other side spoke to the Chantry sister filling her glass from a blue-eyed bottle. "May I take a closer look at the bottle, Sister? I'm a wine merchant, and that label is unusual."

The Chantry sister shook her head and muttered, "Later, serah."

Rhi looked to both the sisters then to the one with the blue eyed bottle. "Now, now sister. I find it fascinating to talk about wine and the different regions that they came from. My good lady here may know where this particular vintage is from. Let us take a look. If only for a moment." Rhi reached for the bottle, with no intention of getting it, attempting to topple over the tainted glass. "Oh my, I am so sorry my lady. Please take my glass.....No, no I insist."

With a gasp, the Chantry sister just caught the wine merchant's glass so that it only partly spilled, then she refilled it by emptying the blue-eyed bottle. But in her distraction, the sister allowed Rhiannon to take the bottle from her. She huffed and hurried away with the other bottle.

Rhi shifted as she took the bottle and handed it to the wine merchant.

The wine merchant bowed her head to Rhiannon and accepted the empty bottle. "Thank you." She examined the bottle, and added, "This label is similar to a winegrower in Val Royeaux that closed down. I wonder if they're related."

Rhi gave a nod then looked to the wine merchant in agreement then spoke up. "Yes, yes very similar indeed. What I find interesting is the blue eyes. What do you think it represents"

The Knight Captain offered his arm to Elinowy with a fatherly demeanor. "Sister Elinowy, please allow me to escort you to my former place at Mother Giselle's table."

Elinowy curtsied to the Knight Captain in a low swing gesture that drew attention of those around them to the Knight's kind actions. "Of course, Ser, it would be my honor."

As the Knight Captain guided Elinowy around the banquet tables, he said, "Please, call me Joseph. You've saved me from a tedious meal, sitting next to Elder Isouda. Though if you enjoy listening to her talk about Chantry politics in Val Royeaux, you might have a pleasant meal." He grimaced, making it clear how he felt about the topic... and Isouda.

Elinowy followed the Captain. "It is my honor to be seated near the Revered Mother. And I agree while Chantry Politics is not always the most interesting of topics it does have its place. We just need to be heedful to not gossip of those higher placed than ourselves. I'm sure Elder Isouda has only the best intentions." she said, knowing full well that was not the case.

Most of the seats at the head table were occupied. The chair Elinowy's escort indicated was two seats to the left of the center seat, and had a place card with *Knight Captain Joseph Dunbar* written on it. The Knight Captain bowed to Elinowy and with a sigh of relief, walked toward an adjacent table.

There were three empty chairs to Elinowy's right, with place cards that read *Mother Giselle*, *Elder Isouda*, and *Captain Landry*. Two Chantry sisters began filling the wine glasses at the table from bottles exactly like the ones Elinowy and her friends had been investigating. Giselle's glass and Elinowy's own were filled from a blue-eyed bottle, but Landry and Isouda's glasses were filled from plain-labeled bottles.

If there was truly a plot against Mother Giselle, Elinowy would never get an opportunity like this again. She leaned over the table as the party of dignitaries was arriving, scooping up the chalice of Mother Giselle and Elder Isouda. She lifted both goblets high above her head in a well-practiced fashion, rotating the goblets from hand to hand while pronouncing words of institution upon the drink. "Hail to the Maker, from whom all blessing flow, and glory to Andraste his bride." She lowered the goblets, rotating them as they descended, placing a cup before Mother Giselle and Elder Isouda as they approached. "Blessings to you sisters," she remarked as Isouda approached the seat.

Mother Giselle arrived, flanked by Landry and Isouda who took their seats. But Mother Giselle remained standing, gesturing with gentle authority for everyone to settle into their places.

Kalian watched his friends from his place with the servants. All three of his friends were sitting at the head table. Katya was seated next to Lady Seryl among nobles of the city at the end of the table on Giselle's right. He frowned at Rhiannon seated among merchants, and the undeniably handsome dwarf trying to chat her up at the other end of the table on Giselle's left. Elinowy had somehow managed a place close to Mother Giselle, with Isouda sitting between them. Less prominent citizens were seated at several more tables all angled toward the head table.

Once everyone was seated, Giselle got to her feet and started giving her speech. "I know you are all

hungry, so I shall keep this brief so we can move on to the toast then sit down to eat. People of Jader, my beloved flock, we are all here by the grace of the Maker, and his bride Andraste..."

As Giselle continued speaking, Kalian felt for the antidote bottle in his pocket and looked to his friends. Did they see who was being served from the blue-eyed bottles?"

Next to Katya, Lady Seryl reached for her wine glass, preparing to drink once Mother Giselle made her usual toast.

Katya, seeing the blue-eyed bottle knocked the glass from Lady Seryl. "Don't drink that! It's poisoned. My friends and I have been doing some investigation the last few days of some poisoning. We have determined it is from certain batches of this wine. The bottles were marked with blue eyes, like the one we just were served.

With startled surprise, Lady Seryl turned to Katya. "Poisoned, you say? If that is true, we must stop the tribute at once. Do you have evidence to back up this claim?"

The two noblemen at Seryl and Katya's sides turned toward them, listening with growing alarm to their conversation. Both put down their glasses.

To either side of Rhiannon, Jerrick and the wine merchant reached for their glasses, ready to salute when Mother Giselle gave the toast.

Rhiannon took up her glass. When the wine merchant started to bring her glass up to drink, Rhi purposefully stepped so that she stumbled into the wine merchant, knocking the woman's wine glass out of her hand before she could drink.

"My lady, are you all right?" inquired Jerrick solicitously.

The wine merchant glared at Rhiannon. "Why did you do that?"

Rhiannon looked to Jerrick and nodded. "I am fine, thank you." To the wine merchant, "Your glass was poisoned as well."

Next to Elinowy, Isouda grinned triumphantly and picked up her glass, her eyes shining with anticipation.

Elinowy held up her own glass next to Isouda. She was fairly certain she had placed the blue eyes beverage in front of the elder.

Isouda noted with approval that Giselle was indulgently ignoring the rude conversations at each end of the main table. The elder had already determined that the scarlet-haired upstart of a sister was the most likely danger to her plan, and Isouda herself stood between her target and her competition.

Mother Giselle's speech came to an end. She lifted her now-filled wine glass into the air and gave a simple toast. "To the people of Jader!"

"To the Maker and all of Jader!" Elinowy called out, looking Isouda in the eye as she brought the cup to her own lips.

Kalian had absolute confidence in his friends. And yet, standing with the servers, he was too far away to see the wine bottle labels, or to have seen who had been served poisoned wine at the main table. Plus they had no idea if guests seated at the other tables had been served poisoned wine.

"Stop!" shouted Kalian. "Some of the wine is poisoned."

"Impossible," said Isouda, getting to her feet. She had to act fast, before her plan fell apart. She cried out, "Of course the wine is not poisoned. Let us all drink with Mother Giselle. To Jader!" Isouda lifted her glass and drank her entire glass down. "You see?" She motioned to the city guardsman and the templar standing guard at the gate to the chantry kitchens, then pointed at Kalian. "Detain that man!"

Kalian offered no resistance to the templar and guard that grabbed each of his arms. "Mother Giselle," he called out, "Elinowy, Katya, and Rhiannon will explain."

Giselle set her wineglass on the table, without drinking. "That is a serious allegation, and I will treat it seriously."

All across the chantry gardens and banquet tables, the guests were talking at once. Mother Giselle held her hands up for quiet and turned her attention to the three women. "What is this about?"

Elinowy looked to Mother Giselle. "I fear it is true Revered Mother." She could feel her head starting to go light on her. "The wine has been tampered with. I fear treachery from Elder Isouda who ordered which wine be poured in what goblets." Her voice began to crack she spoke. She looked into Elder Isouda's eyes. "By the maker, I changed goblets with mother and..." The flame haired sister crumpled in her seat, sliding under the banquet table.

Rhiannon jumped down and ran to Elinowy, pulling out the antidote. She will use it on Elinowy.

"Hurry Rhiannon!" If Elinowy didn't make it, well the thought was too much for Katya. She took a deep breath and began to explain what happened. From the discovery of the elves to the determination it was the poisoned wine and determining the bad bottles had blue eyes to making the antidote to coming here to prevent Mother Giselle and others from being poisoned. "So that is the story! I am glad we stopped the poisoning but I'm sure Isolde was not in it by herself. I recommend investigating the serving staff. Some might be part of Isolde's conspiracy."

Katya waited for Rhiannon to administer the antidote to Elinowy. She silently prayed to Andraste for Elinowy's life.

Mother Giselle devoted her full attention to Katya, listening to her explanation, then turned to Isouda and demanded, "Is this true?"

Isouda opened her mouth as if to speak, then swayed on her feet and collapsed to the ground.

Rhi ignores Isouda.

Guard Captain Landry was on her feet, and pointed accusingly at Katya and Rhiannon. "They are responsible, Mother Giselle. I had guardsman Martin Josceran arrested this morning for working with these criminal *vigilantes!*"

With the templar and guardsman - each holding one of his arms - distracted, Kalian reached into the fade for an instant, and released a spark of electricity like an electric shock to their plate armor. They let go with a simultaneous gasp, and Kalian ran forward, and dropped to his knees next to Isouda, and administered the antidote. His captors tried to re-apprehend Kalian, but Giselle waved them back.

"Mother Giselle," said Kalian, looking up at her. "Like Katya said, Isouda planned to poison you, and your supporters. She arranged to buy a special shipment of wine, with poisoned bottles marked as such. She hired a criminal named Carlos Acerbi to have the wine brought to Jader. Captain Landry is working for Carlos Acerbi, and may be in on the poisoning scheme."

"That is ridiculous," sputtered Landry. "Mother Giselle, I must arrest these miscreants immediately."

"We have proof!" declared Kalian. "We have Acerbi's business ledger, detailing the wine deal and payments made to Landry and other guardsmen."

Isouda opened her eyes, groaned, then rolled over on her side and vomited.

Kalian went to Elinowy's other side, across from Rhiannon. "Eli? Elinowy, can you hear me?" With less subtlety than he had used to zap the guards, Kalian opened himself to the fade and pressed one hand against Elinowy's temple, and the other to her stomach, and poured healing magic into his friend.

She floated in darkness, not soothing or relaxing, more draining of everything in her. Elinowy strived to move her arms in a swimming motion, but the void didn't respond. There was just darkness. She felt her body start to convulse in the cold as it dug into every part of her being. A desperate panic began to fill her.

Then came the fire. Of course it would be fire. Praise Andraste, the darkness began to give way to an all pervasive redness.

"Eli? Elinowy, can you hear me?" said a voice floating in the fire. She reached out to respond to her Maker's bride. And then the heat began in her belly. A wonderful deep heat. Stirring, but curiously familiar. She felt the heat wash over her in a glorious crescendo of joyous release.

Her eyes shot open, looking directly at Kalian as he held her temples and stomach. He had done it again.... here is the presence of the Chantry, the Templars and everyone else. She didn't care. She shut her eyes and grabbed Kalian's hand on her stomach. Again, she thought, the words not quite finding their way to her trembling body.

Rhi had pulled Elinowy up close to her when she poured the antidote down her throat. Massaging her neck to get it down. She hadn't seen Kalian shock the two who had been holding him. She just saw him drop to his knees, place one hand on Elinowy's temple and the other her stomach. She couldn't see him use his magic, even though she knew he must be. So when Elinowy opened her eyes, Rhi let out her breath she had not realized she had been holding. She made sure that she would help her up when she was ready.

Meanwhile, Lady Seryl had joined Giselle, and the Knight Captain and several templars converged around them, at a respectful distance. "What are your orders, Mother Giselle?" asked the Knight Captain.

Mother Giselle shook her head sadly, but answered, "Detain Isouda and Captain Landry." Then to Katya, Kalian, Rhiannon, and Elinowy, she said, "Please remain here, while we sort this out."

"Was it worth it Landry? betraying your faith? Trying to murder a good woman for your own gain? You disgust me! Mother Giselle, Martin has been working with us. He's a good man! As for Isouda, well looks like she saved you the trouble. With luck she is already dead! Andraste will deal with her! Speaking of Andraste, I thank Andraste you are safe Mother Giselle! You and Lady Seryl and the others she planned to kill!" Katya said.

After Eli woke up, Katya rushed over to her and knelt. "You listen here young lady!" she said. "Don't..you..ever..scare... me...like...that..again!" tapping Eli's nose each time to emphasize her words. "Kalian, my friend. Thank you for helping our foolish friend here."

Epilogue:

Isouda claimed ignorance about the poisoned nature of the wine in the blue-eyed bottles, and insisted those bottles were supposed to be better-quality wine (this is what the servers were told). However, the letter Martin found written in Isouda's handwriting implied otherwise. Isouda was sent to Val Royeaux to serve her penance.

In her defense, Guard Captain Landry claimed she was accepting money from Acerbi in order to infiltrate his criminal organization, and that she was ignorant of the poisoning plot. But the four guardsmen who were also taking bribes from Acerbi refuted that claim. It was discovered that Landry had gambling debts and she had enabled other illegal operations, including the enslavement of Ferelden refugees at the silverite mine. Lady Seryl sent Landry to Val Royeaux to await trial, since she might not be secure in the Jader jail. Lady Seryl is planning to hire a new Guard Captain.

Kalian's use of magic did not go unnoticed. Mother Giselle had a long conversation with Kalian, and afterward she spoke on his account to Knight Captain Dunbar, who agreed that Kalian may remain free *for now*.

Mother Giselle offered Elinowy Isouda's former position as Jader Chantry Elder. In consideration of her respect for Mother Giselle, Elinowy politely consented to think the offer over carefully.

Lady Seryl now considers Katya to be a trusted adviser among the nobility of Jader.

Isouda and Landry's attempts to cast blame on the *Night's Kiss*, Rhiannon's mother's ship, failed completely. As a merchant in Jader, Rhiannon and her mother gained preferred standing with Lady Seryl for city contracts.

### 3. Hall of the Phantom Shadow

Begonia Baudelaire from Val Royeaux purchased an old, abandoned mansion half-a-day's walk outside the town of Jader. But when she arrived in Jader and made inquiries, she was informed that

the mansion is haunted. Nevertheless, she hired workmen to go with her to assess the mansion's condition, and they were frightened away. She needs help.

Who you gonna call?

## Home is a Tower of Light

Posted on 20 Sep 2022 @ 6:29pm by [Mage Atria Jain](#)

Edited on on 23 Sep 2022 @ 10:01am

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

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Jader - the Lighthouse

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 3, Morning

"Atria, have you seen-"

"Under the stack of books," Atria said, forcing out the words as she struggled to finish her third set of pull ups. "On the table. Where you left it."

No reply came but she released the door frame and dropped heavily to the ground. Every morning, she followed her regimen, and every morning her schedule was threatened by Interlopers. What was the chaos of battle compared to the chaos of a household?

A thundering down the stairs preceded one of those Interlopers. The Tevinter woman turned to face her enemy and laughed when Philippia, a young child of eight, flung herself off the stairs in a tackle. Atria caught the girl with one arm and caught her day bag with the other. Two books in it, judging by the way, instead of one...

"Go on then, the Chantry school won't wait for you," she said with a chuckle.

More invaders descended into her domain, followed by their most beautiful shepherd. "Join us?" Adrienne asked. Suddenly self-conscious, Atria set the feeling aside and kissed her wife good morning before following the pack out the door.

The city of Jader lay before them. As a strategically placed trade city, that was also a port, ships needed to find port even at night. The Tremblay's took care of that in exchange for a modest living paid through tariffs. The family had been here as long as any other family and Atria's eyes took in the familial traits on the faces of her in-law's children. Traits that Adrienne shared, including a light complexion with freckles.

Unlike the Tevinter woman herself. She was darker, stronger, dressed in a shirt tucked into trousers instead of the blouse and skirts of her wife. That would come when she had a chance to clean up



and dress for the day. But Adrienne had invited her along and she decided to come, leaving her feeling a little more out of place than usual which was entirely her own doing.

"Any big plans for the day, *lever du soleil?*" Adrienne asked. That Orlesian accent always sounded so musical.

"Depends on what you need, love. I know that section of railing needs mending. I'd planned to visit the mill, possibly size up a bundle of like boarding to store so that future replacement boards look the same. Nothing urgent."

"Have you given any thought to what we talked about last night?"

Atria eyed her wife a bit warily as they approached the town proper on the way to the Chantry. "What, the City Guardsmen?" It took a moment to compose her thoughts. "I confess there's a certain appeal. It's easy work, compared to Seheron. Not particularly dangerous either. Then there's the other incentive; coming home to you every night."

"But?"

"But it's uniforms again. Marching, probably. Taking orders." A longer pause. "I was a..." Her thoughts paused again as she searched for the local equivalent. "Commander, I led a Regiment. I don't want that again, having to prove myself to men again, having their lives in my hands. And I'm not sure if I have it in me to 'yessir' men who have never seen a battlefield."

Ahead, the Chantry loomed. Well, as much as any building in Jader loomed. This place was no Minrathous, or even her home city of Qarinus. The Chantry didn't look the same either, compared to home. But the several Affirmed calling in the local children for school was a heartwarming sight. They'd married here. This was a special place to Atria, no matter which Divine they honored.

"Will you join me?" her wife asked, changing the subject again, pausing the pair of them by the doors to the Chantry.

"I'm not dressed for it, love."

"Join me anyway." There was an easy humor in her wife's eyes, covering up a deeper firmer wish.

"Join you? Always. Anywhere."

The two left the question around Atria's future outside.

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## Meeting Of The Minds

Posted on 24 Sep 2022 @ 1:05pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Rogue Nazri Arisant](#)

**1,412 words; about a 7 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Jader - the Raven's Roost

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 4th

Nazri had killed a man. To be fully transparent, he'd killed a score of men. It wasn't as though he went out of the way to kill, but it was an occupational hazard in his line of work. He was a bounty hunter. He'd lost a lot of sleep over the first. He hadn't had a case of insomnia since. The people he killed had it coming and he gave them a chance when he could. He really didn't feel a sense of guilt until now.

He'd given Hiram a chance too. A choice between surrendering or being shot. Hiram had chosen a third option, he'd jumped to his death, but not before swearing his innocence. Everyone he hunted was innocent or at least said they were. So he hadn't considered it might actually be true.

But something Hiram had said before he leaped had caused him to think. Thinking had caused him to check things out. Checking things out had led him to believe he might have been right. He'd spoken to Ian, Hiram's brother who had told him he could find his answer in Jader.

So he'd decided to check things out a little further. He stepped off the *Falcon* and took a moment to get adjusted to not having a swaying deck under his feet. He spotted a tavern with a sign above it. Not all of his people could read, but Nazari could. *Raven's Roost*. It seemed as good a place as any to start his search, or at least get a hot meal and a cold drink.

He crossed the distance to the establishment, pushed open the door, and stepped inside.

Kalian looked up from the bar, his eyes widening at the sight of a qunari ducking his horned head to fit through the Raven's door frame. It'd been a slow afternoon, the usual lull before the evening patrons started to arrive. "Good day, serah," said Kalian with friendly enthusiasm. Jader was a busy trade port, so qunari weren't rare exactly, but certainly interesting. "Welcome to the Raven's Roost. How may I help you? We have some delicious stew simmering in the kitchen, made fresh this morning, and even better ale on tap."

Nazri didn't realize he'd been frowning. At the mention of food and now being fully, or at least mostly acclimated to being on solid footing, the frown slowly morphed into a smile. At least the corners of his lips were turned up.

He turned his head slightly and made no effort to cloak his sniffing the air. "Stew sounds so good, smells good too. What is it?"

"Lamb, with carrots, turnips, onions, and a blend of culinary herbs and spices that Cook keeps

secret." Kalian gestured to the common room, empty except for two older women chatting at a corner table. "Choose any table you like, and I'll bring you a bowl."

"Sounds good, and I'll have a tankard of ale."

"It will be my pleasure." Kalian hurried to the kitchen and filled a large-sized bowl with the hearty stew, brought it out with a half-loaf of crusty bread fresh from the bakery that morning, and set it on the table in front of his qunari guest. Then he returned to the bar and filled two tankards with ale, set one in front of the qunari, and asked, "Do you mind if I join you?"

Nazari quirked one brow, it wasn't a question he often got. "Sure," he replied "If you want. I'd be happy to have you join me."

Kalian sat across from the qunari and took a sip of his own beer. "My name is Kalian. The tavern belongs to my family, my sister runs it." He grinned and looked the other man over curiously, gaze lingering on the horns. "If you don't mind me asking, what brings you to Jader?"

"My name is Nazri," there was a pause, the qunari wasn't going to put all his cards on the table just yet. "I've been told a story, I'm here to check it out."

"Well, Jader *is* full of stories." His curiosity was peaked, but Kalian resisted prying... for now. "Have you visited Jader before?"

"No, I can't say that I have," Nazri replied after a long sip from the tankard, "What about you? How long have you been here?"

"I grew up here, for the most part. For a few years I, uh... stayed with my grandmother southwest of Jader. To, uh, help her out." The truth of it was, Kalian's grandmother taught him to control his magic, but that was a story he was unlikely to tell a stranger. Kalian took a deep pull of his ale. "This tavern... before my sister, my father ran the Raven's Roost, and my grandfather before him. If you're looking for a place or a person in Jader, I know the town pretty well."

The qunari cocked his head slightly studying the human. "I could use a room," he admitted. "Maybe a few days, maybe a week, I'm not sure."

"Of course. We have a couple of rooms available. The place was full-up during the Summerday festival, but most of the out-of-towners and folks comin' in from outer settlements have left." Kalian grimaced. Summerday was usually fun, but this year's festival had been downright dangerous, and he was glad it was over.

"As for people, I...uh don't really have a name. Just a description. Human, late forties or early fifties. Stocky, blading, what hair he has is red our used to be red, and from what I'm told, he doesn't have a sterling reputation."

"That description might fit a few human men in Jader".Kalian rubbed his chin and considered. A qunari in Orlais stood out too much to be an assassin, and yet... "I apologize in advance if this is an offensive question, but I have to ask. What do you want with this man?"

Nazri favored the other man with guileless (and tormented)eyes. "No offense taken. I am just checking out a story someone told me. Making sure I was given accurate information." His answer was true, not the whole truth, but the truth.

Kalian smiled in relief that his new acquaintance wasn't a murderer. "I'd start with the taverns close to the docks and the brothel. They cater to sailors, traders, and folks just passing through the port. The Orlesian Arms tavern is favored by the templars in town, and the city guard frequents the Thistle of Jader Inn. At the Raven, we tend to get customers from the local craft guilds. If the reputation of this man you're looking for is in question, you might try asking at the guardhouse." Kalian imagined the range of receptions that Nazri - a qunari - might receive around town. "I could accompany you if you'd like."

Nazari was different than most of his kind. He enjoyed social interaction and was pretty good at it, but he was aware of people's perception of qunari. "I would be honored to have you come along."

"Sure, sounds like fun." Kalian was looking forward to introducing Nazri to Rhiannon and his other friends. Elinowy's aversion to elves always surprised him, and Kalian wondered how she'd react to a qunari. "You might give a little more thought to the, uh, story you're going to tell, about why you're looking for this man. I know Jader pretty well. Once you start asking questions, the gossip will spread. Depending on the story, the man you're looking for might go into hiding or he might even seek you out."

"You have a point," Nazri conceded. "I will have to give it some thought. I don't want to lie. At the same time, I'm not sure how forthcoming I should be."

Kalian drank more of his ale and resisted the urge to ask more questions for a time, to let Nazri eat his stew. This Nazri was a man of integrity, reluctant to lie and not afraid to say so. After a few minutes of companionable silence, Kalian drained his tankard. "I'll let my sister know you're staying for about a week." After a moment's consideration he added, "The day after tomorrow I've invited a few friends to gather here. Join us, I think they'd like to meet you."

Nazri had taken his time eating his stew, at least by human standards. "That sounds like a great idea. I'm looking forward to it."

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## Afternoon Picnic

Posted on 06 Oct 2022 @ 5:04pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#)

**2,036 words; about a 10 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Raven Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 3rd, afternoon

Rhi stood outside of the Raven Roost Tavern. This was something that Rhi had never felt before. Fear. Well this kind of fear. She had faced down things that others would consider way more frightening than this. Yet for Rhiannon Crimsonheart Cadash, this fear was not one she had ever felt before.

So there she stood, outside of the Raven Roost Tavern, picnic basket in hand as patrons passed her by. She had spent all morning cooking this meal. It starts with chilled cook shrimp with a red sauce. Next a summer berry salad loaded with spinach, fresh berries, candied walnuts and feta cheese all tossed in a light white balsamic vinaigrette dressing. Then a slow roasted herb encrusted lean boar sliced thin. With and Aus Jus sauce and asparagus. Followed by what she called a Death by Chocolate cake made with milk, dark and liquor chocolate. But would he like it.

After about five minutes of standing outside she summoned up the courage and made her way inside. She took a few steps inside and again stopped. Picnic basket in front of her she looked around to see if Kalian was there.

Tessa, Kalian's sister, approached Rhiannon with a wide grin, drying her hands on a dishcloth perched on her shoulder. Her brother had been spending far more time than he usually did on his appearance, and had informed her that he would be away all afternoon and evening. Fortunately, their elven server Dilana had come in early. Tessa spoke louder than truly necessary, so that Kalian would hear her. "Rhiannon, how lovely to see you. Kalian will be down in just a moment."

Rhiannon took a second to react to Tessa, she looked at Tessa and gave her a nervous smile. "It is good to see you as well." Giving Tessa a nod acknowledging that Kalian would be down in a moment.

"*Maferarth's balls!*," Kalian muttered when he heard Tessa. He'd intended to wait for Rhiannon downstairs, but then he'd decided to change after his hair – damp from his bath – had dripped on his shirt. And he was still trying to put his room back in order now that the Summerday festival was over, since he'd been relegated to the floor at his sister's house while she rented out his room in the tavern to the potion-master. It still smelled like herbs, though not in a completely awful way.

Kalian ran down the stairs and came to a full stop when he saw Rhiannon. She was wearing a form-fitting leather number that hugged her curves and left little to the imagination. And his imagination had been active overtime. "Wow," he gasped, and made a conscious effort to close his mouth, then repeated, "Wow. Rhi, you look absolutely *amazing*."

At Kalian's compliment Rhi looked down towards her feet as one turned in slightly, her cheeks turning a bright red. She has been complimented before, even by Kalian, though this is a bit different. She had been falling for this man and she knew it. This was new territory for her. After a moment she looks up and smiles. Warm, caring with just a hint of mischief. Her crimson eyes shown with the budding feelings of love. "Thank you. You look very handsome Kalian." As calm as her voice was both Kalian and Tessa could hear that touch of nervousness. "I made....Are you ready to go?"

"Thank you, my lady." Kalian dropped to one knee and formally kissed Rhiannon's hand, then got to his feet and bowed. "It will be an honor to accompany you... *anywhere*." Rhiannon seemed to be as nervous as he was. Kalian had never dated a dwarf before, and he'd been more cautious and taken his time with... certain aspects. Plus, he really didn't want to screw this up.

Chuckling, Tessa took the dishcloth from her shoulder and snapped it at Kalian's backside, much as she had frequently done when they were children. "Go. Have fun you two."

Rhi seemed to relax a little when she saw Tessa snap the dishcloth at Kalian. A playful grin crossed her face as she looked to Kalian. "You heard you sister. Let's go have some fun." She reached out for his hand.

Kalian took Rhiannon's hand and guided her to the door, holding it open. "May I carry that basket for you?" He knew quite well that she was stronger than him, but offering was the chivalrous thing to do.

Rhiannon felt Kalias hand takes hers, it brought a sense of excitement. She looked up warm smile and eyes a glow. She handed Malian the basket, "Thank you."

"Do you have someplace in mind for us to go?" asked Kalian. "There are some places around Jader with lovely views."

With all Rhiannon had done to prepare for this picnic she had not thought of a place to have it. The look of nervousness returned. "Damn. I.....I hadn't thought of it. I was so focused on making it.....I'm sorry." Her tone was one of frustration with herself.

"Oh Rhi, no need to be sorry." Kalian paused to lean down and give her a brief, sweet kiss. "It is a bit of an uphill walk, but if we follow the road up through hightown and go past Lady Seryl's mansion, there's a lovely little clearing in the wooded area on the bluff, with a view of the harbor." It was also, Kalian thought, reasonably secluded.

The kiss was so sweet that Rhi did not want it to stop. The shivers that ran through her when their lips touched, she knew she was alive. It took her a moment to take in what Kalian had just said. "Uphill, through hightstown, lovely clearing. That sounds wonderful." She held his hand as they walked.

As they made their leisurely way past the fancy houses of hightown, Kalian was well aware that Rhiannon was a successful businesswoman, and well respected. And he... was basically a tavern server. "How is your mother? Is she still, uh... okay with you spending time with me?"

Rhi looked up at Kalian when he asked his questions and smiled. "She is fine. She is a stern as ever buy good. As for how she feels about you spending time with me. (long pause then a giggle) She is wondering when you will ask her for my hand." With that she stopped in the middle of hightown, looked up at him. "Now, the question I have, is your family ok with me spending time with you?"

Jessamir was wondering when he would *ask for Rhi's hand*? Kalian blinked, uncertain how to respond. Was that what Rhiannon *wanted*? They'd known each other for - he counted back - since Cloudreach 17th, less than three weeks, although it seemed like more than a year. So far, the two of them hadn't done much more than kiss, though *Maker's Breath*, he really wanted to, and he thought she did too.

"Are you kidding? Tessa, Ben, Iris, and my father... they all like you. You're smart, and capable, and independent. And, well, they can see you make me happy." Kalian took her hand and continued their walk up the hill.

They had almost reached the grounds of Lady Seryl's estate, and Kalian led Rhiannon along a trail that veered off into the woods. It was quiet here, the trees thick enough that the sun overhead was obscured. Kalian spoke in a soft, low voice. "It's been a while since I walked this path." The last few times he'd come up here, it had been as a bird.

Up ahead, the trees thinned out, and the trail opened upon a wide clearing carpeted by soft moss and grass. At the other side of the clearing was open space, the Jader harbor spread out below them. "Beware the drop-off, it's a shear cliff, but the view is magnificent."

Rhi smiled when Kalian told her that his family liked her. This made her happy. As they started to walk again Rhi listened as Kalian talked about it being a while since he had been to the clearing.

As the path opened up she could see why Kalian would come up here. It was beautiful. She made her way to the edge of the clearing and looked over the harbor. She spotted the Nights Kiss below and grinned. She caught the faint smell of the sea. She turned back and made her way to Kalian. "It is beautiful." She looked up at the man who was definitely stealing her heart. "Lets eat so we can enjoy the rest of the day here." She reached for the picnic basket.

"It *is* beautiful. Almost as beautiful as you are," said Kalian, gazing down at her. "The view here is similar to what I see when I fly over Jader." He looked behind him, reflexively, to assure himself they were alone. It was hard to get used to, speaking openly about being an apostate to someone who was *not* also an apostate, and yet accepted that he was. Kalian opened the basket to find a blanket on top. He spread it out on the soft grass, then knelt behind Rhiannon, wrapped his arms around her and kissed her neck beneath her ear. "I might want to start with dessert," he whispered playfully.

Rhi grinned. "I have something special for dessert. But it is for after lunch." Mischief and something more could be heard in her voice.

After lunch Rhi leaned up against Kalian feeling his arms around her. Her voice warm, soft, "Thank you for bringing me here." She shifted to look up at him. Her body fitting in just right. Her crimson red eyes blinked slowly as she tilted her head. "Did me telling you that my mother wants to know when you are going to ask for my hand, scare you?"

Kalian didn't let go but pulled back just enough to move in front of her and look into her eyes. "Not scared, exactly. It's just that... things are complicated, and we haven't known each other for very long. And my life as an apostate is uncertain. I might have to run away from the Templar order at any time. And, well, you're a dwarf and I'm a human." His gaze raked over her body, robust and enticingly curvy, but also compact in a way that worried him. "I've never been intimate with a dwarf before. I don't know if, uh... that is, I've heard dwarves only couple with other dwarves."

Rhi looked into Kalian's eyes. Hers shown with warmth and caring. "Yes we have only known each other for a short time. So you need not worry about my mother. I want to take things as we are now. Marriage is not what I am looking for. It least not at this time." She moved her hand so that she could trace his jaw line. "You being an apostate is of no worry to me. Yes there are the Templars, which we can handle if needs be." She snuggles closer, shifting so that her face was only inches away from his. "And if you had to run, just head to the Nights Kiss. They know better than to stop onboard my ship." Reaching up to run her fingers through his hair. "As for dwarfs only coupling with other dwarfs, that is not true." She leans in closer to whisper in his ear. "So not true." Her lips brushing his ear before she pushed him down on the blanket. Her hair hanging loose framing her face as she leaned down and gave Kalian a very passionate kiss. Only breaking to whisper, her voice filled with passion and wanting, "It is time for dessert."

"Rhiannon," murmured Kalian huskily, his voice full of emotion. He returned her kiss with equal passion. Everything he had imagined about what was under those tight leathers she wore paled in comparison with the reality, just as all of his fears about their relative sizes were quelled. He and Rhiannon fit together in the best possible way, and Kalian was besotted by her.

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## The Man Comes Around

Posted on 09 Oct 2022 @ 5:48pm by [Warrior Skeld](#)

**2,176 words; about a 11 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Jader - Outskirts



**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 6th - Morning

**Tags:** None

**NRRPG: Just a bit of an intro for Skeld, to give a taste of how he's seen by those that know him. Happy to be back in the game!**

Sunbeams were just starting to break through the trees to the east as irregular, golden beams of light that lit spots of the countryside and heated the dew, causing patches of mist to form that gave off an eery stillness to the morning, broken only by the popping of embers of the small fire. The border guard warmed his hands over the outpost brazier, as the new recruit worked to bring more firewood from the loggers cabin; It was absolutely normal for both of them to be involved in gathering the wood, but it was a brisk morning and the senior guard hadn't hazed anyone in a while, and it *was* character building. ...Or so *his* mentor had told him when he started the job. The lad was a good kid, though – strong, obedient, could read and could even string a sentence together; wasn't much else needed for a gate guard in Jader, besides perhaps the ability to get pretty much any other job in the garrison.

"How you doing, boy?" he asked, the monicker more a term of endearment than an indication that he'd forgotten the lad's name.

"Yeah," he puffed, as he dropped the two nets of wood he had told him to bring in the guard house; important to keep the buggers dry, or the journey would be for naught. "Just ... need to... catch my breath," he panted, removing his helm. Steam rose from his hair, making the older man chuckle.

"Good lad, make sure you get by the fire or indoors for a bit; sweat in the cold will strip the heat from your bones, once you stop moving. Don't want you dying on the job, it's a lot of paperwork and you know what I say about paperwork-"

"-if it's paperwork, it's my work," the boy replied, with a breathless laugh. The older man grinned – yeah, he'd work well out on the gate.

It was then he noticed the figure walking towards the gate, instantly knowing him by name. "Look alive, lad – we have a visitor. I don't think you'd want to try, but – make sure your courteous to this one," he said, clapping his hands over the fire a couple of times before refitting his fingerless gloves and leaning the spear into his left hand. The boy looked at him, confused, then out to the man in the distance.

"You can tell who it is from here?" he asked, fanning heat into his cloak before he, too, refit his gloves and helm, grabbing his spear.

"Left hand, boy!" the older man hissed. "Do as I do." He indicated the relaxed grip, the spear in hand but held on the left, resting against the shoulder. He looked confused, from his mentor to the spear, to the man on the road, then back to the mentor.

“I don’t understand, I’m right-handed,” he said, as if that resolved the matter. The older man rolled his eyes. The red hair of the man on the road was visible now he had dropped his hood.

“I know what side your bleeding hand is,” he growled at the younger man, “I’m telling you that your spear shouldn’t be there – move it, afore you cause offense.” Confused, he moved to comply, but squinted down the road as if the answers to why might be found there.

“I don’t understand, you’ve not had me do this before – is he someone important?” he asked, making the older man bark.

“Look lad, you’ll find in this job there’s a couple types of people that you want to remember your courtesies around. There’s the nobles, true – to a point. And then there’s buggers like Skeld, who you are about to become acquainted with. Remember – don’t raise your voice and for God’s sake don’t move that spear into your main hand.”

“Why, what’ll happen if I do?” he asked, worried as the man drew closer.

“Then I’ll be needing to fetch me own wood and fill out me own paperwork,” the mentor said, ominously. The wider eyes on the lad suggested he took the guard’s meaning, and he turned back to the road as the crunching of footsteps came into earshot. The boy instinctively drew himself up to his height; for most, it would be enough to put him eyeball to eyeball, but not Skeld. The poor lad started getting paler as the hulking man stepped closer and closer, gulping when he drew himself up to the guard post; the building wasn’t big, but the lad had never needed to stoop while inside, yet the painted redheaded man was tall enough he could inspect the top of the roof without issue. The poor lad was craning his neck to keep eye contact, which Skeld seemed to think was funny.

“Morning, Skeld,” the mentor said amicably, raising his right hand in greeting. Skeld did the same, left hand on his belt, where a bearded axe hung on either side. On his back he wore a cloak and above that, a great axe was strapped across his back. Skeld looked down at the guard, and broke into a grin.

“Leopold, my old friend!” he bellowed, his voice carrying in the still, morning air. “Gods, it has been ages – still on the gate? Has the guard captain truly not forgiven you?” The lad’s ears pricked at that; he had been gawking at the giant in front of him, but on hearing a note of Leopold’s history, he suddenly had something else to focus on.

“Well, as to that – I find the gate suits me in my waning years, so I decided to stay,” he said, laughing it off. “You’ve been away a spell, any tales to tell?”

“Oh, tales aplenty!” Skeld’s tone was mirthful. “I just took down a dark presence in the Dales, some ancient cursed bastard from the elves of old! Twisted demon of hunger or some such, wanted to eat me!”

“That so?” Leopold asked, looking to the map etched onto the board by the guard house. “Haven’t

heard tell of anything recently by the road, were you in the deep forest again?" he asked, the lad looking from the road to the map to the man.

"Oh yes, I found myself taking a road that led deep into the woods, following a halla beast's trail..."

Skeld proceeded to go into detail about his journey; how he had stalked the halla, only to find its hoof prints changed to those of a man, and then disappear entirely on the outskirts of some ancient elven ruins. How he had been called to enter by name, voices drifting on the wind as the mists rolled in around the ruins to confuse all senses but the sight of that which was just before you. His description of the beast had the young lad enraptured, and Leopold had to admit that the

"... it came down to the final lunge; his hunger against my strength, we threw caution to the wind and committed for the final contest. It almost had me, but my footing found an unexpected foundation stone and I was able to launch him onto his back. We rolled as I got my hands on his spine and twisted his head until it snapped; all at once, the mist and the demon were gone, expelled into the sky like smoke, leaving me panting in the grass, half dead from exhaustion," he finished, breathing loudly and beaming with pride. The young lad was gawking now.

"I never heard of anyone but a templar killing an abomination like that," he breathed, impressed.

"Well, you should have Leo tell you a few stories, we fought one together once – defended this gate until we were the last two remaining," he said, looking fondly to Leopold, who smiled politely.

"Oh, enough of that Skeld – I suppose you'll be heading in to the Roost, if we need you?" he asked, to which the larger man nodded.

"Oh yes, let me know if there's anything strong to fight – always happy to lend the guard a hand in times of trouble," he added, clapping the boy on his shoulder and nearly making him buckle. It was the sort of action Leopold had seen from those trying to assert dominance over a man of authority, clapping them hard on the shoulder or some such to remind them just how strong they were, but he knew Skeld didn't do this to intimidate or imply any such dominance, he just genuinely had trouble holding his strength back. The boy recovered gracefully, though, and avoided falling to his ass, which was a point in his favour.

"Right you are, Skeld – as always, Jader welcomes you. Be seeing you," Leo said, raising his right hand in farewell. The boy followed suit after a moment of gawking some more, and Skeld was on his way, singing a soft tune in some tongue Leo was not familiar with.

"You killed an abomination?" he breathed, a new level of respect in his voice that made Leo question the times he had thought the boy had sounded impressed before. In truth, it would be nice to have a little hero worship, and he toyed with the idea of just keeping his mouth shut and going back to his business, and let the boy think of him as Leopold the abomination slayer, but he'd never be a good guard if he did that.

“What gate is this, boy?” he asked, finally, jerking his thumb at the gate behind him, as the sound of Skeld’s singing went out of earshot. He tossed the spear to his right hand, and planted the shaft into the ground with force as if to remind the boy they were on duty.

“I don’t... erm...” a look at Leopold told him that this was not a trick question. “The eastern gate?” he asked, as if he wasn’t sure of the answer.

“Good. So tell me how a man can pass through the Dales, fight an abomination with his bare hands, and then approach the city of Jader from the *east*,” he asked, rolling his eyes. The boy blinked, as if thoughts were coming to him slower than usual. “Come on boy, it’s not hard,” he added, dryly.

With blinking realisation, the boy looked back to the road towards Ferelden, then back to the city walls. “There’s... there isn’t any way, he’d approach from the west,” he responded, to which Leo nodded, wryly. “Wait, that was all a lie?” he asked, incredulous.

“Lesson one about being a guard on the gate; Skeld lies. But he’s a good story teller,” he added, as if that made up for it. The boy was flabbergasted for a moment, looking back to the road Skeld had taken into town.

“Wait, shouldn’t we arrest him or... something?” he asked, and Leopold barked a laugh.

“Not against the law to lie, boy – if t’were, half of Jader would be in jail, and they’d be the honest ones. Skeld is solid in a fight, but take care with his words; they tend to change in the telling.” The boy stared for a few, long moments, taking this in.

“So, did you not kill an abomination then?” he asked, and Leopold sighed.

“There *was* a mage,” he said slowly, the unspoken but prescient “but” hanging in the air. “and he *was* not in his right mind, and Skeld and I *did* indeed fight to protect the gate...”

“... *but*?” the boy pressed, eliciting another sigh.

“...*but* the only spirit that had made its way inside that man was served in the many taverns of the harbour. And Skeld had been out drinking with him, so that’s how it came to pass that they were walk through the city gate at the same time. As for me and Skeld fighting as “the last defenders holding the gate”, well... It’s not hard to be the last two standing in a three person dust up. We threw the mage in the vagrant cage and had the templars take him back to the circle.”

The boy whistled at that, shaking his head. “I totally believed him...” he said, half impressed and half annoyed. Leo grunted, taking his gloves off and once again warming his hands by the fire.

“*Everybody lies*, lad. Skeld... just practices more than most.”

**NRPG: Skeld will arrive at the Raven's Roost tavern in the middle of the current kerfuffle, looking for Mead and Kalian to drink with :)**

## Who You Gonna Call?

**Posted on 19 Oct 2022 @ 1:11pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Warrior Skeld](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Rogue Nazri Arisant](#) & [Mage Atria Jain](#)**

**5,973 words; about a 30 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 6th

Jader was finally returning to normal now that the Summerday festival was over until next year. Out-of-town visitors had gone home, transitory vendors had shut down their stalls, the streets had been mostly cleaned of litter, and the children were back in school. If a town could go on a week-long binge, suffer an excruciating hangover, and recover with a couple of days' rest and a questionable promise not to do it again, that was the current state of Jader.

Monday evenings were usually slow at the Raven's Roost tavern, and Kalian's sister Tessa had agreed to allow Kalian to invite his friends to gather there for the evening. The common room was filled with the delicious aroma of the whole chickens Cook had roasted for the occasion, accompanied by savory root vegetables, and fresh bread. All of it waited in the kitchen, ready to serve once everyone was there, along with the tavern's signature ale.

Kalian expected Katya, Elinowy, Atria, his new friend Nazri, and of course Rhiannon. He wondered if he should say something about his and Rhiannon's relationship to his other friends, but surely they already knew. Martin was unfortunately busy, with the arrest of Guard Captain Landry and four guardsmen the city guard was short-handed.

Rhi had been busy all day helping out with the mine. She had left the day before and spent the night. She wanted to make sure that things were progressing. Once she was satisfied she left early the next day to make sure she was back in the city so she could meet with everyone that night.

With all that had happened the previous week, Rhiannon was happy that things had worked out. Though what she was most happy about was finding Kalian. She wasn't sure where their relationship was going but she knew where she wanted it to be. Their picnic the other day was something that she would never forget.

She had made her way early to the Ravens Roost for two reasons. Well, she told herself it was two,

one because she liked to arrive early and the second was to see Kalian. When in truth it was to spend time with Kalian before everyone else showed up.

Rhi made her way in and could smell the food. As good as she was at cooking, Cook out did herself. She spotted Kalian coming out of the kitchen. "Ibinê." (my gem) She made her way to him, hugs him, and looks up ready for a kiss.

It was becoming second nature for Kalian to drop to one knee in Rhiannon's presence, and gaze up into those intriguing, crimson eyes of hers. He pressed his lips to hers, in what started as a lighthearted peck, but lengthened into a long passionate kiss. Finally, he broke it off reluctantly and got to his feet with a look of chagrin. "I'll be holding that thought," he said huskily, "everyone else will be here soon."

Rhi had started to become accustomed to Kalian getting down on one knee to kiss her. She honestly thought it was very sweet and it really showed how much he cared about her. This kiss though was a little different. There seemed to be more passion in it. Which she definitely found more exciting and she returned in kind. When they broke she had to take a few calming breaths. *Damn this human can kiss*, she thought to herself. Out of the very few humans, she had ever kissed let alone anything else with, Kalian was way more forward, direct. Almost dwarf-like. Which she found both fascinating and very attractive. For her most dwarf men were too brash, too opinionated, and too gruff. There were a few that had the qualities that Kalian had yet there was more to him than just that. What it was she couldn't place it yet. And right now, as she looked up at him, her thoughts running wild with what she wanted to do to him when they were alone, her eyes gleamed that bright crimson red, and that wicked mischievous grin rose up. "Oh, I will hold you to that my Ibinê."

Sister Elinowy stood outside the Raven's Roost, watching the sun finish its descent towards the West. As the great fiery ball came close to touching the horizon she began her practiced ritual movements and began the night's song:

"Then did I see the world spread before me,  
Sky-reaching mountains arrayed as a crown,  
Kingdoms like jewels, glistening gemstones  
Strung 'cross the earth as a necklace of pearl.  
"All this is yours," spake the World-Maker.  
"Join Me in heaven and sorrow no more."

"World-making Glory," I cried out in sorrow,  
"How shall your children apology make?  
We have forgotten, in ignorance stumbling,  
Only a Light in this darken'd time breaks.

Call to Your children, teach us Your greatness.  
What has been forgotten has not yet been lost."

As the completion of the evening's Chant and her routine through the prescribed movements came to an end, the blanket of night had begun to fall upon Jader. The end of another day. A time to rest, be refreshed, and reflect with sisters and family. Elinowy looked at the Roost, its humble walls had become a bit of a home since arriving in Jader. It brought comfort, curiously more than the Chantry walls. Pulling her hood back atop of her flowing red hair, she turned and walked toward the Inn.

Nazri had been out most of the day hunting. He hadn't had much luck, a pair of rabbits was all he'd mustered. He'd almost had a deer but something had spooked him. He'd gotten back to the Raven's Roost where he had taken a bath and changed his clothes. Charcoal gray pants and a black tunic, made of silk. and soft leather boots that rose to his knee.

He heard the commotion and smelled the aroma from the stairwell, and by the time he stepped inside the common room, he was starving.

Rhi had heard that there was a Qunari in town. Had seen him down by the docks and knew that he was staying at the Ravens Roost though had not met him yet. So when he stepped into the common room she was not surprised. She gave him a nod and a smile.

Kalian greeted Nazri, noticing how the qunari had taken some care with his appearance after being away all day. "Nazri, I am happy you're joining this little soiree." He squeezed Rhi's hand. "This is Rhiannon. She's my, uh..." Kalian was at a loss for words. *girlfriend* seemed a bit juvenile for what she was to him. But luckily Katya arrived and interrupted his looming blunder.

Katya aka Lady Katya Charbonnet approached the Raven's Roost. It seemed like a second home almost. Kalian and the rest of her friends hung out here. The last week seemed like an age ago. So much had happened in so short a time. Because of all that happened they had formed a bond. She smiled as she entered. Of course, the first one she saw was kalian, her old friend. "Kalian, old friend. How are you?" she sniffed the air. "Mmm, I do love your sister's cooking. If she were single, by Andraste I would pursue her and romance her with everything I got!" She reached out her hand to him.

Kalian clasped Katya's arm in a warrior's grip. "Thank you for coming, Katya. Cook actually did most of the food preparation. I helped – under her supervision, you'll be relieved to hear."

"Rhiannon. Wonderful to see you again. How fares your mother? I hope nothing adverse happened to her because of Isouda's lies?" she held out her hand to Rhiannon

Rhiannon had given Elinowy a hug when the Sister had come in. It was good to see that she did not have any effects of the poison left behind. Her attention was then drawn to Katya as she entered. The woman was a force to be reckoned with. Fun as well.

"No, no issues. My mother and the *Night's Kiss* have a sterling reputation. And with all that has happened, we now have an exclusive contract."

"That is wonderful news! And well deserved! Even I know of the *Night's Kiss's* reputation! I am quite pleased to hear that Rhiannon!" Katya said with a big smile. Indeed the *Night's Kiss* was a very well-known ship and she was pleased that no damage to the Ship's rep or that of the crew had been affected! Besides Rhiannon was her friend!

She saw the scarlet-tressed sister. "Fair Elinowy always a sight for my eyes." Katya took Elinowy's hand and kissed it.

From beneath the scarlet hood, she got a flash from the serene blue eyes of the sister. "May the Maker bless you for your affection to his call."

"I admit a great affection for the Chantry. Mother Giselle in particular!"

Then Katya saw the qunari. "Kalian who is our guest?"

Elinowy turned in the direction Katya was looking and literally gasped as she saw a full qunari standing there. "By the Maker..."

Kalian stepped closer to Elinowy, and put his hand on her shoulder, a gesture he hoped would be reassuring. Before he could answer Katya's question, Nazri spoke up himself.

The qunari bowed, in his best imitation of a human, "I am Nazri Arisant," he said with a smile extending his hand. "Who are you?"

"Well met ser. I am Lady Katya Charbonnet! Mercenary, adventurer, and purser of lovely ladies! So what brings you to the Roost?"

The corners of the horned being quirked up as he stood to his full height. "A woman who speaks their mind. I like that. I too am a mercenary of sorts. I hunt those that deserve to be hunted. I've come here seeking truth."

"Truth can be good. I myself seek to protect those who can not protect themselves or whom I want to protect."

"Nazri, I'd like you to meet my dear friend, Chantry Sister Elinowy," said Kalian. "You may have heard her singing outside."

Elinowy was taken a little aback to speak to the creature. She had never seen a true Qunari. She



had met heretics spreading their godless teaching they called Qun. But those had been converts to these false teachings. The Chantry had made it clear the Qun was dangerous, undermining the Chant of Light and the Maker's Will in Thedas. She fought to keep a serene face as she gracefully stood. "What brings you so far from your lands?" she inquired of the creature. She knew the Revered Mother would be most interested in these exchanges.

Nazri was pretty good at reading people's body language and picking up on their facial expressions, and he noticed a small tic in the Sister's face when he was introduced. But he couldn't read minds, so he put it off as being his imagination, or perhaps some issue unrelated to him.

Now he was the one trying to keep his expression serene, or at least neutral. "I chose to keep those things to myself, but suffice it to say, I'm not going back there."

Kalian cleared his throat. "I'll serve dinner in just a moment, I'm expecting one more person." It was not a private party; the tavern was open for business. But as he looked around it suddenly occurred to Kalian that maybe he should have warned Atria that he'd invited a qunari. Or maybe he should have warned Nazri that one of the friends he'd invited was from Tevinter. He was just about to take Nazri aside when the door opened and his Tevinter friend walked through the door. "Atria," he called out. "It's good to see you."

Right on time. The Tevinter woman did her usual greeting towards Kalian, a sort of reverse nod where she lifted her chin in acknowledgment accompanied by a confident smile. Tonight, she wore a long-sleeved mid-calved length dress, brown and practical, and probably a bit more cloth than was strictly needed for summertime but Atria considered Orlais colder than the locals did. Despite the common look, she walked without any of the demure reserve all too commonly found among female citizens of the nation. Broad shoulders, strong arms, and a posture indicative of military life suggested her real profession, despite the lack of weapons. And, of course, she was noticeably darker in complexion than the average Orlesian.

"Kalian," she called back as she crossed the tavern floor. "And you. Quite the little crew you have here. I think I've seen most of you aro-" at which point that telltale Tevinter accent stalled as she spotted the Qunari in the room.

Atria came to a complete stop and took several fast, sharp breaths, her eyes abruptly wide in reaction. She almost wobbled where she stood before finally, with visible effort, she drew her composure back in. Casting her eyes about, her gaze settled back on Nazri. "*Fasta vass*. Right. Wasn't expecting to see a Vashoth here. Any more of you lads about? No? Just you then?"

Nazri turned towards the new arrival. He was, by now, accustomed to the look he received from her, it was a far too common thing, but it still made him feel unwelcomed. There was nothing he could

do about it though, so continued to his stoic façade.

"There are not more of us," he said in a flat tone. "There is just me."

Not the friendliest response but then Atria wasn't feeling friendly either so she could hardly blame him. That's when she noticed where he stood, part of the people gathered near Kalian. She'd never seen one of the Qunari mingling with those not of the Qun. But he was known to these people. Known to Kalian in particular. The two were close to each other as if they'd just been talking prior to her arrival.

Atria's eyes narrowed. Then she forced a smile. "Never seen one of your people by themselves before. But then you're not, are you? Kalian," she said, changing who she addressed while not taking her eyes off of Nazri. "Why don't you introduce us?"

Sister Elinowy was relieved someone else was concerned at a Qunari being so far from its area. At least the Tevinter Imperium still knew who its enemies were. She watched as the woman gestured to be introduced. This should be interesting.

"Of course. Right. Uh, introductions. This is Nazri, a peaceful visitor to Jader and a guest at the Raven's Roost," said Kalian, nervously. *Andraste's flaming knickers*, he really should have warned his mutual friends. "And this is Atria, who has made her home in Jader for the last, well, several years." Kalian gave a dramatic shrug and pointed to himself. "And as you all know, I'm Kalian. Your foolish friend who invited you all, without any forethought to your... uh... well your different backgrounds, I guess." At least he hadn't invited any Templars...

*Peaceful visitor, eh?* Atria stopped staring at Nazri long enough to give Kalian a good look. It helped, surprisingly. Just...not looking at the Qunari reduced her tension by an order of magnitude. It'd been years since the front, yet just the sight of those horns had brought it all back. But that wasn't Kalian's fault or the fault of his friends and, if she were incredibly charitable, it wasn't Nazri's fault either. Probably. Well, maybe.

"Atria. Welcome to our little group. Katya Charbonnet. Nice to meet you!"

Meeting someone else, someone not quite so triggering, was a welcome relief. "Katya, I think I've seen you around," Atria returned with a good effort at a smile. "Nice to meet you too."

Rhiannon watched the exchange between the two newcomers. This could get ugly quickly if either of the two decided it was in their best interest to relieve the other of their life.

After a quick tense moment, Rhi took her hand off the hilt of one of her hidden blades. The Tevinter woman seemed to take the Qunari in stride, as he took the Tevinter woman in stride as well. Looking around she smiled and spoke. "Well, the mention of food has gotten my stomach a rumbling. I smell a great feast has been prepared by the cook and my lbinê. So let us sit, eat, drink and enjoy the company of friends." With that, she steps forward and looks to both Atria and Nazri, "Why don't

you both join me? I have many many questions for the both of you." She smiles at the both of them as she gestured to two seats with one in the middle. Her smile is warm and genuine.

Kalian relaxed marginally and gave Rhiannon a grateful smile. "Indeed, we wouldn't want to disappoint Cook by not eating the food she has prepared. I count each of you my friends, and I would be honored if we could all sit down together and share a meal."

"Well said old friend. I am hungry!" said Katya.

The qunari had been careful to keep his hands well away from his sword and hadn't bothered to bring his bow. He knew the reputation his people had. He knew that in many cases it was deserved, he knew because he'd been a victim of their collective ire. He had also been on the receiving end of others' judgment of him, simply because of something he had no control over. So he had learned to be careful. He didn't want trouble.

As Rhiannon spoke he sensed some of the friction in the air subside. "I would be delighted," he said as he took a step toward her.

The same seemed true for Atria as well. Rhi's invitation was another pleasant de-escalation. These were friends, people Kalian had known for a good long while, and if she was ever going to come to another one of these, she needed to put forth her best effort. Maker knows it would be amazing to have people who weren't *entirely* her wife's friends to spend time with.

Finally, she took the seat Rhiannon had pointed out to her with a grateful smile. "Food would be nice, thank you. But before questions, an ale first. A wet throat's better for answers than a dry one, don't you think?"

Rhi gave Atria a smile. She pulled out a flask from the top of her boot. "I agree completely." She twists off the top and takes a sip, then extends it to Atria."

While Rhiannon made herself the dwarven buffer between his Tevinter and qunari guests, Kalian looked to Elinowy and Katya. "Please, make yourselves at home. I'll bring out the meal."

"Thank you, Rhiannon," Katya said.

Rhi gave Katya a nod.

Kalian brought out two platters of food, one at a time, and set them on the table. Each platter was laden with three whole chickens, each cut in half, marinated in Antivan spices, and roasted, along with a variety of roasted root vegetables, and fresh bread rolls. Next, he brought a stack of plates and cutlery. Last, of all, he poured tankards of ale for all of his friends except Elinowy, whom he presented with a cup and pot of tea before taking a seat next to her.

Deferentially, Kalian asked, "Elinowy, would you like to give a blessing, or shall I?"

"Would you Elinowy? I would dearly love to hear your blessing!" said Katya.

The Scarlet Sister bowed her head humbly. "My blessings are meaningless, but to speak the words of the Maker is in honor."

Rhi had sat down next to Nazri. She watched as Kalian brought out the food, which smelled so good. She wanted to dig though she waited on the blessing.

Atria's eyebrows went up as she realized the woman who couldn't possibly be a Chantry Sister casually hanging out in a tavern seemed to *actually be a Chantry Sister casually hanging out in a tavern!* But a blessing was a blessing and she'd had years to get used to women doing it.

Elinowy lit the center candle on the table, closed her eyes, and began:

*"My Maker, know our hearts  
Take from us a life of sorrow.  
Lift us from a world of pain.  
Judge us worthy of Your endless pride.*

*My Creator, judge us whole:  
Find us well within Your grace.  
Touch us with fire that we be cleansed.  
Tell us we have sung to Your approval.*

*For You are the fire at the heart of the world,  
And comfort is only Yours to give."*

As she progressed into the blessing her words began to take on a rhythm that grew as she cantered, by the final words the whole experience felt almost musical although spoken. Even those with no interest would notice something beautiful had just happened. Her bard-like abilities brought an atmosphere of comfort and closeness to those who listened.

"Elinowy! That was beautiful. It was even glorious. Thank you for that! The maker must surely flow through you!" Katya said.

"It was indeed lovely," said Kalian, sincerely. Then he grinned and stabbed a chicken leg with his fork, the meat so moist and tender that it pulled easily away from the rest. A heaping spoon of vegetables followed it to his plate. "Let's eat."

Rhi had listened quietly to Elinowy as she had said grace. Rhi wasn't one that followed the Maker though was not one to follow her people's ideals as well. Still listening to the Sister was music to her ears. "Sister Elinowy, very beautiful."

Nazri wasn't particularly a spiritual man, at least not in the human sense. Nevertheless, he thought the prayer had been beautiful. "That was very touching," he said, "Not sure if I believe every word, but it was still nice."

"Elinowy, was it?" Atria asked, seemingly moved and surprised by it. "Thanking you for that blessing might be as meaningless to you as you deem your words. But speaking the words of the Maker is an honor and you brought honor to them. Nice to meet you, by the way. And all of you," she said, glancing about the table. "Kalian and I, well, we go back a bit. First time I've been out with you lot, though. Thanks for having me. Cheers." And she raised her tankard in acknowledgment.

After a long swallow from it, she leaned back slightly in her chair as she took a roll. "Now, easy stuff first. I'm from Tevinter. Qarinus actually. Although I suppose the more common name now is Ventrus. Why they renamed it," Atria shook her head. "Long story. How'd I end up here? Took a ship. Walked. Why am I still here? Met a local girl, Adrienne Tremblay, who swept me off my feet. Married her, actually. We keep the lighthouse down by the water. Why am I out with you lot instead of home with the wife, her two siblings, and their spouses, and their combined half a dozen children doubtlessly running around and having a laugh?" She snickered before taking a swallow of ale, finally finishing with "Now, did I miss any questions? Ask away."

"Honestly Kalian, who don't you know?" Katya shook her head at her old friend. It seemed everybody was an old friend of Kalian.

Rhi was about to ask a couple of questions when the door to the tavern opened. She turned to see who had come in.

Kithris had been out in the woods most of the day. She had finished prepping the pelts she had set out to dry a few days ago. She brought them into the city an hour ago and sold them and was looking for a hot meal. She had been told that the Raven Roost Tavern was a good place to eat.

She made her way to the tavern as the sun started to set, as she got close to the door she could smell the aroma of the food and could hear the sounds of people having a good time. This was what she was looking for. Good food and good people. Unstrung bow in hand, silver on her pouch she made her way in.

As the door closed behind her, Kithris looked over those that were there and spotted someone she had not thought she would have seen. A smile lit up her face as her hazel eyes shown with excitement. "Kalian." Her voice warm and sweet with a musical hint. She made her way over to Kalian, moved to give him a hug.

That voice, calling his name instantly brought to mind summer days and nights in the arms of... Kalian turned to see the beautiful elven woman, familiar but so out of context he was temporarily stunned. The last time he'd seen her was in the forest more than four years ago, when they'd said goodbye. "Kithris!" He opened his arms and hugged her back with warm enthusiasm. "It is so good to see you, Kit."

Rhi had not thought much of the new arrival till this elf woman said Kalian's name and moved to hug him. She was not one to be jealous. Still.

"Kalian, who is your lovely friend?" Katya said. Her eyes lit up as a new beautiful woman came in. An Elf no less. Her voice was very pleasing to Katya's ears.

Kalian broke off the hug with Kithris, his hand lingering on her back until he met Rhiannon's gaze and took a step away from the elf. Heat crept up his throat and spread to his cheeks. "Uh. This is Kithris. She and I are, uh... that is, we met about five years ago, but *I haven't seen her in years.*" The last part was directed a little guiltily to Rhiannon.

"So, um, Kithris, I'd like you to meet some of my friends," continued Kalian, indicating each of them in turn. "This is Katya, Elinowy, Nazri, Atria, and Rhiannon. And, well, Rhi and I are a couple."

Kithris felt Kalian's hand linger a little on her back. She took note of how quickly he stepped away when he looked at the dwarf lady. She followed along giving a smile to all as they were introduced. When the dwarf was introduced and he said that they were a couple, Kit's look lingered on this Rhiannon. "It is nice to meet you all."

Katya chuckled. "Took you long enough to admit it Kalian. Don't know why you hid it for Andraste's sake. She worth bragging over!"

Elinowy watched as the pagan elf walked into the Tavern. This was just splendid, a Tevinter heretic, the godless Qunari beast and now a Dalish heathen. She lifted her tea to take a sip, her eyes rolling slightly as Katya walked up to introduce herself to the she elf. Maker help her, this was going to be an interesting evening.

Rhi didn't take her eyes off of Kithris. When Katya commented that she was worth bragging over, Rhi glanced at Katya and gave her a warm smile. It was only then that what Kalian had said. Out loud. She turned to face him, a warm caring smile shown on her face. "Yes, yes we are."

She took Kithris' hand and kissed it. "Lady Katya Charbonnet at your service lovely lady!"

Kithris looked up at Katya, felt her hand take hers gently. The soft touch of the woman's lips as she kissed her hand. This brought her attention away from both Kalian and Rhi. "Lady Katya Charbonnet, I am Kithris Sabrae. It is a pleasure to meet you." Her voice warm, inviting, with that musical touch.

"A very lovely name Kithris Sabrae! What brings you to Jader? Besides Kalian?" she said with a grin.

Kit looked up at Katya and smiled. "Thank you. You have a beautiful name as well." Her tone was friendly with a touch of curiosity. "I had not thought that Kalian would be here in Jader still. It is nice to see him. As for what brings me to Jader. I was heading back to my clan when I decided to take in

the festival. Had fun and decided to stay a little while. (looks Katya up and down) Glad I did." This past part said softly.

Katya smiled. Things were looking up in the romance department. "Perhaps you would like to join us? I believe there is an empty seat by me."

Rhi felt a bit more relaxed when she noticed the elf seemed distracted by Katya. She hoped that this elf would stay away from Kalian. Otherwise she would have to..... Rhi stopped her thought process and realized that she was jealous. She was jealous. Which meant that her feelings for Kalian were deeper than she realized. Oh she knew that she was starting to fall for him. And after their picnic the other day. Oh the picnic. What they did for dessert brought a very wicked and satisfied grin as her crimson eyes glowed.

Kalian heaved a great sigh of relief at the way Katya and Kithris seemed to be hitting it off. *Maker's breath* Kithris' inopportune arrival could have gone so much worse. He gave Rhiannon a warm smile, the sparkle in her eyes recalled their afternoon together, the soft, firmness of her... *Nope. Nope, not the time to be thinking about that.* Kalian surreptitiously adjusted his trousers and turned toward the commotion at the tavern's door.

Skeld came to a stop by the Raven's Roost, his usual spot in Jader. It had the best mead that he had found this side of the mountains and the food was good. They even had a room that he could fit in; being more than a head taller than most Orlesian men when they wore heels meant that common folk buildings were often just a shade too short for him, at least at the doors. He stooped slightly to enter, but once fully in the common room was able to raise to his full height, which was another thing he liked about the Roost.

A few of the patrons near the door stopped talking to observe him as he entered, as he was accustomed to; Skeld was a man who made an entrance (both figuratively and, if the need arose, *literally*); tall, broad, muscular and carrying three axes, Skeld was aware he stood out. His armour was also of unusual make and marked with the same sorts of runes that lined his skin all over, and how many Orlesians had their *faces* tattooed? It wasn't exactly common in the human lands of Thedas, to begin with. Even his hair was a bit of an oddity; true, they had red hair in the Ferelden lands, but his was like blood or fire, depending on the light.

As he straightened up, the gasps of a couple of patrons was drowned out as he spotted the young man at the bar. "KALIAN!" he bellowed with a laugh, crossing the room quickly to join the man, his accent causing frowns and stares for its own right; loud, yet soft, and tense at the wrong sounds; it didn't sound much like anyone of Thedas, though it was how Skeld had always sounded.

"Uh, Skeld?" Kalian blinked. Two surprise guests in one night. At least Skeld was unlikely to get him in trouble with Rhi. Well... probably. Skeld had been the perfect companion for the man Kalian had been until just a few weeks ago, when he was hiding in plain sight under the Chantry's nose by pretending to be an irresponsible, flirtatious drunkard. But now that he'd outed himself to the Chantry and had vague plans to try and impress Rhiannon's mother and a few others that he really

was a responsible adult, Skeld's reappearance in Jader might not bode well. And yet, how bad could a visit from an old friend be? "Skeld! It is great to see you."

Three tankards of mead!" he said, loudly, as he wrapped his arm around Kalian's shoulders to speak conspiratorially. "Two for me, one for you - we keep drinking like that till at least one of us can't walk! HA! **It is good to see you, my friend!**" he yelled, standing to his full height again and carrying the man up with him in his arm, his body being shaken by the good natured laugh that seemed to echo in the common room.

"I'm the barkeep here, remember? Except when it's my sister or her husband. And just so you know, Tessa is expecting an apology after the last time when you-" Whatever Kalian was going to say was cut off when Skeld hugged him and lifted him into the air. Kalian gasped. "Down. Put. Me. Down. Can't breathe," gasped Kalian.

"Oh no! Skeld! Why now?" Katya said.

Elinowy put her tea cup down on the table as the enormous man rose up in the room. He was quite unique in appearance. Hair nearly as fiery as her own, the Pagan tattoos on his face and runes inscribed in his armor and axes made a strong statement. Studying the man's appearance made her pause. The glyph inscribed on his shoulder she had seen before, she did not know what it meant, but... "By the Maker..." she blurt out. Pagans, beast and elves faded to the back of her mind, the big man had her attention.

Skeld laughed as he placed the smaller man back on his feet, "Oh no, no no - being the barkeep will *not* get you out of drinking with me, my friend! But I suppose, considering you have so many half empty cups," he said, looking around the room, "we can start drinking *properly* a bit later. I'll even apologise to Tessa for the table-"

"Three tables," corrected Kalian. He glanced a little nervously at the back door. Tessa was enjoying a quiet evening in the cottage with the rest of the family. Mondays were *supposed* to be slow, after all. With Skeld here, things could get out of hand fast.

Skeld, chuckled. "-I will apologise to Tessa for the *tables*," he corrected, taking the tankard of mead. "... and whatever else I may or may not have done," he added, with a wink. "So, what is new with you, my friend?"

"I was just having a little gathering with friends," replied Kalian. He made introductions again, gesturing to each of his friends. No doubt Martin was acquainted with Skeld, but he was not there. "I think you know Katya. Elinowy, Kithris, and Nazri are new to Jader. And you might have crossed paths with Atria or Rhiannon." Kalian made a quick decision not to mention his relationship to Rhi. Not because he didn't want to, but because that might trigger Skeld-style stories featuring exaggerated carnal exploits.

Skeld looked to the large group who were nearby; quite the assortment of individuals that easily



stood out from the Orlesian standard. "My friend, I'm wounded - you had a party and didn't invite me?" he asked, his face contorting with mock anguish. The fact that Kalian hadn't known Skeld was anywhere near Jader at the time was no excuse! He squinted, as if peering against the bright sunlight. "That you, Katya?"

"Hello Skeld!" Katya said. He always had the worst timing. Here she was just meeting this gorgeous elf and trying to spark something between them and in comes Skeld. Larger than life and twice as loud and three times as obnoxious! She sighed. It was turning into one of those days!

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OOC: Continued in post 'Haunted Bandit Halls'

## It's Good To Be Nobility

Posted on 30 Oct 2022 @ 6:53pm by [Townfolk The Scholar](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Sharbon-ay\)](#)

**2,645 words; about a 13 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Lady Seryl's Mansion

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 5th

Lady Seryl's home was not only the largest but also the grandest mansion in Jader, and occupied the highest point in Jader's hightown, overlooking the town and the harbor. Soon after the banquet incident, Katya had received a formal invitation, handwritten by Seryl herself, to a private dinner. Even though it was not a long walk, a carriage arrived at Miss Caroline's orphanage to collect Katya and her mother, known by most as Miss Caroline, and bring her to Lady Seryl's home.

Katya had left her armor at home. This was not an occasion for armor and weapons. This was an occasion to dress up and look nice. Which both of them did. Katya had her hair back and had tied it with an ornate hair clasp her mother had given her.

Caroline was beaming at how radiant her daughter looked. She felt so proud of Katya!

On arrival in front of the mansion, a butler opened the carriage door and politely offered his hand first to Katya and then to Caroline to help them out of the carriage. "Please follow me, Lady Charbonnet and Lady Charbonnet. Lady Seryl is expecting you."

That was one thing Katya was still getting used to. She was nobility now. After growing up thinking she was an orphan, to suddenly find out her true identity was rather disconcerting.

The butler escorted Katya and Caroline through the front door, down a hall, and into a sitting room where Lady Seryl sat on a sofa with her hands folded. The butler started to announce Katya and her mother, but Seryl waved him off and reached out a hand. "Now, now. No need to stand on

ceremony," said Seryl. "It is good to see you, Katya. And this must be your mother?"

"Lady Seryl! It is so good to see you again! " She clasped the woman's hands in her own.

"Lady Seryl! We meet at last!" Caroline said.

"Miss Caroline, it is indeed an honor to meet you. For many years now, your orphanage has provided an essential service to the people of Jader, especially our children, and I regret that I did not invite you to my home before now." Lady Seryl took Caroline's hands in hers. "But I'm afraid your father was quite influential, and he forbade recognition of you as nobility or a family member. I feared that challenging him would only make your burden more difficult to bear. Please accept my humble apology for this slight."

"Don't worry about it. Unlike my father, I do not worry about such things, I have an orphanage to run and many children to take care of. I don't have the time to worry about such things!"

The butler returned, and said, "Lady Seryl, dinner is ready to be served." To Caroline and Katya he added, "My ladies, the dining room is this way."

Both women thanked the butler and followed him to the dining room

The butler led them to a large formal dining room, featuring a long table, but with only three prepared place settings. Lady Seryl at the head of the table, and gestured for Katya and Caroline to sit at her right and left. Before they'd even noticed he'd gone, the butler returned with the first course. "Carrot and parsnip soup, my ladies," said the butler.

Lady Seryl sipped bright orange soup from her spoon and said, "Katya, my dear, tell me more about yourself. I understand you help your mother with running the orphanage, and you worked for the city guard for a time."

"Well, yes both are true. I help out when I can at the orphanage as it is still my home. As for the city watch, well I was never truly happy there. You know what happened to the captain. I have always been a protector. I have always stuck up for people who were unable to defend themselves. I hate bullies and whenever I saw kids bullying other kids, I stepped in and gave them what for! One thing about me is I never stop fighting until I can't fight anymore or I have won.

When I grew up I knew I had to support myself. So I joined the city guard. I learned about wielding a sword and wearing armor. That last for the 4 years as I said. Then I struck out on my own as a mercenary, trying to take jobs where I could help people and protect them. At first it was a lot of Guarding caravan type thing but eventually my reputation grew and I became rather well known and more lucrative jobs came in. I like the idea of protecting people. So I help out at the orphanage when I'm not on a job. "

"She gets that from her father." Caroline said. "He was always like that! Katya takes after her father

in many ways! Sometimes when I look into her eyes I see him. He left behind the greatest legacy of all! A daughter who has a big heart and the strength and skill to fight for what's right!"

"I think she must get that from both her parents, Miss Caroline. You may not wield a sword, but to care for so many orphans over the years, you also have the strength and skills to fight for what's right," said Seryl in a tone that was both serious and amused. "Forgive me if this is an indelicate question, but if I may ask, who was Katya's father?"

"Her father was a handsome, caring man named Thomas. A warrior with a big heart. Unfortunately, he died before Katya was born. One of my greatest regrets is that she never knew her father."

"What will you do now that the elder Monsieur Charbonnet has passed?" asked Seryl. "If there is any controversy over his estate, please do not hesitate to call upon me to arbitrate."

"Thank you Lady Seryl. Right now just continue on as always. We will see what happens with his estate. I hope Katya is provided for." Caroline said.

"What about you Mother?"

Caroline shook her head. "I don't care about myself. You are my daughter and the one that I love more than anything. I want you to have something. You deserve it sweetheart!"

Turning to Katya, Lady Seryl said, "With your experience as a member of the city guard and a working citizen of Jader, and your position among the noble families of Jader, I would very much like to call upon you as an adviser. I have a trusted solicitor looking through our ex-Guard Captain's records, and in a few days I hope to have assembled a roster of potential replacement candidates. Corrupt though she was, Landry managed to keep the peace in Jader. Now that the city guard is short-handed, and we've no captain to hire more, I have received some disturbing reports of criminal activity."

Katya's eyes went wide. "I..um ..wow! I accept! How can I say no?"

"Thank you, Katya. It is such a relief to know that I can call upon your knowledge and experience when I need advice," said Seryl. "I expect to make a decision about the next Guard Captain in a week or two, and I do look forward to your help reviewing the candidates."

"It would be an honor Lady Seryl! I think there maybe some worthy candidates in there and perhaps some might deserve some advancements. "

"As I was saying..., I received news of criminals preying upon travelers on the Imperial Highway. As I'm sure you are aware, it is an ongoing problem of our times, unfortunately. The city guard always recommends that traders hire mercenary guards, and those who can't afford guards travel in groups. It seems there is a new group of bandits who were preying on Summerday visitors as they arrived, and presumably as they return home. The last wagon of would-be victims successfully

fought off the criminals and gave chase, but claimed the bandits disappeared into a fog."

"Now that is intriguing. Hmm smell of magic to me. Highwaymen and magic. A bad combination. I take it you'd like somebody to investigate and deal with the problem?" Katya said with a knowing grin

"Katya dear don't be rude!" Her mother said.

"Oh please mother. It's obvious she needs help in this matter and I am glad to offer my services and talk to my friends and see if they will help!" Katya replied.

"Miss Caroline your sense of propriety is impeccable, but let us not stand on formalities," said Seryl. "Now Katya, you must not put yourself in danger, of course. It seems very wise of you to enlist the help of your, shall we say, *unconventional* band of associates, to investigate. I must confess that I am rather curious. Landry referred to them in one of her reports in quite scathing terms, though she has proven to be quite disreputable." Seryl smiled at Katya expectantly, hoping to hear more about her friends.

"Ahh well never been very good at formal niceties. Anyway, Yes they are rather unconventional. Kalian I've known the longest and best. We met during the last blight. He helped me get the children to the orphanage. Most were pretty scared! All of the ones we rescued had lost family to the blight and were all alone."

"Kalian is an interesting guy. He is a mage. I don't see any point and denying that anymore. He has a big heart and is quite brave. His sister own's the Raven's Roost! I guess you could call it out hangout." Katya said with a chuckle. "He is also an excellent hunter. We've gone hunting many times together."

"Then we have Rhiannon. A dwarf and a valiant ally and friend. Daughter of the Captain of the *Night's Kiss*. One of the foremost trading ships around. She and Kalian are definitely in a romantic relationship although they have yet to admit it. It's pretty obvious. She is an extremely capable woman. She is a cunning warrior. We really hit it off. She's a good friend."

"Then we have Elinowy." Her face seemed to light up when she started talking about Elinowy. "Easily the most beautiful of the bunch. A sister of the Chantry, much to my dismay. Oh well. Still she is quite charming and is devoted to the Chantry. She is smart and such a beautiful spirit. She is truly amazing. She is patient and knowledgeable about many things. She lights up a room just by being in it!"

Lady Seryl listened with rapt attention to Katya talk about her friends. It was clear that Katya had romantic feelings for the Chantry sister that were perhaps unrequited. Seryl was comfortable with the years she had lived, but just at that moment regretted she was closer in age to Katya's mother Caroline. She patted Katya's hand sympathetically. "My dear, you have all of those qualities you see in your friends and more. Plus you are yourself quite lovely."

Katya blushed. "Thank you Lady Seryl. I appreciate that! I try! Mother raised me to be a good person and protecting the weak, well from what Mother says, that comes from my father! I keep hoping to meet the right woman. I try to be patient but I admit, I get lonely sometimes. Still, all in all my life is pretty darn good. I do have friends and family and I like what I do. All in all not too bad!" She had always thought lady seryl a beautiful woman for her age.

"Sweetheart, I know there is someone out there for you! You have so many wonderful qualities! You will find the right lady! I know you will!" Caroline said.

"I'm sure the right person will come along when you least expect her," said Seryl confidently. "And I will expect you to introduce me."

The butler cleared their soup bowls away, and served the main course, slices of roast pork and baked potato with gravy and butter served on the side.

"I do hope you're hungry," said Lady Seryl, "bon appétit!"

Caroline looked at her daughter. "Well Lady Seryl, if you really wanted to curry Katya's favor, you served the perfect thing. She loves pork roast!"

"Oh boy do I ever!" Katya said as she tried not to drool. "Especially when you make it mother but this smells almost as good."

Caroline was glad her daughter was enjoying herself. Katya was a little rough on the social graces but she had never really had to use them until now. Still all in all she was doing alright. "So you know a lot about us but what about you Lady Seryl? I'm afraid neither one of us has been keeping up with politics or anything like that so why don't you tell us a little about you?" Caroline said.

"Oh yes please. I really don't know much about you and well since we are going to be working together, I'd like to know the woman behind the title."

"You want to know about me?" Seryl gave an amused, self-deprecating laugh. "Well, dear, let me think. I was born right here in Jader, in this very house. Jader is my home, and I would do whatever it takes to care for her people."

"Back when Ferelden won its independence from Orlais and cast Orlesians out, I was a girl of only eleven summers, but it made an impression on me. Many wealthy Orlesian families who moved to Ferelden lost their fortunes, and their noble status. We hosted some of them for a time, my father called them refugees." Seryl shook her head. "Spoiled and entitled. Nothing like the refugees from the Blight, as you will remember. It was such a difficult time, I don't know what Jader would have done without Mother Giselle. And still the Ferelden refugee encampment persists, though the situation is better now with the silverite mine in operation."

"Empress Celene has stayed here, you know. Before she was empress. She accompanied her father

on hunting trips. Such an intelligent and witty young woman. She has brought civility and enlightenment to Orlais, and I have always been deeply loyal to her." Seryl smiled, conspiratorially. "Which could be why I still govern Jader."

"I understand. I too love Jader. This where my friends and family are. I would not want to leave her permanently. I have traveled for jobs but this,,," she made a sweeping gesture with her hand, "This city is my heart and I will do everything in my power to protect it!" Katya said

"So when do you want to get started on the selection of the new Guard captain? Maybe within the next few days we can meet and start things moving?"

"The sooner the better, although of course first we must have suitable applicants to choose from, and that may take some time. Perhaps after you look into that bandit issue." Lady Seryl smiled at Katya and her mother. "My dear, I am so looking forward to working with you, and having an honest and trustworthy young person to rely upon."

Katya smiled. "Thank you. I appreciate the compliment. I am looking forward to working with you as well. I will ask my friends tomorrow if they will help with the bandits. The sooner the better. I hate those that prey upon the weak and helpless. One way or another they will be dealt with!"

"Excellent, my dear," said Lady Seryl. "After our meal I'll fetch a map for you from my office. The approximate locations of the bandit attacks are marked, so you'll have an idea of where to look. It does appear the bandits have targeted a region around the Imperial Highway about half-a-day's walk northwest of Jader."

"Excellent. That sounds like a great way to start!" Katya.

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## Haunted Bandit Halls

Posted on 08 Nov 2022 @ 5:15pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Warrior Skeld](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Rogue Nazri Arisant](#)

**2,349 words; about a 12 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 6th, after post 'Who You Gonna Call?'

"Ok gang, now that we have eaten, I have news. I have talked to Lady Seryl and she has appointed me as one of her advisors. I will be consulting about the city guard. Especially the appointment of a new guard captain!" Katya said.

"Congratulations," replied Kalian, raising his tankard in toast. She had the ear of the most respected noble in Jader, quite an advantage, but also a significant responsibility. "It won't be easy to replace Landry. Even if she was corrupt, she kept it well hidden, and many of the guardsmen respected her. I know Martin did."

"Yes, I admit I never liked the woman but she did a good job keeping the underworld in line. I was disappointed when she was exposed as an accomplice in a murder attempt on Mother Giselle. It will be a hard job but we will find the right person for the job! Oh, and by the way, there is a bandit problem she'd like us to take care of. I told her I couldn't guarantee anything but I would certainly ask." Katya said

Rhi had done her best to keep the Qunari and the Tevinter occupied by asking about their homes. She had been to Tevinter when she was very young. She had only seen the port but had never left the ship. As for the name of the city she thought it was Karats or Carastes. She was not sure. After dinner, Katya spoke up and said that she had been appointed as an advisor to this Lady Seryl. She had heard of this noble, her mother has had dealings with her a few years ago. She will have to talk to her mother about her. "Very well done Katya. Very well done."

"Thank you Rhiannon!" Katya said and smiled at her friend.

Kithris had sat next to Katya for dinner. She liked this woman. Blunt, which Kit found refreshing. She would occasionally glance at Kalian and then see the dwarf woman Rhiannon looking her way. Not in a jealous way, well not that she could tell. The woman had a great Wicked Grace face. Cards with her was a definite no. She let the woman know that she was not interested in Kalian by giving her a slight nod of stepping back. The woman gave a flash of a wicked mischievous grin before returning the nod.

After dinner, she gave Kalian a nod about more drink. Though when Katya spoke up about becoming an advisor to some noblewoman. "Well, that is wonderful." As she reached out to take Katya's hand in hers. When Katya continued and said that there might be some work taking out some bandits. Kit looked away briefly as her eyes flashed green as a streak of anger ran through her. When she stuffed the feelings down she looked back to Katya, "Count me in."

Katya smiled at Kithris "I didn't want to speak for you but I would very much enjoy having you along Kithris." Katya said with a smile.

"Anyone need another drink?" asked Kalian, playing his part as host.

"Yes please Kalian!" Katya said.

"**Mead!**" Skeld cried with enthusiasm, holding out his tankard, looking over to Katya. "Count me in for the bandits, too; you know *I'm* always up for a fight, and someone has to make you look good to the boss!" he laughed, catching her glare. "Congratulations, Katya! You'll do a good job as Seryl's new advisor - just don't lose your sword arm to the pen; you're too good to not be in the fight!" he added, clapping her shoulder.

Begonia Baudelaire, dressed well but appropriately for the rustic venue, entered the tavern with a kind of hopeful skepticism. It had been a long, exhausting, and even horrifying day. She had taken a room at the Thistle of Jader Inn, but everyone she'd spoken with had urged her to come to the Raven's Roost tavern to find help, so here she was.

Kalian turned toward the door at the new guest's arrival and grimaced at her fancy attire. For a slow Monday, they sure were busy. "Good day, Mademoiselle! How may I help you? I could prepare a pot of tea..."

"Antivan Brandy, if you have it. Top shelf," said Begonia. Whether because her appearance was unusual, or because of a serendipitous lull in conversation, her next words carried across the common room with clear articulation. "I need to hire some brave souls. The mansion I purchased seems to be haunted." Begonia took a seat at a table near the fire and stared at the other patrons. It was an unusually diverse group.

Nazri had just finished his fourth whiskey or was it his fifth, he couldn't remember exactly. He wasn't drunk, not by a long shot, but he wasn't sober either. He'd been getting along okay. but his reserves were starting to dip below what he considered to be an acceptable level of risk. The prospect of money caused his head to turn.

~Haunted,~ he thought to himself,~Not sure how I feel about spirits and things that supposedly go bump in the night, but I'm a qunari, I can deal with those things, especially with my particular brand of magic.

Standing to his feet, perhaps a bit too quickly, reminded him his current whiskey should probably be his last. After gathering himself, Nazri moved toward the well dressed woman, "Haunted you say? In what way?"

Well now! "That's interesting Mademoiselle. I think I speak for my friends in saying we would like to hear more!" Katya said.

Kalian returned with a bottle he'd had to dust off, set a glass on the table in front of the woman, and poured.

Begonia tossed the whole glass back in one go, relishing the fiery goodness. It was just what she



needed. She motioned for the young man to refill it, but sipped this time, her eyes straying to the qunari's horns. "My name is Begonia Baudelaire, I'm from Val Royeaux. I purchased a mansion, a great house, outside Jader. It was disclosed to me in advance that the mansion was in quite poor condition, so I hired workmen and a wagon, and we drove out there early this morning to visit the property and assess the needed repairs."

"When we got there, all seemed much as I expected. The gardens were overgrown and taken over by weeds, windows boarded up, but the stone structure appeared solid. It all went wrong when I opened the front door and the foreman and I went inside." Begonia took a gulp of the brandy. "It was dark, and then we saw a... a corpse. Walking! Down the hallway right towards us!" She shuddered and emptied the glass, starting to feel better now that the alcohol was taking effect and she was telling the story to people who seemed to believe her. "We ran. Got back in the wagon and hurried back to Jader as fast as we could go."

"Fascinating. It may be haunted or someone is tricking you. What do all of you think? Kalian? Rhiannon? Elinowy?" asked Katya.

"Don't forget Skeld," the big man laughed, draining his cup. He looked the woman up and down quickly, appraisingly. There'd be coin in sorting such a problem; and while he wasn't desperate for it at the moment, Skeld was not one to pass up good coin when it came along.

Kit had never dealt with undead but the thought did not bother her. For her, it came down to putting them back in the ground so that they will rest in peace. She will keep her opinion to herself for now. She looked to Katya to see where she stood on this.

Rhi listened to this Baudelaire woman. She shook her head slightly at the thought of a walking corpse. "Walking corpse." Her voice low, she took out her flask and took a swallow. She then looked up and around the table. "I for one am not a fan of the walking dead. I have never personally dealt with one though there are plenty of sea stories about them. Our quartermaster has told me a few. One of which he says he was a part of. Says that is why he has that strip of white hair on his head and his one eye is white. He's not blind it just turned white. The stories though, they never end well." She paused for a moment and for those around her, they may not notice but Kalian probably would. She took another swallow from her flask and as she was putting it away her hand had a small shake to it.

Kalian heard the trepidation in Rhiannon's voice and moved to stand behind her. He rested a hand on her shoulder in a way he hoped was comforting.

Rhi looked up at Kalian when he rested his hand on her shoulder. Her crimson eyes lighting up as she calmed down. Giving Kalian a warm smile as she placed her hand on his.

Nazri furrowed his brow as he heard the report about the walking dead. He couldn't rule out the supernatural, he wouldn't rule out the supernatural. After all, he did not only believe in magic, he practiced it, or at least he used it when the need arose. So, it was a rather small logical leap to

believe there was unexplained phenomenon that was truly unexplained. Still, he was a bit skeptical about the mansion being haunted by something from the supernatural realm. He suspected that the source might be natural.

Still, he wasn't ruling out any possibilities. "Did you get a good look at it?" he asked, "can you describe it?"

Begonia shuddered. "It was a dead person. A human woman, with gaping holes in the leather armor, and the stench..." She shuddered again. "Definitely dead."

Kalian rubbed his chin distractedly. "That corpse *could* have been possessed by a demon, if the proper rites and cremation were not performed." Possession of dead bodies was, after all, the practical reason Andrastrians burned their dead. He hesitated, looking from Elinowy to Atria, then added, "It's also possible that blood magic is involved, though I wouldn't want to jump to conclusions."

Skeld had listened, nursing his drink slightly as he did so. He shrugged, suddenly. "I've fought undead many times. Hit them hard enough and all that's left is on the walls."

The conversation for the evening had taken a decidedly dark turn. The scarlet sister looked thoughtfully at the noble woman. "Were any of you harmed? Or even touched? You should have been examined by the clergy upon your return. It would be unlike a demonspawn or the truly dark creatures to have let you escape so easily. This merits investigation. I can summon the Templars."

"I agree Elinowy. Let the templars look at it and see what is going on. I did promise Lady Seryl I would take care of the bandits as soon as I could so I would like to deal with that first. Then if the house still merits investigation, we can certainly do that!" Katya said.

"Blood Magic," said Begonia in a hushed tone. "I suppose we were lucky to escape. No one among my group of workers attempted to engage it, we all just ran away."

Kalian had cringed at Elinowy's recommendation to summon Templars, but... "My status as an apostate has recently been made public. However, contrary to popular belief, apostates and blood mages are not the same thing. I don't know any blood magic spells, nor would I want to. So, I agree with Elinowy that we should notify the templars. But I think we should investigate as well. There are a good number of us, perhaps we can look into both the bandits and the haunted house."

Rhi gave Elinowy a look when the sister mentioned the Templars. When Kalian agreed with Elinowy, she looked up at Kalian with that, are you sure look.

Kalian caught Rhiannon's look, and shrugged. He wasn't sure about associating with Templars, but he just might have to anyway.

"I'm willing to offer a substantial reward for clearing the undead from my mansion," said Begonia

hastily. This group was unconventional, but certainly looked like they could get the job done. She took a piece of parchment from her pocket. "The location is marked on this map. Can you go in the morning?"

Katya looked at the map and immediately the wheels began to turn on her head. "Well, now that is interesting. M'selle, it appears your mansion is where the bandits we are hunting are reported. We think their base of operations is right in that area. Maybe a coincidence but maybe not. Alright my friends, it seems that we can do both. Elinowy, go ahead and inform the templars. We might need their help. However, if my suspicions are correct, we just might kill two birds with one stone. So what say we leave tomorrow morning and investigate this mansion?"

Kit moved to the map, stood next to Katya, as she looked it over. When Katya got done, Kit gave the women a smile. She liked this woman. "You can count me in. Though I would prefer to stay away from the Templars."

Kalian understood Kithris' Templar-avoidance sentiment, Kit was a Dalish Keeper's first. Or was she a Keeper now? He'd have to ask. "We can all meet here first thing in the morning, eat breakfast, then set off."

Rhi had looked up at Kalian when he mentioned meeting here in the morning. She shifted to stand in front of him, looked up at him and grinned. Speaking softly but loud enough for him to hear. "Thought I could stay here.....with you."

Kalian took both of Rhiannon's hands, and smiled at her. "I'd really like that. Is there anything you need from the *Night's Kiss* for tomorrow? You look amazing in that outfit, but I'll worry about you a little less if you're wearing your armor, and weapons."

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## Those Meddling Adventurers

Posted on 22 Nov 2022 @ 10:02am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Warrior Skeld](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Rogue Nazri Arisant](#) & [Mage Kithris Sabrae](#)

**5,001 words; about a 25 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost Tavern

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 7th, after post 'Haunted Bandit Halls'

It was just before dawn. Kalian yawned, belatedly remembering to cover his mouth as Cook spooned cooked sausages from a huge cast-iron frying pan. "Cook those smell delicious. Cumberland sausage, my favorite." He reached for one.

Tessa slapped his hand away and began moving the crisp, juicy sausages to a serving plate. "Make yourself useful and set out the dishes, cutlery, and that bowl of oranges. The bakery delivery should be here any time." She paused in her work and gave him a worried frown. "Promise you'll be careful today?"

Kalian resisted the urge to tease his sister and said only, "Promise." He began to set up for breakfast in the common room, served buffet-style *every* morning at the Raven's Roost, but today there would be extra people because his friends were gathering here before their adventure.

Rhiannon spent the night with him, and it was just... incredible. By all rights, he should be exhausted this morning, but he'd also had the best night's sleep in a long while. But really the most excellent part had been waking up with Rhi in his arms. Kalian had been reluctant to leave her there, but with a soft kiss he'd gotten up to help with morning preparations.

Nazri and Skeld had spent the night in their rooms upstairs. Kalian opened the tavern's front door in anticipation of Katya, Kithris, and Atria's arrival, and maybe to listen for Elinowy singing her morning adulation. Right there in front of the door, stopped on the road, was a large wagon pulled by two horses. The driver, a young stable-hand Kalian recognized, climbed out of the seat and said, "Mademoiselle Baudelaire rented this for you. Take care of the horses." She gave him a hard, *or else* stare, then walked away toward the stables.

Katya arrived at the tavern, which was fast becoming one of her favorite places. This had become their gathering place. Of course, now that Kithris seemed to have entered her life, well it felt like everything was coming together for Katya. It seems the lovely elf was romantically inclined towards Katya and Katya most decidedly felt the same way. She greeted Kalian as usual. "Morning Kalian. How fare you this morning?" She smelled the breakfast and was more than ready to dig in and have a hearty breakfast. One thing Katya could do is eat. She loved to eat. her mother had done her best to keep them all fed and Katya had done her bit with hunting when she could but still, there were times when her appetite was not satisfied. She tried not to complain but as an adult, she ate whenever she could and liked a good sizable meal. After all, sometimes you just don't know where your next meal was coming from. Her horse was waiting outside as usual.

Nazri was a bit disappointed that he had awakened yet again, alone in a bed. It had been a while since he'd woken beside another person. But he quickly, put that thought out of his head. It wouldn't do any good to dwell on that particular issue at the moment. He had more pressing issues to deal with. He had a job to do, and he had a man to find.

But first things first, after morning ablutions, he went down to the common room to find himself some breakfast.

The pale light of the dawn was creeping into the sky above Jader. Elinowy made her way through the darkened streets, having left a note for Martin on the kitchen counter that she was meeting with Kalian and several other companions to investigate some possible bandits and maybe the Blood Mage the Revered Mother had told her about. Martin had not been at home much lately. Elinowy

had been helping with caring for the children. She knew he had many concerns with the changes in the Guard. It was the least she could do for him allowing her to stay on a warm pile of blankets in the main room.

Elinowy could just see the lights of the Raven's Roost in the distance. To the east, she could see the first rays of the sun coming over the horizon. She had a duty to do. She put down her kit of medicinal herbs and turned to face the rising sun. Her feet spread evenly apart as her shoulders. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

"You who stand before the gates,  
You who have followed me into the heart of evil,  
The fear of death is in your eyes; its hand is upon your throat.  
Raise your voices to the heavens! Remember:  
Not alone do we stand on the field of battle.

"The Maker is with us! His Light shall be our banner,  
And we shall bear it through the gates of that city and deliver it  
To our brothers and sisters awaiting their freedom within those walls,  
At last, the Light shall shine upon all of creation,  
If we are only strong enough to carry it."

Her body flowed through the practiced forms with a high degree of mastery. At once graceful but equally a deliberate exercise in movement and force through her body. With the completion of her recital, the full corona of the sun was climbing in the morning sky. The scent of warm sausages was on the breeze. Elinowy smiled. Tessa had been busy this morning. She gave one final prayer of praise to the Maker and turned back toward the Roost.

Rhiannon had gone back to the Nights Kiss to grab her weapon, shield, and her armor. Along with a couple of risqué things for the night. Once she returned she put them in Kalian's room and then came out to finish up the night with everyone. After everyone had gone or gone to bed, she followed Kalian to bed.

Rhi had woken to the sun peeking through the shade in Kalian's room. It took her a moment to remember where she was at. When she did a warm wicked smile crossed her face. Oh, what a night. She had not thought that Kalian could outdo their first time together, but he gave her a run for her money. She had felt him get up a short time ago, even felt him stroke her side and kiss her cheek. She smiled and murmured something about being up in a few and how she had a wonderful night.

Stretching, Rhi finally moved and got up. She quickly washed up from the basin, threw on her gear, and headed out the door. Her hair a mess she walked into the common room to find Katya and Nazri. "Morning you two. (sniffs the air) That smells delicious."

Kithris had wanted to stay the nights at the tavern and had wanted to get to know Katya more. That

was a woman. Kit's mind wandered picturing the tall woman with curves in all the right places. If she had not had to go back to her camp she would have seen if Katya would have..... Kit shook her head as she made her way back to the tavern.

As she approached the tavern Kit could smell the food. "Smells good," she said out loud as she opened the door and stepped in. Looking around she spotted Nazri, Rhiannon, and Katya. She looked the woman up and down and gave her a semi-shy, yet warm smile. Without realizing it, her right hand briefly glowed green. "Morning everyone. Katya." She did notice out of the corner of her eyes, Rhi. A grin crossed her face. "Well, it looks like someone had a fun night."

It took Rhi a moment to realize what Kit was talking about. Actually, it was only because Kit motioned to her hair. A quick blush flashed over the dwarf's face. With a mischievous tone, "Yes, very much fun."

"Hello, Kithris!" The blonde made her heart race. Her beauty, well simply put she was stunning. She took Kit's hand and kissed it. "You are lovely this morning." She gazed into the beautiful eyes. Yes, this felt right. She did manage to notice Rhi. "Well fun huh? Well good for both of you!" She again looked at Kit and smiled.

Kit's warm shy smile flashed across her face when Katya took her hand and kissed it. She could feel the heat rise in her face when Katya looked at her. She barely heard Katya say something to Rhi. As Katya held her hand Kit moved slightly closer. "You look beautiful as well." Her voice was a little low yet had a matter-of-factness to it, all the while with that musical tone to it.

Rhi searched her pouch for the small mirror to see how bad her hair was. It was bad. Oh so bad. She realized that there was no hope in fixing it now, other than putting it in a ponytail. Which she does. Looking back to the three there she smiled. "I would say that it was very good for both of us. (grin) Anyone seen Kalian?"

'Oh, he is here somewhere." Katya said in a distracted tone of voice. Kit had her full attention. She found herself moving closer to Kit. Her hand went up to the side of Kit's face, brushing her hair and before she knew it, she had leaned in and was kissing Kit. She tasted very nice.

Kit had heard Rhi but Kalian's location was not a pressing matter at this moment. As Katya took her hand, raised it to brush her hair aside. Kit felt Katya's hand, warm, strong yet there was a softness. Her heart began to beat faster as she looked up at Katya. Feeling this woman so close to her, Kit's nervousness fell away as she lifted her head. Then the kiss. Oh, the kiss. This woman knew how.

It was a brief kiss though it was long enough for Kit to know that she wanted to get to know this woman. When they parted Kit looked up and smiled. "I wasn't expecting that. Expecting or not I liked it very much." Soft and musical tone.

Katya smiled. "Well, I admit it was an impulse but I really enjoyed kissing you very much." Oh yes, Kit knew how to kiss. It was so very nice and she was so beautiful.

Outside the tavern, Kalian greeted the baker's apprentice making his delivery, then staggered inside under the weight of several trays of baked goods just in time to see Katya and Kithris locked in a battle of lips and tongues. Fortuitous for him to be spared any romantic complication, but also great for both of his friends. "Wow, you two. I'm glad to see you starting the morning with, uh, so much enthusiasm."

"Enthusiasm. That's one word for it." she continued to look into Kit's lovely eyes. She couldn't help but smile.

Kit glanced at Kalian then back up at Katya. "Very much so." She smiled back batting her eyes.

Kalian put the baked goods down on the table. If Rhiannon was still in bed, maybe he could... but then he saw her, hair in a somewhat haphazard ponytail. Kalian sat on a chair next to her and said, "You look gorgeous this morning, Rhi." Then he whispered in her ear, "The only way you could look better is if you were still in my bed."

Rhiannon felt the warmth of Kalian's breath over her ear. It sent a shiver down her spine. If they had not had plans for today, she would take him back to bed. She grinned and leaned in to whisper, "Keep whispering and I will take you back to bed." Her breath warm as she gave a quick peck on his cheek.

Looking around, Kalian saw that Nazri was also awake, and eating breakfast. "Nazri, did you sleep well? Do you have everything you need for today?"

Nazri nodded at Kalian, "Yes," he said with an easy and relaxed smile. He took a sip of tea and wiped his mouth. "The food here is good, as usual."

"I think I have everything I need. At least for now."

"Serah Baudelaire sent a wagon so we don't have to walk. It's waiting outside. Has anyone seen Skeld?" asked Kalian of his friends. "He did drink quite a bit last night... but he drinks a lot every night." And day. He wondered if he should bang on the large man's door to wake him.

"This is true. If you plan to wake him, proceed with extreme Caution!" Katya warned

From what Kit had seen of this man Skeld last night, she would agree with Katya about proceeding with extreme caution upon waking him.

"Elinowy and Atria should be here soon. Everyone get some breakfast. I have a feeling this is going to be a long day." Kalian wondered if Elinowy had been able to send a message to Mother Giselle, to get a templar assigned to help them, in case they did encounter a blood mage.

"I'm sure she did. After all, Elinowy was one of the ones who saved Mother Giselle's life!" Katya said.

"A templar could be useful on this mission." She looked at Kit again and said "So, shall we partake of some breakfast?" She offered her arm to Kit. It was but a short way to the table but still, manners were manners.

As if responding to her name, the scarlet sister flowed through the front doors of the Inn. "The Maker bless this house and all in this glorious day," she said in greeting. She moved toward the banquet table and took up a cup of tea. "I made inquiry of Mother Giselle to request a Templar to our undertakings. She said she would see what she could arrange. I asked that they report here if they were available, but I did not see one outside."

"There she is. Good morning Elinowy!"

Kalian grinned at his lovely friend, the Chantry sister. "Thank you, Elinowy. If we have to confront a blood mage, having someone along with a templar's skills will be a definite advantage." He just hoped that whoever Giselle sent shared the Revered Mother's tolerance of mages.

At the mention of Templars, Kit glanced at Kalian. She knew as well as him that any Templar involvement could spell trouble for the both of them. Still, with Kalian's help in saving Mother Giselle, he has a better chance of not being taken to the tower. She will have to take care in showing any sort of magic. Her thoughts were interrupted when Katya gave her her arm and asked if about partaking in breakfast. Taking Katya's arm her nerves calmed a bit. "Yes, yes that would be very nice." That hint of nerves underlying the musical tone.

Katya escorted Kit to the table and pulled out a chair for her.

Martin pushed the door of the Raven's Roost for the first time in days, only to stop dead in his tracks on the threshold. *Go meet the group of adventurers getting ready to investigate potential banditry and blood magic*, he'd been told. He hadn't expected there to be such a large group though; and especially not such a diverse crowd as this.

His eyes stopped on the Qunari first. He was hard to miss, what with the horns and all, but being engaged in such a mundane activity as eating breakfast made him look significantly less intimidating. Was he part of the group headed to the haunted mansion? He did appear to be on friendly terms with everyone else.

After a pause, Martin stepped inside and closed the door behind him, and crossed over the room to greet Kalian and his other friends. Hopefully, they wouldn't mind him tagging along instead of a Templar escort.

"Good morning, Kalian, Rhiannon - " He paused when he saw how close the two were sitting, and filed the information for later consideration. He had been so busy after the guard captain had been arrested that he hadn't really had time to keep up with his friends, and clearly *some* things had happened. "Sorry to just barge in. I heard that you're just about to meddle with dangerous bandits, blood mages, and rumor has it a dragon is involved," he grinned at the gross exaggeration he was



indulging in. "I want in."

Rhi looked over when the door to the Roost was open. Her face lit up at the sight of Martin. For her, Martin had proved himself in battle and in being a person she could trust. This meant that he was family. Giving Kalian a quick look, as if to say I am yours, she made her way over to Martin as he was talking. When he was done she quickly gave him a hug, picking him up a little, "You my friend, have been away for too long. We have missed you." Putting him down she let go and looked up at him. "Dragons you stay. Well, that would be fun."

Kalian smiled fondly at the way Rhi hugged their mutual friend. He was pretty sure Rhi's remark about Dragons being fun was just teasing. "Martin! It's good to see you. You're just in time. Help yourself to some breakfast."

"Well, Martin. Good to see you again. Glad you could get away!" Katya said.

Kit had noticed the door open and a man walk in. She looked him over and it took a moment to remember that she had seen him before. During the festival, she had seen him with the guards. When he said hello to Kalian and Rhi, Kit figured he must be a friend. Her curiosity peaked a little at the mention of a dragon.

Nazri looked up from the biscuits and gravy he'd been eating at the new arrival. From the others' reactions, he wasn't a stranger or a quest. He had to be a regular of some kind. Nazri found him youthfully handsome and wondered who he was.

"Whoah there," Martin laughed as Rhiannon picked him up with an ease that belied her size. "I'm glad to see you too. Sorry I haven't been around much. Things have been..." he grimaced and waved a hand in frustration as the right word eluded him. "...hectic, I guess."

The past few days had involved a lot of reorganizing and of going through all the paperwork to see just how deep the Guard Captain's betrayal had run. Without a replacement as of yet, the responsibility of handling everything had fallen upon the shoulders of a few men and women who were deemed trustworthy. Martin was honored to be counted amongst them, but between all the tensions and mistrust, the atmosphere at the Guard station had been thicker than Fereldan porridge and left an aftertaste just as bitter.

After all that it was nice to be back amongst friends, without second thoughts, agendas, rumor-mongering or back-stabbing.

"I see you have new friends?" Martin said. "I know Katya," he dipped his head to her in a courteous salute, "but I don't think we've ever met?" he looked at the elf and the Qunari. The elf definitely didn't look like a city elf. Dalish then? Although she was short and slight there was a confidence to her demeanour that suggested she was not easily intimidated.

The Qunari was hard to peg too. He was... well, short may not be the right word, but certainly less

massive than one would expect. And indisputably very handsome.

"Martin, meet Kithris. You might say she is the newest member of the group. Kit Meet Martin. He's with the City Guard." Again Katya smiled at Kit.

Nazri carefully wiped his mouth with a napkin. It was a new habit for him. Had he still been back home, he would have just used his hand, or maybe his lips if he bothered at all. But he had gotten used to the new culture or was getting used to it at any rate, and mostly knew the right thing to do in polite society.

He stood to his feet then and moved close to Kit and Katya, and not uncoincidentally, the newcomer. Normally pretty shy, Nazari wouldn't be bold enough to introduce himself to a stranger. But, it was obvious that the man was well known in the city. It almost seemed impolite to ignore him. At the same time, he wasn't going to interrupt the current proceedings.

Kalian looked from the ex-templar city guard to the qunari mercenary, aware they had already noticed each other. "Nazri, this is my friend Martin. And Martin, this is my new friend Nazri who is staying here at the Raven for a few days."

The qunari dipped his head slightly then extended his hand in the human form of greeting. "Hello, it's good to meet you. What brings you back home?"

Martin took Nazri's hand and smiled as he shook it. "Pleasure's mine. I was never really gone, just very busy. We've had a bit of a crisis here, you may have heard some of the rumours, but we're handling it. Now it's all back under control so I was able to free up some time. Actually," he glanced at Kalian,

"Mother Giselle suggested I might join you after she received Elinowy's report." Turning his attention back to Nazri he added, "What about you? What brings you to Jader?"

While not unheard of it was unusual to come across lone Qunaris, even in a port city and commercial hub like Jader.

"I've come looking for a man," the Qunari said his expression deadpan. Then, his left brow quirked as he realized how that might have sounded. "a man that can verify a story I've been told is in your fair city. Unfortunately, I don't know much about him, except that he is old."

"That... is not much to go on," Martin observed, amused. "We do have quite a few elderly citizens in Jader. But you've come to the right place at least, Kalian knows everyone in Jader, or close enough. Either way, if you're coming with us I guess the search will have to be postponed." He looked back at Kalian. "Is this everyone then?"

"Skeld was planning to come with us, I think he's still sleeping upstairs," said Kalian. He glanced toward the stairs to the second floor, wondering if he should wake the man. He was pretty sure the

large man made a habit of spending at least one night in the guardhouse at every visit to Jader. "Do you know Skeld, Martin?"

"Skeld?" Martin scrunched his face in concentration. "Uh. Big fella? With scars and lots of hair? I think I've seen him around but I can't say we're acquainted. Why is he involved, anyway?"

Skeld. The big man had been on Elinowy's mind constantly since their first meeting. She was pleased he would be joining their group. While gruff and reckless, she knew that he likely held the key for unlocking many mysteries she could not find answers for from Mother Giselle or any in the Chantry, at least none that had come forward yet. The Maker had something in mind throwing them together like this. She was eager to discover what.

Rhi had moved back to the table and sat down. She listened quietly as Martin spoke. At the mention of Skeld, she smiled. She liked the big man. One of only a few that could keep up with her drink for drink. Of she didn't know any better, he might even be able to out drink her. Either way, the smell of breakfast was calling to her, so she got up, made her way to find Tess and help her bring everything out to the table.

Kit listened to Martin though her attention kept returning to Katya. Like Rhi, the mention of Skeld brought a grin to her face. For a human he was very tall and quite funny.

Skeld awoke to the sound of the clay bottle clanking against the floor as it slipped from its perch on his chest. It had been a comforting presence as he slept; not quite the bed partner one would *hope* for, but at the very least a better bed partner than no partner at all.

He unfurled himself from the bed, stretching out to his full height and felt his hands slide against the ceiling. He gripped them to two of the long beams of wood that supported the floor above and pulled, hearing the joints crack and creak as he released a guttural, almost animal sound of a beast awakening to find it had drunken all the mead the night before.

After the last pop of his joints, he let go of the beam and rolled his shoulders experimentally, growling. Skeld didn't get hangovers, but waking was sometimes a chore; and these instances did appear to match his drinking.

The room was cold; he had left the window open to let the cool air wash over his body during the night, but this had led to a morning where the cool air washed over his body – another growl, but the fireplace refused to light itself. He ignored it, and reached to the chair where he had flung his clothes; he was used to the cold, though he could stand to get used to the warmth of the inn, as well.

As he dressed, Skeld found himself singing an old song or chant, slowly to himself, his deep voice

rumbling in his chest.

*Véld mælti mín móðir,  
at mér skyldi kaupa*

His body wanted food, so Skeld made for the door. Tessa would have purchased extra meat for the morning – they had that understanding, and Skeld would of course pay when the bill came due. The corridor was a quiet bustle as the

*Fley ok fagrar árar,  
fara á brott með Úlfhéðnar,*

Skeld was used to odd looks from Orlesian commoners, and the outright hostility of the Orlesian nobility; he was much bigger than the people around him, marked as an outsider by sight by his size, tattoos and features. Orlesians tolerated him, but Skeld was happy to not make that the easiest of tasks. The Orlesian man in the corridor with his companion of the night before gawked at him as he passed, forgetting his place with his coins. Skeld ignored him and continued softly singing to himself as he descended the stairs. A man's voice drifted up them; inquiring about him. "Skeld? Uh... Big fella? With scars and lots of hair?" there was more, but Skeld resumed his singing and drowned it out.

*Standa upp í stafni,  
stýra dýrum knerri,*

He reached the bottom of the stairs and entered the common room, his strange voice or the foreign lyrics drawing more stares from some as he stooped under the low hanging beam. He made his way to the bar, his voice carrying to catch the attention of a busy Tessa, who gave him her most genuine of welcoming smiles as he approached.

*halda svá til hafnar  
hoggva mann ok annan,  
hoggva mann ok annan.*

The song ended softly as he drew close to the bar, leaning over it. "Please tell me those are sausages I can smell?" he asked, hopefully.

Tessa regarded Skeld with an irritated fondness. The man ate and drank in proportion to his size, but he paid in proportion as well. And, preposterous as his stories were, he entertained her clientele in the evenings he was there. "They are indeed Cumbrian sausages, and the bakery has just delivered fresh bread. I'll fill a plate for you if you'd like." Most of her guests simply helped themselves, but she knew he liked that personal attention. "Did you sleep well?"

Fresh bread and sausages would make for a fantastic breakfast, he decided. "I slept well, thank you – the kiss of the golden lady you sent to my room last night knocked me clean into bed," he said,

though he was talking about the Mead.

Tessa busied herself with getting his food and he accepted it gratefully before seating himself near the others, who had begun assembling already.

“Big man? Scars and lots of hair? You forgot about my wonderful skin,” Skeld announced from behind the guard, sweeping his arms slowly to reveal the tattoos that covered them. “You are guardsman, yes?” he asked, measuring the smaller man with his eyes.

Martin's eyes traveled up all the way until they met Skeld's face. The man was even taller than Nazri - quite a bit taller in fact. He looked like he was directly descended from the Avvar, and maybe he was if that song was anything to go by. Although Martin hadn't understood the words he had been charmed by the lilting sounds of the song.

"Indeed I am," he confirmed agreeably. "Martin Josceran, guardsman of Jader. Pleased to make your acquaintance." He held out a hand and hoped faintly he was going to get it back intact.

Skeld put his breakfast aside and took the offered hand, clapping the smaller man's shoulder gently as he did so, or as gently as he was able. "Skeld - Big man with scars and lots of hair, of... Nowhere you would have heard of," he admitted, laughing good-naturedly. "Good to meet you!" he said, before releasing the man and taking his seat.

Skeld bit into his sausages, while the other hand mopped up the juices from the plate with some of the bread. Jader had good bread, he decided, as he listened to the guardsman's introduction.

"So, I seem to be late - apologies," Skeld announced. "I hope not too late to come with? I've never met an Orlesian ghost before..."

"Well now that you're alive Skeld, eat breakfast and we'll leave shortly afterwards." Katya said.

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## High Tea and Cookies, Demons not invited

Posted on 05 Dec 2022 @ 8:55pm by [Townfolk The Scholar](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**2,480 words; about a 12 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Jader Chantry, Giselle's private chamber

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 2nd, morning

With Summerday, the last day of the festival, just the day before, the chantry gardens had a somewhat trampled appearance. Crushed flowers, uprooted shrubbery, and bare spots marred the usually manicured refectory garden. But, a handful of laypeople were already at work setting the

garden to rights.

The commotion of the last few days and the upheaval in the leadership of the Chantry and local guardsman had put a pall on the normal spiritual and emotional exhilaration of the Festival for Sister Elinowy. The disheveled gardens brought to mind the dark days after her Chantry was destroyed and the modest and solemn observation of the holy days and festivals as she worked to rally the community and sisters to rebuild. But it was a time to be thankful for the Maker's protection of the Revered Mother. Lives were saved, that was joyous enough. But Elinowy felt detached.

A young initiate approached the flame-haired sister. "Sister Elinowy, the Revered Mother awaits. Please follow me."

The teen led Elinowy into the chantry dormitory and into what appeared to be an office, with a large, neatly arranged desk in the center, and overflowing bookshelves taking up every inch of wall space. Before Elinowy could take one of the visitor chairs, the initiate opened a side door to a small sitting room with a window looking out at the garden, and a table next to the window where Mother Giselle sat.

"Sister Elinowy, my dear," said Mother Giselle. She stood and reached out to take both of Elinowy's hands in hers. "Please, sit here with me."

Elinowy gave the kindly older woman a genuine smile and reached out to let herself be led to the seat Giselle steered her to. "Thank you, Revered Mother," she replied sweetly. Despite having run a smaller Chantry herself as a Revered Mother, she could feel an aura of wisdom surrounding Giselle she could never pretend to emulate.

"How are you doing now that the festivities have concluded as they have?" Elinowy asked, ignoring that she had been the one actually poisoned at the banquet. Still she knew the aftermath of a major festival was elating due to it finally being over, yet draining with the multitude of tasks ahead.

"I am grateful that the remainder of the festival proceeded without incident, thank the Maker. I think perhaps wine will not be served at next year's banquet " Giselle took her seat and gave Elinowy a rueful smile. "I blame myself, partly, for Isouda's treachery. She was terribly ambitious. I have never been one to play *The Game*, and I failed to recognize her frustration. Of course, that does not excuse her actions. I deeply regret that you suffered the effects of Isouda's poison. How are you feeling?"

"The Maker has seen it fit that I shall continue serving him here for now, and so I shall joyfully," she replied. "I believe most of the after effects have passed at this time. I was able to perform all 39 forms in my morning devotion for the first time since the incident."

The initiate, who had hurried away when Giselle greeted Elinowy, returned with a tray laden with soft bread rolls, butter, fresh fruit, a pot of tea, sugar and cream, and set it on the table between

Elinowy and Giselle. The revered mother poured two cups of tea. "I had a long conversation with the apostate, Kalian. He seems a reasonable young man. I believe he is your friend, what is your opinion of his... reliability?"

"I fear that I must confess to knowing of his apostate nature prior to this Mother. Back when the ring of slavers in the mine was broken up, I was gravely injured. He used his power to heal and save my life. Upon reflection it felt ungracious to turn him over to the Circle. So I took it upon myself to personally lead him on his journey toward the Maker. In time, I am hopeful he will take his rightful place in a circle at a point of his choosing. Until then, I watch. "I know it is not in accordance with Chantry teachings, and conflicts with the Nevarran Accord," but I was given certain latitude in the course of my sojourning to seek the Maker's truth and will in such matters."

"Kalian spoke highly of you and your influence." Mother Giselle smiled warmly and sipped her tea. "The Chant of Light tells us *Magic should serve man, and not rule over him*. The Chant tells us what should be, but not how to get there. Often the methods of men undo the spirit of our goals. Andraste taught that it is pride, not magic that is evil, and pride does not only corrupt mages. As we have unfortunately seen, pride can corrupt a Chantry Elder."

Elinowy gave the older woman a kind smile. "I am learning of such things. I had always been taught before I was even a novice that Magic corrupts, but it appears out trust is more secure in one such as Kalian than as circumstances show even some of our own. I do believe he has a good heart. And perhaps it is a weakness on my part, I feel I owe him his freedom for saving my life." she said, fighting to keep the practiced serenity of her words, even though she knew she went against Chantry teaching.

Mother Giselle put down her cup and carefully lifted a flaky pastry to her mouth and took a bite. "Ah, Jader is blessed with excellent bakers." She finished it and brushed crumbs from her robes. "I would very much like to hear more about your journey of discernment, Sister Elinowy, if you would indulge me."

The sister blushed, making her complexion, hair and robe a range of rosy hues. "I regret that much of my instructions were sealed by Grand Cleric Callista, but I can let you know that I am on the path of a Seeker of Truth. While I fear I lack many of the Martial Skills desired by the order, they felt my tenure in Bete Noire gave evidence of my commitment to Andraste and... they thought I was clever. I was commissioned by the Grand Cleric to take on the role of an impoverished sister, with no belongings, and not able to accept refuge or aid from my sisters, so that I might seek the pure will of the Maker for my life be it with the Seekers or as a Mother or simple sister. I only know that the Maker provides what I need and there is so very much I have to learn. Kalian was a lesson in that for me."

"I admire your dedication, Elinowy." Giselle sipped her tea contemplatively. She had never heard of a Grand Cleric setting a Chantry sister or Mother on such a path. For that matter, she'd never heard of a Chantry sister becoming a Seeker of Truth. "I believe your situation is unique. It is my understanding that fortitude and mental discipline are essential attributes for a Seeker of Truth,

qualities you seem to have in abundance."

The younger sister bowed her head. "It was certainly nothing I was ever expecting either. I was summoned to the Grand Cleric while at a conference in Val Royeaux. It seems my investigation and prosecution of the brigands that destroyed my Chantry in Bete Noire eight years ago was noticed. They felt I could be an asset to our order by seeking out others that, shall we say, cause troubles. I had never imagined my journey to have taken the path it has to bring me here to Jader. The Maker humbles us as he builds our faith.

"The Jader Chantry is in need of the services of a replacement Elder, and it would seem that you are the ideal choice, if your journey of discernment would allow such an assignment. Perhaps on a temporary basis?" asked Giselle.

Elinowy closed her eyes as she listened to the Revered Mother. "There are many needs to serve in this city. It would be an honor to work with you. However I fear my present journey is to be outside of the confines of my beloved Chantry. I was given... gifts... to help me on far darker paths." she said unconsciously moving her hand to her stomach. "Forgive me, but I must decline at this time. I pray the Maker would call us together in service again, for your ministry here is a joy to take part in."

"Of course, I am disappointed, but we all must find our own path to serve the Maker, and I understand." Giselle gave Elinowy a sincere smile. "Gifts? A dark path? My curiosity is piqued, Sister. Are you able to elaborate?"

Elinowy looked seriously at the Revered Mother. "The Seekers oversee the Templars and even regulates troubles within the Chantry itself. It is a dangerous life filled with dark magic, demonspawn and all sorts of terrible things. Yet the Maker's children need defending, sometimes from themselves. So I go as a humble servant, to do the Maker's will in the darkest places necessary. The Grand Cleric was of the opinion such work requires measures that go against the orthodox teaching of the chantry... so she had them give me... this..."

The sister slowly slid her scarlet robes upward, revealing her long firm legs and abdomen. Even in the gentle morning light, a distinct greenish glow. Once fully revealed the intricate pattern of arcane runes was at once fearsome and hypnotically beautiful.

Elinowy let the older woman have a long look at the glyph tattooed on her belly. "I don't know what they are, or what they say. They wouldn't tell me, only that at some time, it would help me. I don't know what that means, or what... this....thing is. she said as she slowly dropped her robe back to the floor.

Giselle examined the symbols tattooed on Elinowy's belly with concern, somewhat aghast. The Seeker order was known to be secretive, but she had never heard of unusual tattoos, especially ones that appeared, at least to Giselle, to be almost elven in origin. The Revered Mother wondered if the young Chantry sister had somehow been deceived into joining a heretical cult, since it seemed unlikely that the symbols had anything to do with the Chant of Light.



After Elinowy dropped her robe, Giselle was quiet for many long moments. Then thoughtfully she said, "I have never seen such symbols, my dear. But I am confident you will find meaning in them eventually." She sipped her tea. Something about the symbols unaccountably reminded her of a piece of information she wanted to share. "The Knight Captain tells me there has been news of a blood mage in the region."

Elinowy tried hard not to look disappointed at Mother Giselle's lack of knowledge regarding the tattoos on her stomach. Her face blushed a little in embarrassment. Mercifully the Revered Mother changed the subject. "A Blood Mage? In Jader? Have the Templars been alerted?" she inquired.

She had never dealt with something like a Blood Mage before. Her calling to be a Seeker clearly meant she should investigate and if needed neutralize an evil threat such as this. Elinowy had hunted down bandits and marauders, but Blood Magic was much more serious. "What have you heard about this Blood Mage?"

"What little I know is disturbing." Giselle pursed her lips and considered what to say. "Her name is Lilith, and one year ago she was transferred from the Cumberland Circle in Nevarra to the White Spire in Val Royeaux, in order to separate her from her lover. Separation of mage couples, and mage mothers and their infants, is a practice I have long spoken against, but as you may be aware, many within the Chantry believe that mages must not be allowed to form or engage in close emotional relationships. Lilith and her lover exchanged letters until she discovered her lover was made tranquil. Though she had no known history of using blood magic, she used blood magic to escape the White Spire."

"When Knight Captain Dunbar returns from Val Royeaux next week, he may have more information. He sent a bird to apprise me, in case any suspicious incidents occurred." Giselle patted Elinowy's hand in a maternal fashion. "It is likely the mage in question is simply hiding. But you seem to have your fingers on the pulse of everyday Jader citizens, so I thought it best to inform you."

The gravity of the situation was a little unnerving to the younger sister. "It sounds like Lilith has had the misfortune of circumstance put upon her. Has she done anything harmful?" Elinowy inquired. Blood Magic as definitely a bad thing, but Elinowy knew well enough what the drive to protect your sisters or family could drive you to. "Perhaps she can be captured without further incident. Her cause is understandable, if misguided, but redemption may still be afforded if she can submit."

"Given that Jader is not currently crawling with mage-hunters from Val Royeaux, my guess is that Lilith did not kill or seriously harm anyone. But, I won't know anything else until the Knight Captain gets back." Giselle shook her head sadly. "The Chantry is an imperfect vessel for the Maker's will. If more within the order embraced the compassion you exemplify, I think fewer mages would feel the need to take desperate action. Elinowy my dear, if you do somehow find Lilith and convince her to return peacefully to the White Spire, I will advocate on her behalf."

Elinowy bowed her head toward the Revered Mother. "We are all imperfect vessels living in hope of

being adequate for the Maker's will. I will certainly do what I can to preserve Lilith and convey to her your generous offer." Taking a sip from her tea cup, the younger sister smiled at Giselle. "We have spoken enough of my challenges, tell me of your hopes for the Jader Chantry and how I might be a help."

Giselle leaned back in her chair, cradling her cup in both hands, and sipped contemplatively. "If I may be completely candid, Sister Elinowy, it would be a great comfort to me to simply enjoy the company and friendship of a sister such as yourself who does not report to me in the Chantry hierarchy. You were Revered Mother of Bete Noir, after all. Let us relax, and speak of whatever occupies our thoughts."

Elinowy sipped her tea and smiled to the Giselle. "That would be very pleasant indeed." she genuinely stated, relieved for even a short time to relax the need to be an example to everyone of grace and virtue. Being one's self was as rare an element as the finest jewels in the world.

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## Fall Off the Wagon Before the Horse

**Posted on 17 Dec 2022 @ 10:20am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Warrior Skeld](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Rogue Nazri Arisant](#)**

**3,585 words; about a 18 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Raven's Roost -> Imperial Highway

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 7th, after 'Those Meddling Adventurers'

Outside the Raven's Roost, Kalian was ready to depart. He wore light leather armor, a gift from his brother-in-law Ben. The weight of the staff his grandmother had gifted him years ago felt strange. He'd never worn it openly around other people. Strapped to his back, the tell-tale clear crystal mounted at the staff's end appeared behind his head, and absorbed rather than reflected the light of the rising sun.

Kalian didn't have much experience with driving a horse-drawn wagon, but it couldn't be that difficult... right? He looked to his friends as they emerged from the tavern and said, "Who wants to drive?"

Rhi looked up at Kalian and then at the others. "Give me a ship and I can take you anywhere. This is not something that I am proficient in."

"I've no doubt you can take me *anywhere*," replied Kalian to Rhi with a wink.

Nazri's eyes cut between everyone as he shook his head. "Not me," he said, "I'm pretty good at riding a horse, not so much the other."

Then after a moment of consideration, he added, "Unless no one else knows how, or wants to. Then I guess I could volunteer."

"Oh for Andraste's sake! I'll drive." Katya said. With that, she tied her horse to the back of the cart. "Sorry thunder but someone got to drive." With that, she got up front. "Kit, perhaps you'd like to ride up front with me?"

Kithris had been one of the last out from the Raven. She just caught the tail end of Katya saying something about driving as she got in in front of the cart. When Katya asked if she would like to ride up front with her, Kit gave a nod as she stepped up to sit next to Katya. "This is much smaller than our Aravels." Kit shifts so her bow can be "used" if needs be. Her hand briefly brushing Katya's outer thigh.

Katya caught her breath as the elven beauty brushed against her thigh. She definitely had an effect on Katya. She smiled at her companion. "Aravel? Not familiar with an aravel. What's it like?"

Kit caught Katya's smile and gave one back. She tilted her head slightly and grinned. "An aravel is our home. It is a larger enclosed wooded wagon pulled by our hallas. I believe that mine would have been given to the Keepers' new First when I left. I have often thought of building a new one." She shifted so that she sat closer to Katya.

"Well I don't know much about an Aravel but I'd be happy to help you if you want. Just tell me what to do. So what is a hallas anyway?"

Kithris smiled. She liked that Katya was interested. "Halla are what we use to pull our Aravels. They are similar to your deer. (slight pause) Dear." This said softly.

She smiled at the last part. "Ohhh, well I think you are pretty dear yourself my dear!" She said with a wink as she leaned over and kissed Kit.

Kit had been a little startled when Katya leaned in and kissed her. Though being startled quickly left when this beautiful warrior woman's lips touched hers. Closing her eyes she felt feelings she had not felt in a few years rise up. Different though, not the wildfire that burned through her that summer. Slower, warming, able to stoked and shaped into something wonderful. Her grip on the magic slipped again and a flash of green light came from her eyes. (the only one who would notice would be Katya if she so desires) This causes Kit to break the kiss off quicker than she wanted. She needs to keep more control over that. Yet, it would not be easy as she looked up at the woman sitting next to her. A warm caring smile crossed her face as she spoke softly, her tone low and musical, "Ma nuvenin, da'vhenan."

"I don't know what you said but it sure sounds good when you say it." Katya had noticed the green flash. She would discuss it with Kit later when they had more privacy. She had some practice at keeping this type of secret. Not to mention there was no way she was going to let them lock up this beautiful woman. Katya was flying. Kit had an effect on her. No other woman had ever made her feel quite like this. She felt like she could fly! This was incredible. She was going to have to tell her mother about Kit. And if Kit was up to it, have Kit meet her mother.

Kithris smiled when Katya said she liked what she said. More precisely how it sounded. "It means, *as you wish, little heart.*" She reached and took Katya's hand. "It is my way of saying that I like you. And I want to see where this will go."

"I feel the same way Kit!!" Katya said as she squeezed Kit's hand affectionately.

Kit gives Katya a smile before she starts to watch the road.

Martin had been about to volunteer when Katya beat him to the punch. Well. That was probably for the best. His only experience in the matter was driving a prisoner from Jader to a neighboring town where he had been wanted for trial, and that trip hadn't been particularly fun.

"I guess that means we're riding in the back," he said and climbed in the back. It was an easier task with his standard issue medium armor than it would have been with something heavier, although he did sometimes think wistfully of the set of full plates he'd used to wear as a Templar trainee. But he'd made his choice, and that part of his life was firmly in the past now. Mostly. He glanced at Kalian, who looked quite dashing in his new kit, and wondered how his friend would react if he ever witnessed him using Templar abilities.

He'd cross that bridge when the time came, he decided. It had been so long, he wasn't even sure he'd still manage a smite. Not without leaving him knocked out for the count, surely, so it would be a last resort. One they hopefully wouldn't need.

Looking back he offered Nazri his hand to help him hop onto the cart.

Nazri could have made it on the cart himself, but he took Martin's hand anyway and allowed himself to be pulled up. The hand was calloused and worn, but warm and comforting at the same time. He met the other man's gaze as he took a seat dropping his bow and quiver carefully on the floor of the cart.

Skeld breathed the morning air deeply as he stepped outside, exhaling it in a fine mist like a dragon breathing fire, and secretly impressed with how thick the mist was. No wonder he had growled at the window this morning; there was a bite to the air, and he'd slept naked with the window open.

His axes marked him again as different in this city; Orlesians tended to carry pretty, thin swords, which often enough proved mostly decorative when meeting a full-weight battleaxe crashing down on them. His rune axe was strapped to his back, a comforting weight that most would struggle with

but Skeld managed easily. The two bearded axes at his hip were not insignificant, either, better for close combat. His soft leather with chainmail armour, which he had donned before leaving the common room, was more maneuverable than the average plate armour of the templars and guardsmen and allowed him to move pretty fast on the battlefield; faster than many would guess, at least, and that often was the advantage needed to catch them off guard. It too had been inscribed with runes and designs matching his skin; to any that had seen both, there was no mistaking who owned his armour.

He climbed into the back of the cart, sprawling into a corner and resting his long axe against his thigh and shoulder, his arms resting on the wooden sides of the cart. "Ten silver to whoever kills the ghost first," he said, yawning.

"Hey! Be careful back there Skeld! Thunder can be skittish sometimes to people he doesn't know!" The horse in question, who Katya had tied to the back of the cart whinnied when the large man came close and dug at the ground with his hoof. "Easy Thunder. He's a friend." This seemed to calm the horse down.

Skeld laughed, leaning down to look the horse in the eyes. "My apologies, I mistook you for a big dog!" he laughed, before standing to his full height. "A horse named Thunder who's afraid of strangers... when most horses are afraid of Thunder. You have an odd name, my friend," he added, before backing off from the horse to take his place in the cart.

Thunder eyed the large man as if insulted by Skeld's remarks.

"Hey bite your tongue Skeld! Thunder is fearless! He doesn't like people he doesn't know! If you aren't careful, he's liable to take a chunk out of you!" Katya said.

Rhi watched as Skeld made his way into the cart. He took up quite a bit of it. This was one of the few times that being a bit smaller than most was a good thing. She made sure that Kalian had enough room.

Kalian settled in next to Rhiannon and wondered if Skeld would entertain them with a story on the wagon ride.

"Say Kalian, you have any apples? I'd like to give Thunder a couple. He's been very good and deserves a little reward." Katya said with a smile.

Now, that was a question he wasn't asked every day. Whilst it was tempting to ask how often Katya filled her pockets with apples, Kalian noticed a couple of sacks in the wagon and opened them. "No apples, but it looks like the groom left a bag of grain and a bag of carrots for the wagon horse. He broke off a chunk of carrot and offered it in an open, flat hand to Thunder. The horse hungrily took the carrot. and whinnied for more. Kalian chuckled and fed the rest of the carrot to Katya's cheeky horse.

Thunder gladly ate the carrot

Elinowy lifted her hood up covering her flame-red hair as she departed the Inn. Unlike her companions, her equipment was light. She carried only a small bag of healing herbs. Her scarlet robes were the only protection she had, beyond her steadfast faith in the Maker, and a little reliance upon Kalian's gifts if need arose. She watched the elf woman climb into the driver's bench alongside Katya. That would make the trip a bit more pleasant, still, there was the Qunari to deal with. She saw him climb into the back. She said a small prayer to the Maker as she approached the wagon. With little difficulty, she boarded the wagon with as much gracefulness as one could board a wagon. She had made up her mind to ride in the back of the wagon so she might extend blessings to the citizens of Jader they passed on the road and to avoid the smell of the wagon. Yet upon entering the wagon she saw the big man Skeld, sprawled out at the top of the cart's bed. She was eager to know of his knowledge of far-off lands and mystic runes such as covered his body. She drew the hood a bit against her face as she settled in next to the big man. "The Blessings of the Maker be upon you," she said in greeting. "Do you mind if I rest here," she said indicating the space next to him his massive leg splayed across.

Skeld looked up, surprised to hear her voice, and quickly moved to make space for her. "Of course, please - my wagon is your wagon," he added, though it was of course not his at all. "Blessings of your makers upon you as well," he added, yawning. "You seem an unusually savory sort to be riding with Kalian's group, I did not expect a priestess - apologies for any offense my ways may cause," he added, as politely as he could. "How did you come to be stuck with a group with people such as myself?"

Carefully allowing her scarlet robe to fold beneath her, Elinowy settled down into the space cleared by the big man. "Thank you kind Ser," she replied.

The wagon was not as uncomfortable as she had anticipated, although they had not gotten underway as yet. "I am only a humble sister. We are all priests of the Maker in our own way by his will," she said in cryptic theological niceties. "I take no offense. I have been in far greater adversity before, and Kalian is good company when heading into trouble. You appear capable to take care of yourself as well. Tell me, your tattoos, are there stories for each? Like that one. Why did you get that?" she said innocently, pointing to the glyph on his shoulder matching the one that had been placed on her abdomen.

Skeld looked up as he folded his mail jerkin, curious at her attention. He had grown accustomed to some Orlesian women, usually after several drinks, asking about his tattoos as a way of seeing just *how much* of his body was covered in them. Normally these were the rich, aristocratic sorts who wanted to explore a bit of passionate, savage love making on the side because they'd read about it in a book or heard about it from some bardic tale and didn't even know what that meant. Of course, the odd Chantry initiate would ask - women questioning their choice of life path and wondering just what they were missing out on; most of them were far too young for a man of Skeld's years, and while the woman across from him was not so young as to be in that group (despite her fair features, he assumed she was between her late twenties and thirty), she was still *much* younger than him, and sober to boot (he assumed). But something told him her interest was less about

where his runes went and more curiosity for where they came from... or maybe something else.

She had picked an odd choice for conversation; the 'tattoo' in question was part of a runecircle that encompassed the entire shoulder; a ring of runes around an inner ring that encompassed a stave of sharp lines in angular designs that radiated out from a core rune that was itself encased in a circle of vines. There was a similar, yet distinct design on his left shoulder as well, notably one without that particular rune, though she could only see a small portion of the right shoulder, with the rest of the whole hidden by his shirt; his shoulder had become bare as he took off the mail tunic, and he had neglected to put the shirt back on properly out of sheer laziness. The runecircle was the outer ring of his first Úlfhéðnar stave. She was pointing to one *very specific* rune, though he doubted that she understood anything about it; that said, taken out of context, that one *would* be confusing... Or misleading, depending on the reader.

"Stories..." he began, making a point to follow her gaze. "Ah, well - many do; stories of mine, stories of the tribes, the stars; but that one - that one is just the names of a pack of dogs," he said, exposing it a bit more so she could see that the ring continued around. "This one is Ulf, a good dog, *very loyal*; we'd hunt for days together. But dog days are not the same as people days, and Ulf is no more; so he is remembered here," he said, patting his shoulder fondly. "His brothers and sisters are lined along the ring. And the center - that's called a 'stave'; this one means 'Remember'," he added, giving her a few moments before raising up his shirt to cover his shoulders, faking a shiver as he did so. "Have you an interest in tattoos? If you like, I could give you one. I learned a bit of the art myself in Antiva. I have my needles... in the Roost somewhere," he added, with a pleasant smile.

While the big man removed his shirt, the comely sister began to wonder if she had begun something she was not prepared to finish. His muscular torso was covered with intricate tattoos of unknown meaning or origin. As he pointed at the one and explained it was the name of a dog, she looked dumbfounded and deeply perplexed. Why would the Grand Cleric have her servants put 'Ulf' on her stomach? It made no sense. She began to grasp at anything that might give the information some meaning. "What language is the name Ulf? Do you know what it means?" she inquired silently, praying this didn't take an unpleasant turn.

"It's not a very imaginative name, I'm afraid - it just means 'Wolf'," he replied, laughing. "And as for the language, those that speak it call it Skeine. They say it is the language of fate, but mostly that's just because everything you say in it sounds like a prophecy when you translate it into Common," he added, putting his shirt back on properly, to her obvious relief.

As to his question. She smiled sweetly at him. "No. Thank you, I've had enough of receiving tattoos. Bless you for the offer." she shuffled in her place uncomfortably.

"Well, if you want one to add to the collection, let me know," he replied, as he reached into his pack and produced a stone to hone the edge of his axe with; the perfect way to pass the time as the cart rumbled along.

Kalian looked around at his group of friends. Katya and Kithris were obviously attracted to each

other and rivaled Rhi and himself for public displays of affection. Martin and Nazri had struck up a friendship. And Elinowy had taken a surprising interest in Skeld. This was already shaping up to be an interesting day. He called out to their volunteer driver, "Katya, I think we're ready to get moving."

"Alright then! Here we go! Giddyup!" Katya said as the cart started moving!

Rhi noticed Elinowy when she came out of the Raven. The sister knew how to make an entrance, even when it is outside. She could see that the sister had decided to sit in the back. This kinda surprised Rhi. Though her surprise was short-lived when Elinowy sat down next to Skeld. Now that was interesting. She glanced at Kalian, gave him a smile, and snuggled in. Without looking up she said, "Don't let me sleep." As she closed her eyes.

Kalian wrapped an arm around Rhiannon affectionately. "But I like watching you sleep," he whispered into her ear. With Elinowy, Skeld, Martin, and Nazri all in the back of the wagon with them, he was content just to hold her.

Rhi chuckled a little. Her voice low as she snuggled in a little closer, hand near the hilt of a hidden dagger, "I know you do."

Nazri turned to his new acquaintance Martin and said, "So, what do you think we'll find when we get there?"

"Well, if we were lucky, hopefully, a perfectly reasonable explanation for what our witnesses saw that doesn't involve any fighting," Martin said with a snort, "but going by our usual luck... maybe I wasn't so far off when I mentioned that dragon thing." He shook his head and spared another regretful thought for his old set of plates. "Jokes aside, I wouldn't be surprised if a mage was involved. Can't think of anything but magic to make this sort of thing happen. The question is what kind. Apostate, dalish... a reasonable guess would be an apostate who found refuge with a group of bandits but we can't know, really."

"These things, assuming they are real, don't just show up on their own. Someone has to summon them. I'm not too worried whatever the source, I'm sure all of those here can deal with whatever threat," said Nazri.

"Sounds like Necromancy to me. Or even blood magic. Though, I don't know much about either," said Kalian. His grandmother had told him how, at least in theory, blood magic worked. But she had warned Kalian against any attempt to use such magic. "Nor do I want to."

"I don't blame you Kalian! That's bad business! Whatever it is, we will deal with it!" Katya said.

Rhi shook her head slightly. "Blood magic." She spits off the side of the wagon.

Kit had been thinking about what could be bring up ghosts and such. She knew that blood magic was more than likely to be involved. So when Kalian made a comment about blood magic she



stiffened a little.

Skeld looked over to Katya and gave a consoling look. "It is fortunate I know the secret to ending blood magic; take one axe, apply to face... wipe off blood. Works every time that I've had cause to try it," he said, his shoulder propping up his runeaxe a little higher than before as if to volunteer it for this function.

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## Looking for Quiet in a Crowd

Posted on 17 Dec 2022 @ 10:21am by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Mage Atria Jain](#)

995 words; about a 5 minute read

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

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

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 5, evening

The Raven's Roost wasn't Atria's usual choice for evening entertainment. At least, not alone. But tonight, the Tremblay trio (her wife and her wife's brother and sister's families) had three separate Ferelden families over for dinner. A few years back, they'd helped take in refugees fleeing the fighting over the border. Half a dozen families had filled the lighthouse's every available space for weeks, months, until the refugee camp came together. As tents gave way to wooden homes built by the overflow, one by one the Fereldens had moved out. But they'd stayed close.

It was nice. It wasn't at all what Atria was used to but it was nice. It was also overwhelming and some nights she just wasn't up for overwhelming. She'd stuck out meal prep and table arrangement but her wife Adrienne spotted the tension, as she always seemed to, and shooed her out before the crowd turned up. The Maker bless her.

Which led to the Tevinter woman being out on her own for a change. She hadn't really aimed for this particular tavern, though it was Adrienne's favorite. But the docks had sailors and Atria didn't feel like dealing with someone making a pass who might make trouble if they caught her accent. She'd been in Jader for six years now. That didn't make her exceptionally close to most of the locals but it did make her known, which undoubtedly meant for a less irritating evening.

Approaching the front, she could hear the clatter of dishes and conversation this far out. Atria paused, thought seriously about heading somewhere else. But it was just food and conversation. No minstrel tonight and unlikely to have more than a score or so of people. None of whom would probably talk about their children, their chores or problems she'd heard a dozen times before. *Perfect.*

Stepping inside, Atria looked for an empty seat. Or a spot at the bar, she wasn't picky.

The Raven's front door opened, letting in a cool draft of night breeze, and Kailan looked up to see Atria, the Tevinter woman who'd married into the family that operated Jader's lighthouse. Kailan thought of Atria as a friend even though they might go several weeks at a time without speaking. Atria's past experiences in Tevinter, and her perspective on magic were fascinating and thought provoking, although for obvious reasons those were conversations they couldn't have openly, just anywhere. Kailan grinned and waved Atria over to the bar. "Hey there, Atria! It's been a while. Let me guess, you've been avoiding the Summerday festival crowds?"

Atria shared the man's grin. She didn't get uptown much but they'd crossed paths any number of times over the years. They had more in common than most, one thing in particular that she was fairly sure no one else did. Well, no one that would admit to it anyway.

Tipping her head up in recognition of the greeting, she crossed the tavern common room and slid into a bar stool. "Kailan. Your guesses are as good as ever. Not that Summerday festival crowds particularly want someone like me around them. Suits me, though. Surprised you lot aren't doing the same. Take a night or two off to recover, maybe?"

Kailan gestured jovially to his surroundings and tipped back his beer. "Sometimes business as usual is surprisingly restful."

Most of the patrons there that evening were regulars, sitting at their usual tables. The bar chairs were otherwise empty, and the background hum of voices afforded a measure of privacy. Kailan poured two tankards of ale and set one down on the bar in front of Atria and took a deep pull from the other. "Where is your better half this evening?"

At the sight of the ale pouring, Atria let out a contented sigh. At the question, she smiled ruefully and said "You know we put up Fereldens a few years back, same as most. With the festival over, Adrienne likes to catch up so there's...what, ten or fifteen of them over? She's having quite the time of it."

Then she followed Kailan's example and took a pull of ale herself. A pleased look eased her often stern expression and she smiled again. "Ahhh. Proper. Cheers."

She glanced around, confirming no one else was particularly close and leaned in. "So, what's the latest? Anything new in town that's got people talking? Anything new with you, for that matter?"

Atria looked genuinely interested in the answer. They'd talked enough, had enough connection for her to inquire after his well being, but the interest in the town was new.

She was interested in Jader? "Well... You may have heard rumors about Elder Isouda's plot to poison Revered Mother Giselle. The potioner who analyzed the poison and created an antidote was a foreigner staying right here at the Raven. In my room, which still smells weirdly of herbs." Kailan

sighed and leaned toward Atria, lowering his voice. "My friend, Sister Elinowy, drank from Mother Giselle's cup, and the antidote didn't seem to be working so I, uh... I used magic. Right in front of the Knight Captain and a few other Templars."

Kalian didn't expect sympathy, but when it came to slip-ups involving magic, Atria was one of few people he could confide in. "Mother Giselle spoke with me for a long time after, asked a lot of questions, and I think she knew some of my answers were evasive. But in the end she decided I could remain free, and somehow she persuaded the Knight Captain. But, Tessa was furious with me. Not that she begrudges Elinowy her life – Tessa is quite fond of Eli. But Templars will be watching me from now on."

Shifting the conversation unsubtly back to his Tevinter friend, Kalian asked, "How are things in the lighthouse, are you getting tired of the solitary life?" Kalian gave her a sly grin. "When Adrienne hasn't filled it with Ferelden migrants, that is?"

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## Are We There Yet?

**Posted on 30 Jan 2023 @ 12:11pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Martin Josceran](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Warrior Skeld](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#) & [Rogue Nazri Arisant](#)**

**5,061 words; about a 25 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Imperial Highway

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 7th, after ' Fall Off the Wagon Before the Horse'

It was late morning, and though rain showers were common this time of year, the sun was out. Dense forest lined both sides of the wide road, plenty of places to hide, but they'd seen no evidence of bandits. So far it had been a pleasant wagon ride and morning out, with good company.

Kalian stood in the bed of the wagon, holding onto the back of the driver's bench seat for balance with one hand, and holding the map Begonia Baudelaire had given them in his other hand. "I think we're nearing the turn-off to Baudelaire's mansion. Another mile or so."

"Ok, Kalian. I'll keep an eye out!" Katya said.

Rhi had felt Kalian's shift before he stood. She moved a bit so that she didn't fall over. She turned to look back the way they came making sure that they had not been followed.

Kit didn't look back at Kalian, she instead continued to look around, scanning the area for threats.

Nazri, who had been sitting with his new friend and chatting about everything and nothing, just getting to know him a little better, rose to his feet when Kalian made his announcement. He glanced upward, but seeing nothing interesting or out of the ordinary, turned to the human beside him, to continue their conversation.

The quiet of the morning was broken as a middle-aged human wearing merchant's clothing cantered toward them, bareback on a pony that was harnessed for pulling a cart. He slowed when he saw the wagon, his face a mask of terror. "Turn around! Bandits up ahead. And a... so horrible... walking skeleton. I was barely able to unhitch my pony and get away."

"Easy Ser! We're here to get rid of the bandits and whatever else is going on. You go home and you will be safe there! We'll take care of this!" Katya said.

When the stranger appeared, Nazri grabbed his bow and stood to his feet in one smooth motion, peering forward to see if he could spot some sign of who, or what, the man was talking about.

The merchant's terrified gaze shifted to the qunari, but since the horned Bowman was focused in the direction of the horror he'd just witnessed, he responded to the driver. "That cart *is* my home, Serah. Everything I own is on it." The man's expression was forlorn and defeated.

"You may follow us if you wish, Ser," said Kalian, "but I recommend you ride on into Jader. If you ask for Tessa at the Raven's Roost tavern and tell her Kalian sent you, she'll take good care of you."

Kalian put away the map and unstrapped his staff from his back. To Katya, he said, "Let's keep moving."

"Agreed!" Katya said

Elinowy found herself emotionally perplexed by the merchant. He had lost all he held dear, and for that, he stoked her compassion. However, her experience of hunting brigands had shown her that many who appear as victims can also be scouts of an armed band that often looped back with compatriots to attack from behind. She kept her eye on him as the wagon passed.

Rhi stayed seated for the moment, though she pulled out her rapier. "Bandits, this might get interesting."

Kit had watched as the man approached. She was ready for anything, though relaxed slightly when she noticed how scared he was. She said nothing though readied her "bow with no string" for anything that might attack.

The encounter with the merchant was unsettling. It wasn't the first time Martin investigated rumors of ghosts or supernatural occurrences; more often than not they were the result of some natural phenomenon and people working themselves into a frenzy. In this case, however, the testimonies

came from so many different sources, he had to believe something truly sinister was afoot. He said nothing, as there was no point making his companions any more wary or anxious than they already might be, but he discreetly checked that his sword would slide out of its sheathe easily and kept his hand on the hilt.

Skeld grinned as he popped his head out to see the merchant. Bandits, and it wasn't even his name-day! He settled back into his sitting position with Elinowy in the back of the cart and whistled a pleasant tune as the cart began moving again, his hand caressing the rune axe he held against his thigh.

Skeld had a thought and poked his head up again, to converse with the driver and his companion. "Kalian - I fear to ask, but - we *are* going to confront the bandits, yes?" he asked, the hopeful smile on his face betraying his feelings on the topic.

"Yes, Skeld, we are," said Kalian seriously. He didn't share Skeld's enthusiasm for battle. Bandits preyed on people who couldn't defend themselves, and dangerous trade roads harmed everyone in Jader. Killing the bandits was probably necessary. And yet, bandits were still people, and he did not relish the need to harm them. But far more compelling, he would do almost anything to protect his friends.

As the wagon approached a bend in the road, up ahead they could see two animated skeletons brandishing weapons, and armed men standing behind them. Further on, they might catch glimpses through the trees of the merchant's cart and his looted belongings and merchandise, with more bandits hurrying to carry goods away.

"Keep an eye out people! The bandits could pop out at any second now!" Katya said. Then she saw them. "Correction, there they are. Kalian do me a favor and untie Thunder. If he's attacked I don't want him to be unable to defend himself. " She stopped the wagon.

"Of course, Katya," said Kalian, and untied Thunder as Katya asked. He hoped the horse and all of them, would get through this all right.

Then Kalian kissed Rhiannon, for luck, and firmly reminded himself that Rhiannon was an extremely capable warrior. "Be careful." Then louder to all his friends, he added, "Don't take unnecessary risks. We don't know if any innocent lives are at stake here, but none of us should risk our lives just to recover stolen goods."

Rhi kissed Kalian back then picked up her shield as she readied herself for battle. With a grin, if anyone could see, reveals how excited she is. "I never take unnecessary risks."

Kit shifted her bow so that it was sideways on her lap as she herself shifted to the edge of the cart bench. Her eyes taking in everything, her face stone.

"I think he was probably talking about me," Skeld admitted, poking his head up behind the drivers

again to look ahead, grinning like an idiot. "And, Kalian my good friend, as always I cannot promise that I will try; but I will *try* to try..." he added, his leg muscles coiling against the seat of the cart, ready to pounce out and fly headlong into battle.

"Fair enough, my friend," replied Kalian to Skeld with a chuckle.

Nazri reached down took hold of his bow, and strung it. He didn't nock an arrow at that point, but his hand hovered over the quiver as his eyes darted all around probing for any threats.

"I suggest all of you ready weapons. This is trouble! Elinowy, when were your people supposed to be here? Those skeletons look pretty real from here!" Katya said.

Elinowy looked over the rim of the wagon and immediately said a short prayer. Bandits were at best misguided children of the maker, but animated skeletons were an affront to the sacredness of life and the Maker's gifts. "Mother Giselle requested we determine if the need of Templars was required. Martin as a representative of the Guard was assigned to help," she replied to Katya.

So those really were bandits and quite a few of them, but not *just* bandits. Martin scanned the group of ruffians, looking for the mage he knew must be hiding amongst them. And not the garden variety. But that mage clearly had had the good sense of hiding amongst the others, and it was impossible to tell at a glance who they were.

Martin hopped off the wagon and unsheathed his sword. He trusted the ranged fighters amongst their group to cover him while he held off any physical attack from the bandits.

Standing in the wagon, Elinowy faced the line of bandits and skeletons and began to sing.

"You who stand before the gates,  
You who have followed me into the heart of evil,  
The fear of death is in your eyes; its hand is upon your throat.  
Raise your voices to the heavens! Remember:  
Not alone do we stand on the field of battle.

"The Maker is with us! His Light shall be our banner,  
And we shall bear it through the gates of that city and deliver it  
To our brothers and sisters awaiting their freedom within those walls,  
At last, the Light shall shine upon all of creation,  
If we are only strong enough to carry it."

As her voice carried around the wagon, her compatriots felt emboldened as they faced the upcoming battle. (Bard bonuses for all!)

Elinowy's song filled Kalian with inspiration and confidence in his ability to support his friends, and he cast a barrier spell on everyone in their company.

As Martin dismounted from the Cart and the good sister Elinowy began to sing, Skeld could barely contain his excitement - he almost *never* got to spring out and surprise people like this; bandits normally saw him coming a mile off and either steered clear or spread out to make him cover more ground; he was filled with a bit of excited anticipation as he began to hum along with the sisters' song; he didn't really hear the words, but the tune was vaguely familiar, and the thumping in his ears was beating roughly in time as he appraised the bandits. Skeletons... not what he was expecting, but that just meant less blood to wash out of his hair, he supposed. Then again, there were still five warm bodies that needed to join their comrades in death, so another bill from Tessa related to the viscera in the tubs was definitely on the cards.

*These Bandits had better have some nice, pretty jewels to temper Tessa's mood,* he thought, looking from man to man. *I'd hate to have to find a different inn...*

On the road ahead, the two skeletons walked toward the wagon. Three armed bandits stood in a row behind them, and further back were two bandits that appeared to be archers, each wearing a fist-sized amulet around their neck with a small red-glowing gem at the center. Other than those five, it appeared the rest of the bandit company was engaged in gathering up the spoils from the merchant's cart and carrying items away.

The five human bandits were slow to draw their weapons, as though they expected the wagon load of people to run away from the skeletons. But they readied themselves once the adventurers in the wagon drew their weapons. One of them shouted, "Drop all your coin and valuables on the road, and we'll allow you to run away unharmed!"

Skeld giggled.

One of the skeletons lunged toward Martin.

Without hesitation, Nazri grabbed an arrow his hand had been hovering over, He nocked an arrow, pulled back on the bow, and fired. It would have been almost impossible at this range even had he been an amateur and Nazri was no amateur. The arrow struck the skeleton square in the chest, staggering it backward. It didn't immediately destroy it, but he'd kept it from being able to attack Martin at the moment and gave him a chance to send it back where it came from.

Katya laughed at them. "Fools! Alright gang, let's give them our answer!" She was off the cart in a flash, sword, and shield ready! "Surrender now or die by order of Lady Seryl! The governor hereabouts!" If they refused, she would charge at the nearest bandit and lay into him with her sword.

Rhi felt the barrier that Kalian created as it enclosed them. She heard Nazri's bow let loose. She watched as one of the skeletons lunged at Martin. This was all she needed. With a yell that could only be Dwarven in nature, "You can't catch me 'cause the rabbit done died." Rhi rushed forward. Shield in hand and with a burst of speed, cause you know dwarfs are made for sprinting not long

distances, she launches herself at the skeleton with Nazri's arrow in it. Her shield crashed into the skeleton's chest. All 117 pounds of raging dwarf driving the skeleton off its feet and hitting the ground. "Amgeforn, Amgetoll, Amgarrak."

(sacrifice, duty, victory) She said after she rolled off and to her feet.

Kit surveyed the situation. The five bandits drew their weapons and told them to leave their valuables and leave. This made her laugh a little. With a flash of green around her hand, she pulled back on a green bowstring as she mutters a few words. Letting it go, grease appeared beneath the five bandits. She pulled back again, her hand wreathed in green as with her eyes, the bowstring was flame red. "You will leave or I will light it." Anyone that heard her tone knew that she meant it.

Kalian gasped in alarm at the grease beneath the five bandits. The road was bordered by forest. He thought of the consequence of lighting a wildfire at the forest's edge, or of burning, panicked bandits running away through the forest. It could be devastating on a monumental scale. A Dalish elf of all people might be more careful. In a low, tense voice he said, "Just don't set the forest on fire, Kithris."

Skeld admired Kithris' restraint and tactical thinking.

He, however, did not share it. The giant man vaulted off the cart and into the air, a maniacal grin splitting his face with a primal roar as he swung the axe down hard on the skeleton that had been knocked back by Nazri's arrow. It reacted in time to put a guard up with its sword, but with the weight of the axe being swung coupled with the falling weight of the giant warrior, it needn't have bothered; the axe crushed the skeleton's guard, battering the sword down and away before crashing through the collar bone and the first five ribs as the axe crossed into the base of the sternum, where the blade stopped. Skeld barely broke stride as he bounded forward a few steps with the skeleton caught in the axe blade, its right arm torn by the sheer weight of his initial strike. The big man pivoted to face the bandits, still a good charge away from him, but he noted he was at least not standing in the flammable grease. He planted his feet and spread his arms wide in challenge, the two-handed runeaxe held tight in his right hand, the still moving skeleton at the end of it moving feebly as Skeld roared in wordless challenge, the bloodlust pounding in his ears.

Elinowy kept singing as her compatriots joined with the Bandits and skeletons in combat. She stood in the wagon to have a clear vantage point of their adversaries and see if any of her party needed medical attention. The Chantry sister was prepared to defend herself if needed, so far, the bandits had taken the worst of the damages, including to see if the elf decided to barbecue the bandits in her oil slick.

Though the band of heroes might not notice, with the destruction of the skeletons the pendants worn by the two bandits at range stopped glowing. The two archers took a few steps so that the trees were right at their backs, well clear of the oil slick. Both fired their bows. One at Skeld, and the other at Katya.

The three bandits in melee range who were surrounded by Kithris' oil slick moved to escape the



flammable oil by moving *toward* Skeld, Martin, Katya, and Rhiannon, with weapons raised for battle.

Kalian cast Barrier on his friends again. Then he prepared a Winter's Breath spell in case Kithris' oil started a forest fire.

Meanwhile, the other bandits engaged in taking away the spoils of their just-completed robbery were quickly disappearing into the forest, leaving many items behind.

Katya charged at the bandit closest to her and let her blade slice into him. Obviously a poor swordsman. A low-life bandit who just got by with surprise and intimidation and fear. None of which applied to a seasoned warrior like Katya. She withdrew her sword as the man fell at her feet dying. Katya felt no pity for him.

With Katya taking care of one bandit Martin focused on the next, leaving the third for Skeld and Rhiannon to deal with.

The poor fellow had drawn the shortest straw, although he did not know it yet.

"You can still surrender," Martin suggested, not because he truly thought the man might take him up on the offer but because his oath as a guardsman demanded this minimal effort to limit bloodshed.

Instead of answering the bandit lunged at him with a guttural war cry. Martin sidestepped him easily, gauging his foe. The man had clearly received little martial training and used his sword more like a bludgeoning implement than an actual cutting weapon. That made him eminently unpredictable but if Martin was cautious and patient he ought to be able to either kill or neutralize him without too much difficulty. He waited for the bandit to lunge at him again. Instead of trying to parry, he dodged the blow - a preferable tactic considering the man's muscle mass and the way he wielded his sword like a sledgehammer - and took advantage of the fact he'd overextended himself to hit him in the ribs. The man fell to his knees, red foam on his lips. It was potentially not a fatal blow, depending on how deeply he'd nicked the lungs, but the bandit wasn't getting up any time soon.

Skeld looked at the remaining man who was bravely holding his ground against his much larger opponent. He held Skeld's gaze for a moment, weapon raised. As the sound of battle around them raged, his eyes darted back and forth, appraising - not fear, but analysis, as he overlooked the situation. It was, on the surface, unwinnable, but he held his ground - it was the sort of action someone took when they knew (or thought they knew) they had a trump card that would turn the tide of battle.

Skeld's face contorted into a savage grin as he bared his teeth like a wild animal, his grip tightening around the haft of his battle axe. His eyes gleamed with a fierce, primal pleasure as he relished the thrill of battle, the sheer joy of having an opponent that wasn't shitting themselves at the thought of fighting. The grin just wasn't human, but rather a feral expression that spoke to a primal, predatory instinct deep within him that wanted - *needed* to tear this man apart.

His eyes locked with the man, and it was as if a jolt passed through the bandit's spine, and he began to recoil in a fleeting but unmistakable sign of retreat - as if he could read the future in Skeld's expression. And he *could* – Skeld lunged forward with a roar, the axe whistling as he swung it through to a punishing strike that the man tried, valiantly but ineffectively, to block by squaring his stance and raising his heavy sword in an upward arc. Metal met metal, and Skeld erupted with savage laughter as he *felt* the snap of a wrist breaking from the impact. The block *did* manage to work to parry the blow, but where there was a window of opportunity where the bandit could have twisted his sword to drive it through his chest, it was fleeting and went unused; the tip of his sword landed into the earth, the weight of the blade collapsing under the broken wrist. It wasn't both of them, but his dominant hand was clearly shattered. He tried to wield the hilt with his left, but the tip dragged and that window of opportunity closed as Skeld's weight shifted to turn the returning weight of the axe into a savage kick to the man's chest. The bandit had fallen to his knee under the blow, and now grimaced with a grunt of escaping breath as Skeld's boot connected with his sternum and he flew backward, his whole body leaving the ground to slide to a stop in the mud. With another savage roar, Skeld followed through into two steps and leaped to bring the Axe behind his back to a full downward arc. Their eyes met again in that moment; savage ferocity locking with dawning realisation and fear. The axe stopped, and so did the man, realisation, and fear giving way suddenly to the distant stare of dying men.

Nazri had no interest in taking the life of fleeing bandits, he wasn't going to take a life in cold blood. but in addition to those attacking his friends, there were two more bandits that were trying to jump up on the wagon. They were at point-blank range and could have easily killed one with his bow. He was ready to do so, he even had the bow pulled back when a new idea struck him.

He put the bow down near him and waved his arms in a tight coil. A circle of shadow encompassed both men and they were teleported fifteen meters into the forest.

Rhi looked up at Skeld after the big man destroyed the skeleton that she had knocked over. She gave him a nod and started to move toward the other bandits near the wagon. "Stay put or I will track you down and end your lives." She yelled.

The two bandits Nazri had teleported into the forest dropped their weapons and looked around in confusion. But at Rhiannon's yelled threat they turned toward her in unison, screamed, and together fled into the forest.

Kit heard Kalian though didn't answer. She wouldn't light the grease unless there was no other choice. She noticed the two archers back up towards the woods. Pulling back on the magical green bow string, uttered a few words and let go. A stone fist formed, flew straight, and struck one of the bandits' bowmen in the chest, knocking him over and out. Turning to face the other, "Move and you will face the same fate as he."

Kalian cast the Winter's Breath spell he'd held ready on the remaining bowman, freezing the man in place. Then he climbed out of the wagon and kissed Rhiannon, intensely relieved that none of them, and his girlfriend in particular, had been hurt.

The battle was over. Of the three original melee bandits, two were dead, and one was severely injured. One bowman was knocked out, and the other frozen in place. Two additional bandits had attacked and were teleported into the forest, then ran away.

Nazri visibly relaxed and he set his bow in the back of the cart.

Skeld regained his footing before removing the axe from the swordman's chest, the spray of blood and bits of bone desecrating the ground that had become the man's grave. The twitch of the man's legs revealed his axe had reached the spine; it didn't last. Skeld howled a cry of victory and turned to look for the remaining bandits, but only saw the retreating forms too far to chase, half obscured by the forest, and he swore. He'd only taken two of them, and one of them had already been dead so hardly counted. But his heart was pounding and the blood roared in his ears, urging him to kill. But the only ones left were handled, so he gripped his axe and took breaths to calm his bloodlust, taking in the scent of the fresh kill at his feet.

Kalian headed for the frozen archer. "Katya, can you help me grab that bowman before my Winter's Grasp spell dissipates? I think we should question him before he has a chance to get away."

"Of course." She went over to the frozen archer and prepared to grab him as soon as he thawed. She really didn't want to grab a frozen anything. She put her arms around him but didn't grab him yet.

"OK how long until the spell wears off?"

Before Kalian could answer, the thin layer of ice encompassing the man shattered. He dropped his bow along with the arrow he' been nocking when hit with the spell.

"You are under arrest by the authority of Lady Seryl of Jader," said Kalian. He nodded to Katya, and together they dragged the shivering man toward the others. "My friends and I have questions."

The merchant they'd passed on the road ambled toward them, leading his horse. Apparently, he'd been watching the battle from a safe distance. He pointed to the bandit Martin had incapacitated but not killed. "Hey! You left that one alive."

"We left a few alive. That way we can question them and get the answers we want!" Katya said. She wondered why he came back. Seemed a little suspicious.

The merchant gave the badly injured bandit one more murderous glare. Then, grumbling under his breath, he headed over to the scattered and trampled remains of his livelihood, and began salvaging what he could.

Kalian removed the bowstring from the man's bow and used it to tie his hands. When a few beats went by and none of his friends spoke up to question him, Kalian said, "Who are you?"

"My name is, uh... um... Vince," said the bowman. "I'm not talking."

Kailan raised an eyebrow. The man's accent was Fereldan, and his name was likely made up. "And who is your boss, Vince?" Kailan knew he did not appear particularly intimidating, so he looked to his friends for persuasive help.

Skeld moved behind Kailan, his axe still dripping with the blood of the bowman's comrade. "If he's not talking, can I kill him? Seems a bit of a waste of time if we take a prisoner who's 'not talking,'" he proposed. The widening eyes in the bowman suggested that he was aware of how serious this offhand comment was.

"Chi-chi, Chiaro Rosso," stuttered Vince, shrinking away.

"Chiaro Rosso," repeated Kailan. "Did he use blood magic to animate those skeletons?"

"Blood magic?" the bandit gasped, eyes went wide, and he looked down at the amulet he wore on a leather thong, that rested on his chest.

Kailan pressed, "That amulet. Is it blood magic? What does it do?"

Katya put her sword point-first at the bandit's throat. "I suggest you answer him and truthfully or I will get upset. I'm sure you can imagine what happens when I get upset."

Skeld grinned menacingly, as if to make the same point, but rather than from being upset, he'd do it for fun.

Vince shook his head. "I don't know 'xactly. Rossa, he's not even a mage. Keeps the skeletons and corpses locked up. Anyone that steps out of line gets thrown in that room and ends up one of 'em. The amulets control them somehow. Rosso sends us out to the road with a couple of 'em at a time. Usually, the marks don't even fight, they just drop their goods an' run away."

Kailan yanked the amulet from around the man's neck, and held it in his hand, examining it. The amulet's crystal radiated a sense of the arcane, but it was different than his own fade-powered magic. This tasted of death. Kailan took a few steps to the downed bandit archer and grabbed the other amulet, which appeared the same, then handed them off to his companions to pass around and evaluate. "What do you think?"

Katya looked at it. "I really don't know much about magic but I get the sense this is bad. Necromancy sounds like. We may not be dealing with a mage but an artifact of some kind." Katya said.

Skeld hovered a hand near the amulet but didn't take it. His tattoos... itched. All too familiar. He grimaced and turned away, swearing under his breath, before looking back at it with a look of pure hatred. "*Allfeigligr. Vendo.*" He turned his head and spat, before turning away completely to put some extra space between him and the vile amulet. But now he knew it was there, it was as if it

radiated heat that he could feel on his skin, that he could feel it through the air, making him feel tainted... unclean.

Nazri took a deep centering breath. This kind of magic wasn't his forte, but that didn't mean he didn't have some experience in it. He focused his attention outward searching for an artifact or something out of the ordinary. After a moment, he felt as if someone was walking over his grave. "This is blood magic, he said in a voice a half octave bellow that he usually used, and there is something or someone out there deeper in the woods. I just can't pinpoint it.

Kalian walked over to the fallen bandit Martin had injured, but not killed. He applied healing magic, enough to keep the man alive and stable, though he was still unconscious. Kalian tied the bandit's hands behind him.

"We need to decide what to do next," said Kalian to his friends. "Do we go after the bandits or continue to the mansion." He paused to consider his own inclinations. "I think the bandits and their animated skeletons are connected with the haunted mansion. I propose we ask the merchant to take these two prisoners to the Jader guardhouse, then split up. Half of us can track the bandits to their layer, and the other half check out the mansion."

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## Split Up And Search For Clues

**Posted on 11 Apr 2023 @ 2:28pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Warrior Skeld](#) & [Rogue Nazri Arisant](#) & [Mage Kithris Sabrae](#)**

**830 words; about a 4 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Imperial Highway

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 7th, after 'Are We There Yet?'

The open area around the bend in the road bore the bloodied and trampled evidence of their encounter with the bandits: two prisoners, three recently-dead bodies, and the shattered remains of two skeletons. Just down the road were the scattered remains of the merchant's goods, where the bandits had plundered his cart.

Though Kalian asked with all of the persuasive charm he could muster, the merchant flat-out refused to transport the bandit prisoners and bodies back to Jader, even when offered the collected contents of their purses – 24 royals - which he insisted was owed to him regardless because of his lost goods. Moreover, the merchant strongly implied the two prisoners would soon be corpses if left in his care alone. In the end, Martin decided to take the living and dead bandits back to Jader in the wagon, intending to return as soon as possible, hopefully with more city guardsmen.

Once the bodies and prisoners were sorted out, Kalian turned to his friends. "So, shall we split up? I'm inclined to investigate the mansion. That could be where the blood mage is hiding."

Rhi had helped get the prisoners and bodies together. She agreed that the group would have to split. When Kalian suggested that the mansion might be where the blood mage was hiding, she knew that he would want to go after them. He would need protection. "If you are going after the blood mage, you are not going alone."

Responding to her pledge, Kalian grasped Rhiannon's forearm as a fellow comrade, then leaned in for a quick kiss.

Rhi did not hesitate when Kalian leaned in for a kiss. Once they separated, she gave him a smile.

"I will track down the bandits. Maybe have a few words with their chief!" Katya said.

Kithris had listened as Kalian had tried to get the merchant to take prisoners and bodies back. But the man refused. When he suggested splitting up, Katya was enthusiastic about tracking down the bandits. Tracking was something that Kit was good at. Giving Katya a smile, "I will go with Katya. They won't get far."

"Well," Nazri replied, "if forced to make a change, I'll go track down the bandits. But, I'm not so sure that splitting up is a good idea. It divides our forces and makes both teams more vulnerable."

"That is true, and the bandits will be expecting us now," Kalian acknowledged grimly. "Still, I can't help but feel the mansion is important. We'll be cautious." After a moment's thought, Kalian said, "Those bandits we fought didn't seem particularly well trained. More like bullies scaring their victims. Mind you, most people *would* run away from walking skeletons brandishing weapons. Those other bandits, the ones gathering up the merchant's goods... I didn't get a good look but I think some of them weren't even armed."

Kalian turned his attention to the huge warrior. "What about you, Skeld? Will you go after the bandits or investigate the mansion?"

Skeld gripped his axe hilt and grinned, turning to look at the group before he would proudly announce that he would be chopping bandits in half. But something... *itched*. He looked at the tattoos on his forearm, flecked with bandit blood but standing proud against his skin nonetheless. He *wanted* to go kill bandits. His *axe* wanted to kill bandits... But Kalian had a nose for trouble and a knack for attracting it. And right then, his nose was pointing him at that mansion. He sighed.

"Ah, killing bandits..." Skeld said, with a wistful tone. "I *really* want to go do a bit more chopping, but someone's got to keep Kalian from getting murdered by some noble. Or... whatever this big house has going on," he added, looking at his friend. "I've got your back, even if this does turn out to be just some fancy pants asses doing nothing."

Kalian's grin for Skeld softened to a smile as he faced the Chantry sister. "And you, Elinowy? You would be an asset in either confrontation."

Elinowy was inexplicably quiet, and didn't answer Kalian's question. But she joined Kalian, Rhiannon, and Skeld all the same.

At this point, Kalian had one of the amulets, and Nazri had the other, which meant each group had one. Kalian stuffed the strange thing in an emptied coin purse they'd taken from a dead bandit, then tucked it into a pocket.

Rhi listened as Skeld commented that he would watch Kalians back, she grinned. The big man could definitely hold his own, she gave him a nod. Looking back at Kalian she noticed that he was putting the amulet in a pouch and then into his pocket. To her, it was more habit but also she knew where it was at if something were to happen.

"Stay safe," Kalian said to Katya, Kithris, and Nazri. Then he headed down the road with Rhiannon, Skeld, and Elinowy, toward the mansion.

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## Dead Justice

**Posted on 19 Apr 2023 @ 7:38am by [Townfolk The Scholar](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Rogue Nazri Arisant](#) & [Mage Kithris Sabrae](#)**

**2,205 words; about a 11 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Bandit Camp near the Imperial Highway

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 7th, after 'Split Up And Search For Clues'

OOC: Bandit Camp Group: Katya, Nazri, Kithris

Nazri, Kithris, and Katya followed the bandits' tracks into the woods. All three were skilled hunters, and capable of sneaking up on even the most elusive prey. However, it soon becomes evident the bandits made little or no effort to disguise their tracks or the location of their camp. As the three make their stealthy approach, they could hear voices up ahead.

From their concealed location, the three adventurers could see the bandit camp. A large, fancy tent at the far side of the clearing, and in a rocky outcropping at the other side, the entrance to a cave. Scattered between are several smaller tents and cooking fires. Unexpectedly, many of the people in the camp did not *look* like bandits. There were children and adults who were neither armed nor armored, who appeared frightened and stood away from the more dangerous group gathered in

front of the fancy, large tent.

"Those look like slaves," Nazri said, "or more likely captives. We need to protect them and make sure they aren't caught in the crossfire or used as cover. Does anyone have any ideas?"

Kit had stayed quiet as they had tracked the bandits. Once the three had found the camp they stayed hidden. It did not take very long to come to the conclusion that there were possible slaves in the camp. Nazri had come to the same conclusion. At his question of any idea, she spoke quietly. "I can shape change and distract a couple of the bandits., see if they will chase me.

"That sounds good Kit! Just be careful!" Katya said.

A large man with a scar across the side of his face and a heavy axe at his side stands in front of the large tent. On the ground in front of him is the recently stolen loot. Facing him are two men and a woman, each of them armed and armored. From the fragments of conversation Kithris, Katya, and Nazri catch, they are relating what happened on the road to their probable leader.

"Ok after Kit draws off as many as she can, the leader is the target. We take him out and then deal with the rest. That is assuming it goes as planned. I think I can take him but may need you to run interference with the others if you can Nazri! I'm hoping once the big guy goes down, the rest will surrender!" Katya said.

In the bandit camp, every person stopped what they were doing to turn and stare at the enormous, hulking bear that had just emerged from the forest and growled, deep and rumbling. When beer raised up on its hind legs, the tableau was broken and a woman screamed. There followed total chaos. Servants, or perhaps they were slaves, panicked and scattered, running into the forest. Surprisingly, nobody ran to the cave entrance, which had the appearance of a very defensible position.

The bandit leader issued commands to his lieutenants. "Kill that bear! Then round up my captives." Raising his voice to be heard by those fleeing, he shouted, "You scum better come back or the dead will hunt you down!"

The three armed bandits spread out to face the bear. The woman was armed with a sword and shield, a slim man with shaggy black hair held two daggers, and the bald man drew a great sword. Their leader, Chiaro Rosso presumably, stood behind them brandishing a two-handed axe. The four bandits were now defending a camp otherwise empty of people.

Katya nodded to Nazri. "Let's introduce ourselves." She stepped out to where she could be seen. "Well, well. If it isn't the cowards who attack women and children. In the name of the governor, you are ordered to surrender immediately or die!" Katya said brandishing her sword and shield.

Kithris roared again when the group of bandits turned towards her. With all the advantages that she had in any of her shifted forms, the one thing she wished she could do, was cast magic. Still, she



loved shifting.

Nazri nocked an arrow and pulled back on the bow. "I'll put an arrow through your eye if you don't give up right now," he said to the one he assumed was the leader given his size and armor.

The slim man with shaggy black hair lowered his daggers. "They have us, Chiaro. We'd better surren-"

Chiaro Rossa grabbed the rogue by the back of the man's leather armor, shook him, and held the man in front of himself like a shield. "You want to spend the rest of your pathetic life in a dungeon? No? Then *fight!*"

The woman with a sword and shield rushed toward Nazri and the bald man with a great sword yelled a challenge to Kithris-bear. Chiaro tossed the rogue aside and then charged Katya. The rogue rolled onto his feet and started to back away.

Kithris lowered down to all fours as the bald man yelled a challenge at her. She took a few steps backward, making it look like she might be backing down. This gave the bald man the opportunity to charge. As he did he failed to realize what exactly Kithris-bear was doing. In the act of backing away, she lowered her back legs, almost like she was starting to sit.

Just as the bald man brought up his great axe and let out a battle cry, Kithris-bear sprang forward. The bald man only realized how fast a bear can be after it was too late. His battle cry became a scream of terror as a 10 foot 1700 pound great bear barreled into him. The axe flew from his grip, straight up, then fell back down just scraping her hind leg. This did not bother Kithris-bear as she tore into the bandit.

Chiaro was like a bull elephant. He charged with his axe trying to land a blow but Katya evaded him and sliced him. He roared and whirled around and as he did so Katya got him in the stomach. He was strong but slow and she was not as strong but much quicker. He was bleeding badly which slowed him even more. "C'mon, you elephant! You move like an old woman!"

That enraged the big man and he charged at Katya right into her sword. That finished him. She withdrew her sword and called, "Nazri, how fare you, my friend?"

Nazri had to pivot to a new target when the woman charged him. He did manage to get off a shot, but it was just a little wide of the mark. It hit the charging woman, but in the shoulder, not the chest. It slowed but did not stop her. He didn't have a choice. He dropped the bow and had just gotten his sword out of its sheath when the woman was on him.

Kithris-bear turned to face the rest of the group. Blood dripped from her muzzle. Spotting the rogue as he turned to run, it only took her a few strides to catch up to the rogue. With one big paw, she pushed the rogue down, breaking one of his legs. With a deafening roar, the rogue passed out. Only then did she turn to look to see if any of the others, especially Katya, needed help.

Arrow lodged in the bandit woman's shoulder, she started to swing her sword at the qunari but grimaced and bashed him with her shield instead. Then with the sudden realization that Chiaro and the others were down, she shifted away from Nazri and dove for the lifeless body of the bandit leader, then rolled to her feet. Dangling from the hilt of her sword was an amulet just like the ones taken from the two bandits earlier. Except, the crystal in the center of this amulet was still glowing.

The shield bash caught Nazri by surprise. He managed to turn himself enough so he took the brunt of the blow on his shoulder, and thankfully it wasn't meant to be a fatal attack. That didn't mean it didn't hurt like hell. It did. And he was knocked to the ground. By the time he had made it up again, the woman was past him.

From the mouth of the cave, a walking corpse emerged, brandishing a sword.

"Oh shit," Nazri said as he saw the corpse come towards him.

"Nazri, do your best to hold off the corpse. I will eliminate the problem at the source!" She turned to the bandit woman. "You think your magic tricks will save you? All you've done is earn a death sentence!" She rushed the woman, intent on ending her life and destroying the amulet. She manages to stab the woman's shoulder. "Surrender now or die!" Katya said.

The woman warrior dropped her sword, disarmed, though she had her shield. But the amulet was still attached to the hilt of her sword, now lying at Katya's feet. Blood poured from the woman's shoulder wound and she taunted Katya, raising her shield and trying to distract the other warrior from the amulet. "I will never surrender! Come and get me!"

The skeleton raised its sword and kept moving toward Nazri, ignoring the bear for now.

Nazri was more of a hunter than a warrior, but that didn't mean he couldn't wield a sword and do so with some skill. So, he dropped the bow drew his bastard sword, and took a swing at the advancing skeleton.

Nazri's sword cut the skeleton's sword arm clear off, sending arm bones flying across the killing ground to land on the unconscious bandit rogue. But the skeleton kept coming.

Katya shook her head. She wasn't stupid. Obviously, the crystal in the amulet controlled the skeleton. The woman was trying to distract her. Seeing the amulet laying at her feet, she brought her sword up and brought it down hard to shatter the crystal!

The moment Katya shattered the crystal in the amulet, the skeleton stopped moving. A second later, what was left of it collapsed to the ground.

Meanwhile, the bandit rogue groaned loudly, regaining his consciousness with the painful realization his leg was broken.

The warrior bandit would not give up, and even with her sword arm bleeding and empty, roared a battle cry and thrust her shield at Katya.

"You just don't know when to give up do you?" She sidestepped the shield and thrust her sword into the warrior woman, mortally wounding her, and releasing her from this life. "Stupid fool! Wasting your life like that! Kit, Nazri, you two ok?"

"A few bruises here and there," Nazri admitted. But nothing too serious."

Kithris-bear had started to move to help Nazri when the skeleton stopped after its arm was sent flying. Seeing part of it land on the unconscious rogue, Kithris-bear gave a bear-like rumble of a chuckle. Her attention was brought back to Katya when she heard the woman ask if both she and Nazri were ok. She gave a snort of acknowledgment and an up-and-down motion of her head.

The remaining bandit crawled toward the bandit leader's tent, trailing his broken leg and groaning with pain each time he moved.

Kithris-bear looked over to the rogue when she heard the bandit groan as he was dragging himself towards the leader's tent. With a roar, she moved a few steps toward the bandit. Which causes the bandit to stop.

The dark-haired bandit groaned and spoke through clenched teeth. "Don't... don't hurt me. I surrender. Please... I'll tell you everything. Anything you want to know."

"We'll treat your wounds and give you aid, just tell us what you know first," Nazari said as he put his hand on the wounded man's shoulder.

Kithris-bear moved to stand next to Katya, bumped her large head into Katya's arm, then nuzzled the woman's side, letting out low warm rumbles.

Katya smiled at Kit and stroked her head.

The bandit cringed away from the bear and the warrior splattered with the blood of his just-killed allies and chose to focus on the handsome qunari who'd promised to treat his wounds. "I joined Chiaro's gang a few days ago. That woman..." he nods toward the warrior Katya just killed, "was his partner. I heard them talking about a blood mage, but I never saw her. They would go into that cave, and come out an hour or more with those amulets, followed by demon-animated undead."

"Then perhaps we should investigate this cave! If there is a blood mage there then there will be further trouble if we don't deal with them," Katya said.

"I wouldn't go in there if I was you," muttered the bandit. Then he appealed to Nazri. "Please ser... you promised to treat my wounds."

Nazri nodded, "You're right," he admitted and started tending the man's wounds.

Kithris-bear let out more warm rumbles as Katya rubbed her head. She listened as the bandit talked. At the mention of a blood mage Kithris-bear shook her head and let out a low angry growl. She looked towards the cave, up to Katya, to Nazri, then back to the cave. Letting them know that she was ready when they were.

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## Mystery Manor

Posted on 05 May 2023 @ 4:29pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Skeld](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**2,208 words; about a 11 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Begonia Baudelaire's Mansion near the Imperial Highway

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 7th, after 'Split Up And Search For Clues'

OOC: Haunted Mansion Group: Kalian, Rhiannon, Skeld, Elinowy

Rhiannon, Skeld, Elinowy, and Kalian did not walk far down the Imperial Highway before they found the side road to the mansion just past the next bend. The road leading to the mansion was overgrown with disuse, although the tracks of Begonia Baudelaire's wagon were clearly visible. All appeared quiet as they approached.

The area in front of the two-story building was once a flower garden but is now overgrown with weeds and brambles. Closer to the front entrance, the adventurers could see fresh lumber and tools, recently abandoned as Begonia described. The windows were boarded up, but the front door stood ajar.

Kalian turned to his companions. "Shall we knock, or just go in?"

Rhi looked at the three for a brief moment then moved up to the door. She looked back, "Knock or open?"

Skeld barely paused for thought before the axe was swung, slamming into the wood of the door and rending it apart like it was made of cloth, the blade coming to a stop as it embedded into the floor at the threshold. He pulled the axe back, and the remains of the door splintered away on either side of him as Skeld relaxed and rested the haft of the axe against his shoulder. "Knock knock," Skeld said, with a chuckle.

Elinowy was about to voice her opinion on entering the Mansion when she was passed by Skeld who promptly rent the doors apart. She shook her head slightly at his display of masculine prowess.

Rhi had to step back quickly as the big man stepped forward and took down the door with his axe. "Looks at you with the manners of a gentleman. Knocking first and all." The sarcasm was plain though switched to a hint of anger. "Next time, let me know before you decide to knock, so I can get out of the way."

With the mansion's front door out of the way, sunlight illuminated an entry hall, with stairs on both sides, although the stairs on the right were broken. At the end of the hall gloom to the left and right suggested passage to the rest of the house. Any additional observations were cut short by movement from behind the broken stairway debris on the right and a corpse dressed in the tattered peasant garb shambled toward them.

Kalian, still standing just outside the door, hastily raised his staff and cast a barrier spell on himself and his three friends.

Rhi could barely see the corpse in front of Skeld. From what she could see, it looked like it had been a servant. "Maybe he is answering our knocking."

The scarlet sister looked at the shambling husk of a person, her heart saddened by the unnatural nature of his reanimation. She prayed the Maker would take his departed soul into his embrace as they dealt with the evil that disturbed his rest. She raised her hand in blessing for the forlorn corpse.

Skeld gripped his axe and hefted it forward, so the blade was held ahead of him like a wide polearm. Doorways were awful places to swing a great axe, but the weapon could serve as a ram or a pike in a pinch. His tattoos itched as he launched himself forward with a warcry, slamming the blunt head of the axe against the undead's chest, the weight of the barbarian buckling the ribcage as the wall met the dead man's back, the grimly satisfying crunch of broken brittle bones reporting loudly in the stagnant room.

"This is why I don't like knocking!" Skeld shouted, pinning the corpse against the wall, out of reach of the grasping arms and biting teeth. Skeld took a moment to look to his sides now that his eyes were not adjusting for the brightness outside, to ensure he wasn't being flanked.

Kalian stepped into the gloom of the mansion's entryway and caused the crystal at the end of his staff to glow, then scanned the hallway past Skeld and the corpse. "I don't see any more about to attack." He commented to Rhiannon, "Either Skeld has taken up decorating with wall-mounted trophies, or he needs a hand finishing that one off."

As the big man charged forward, Rhiannon shook her head slightly. It is not like anyone who was here did not know that they were here now. Still.

Stepping into the entryway with Kalian she pulled out her short sword and gave Kalian a nod. Walking forward she moved just to the side of Skeld, taking her sword she laid it against the stomach of the corpse. With all the strength of her Dwarven heritage, she cut the corpse in half, letting its lower half fall.

"That could be the corpse Lady Baudelaire encountered." Kalian wrinkled his nose. "Why is it that the adventure stories about walking corpses never mention how bad they *stink*? So, where shall we search first? Left? Right? Upstairs?"

Kalian was right about the stench. "Then no one would go out adventuring." Rhi grinned. "As for our three options, it makes no mind to me. Just remember though, never split the party."

At least, *never split the party more than it already was*, thought Kalian. "I'm thinking we try to make sure we can't be surrounded." Cautiously, Kalian walked past the stairs on both sides leading to the second floor and shined the light from his staff at the far end of the entryway area. To the left was a closed doorway. To the right was a hallway with two doors, one closed and one open that seemed to add a little light to the gloom of the hall, as though the windows were not as thoroughly boarded-up as they appeared from the outside. "Shall we check those two rooms first?"

Elinowy walked behind Kalian as he made his way into the manor. "The building doesn't feel as foul as it ought were this an incursion from the Fade. But still, it would be best to be wary of what lies ahead."

Skeld swept the axe in the direction of the body, flicking off bits of grime and viscera back to their previous owner, before turning to the doors Kalian had suggested. "We'll need a lock pick," Skeld said, turning to face the doors. "Hmm... I pick.... that lock!" he said, as he stepped forward to the door to his left and smashed the head of his axe into the lock of the door, splitting the wood apart into splinters. The remains of the door blew apart, the hinges being yanked off of the door frame. The lock, for its purpose, survived fairly well but was rendered mostly moot by the destruction of the door around it. "There we are! Lock *"picked"*!" Skeld said, proudly. The door opened to a bedroom, though the bed had taken a bit of a beating. There was an axe on the floor - someone had done something awful here, then left the axe behind. And locked the door behind.

Kalian could not help but grin at the way Skeld 'picked' the lock. "I must admit, that is an effective lock-picking technique." He must remember not to ask Skeld to pick the locks of any doors they wanted to keep intact. A cursory glance in the opposite room with an open door revealed a full bookcase, a ragged chair, and a moth-eaten bear skin rug. But no corpse.

"Any of that... magic sense, Kalian?" Skeld asked, stepping out of the doorway. The bed's covers were covering what looked like a body, but for the moment it was still.

"Do you think we should break the leg bones of that corpse in the bed? To slow it down in case it gets up?" Was it Kalian's imagination, or did that corpse just move...

"Can do!" Skeld replied, volunteering his axe.

Rhi looked to the skeleton in the bed, tilted her head slightly as she approached. She stood waiting for it to move. When it didn't, she gently separated the head from the body, placing it on the table near the bed. Turning back to the others, "If it decides to get up, it will have trouble finding us."

Sister Elinowy looked very serious at the events unfolding. "There is clearly evil afoot here, but it genuinely does not feel as foul as what experience with demons I have had. This feels more... simple." she stated.

"Blood magic doesn't rely on a connection to the fade, so I'm not sure I could detect that. I'll try..." Kalian closed his eyes and concentrated. Very faintly, he got the sensation that someone else might be reaching for the fade nearby. "I think someone might be touching the veil, someone in the house." He turned thoughtfully, then regarded his three companions and shook his head uncertainly. "Upstairs, maybe?"

Rhi moved to stand near Kalian as he started to concentrate on the veil. For Rhiannon, magic was to be looked at as a tool. Though a tool that if not used correctly could destroy everything.

She positioned herself as to protect Kalian as he searched the veil. When he finished and let them know that there was someone touching the fade and that they may be upstairs, Rhi gave a nod. "Upstairs is as good a place as any." She made her way to the door of the room.

Elinowy followed the dwarf in part to provide her what protection her faith in the Maker provided, but also because it felt safer in numbers.

Skeld opened the strap on his battleaxe and strapped it onto his back, opting to instead fight with his two bearded hand axe; a doorway was an awful place for a heavy battleaxe, but could be worked around with the right adjustments – ram through, head of the axe first and take them by surprise; once in the larger room, swing away and redecorate as required. *Stairways* and battleaxes were a recipe for murder, and not the kind he got to go to the bar and drink afterwards; low ceiling to embed the blade in, fighting on elevation, stairs were awful for footwork even if you did have room to manoeuvre (which you didn't), and to top it off going up meant and to top it off going up meant you were at a severe disadvantage to any move you could make. Smaller, quicker one handed axes would serve him better, and if all else failed they were a lot easier to throw than the rune axe.

"Lots of books in this house," Skeld commented, though it was hard to tell if this was a comment of admiration or of derision.

Kalian gave the bookshelves a quick look, but didn't take the time to search them. "Looks like whoever owned this house before Begonia Baudelaire was a mage, or interested in magic. Nothing obvious about blood magic, though."

Waiting for one of the two warriors to take point, Kalian then followed behind as they passed the

closed door on the west side of the hall under the stairs, and made their way up the stairs. At the top of the stairs is a door on the left (west) that is barred from the outside. To the right (east) is a hallway with two closed doors, one on each side.

Elinowy prayed for the Maker's protection. It was not her place to be in doubts of his providence, or to test it, but a place shrouded in darkness such as this certainly made prayer an attractive option. She sang out the verses, her voice starting softly but growing in confidence as she sang.

"You who stand before the gates,  
You who have followed me into the heart of evil,  
The fear of death is in your eyes; its hand is upon your throat.  
Raise your voices to the heavens! Remember:  
Not alone do we stand on the field of battle.

"The Maker is with us! His Light shall be our banner,  
And we shall bear it through the gates of that city and deliver it  
To our brothers and sisters awaiting their freedom within those walls,  
At last, the Light shall shine upon all of creation,  
If we are only strong enough to carry it."

Rhi had moved up the stairs as quietly as she could. Not really sure what to expect. When Elinowy started to sing, Rhi wanted to ask her to stop but refrained as the woman's voice washed over her. The beauty in that voice put her at ease and helped her focus.

As they topped the stairs Rhi looked at the door and seeing that was barred, she figured that what or whoever was in there, was not meant to leave.

"Prisoners or nasties?" Skeld asked, reaching for a pocket for a coin. "Who wants to wager on it?" he asked, quietly, though he suspected the singing might have given the game away. Or the wholesale destruction he had wrought downstairs on the doors. Skeld was one who lived by the rule "Stealth Optional".

From behind the barred door at the top of the stairs, a woman's voice called out, "Hello? Who's there?"

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## Undead Underground

Posted on 11 Jun 2023 @ 3:52pm by [Townfolk The Scholar](#) & [Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\)](#) & [Rogue Nazri Arisant](#) & [Mage Kithris Sabrae](#)



**1,460 words; about a 7 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Bandit Camp near the Imperial Highway

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 7th, after 'Dead Justice'

OOC: Bandit Camp Group: Katya, Nazri, Kithris

After leaving the Bandit survivor with some of the captives who had begun to return to the camp, Nazri, Katya, and Kithris-bear approached the cave entrance. In the dim light filtering in from outside, they could see that the cave was no bigger than a small room, empty except for two unlit lamps with handles. Across the cave on the other side, was a spiral staircase leading down.

"Well, looks like we head underground. Kit you want to change back or go in as a bear. Might be a little cramped as a bear," Katya says.

Kithris-bear looked at both Nazri and Katya as her large bear head nodded. It took a few moments for the shift back to being herself. She took a deep breath and sighed slightly, "It is always fun being a bear. Though you tend to be hungry all the time." She glanced back at the bandit when she said his.

Looking back to the cave, Kithris added, "Well, I say we see what is down at the bottom of the stairs."

"Sure," Nazri replied with a grim smile on his face. Let's do this."

The three head down the spiral staircase without incident, and find themselves in a narrow corridor, the sharp corner ahead dimly lit by a wall lantern. Easing past that turn, they can see that the hallway is long, fading into darkness at the end. Two doors are on the left, both closed, one near and the other further on.

"If one of you wants to open the door," Nazri said, his hand on his bow, "I'll cover you."

"Well sounds like something I should do," Katya said. She opened the closet door first, readying herself for an attack, just in case.

Nazri had his bow in one hand and was prepared to bring it up and nock an arrow if he needed to, but he took a deep centering breath. He had arcane powers he could draw from as well. Those might be better suited to deal with whatever was beyond the door.

Kithris stood just off to the side, her eyes brightening as her right hand turned a light blue. The magic gathered as she readied Winter's Grasp. "Ready when you are."

The door opened to the stench of rotting flesh and the sight of a small dark room that held both skeletons and partly-decomposed corpses. One corpse that leaned against the far wall stirred and

began to shamble towards the door.

Nazri saw the corpse amble forward, he reached forward into the shadow closest to the door and used it to slam the door shut.

Kithris was ready but had not expected such a stench to waft out from the other side of the door. This had caused her to take a small step back and lose focus on her spell. She was quick to regain her concentration. Her hand turning a light blue she didn't get the chance to cast because Nazri was quick to shut the door. "Take away all my fun."

Taking the lamp from the sconce outside the room full of dead, Nazri, Katya, and Kithris were able to see down the dark corridor. The wall to their right was plain stone. To their left was a closed door, followed by an open hallway to the left, and another closed door ahead at the end of the corridor.

"Alright, well so much for the closet! Let's check the left door first. Ready yourselves" Katya said as she opened the door cautiously to see what was in there.

Kit gave a nod to both Katya and Nazri as she readied to cast a barrier around the three of them.

The door opened to a room about the same size as the first. But where the previous room was populated by stored corpses, this room appeared to have a less macabre purpose. There was a desk and chair, weapon racks, and two chests. But no animated corpses in this room.

On the other side of the room was another door, equipped with a bar on the outside to lock something in, although the door was open. Shining a light into that room, Kithris, Katya, and Nazri could see that its meager furnishings suggested a jail cell. Another door on the south wall was closed, and (if they tested it) barred from the other side. From the relative dimensions of the two rooms, the three explorers might guess that the door led to the hallway they had not yet investigated.

"Well, looks like we have another hallway to investigate! Let's go!" Katya said

"Perhaps I should take the lead?" Nazri suggested. "I might be better equipped to handle things. What do you think?"

Kit looked to both Katya and Nazri, "I agree that we need to check out the other hallway. I say we check this room here with the desk, weapons, and chests. There might be some information on what is going on with these undead and amulets. Besides, there might be something in those chests that we could use or the weapons

"That is a wise idea," Nazri said, "let's see what is in them. Do you think any of them might be trapped?"

Kit shook her head. "I do not think so."

Inside the chest, the three adventurers found stolen coins and jewelry, and a letter that references *Miss Caroline Ellis' orphanage* catches Katya's eye.

Kit grabbed the jewelry, leaving the coin and letter.

Returning to the hallway, Katya, Kithris, and Nazri once again saw a closed door at the end of the corridor to the south. Another corridor led to the east, with a barred door on the left the three realize leads to the cell they were just in. The three adventurers approach the closed door at the end of the hall and open it cautiously.

Inside, they find more chests and stored valuable loot, but luckily no walking corpses. There is one more door, partway down the east corridor.

"OK let's grab the loot afterwards. One more door to check." She was still concerned about that letter. She took a closer look at it while she had a moment. Why was a letter addressed to the orphanage here? it worried her. She read the letter hoping to shed some light on the subject!

Kit gave a nod as they stopped at the last door. She looked to Katya when she noticed that she was looking over the letter that had been in the chest. Moving closer she put her hand on Katya's arm. "Is everything alright?:"

On closer inspection, Katya along with Kithris and Nazri looking over her shoulder, could see that it was not exactly a letter, but a familiar invoice neatly printed on a sheet of foolscap. The farmer who made daily early-morning deliveries of fresh milk and cheese to Katya's mother's orphanage included just such an invoice tucked among the bottles and crockery every week. At the top of the sheet were the words 'Miss Caroline Ellis' orphanage' and below were tallied the daily products and costs for that week, with a total. The invoice's date was yesterday.

A note was scrawled across the sheet in less neat handwriting, that read:

*Rossa,*

*The witch's kid is here.*

*More carers in house than expected.*

*Best to act when the warrior is away and kill all witnesses.*

*Ready and awaiting your command.*

~A

"Does anyone know who the witch's kid is?" Nazri asked, "or who A is? This note raises more questions than it answers."

"No idea although I fear for the Farmer. he was always so nice to us."

Kit shook her head when Nazri asked if anyone knew who A or the witches kid was. She looked up at Katya when she commented that the Farmer had always been nice to her. Giving her a smile, "If you

think you need to check this out, I will be there with you."

In the last room, Nazri, Kithris, and Katya found more stored loot, including a table with a pile of loose coins. But this room was distinctly different than the others, more like the basement of a house. On one side were wooden stairs leading up.

They could hear voices from the room above them.

Nazri put a finger to his lips to indicate silence than listened to see if he could make out what was being said.

Katya listened to the voices to see if she could make out what they were saying.

Kit stopped and gave a nod. She motioned to the two and made a gesture of pointing to herself then gesturing making herself small. Then she shifted into a mouse and headed to the door.

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## A Witch Opportunity

Posted on 25 Jun 2023 @ 8:09pm by [Mage Kalian Winter](#) & [Warrior Rhiannon Cadash](#) & [Warrior Skeld](#) & [Rogue Elinowy Ursulas](#)

**2,308 words; about a 12 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Begonia Baudelaire's Mansion

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 7th, after 'Mystery Manor'

OOO: Haunted Mansion Group: Kalian, Rhiannon, Skeld, Elinowy

From behind the barred door at the top of the stairs, a woman's voice called out, "Hello? Who's there?"

Rhi moved to flank the door, waited to see what the others were going to do.

Skeld looked down at the coin he was about to flip, sighed and slipped it back into a pocket. "Could have waited till I'd won a coin or two," he grumbled to himself. "Though, could *still* be a nasty – who's game?" he whispered, brightening up.

The voice made Elinowy stop in her chant. "We are friends in the Maker, my child. Who might you be," she said moving toward the sound of the voice, her fingers crossed in a stance of blessing.

Quietly Rhi spoke the others. "I can remove the bar, when you are ready."

"Are you friends of Rossa?" the woman's voice called. More quietly, as if to herself, she said, "No, no... they couldn't be. That singing... it was so beautiful." Raising her voice again, she called, "Beware the undead! They roam the halls. Rossa *made* me do it. Please, let me out. My name is Lilith."

Kalian looked from Rhiannon to Skeld, and spoke loudly. "Stand back from the door, Lilith."

Skeld raised an eyebrow at the description of the Maker as a friend of his, but didn't comment; *had* he gone out drinking with the maker and not known it? What a tricky god for such a straightlaced woman to worship! He chuckled at the thought of his bar crawl with a deity, and looked to the door, secured as it was from the outside.

"I normally toss a coin, but this kind of gamble works also," Skeld said, standing ready to take the weight of any charging beast that might be behind the door. He had met many great predators who could sound sweet and turn sour, and magic always seemed to be involved when he did. "Ready when you are," he nodded to Rhiannon.

"We need not alarm her." the Chantry sister spoke softly to her companions. Skeld's axes would certainly give a different message, but she approached the door with her hands up as she neared Rhiannon. "Proceed."

Kalian cast a barrier spell on his friends before Rhiannon lifted the bolt. The sight that met their eyes when the door opened was somewhat anticlimactic. In the far corner of the room, slightly to their right, stood a woman with dark hair, a tattoo on her face, and dressed in circle robes that were tattered but relatively clean. The room itself was shabby but neat. Lilith held up her hands in surrender, no staff, though she was surrounded by her own barrier spell.

Elinowy immediately took pity on the poor girl. Evven with her robes and tattoos suggesting she was part of the Circle, at least she had come from a point of control and legitimacy. She smiled kindly and moved into the room.

Rhi had removed the bolt holding the door then moved to step onto the room. She had to step around Kalian so she was in front of him pulling her rapier so that she could protect him if needed. What greeted them was a dark haired tattoo faced woman in what looked like circle robes. Rhi kept her rapier up in a defensive position.

Lilith's eyes were wide as she took in Rhiannon and especially Skeld. "D-d-don't hurt me. Please, serahs. Who-who are you?"

"As long as you are not a danger, we won't hurt you," said Kalian. "What happened here?"

Lilith turned her fearful gaze to the other three people facing her, looking for reassurance they did

not intend to harm her.

"You are safe child." Elinowy stated in as maternal and kindly of a voice as she could. If this was indeed the same Lilith that the Revered Mother had spoken of, her need to treat her with compassion was paramount. "We are here to help."

"Well, 'help', 'smash undead' - same difference," Skeld said, giving her a grin, though her barrier spell made his tattoos itch. "So, just how many friends does this 'Rossa' have? And, while you're at it - who is Rossa?" he asked, looking back into the hallway, to ensure they were not about to be jumped.

Rhi noticed how the woman looked at both her and Skeld, she was scared. Kalian assured her that they were not here to hurt her. Elinowy reassured this woman ask will. Then Skeld did as well, in his own way.

Rhi was one to not be out done, she stood bringing her rapier up, then with a flourish and a bow she said. "Rhiannon Emorette Dayntee Cadash. At your service." Her tone was respectful with a hint of daring and concern. As she finished her flourish and bow she kept her rapier in hand though she made sure that she presented no threat to this woman. Yet her crimson colored eyes showed that she was watching.

Kalian turned his attention away from the other mage to Rhiannon, distracted by hearing her full name for the first time. He wondered what the significance of those names might be, and what it meant that she chose this moment to share them.

Lilith gave them each a long wary look, and when Kalian dropped his barrier spell, she dropped hers. Still, she wrapped her arms around herself in the habitual way of someone who has felt persistently threatened for some time. She faced Skeld and answered his question, speaking with a Nevaran accent. "Rossa is the bandit leader. He locked me up here, made me do certain magic..."

"The bandit we questioned said Rossa was the leader's name," Kalian confirmed. He took the amulet from a pocket and showed it to Lilith. "It looked like he was using this amulet to control a corpse abomination with blood magic. Was that your doing?"

"Y-yes. B-but it's not... I mean," Lilith wrung her hands. "I'm from Nevarra. Before I was sent to Orlais, I assisted at the Grand Necropolis, and helped spirits inhabit the bodies of the mummified dead. I came to Jader looking for my child. I hid in this house, and was using a skeleton for a guard when Rossa found me. At first, he promised to help me search in exchange for sharing this place as a hideout, with undead guards. But then... Rossa imprisoned me, and threatened to harm my child if I didn't do what he wanted."

Sister Elinowy was moved one hand to cover her mouth as she listened to the horrifying story Lilith was presenting. While blood magic was a forbidden practice, Lilith's cause seemed to be based on desperate coercion for perfectly legitimate reasons. She knew what she would do for her sisters, let

alone if she were to have a child. She reached out to gently touch the woman. The Maker was teaching her many strange things in recent months. For a second time she was reaching out in compassion to help a magic user.

Lilith searched each of their faces and asked hopefully, "Is Rossa dead? Did you kill him?"

Rhi stood in a way so that she could move quickly, if needed, to protect Kalian and the others. She listened as this Lilith explained what Rossa had put her through. For Rhi the idea of blood magic chilled her to the bone. And the fact that she was standing in the same room with someone who had done blood magic. It wasn't till the mention of a child did Rhi let her guard down, just a little. She didn't bother answering this Lilith's question if Rossa was dead or not. "Where do you think he might have kept your child?"

"Last I knew, Luca had been given to an orphanage in Jader. Rossa said he'd send someone there to kill my child, and maybe some others to be sure they got mine, if I didn't cooperate." Lilith glanced furtively at the open door. "He's dangerous. And his partner, she is ruthless. If you didn't kill him, Rossa's probably in the bandit camp. We have to get out of here, he might come back-"

"The other half of our party went to the bandit camp," said Kalian. "If Rossa didn't surrender to them, he's probably dead by now." At least, Kalian hoped that was true, he was starting to feel a bit more worried about Kithris, Katya, and Nazri. Kalian looked to Skeld, Rhiannon, and Elinowy. "Maybe our friends need help?"

"There's another corpse abomination in the room below this one," said Lilith. "The amulet that controls it is probably on the other side of that room in the kitchen at the back of the house. From there, I know a way to the bandit camp."

Skeld bristled at the thought of another corpse abomination - they were aptly named, an unspeakable violation to create. "We kill that before we leave. We leave none of the defiled, or they will just create more death." He turned to the others, his face very much informing them that he'd go alone if necessary, though he didn't think he would have to.

The scarlet sister couldn't argue with the big man's summation. A reanimated corpse dead would only breed more destruction.

Kalian hurried back down the stairs to the door beneath Lilith's room they had not opened yet. He waited for Rhiannon and Skeld to join him, with Elinowy and Lilith back a little. "Ready to kill another walking corpse?" he asked Skeld and Rhiannon.

"Be careful!" hissed Lilith. "That one is a rage demon."

Rhi readied herself. "You just stay behind me Kalian. Understand." Her tone said, do not argue.

Kalian just nodded, and took a brief moment to admire Rhiannon's behind.

"Best do the same, Sister," Skeld mentioned with a smile before he stepped forward and joined Rhiannon, the title feeling strange in his mouth. He stretched his back muscles for a moment, as he prepared himself to fight the demon, visualising his axe cutting it in two as he did. *Demons... why'd it always have to be demons?*

Elinowy moved to put herself between Skeld and Lilith. The mage needed to be protected from her own creation. The Rage Demon, while dangerous, was easily dispatched, at least according to what she had studied. Even a lower grade demon like this was still an abomination to the Maker. She gracefully moved into a defensive form her fingers twisting into a basic warding glyph.

Kalian cast a barrier on all of them, then opened the door and stepped aside to let Skeld and Rhiannon in first. Inside the room was another corpse walking toward them, brandishing a sword.

Rhi stepped into the room. Without a second thought she charged the walking corpse. "You need to stay dead. And I intend to make sure you will." She expertly pivoted just before she reached the corpse, took a roll to the right and took out its left knee with her rapier.

The corpse fell to one knee, and dropped the sword. With a roar, the corpse began to transform into the fiery red, glowing monstrous shape of a rage demon.

Elinowy's stance shifted as the creature transformed. A most astonishing sensation moved across her abdomen, one she had not felt before. Not cramping, but an itch that was almost a tickle. Her eyes darted to Kalian, and then she turned back toward Lilith, thinking the mages were doing something. She straightened her robes across her midsection with one hand as she whirled into a new defensive form.

Skeld followed Rhiannon through the door, hand gripping his broad axe tight as he swung with a roar over her head and directly at the corpse's upper chest. The tattoos itched as he did so, though from the presence of the undead or the spell Kalian had cast, he was unsure. The blade crashed through a collection of plates, cutlery and goblets that had been stacked on a side table, but they did nothing to slow his attack down, though they did drown out his warcry somewhat.

Kalian cast winter's grasp, hitting the rage demon a fraction of a second before Skeld's axe crashed down. The demon shattered into dozens of pieces.

And like that the sensation subsided. Her eyebrow raised as she drew the conclusion that the feeling had to do with the manifestation of the demon. She was uncertain what this meant, but she felt fairly certain whatever was inked into her belly was the cause. But the Demon was dispatched. That was good. "Praise to Andraste." she uttered.

Rhiannon had watched as the undead started to fall after taking its lower leg, seeing a rage demon starting to form. Then a blast of icy cold hit it just as Skeld's axe came down shattering into thousands of pieces. "Oye, that is one way to make sure it stays dead."



"Thank the Maker," said Lilith with wide eyes. She headed for the other door. "The kitchen is in here, and there are stairs that go down to a tunnel that leads to Rossa's camp." But, at the kitchen door, she froze. Lilith pointed to the open doorway across the room and said, "I hear someone in the room just below."

Rhi turned towards the door that Lilith had run out when hearing her say that there is someone else below. She moved to stand by Lilith. "Stay behind me. I will go first." Rhi will move slowly towards the kitchen.

Elinowy moved to Lilith, her hand still covering her stomach. "We will protect you and your child." She stood ready not knowing what would be in the kitchen, but she prayed the Maker would grant them his Providence.

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## Zoinks, the Gang is Back Together

Posted on 14 Jul 2023 @ 7:47pm by [Rogue Jaslyn & Mage Kalian Winter & Warrior Rhiannon Cadash & Warrior Katya Charbonnet \(Shar-bon-ay\) & Rogue Nazri Arisant & Mage Kithris Sabrae](#)

**1,951 words; about a 10 minute read**

**Mission:** [Hall of the Phantom Shadow](#)

**Location:** Begonia Baudelaire's Mansion

**Timeline:** Bloomingtide 7th, after 'Undead Underground' and 'A Witch Opportunity'

The moment was tense.

The group that had been exploring the mansion prepared to meet whatever emerged from the downward staircase across the room. Rhiannon and Skeld stood in the center of the kitchen, with Elinowy, Kalian, and Lilith behind them.

Meanwhile, the group that had been exploring the tunnel prepared for whatever might be awaiting them in the room above. Kithris took the form of a mouse to sneak to the top of the stairs. Kithris-mouse quickly recognized her friends and allies, and a potential accidental friendly-fire situation was neatly avoided.

In a flurry of disjointed and excited bursts, the reunited team of adventurers exchanged their stories about what had happened since they split up.

The solution to the mystery soon became clear, and Kalian summarized it. "So, this started because

Lilith was, uh, squatting in this abandoned house whilst she looked for her son in Jader. Rossa found her here and offered her a deal. He would help her find her child, and she would animate corpses to guard their mutual hideout. But soon, Rossa imprisoned her in the house, and he and his gang were using the abominations to terrorize and rob travelers. Plus he was making many of the survivors serve him in his camp. Until Begonia Baudelaire bought the house and hired us to investigate."

Rhi listened quietly as Kalian went over what they knew. "I am glad that this was not a true haunting. Ghosts are nasty business. Most of the time."

Kit looked to Rhi then to Katya as if the dwarf might not be completely right in the head. Like is she for real? Ghosts?

"I've never seen ghosts," Nazri interjected, "but I've seen some really weird things. I don't doubt their existence."

Lilith had begged to read the note Katya found and had been staring at it while the others talked. She handed the note back to Katya. "I believe the 'A' who wrote this note is an Antivan woman named Agnola. Rossa brought her to see me once when I refused to cooperate. *Oh Maker*, the thought of her watching my Luca and the other children at the orphanage, of getting close enough to the children's milk to take this invoice." Lilith shuddered. "My darling Luca is not the only child in danger."

Kithris had read the note, over Katya's shoulder, not sure what to make of it. So when Lilith had read the note and explained what it meant. "There is nothing more that I hate, than the mistreatment of children. We need to look into this."

Rhiannon listened as Lilith explained the letter that Katya had found. Anger crossed her face at the mention of children being mistreated. Hearing Kithris say what was in Rhiannon's heart, the gleam in her crimson-red eyes seemed to glow. "Yes. I agree. Those who treat children like this....." Her tone was more a growl than words as she couldn't seem to finish her thoughts.

"We don't just need to look into it," Nazri said, "we need to end it and end anyone that took part in it."

"If she hurts any of the children, I will run my sword through her personally." As it was Katya's blood was boiling! How dare they threaten innocent children? Perhaps she should let her mother know so she could be on guard against this woman. "Lilith, any idea where we can find this Agnola?"

Lilith shook her head worriedly. "I don't know. The note implies Agnola is watching the orphanage, so she must be staying nearby. I would recognize her if I saw her again."

Kalian regarded the Nevarran mage thoughtfully. "We'll need to warn Miss Caroline as soon as possible, and look for this Agnola person. Lilith, it will be easier to find her with your help, but if you

go into Jader you could be caught and sent back to the Circle." *Or worse*, he thought, *if Templers knew she'd used blood magic*. He tried to catch Elinowy's gaze, wondering what the scarlet sister thought about that.

"I don't care, I just need to make sure Luca and the other children are safe," insisted Lilith.

The three warriors, Skeld, Katya, and Rhiannon, did a quick sweep of the remaining mansion rooms, and destroyed one more possessed corpse, completing the task set for them by Begonia Baudelaire.

The whole group back-tracked through the underground cellar to the bandit camp, collecting bandit loot as they went.

Skeld's disappointment at not getting to destroy more walking corpses was quelled when he rushed into that first underground room Nazri, Katya, and Kithris had wisely shut, and emerged in a happier, but messier, state.

The heroes found the bandit camp emptied of living people. The bandit leader's tent was cleaned out, and his victims dispersed. Luckily, there was a stream close to camp where those who wished to could clean any accumulated gore off their armor.

A familiar large wagon pulled up to the gathered heroes, driven by an elven woman wearing Gray Warden light armor. "Good to see you again, Elinowy, Rhiannon, and Kalian. I ran into Martin headed into town. He was delayed at the Guardhouse, so I offered to bring the wagon back, and help. Though it looks like you have the situation under control." She turned her attention to Lilith, Katya, Kithris, Nazri, and Skeld. "Good to meet you, my name is Jaslyn. Are you ready to head back to Jader?"

"Nice to meet you Jaslyn, I'm Katya Charbonet!"

"I'm ready," Nazri spoke, "I think we all are. I think time may be of the essence."

Strider had been patiently waiting for Katya! "Alright! Let's go! Kit, care to ride with me?"

Kit looked at Katya and smiled. "I would like that." As she moved to be close to Katya.

Jaslyn gave Kithris a long familiar look, recalling the afternoon and evening she'd spent with the Dalish elf and Cainan on the first day of the Summerday festival. With a sly grin, she noted the easy way Kithris accepted the warrior's invitation.

"Good to see you again, Jaslyn," said Kalian. "We need to get back to Jader as quickly as we can."

The wagon ride back to Jader was both faster and more serious than the ride out to the bandit hideout at the mansion. Jaslyn pushed the pair of horses pulling the wagon as hard as she dared without hurting them, whilst she prompted her passengers to describe their adventure. Upon hearing about Lilith's plight, Jaslyn offered to publicly conscript Lilith as a last resort if Templars tried to apprehend her. With an unsubtle glance over her shoulder and raised eyebrow, the elven Grey Warden extended the same offer to '*any other apostates they might know*' who found themselves in a similar predicament.

Kithris glanced at Jaslyn and gave her a small nod then looked to Katya when Jaslyn made the offer if there was any trouble. She knew who Kit was and had kept her secret. "If it comes to that. It might be my only chance to stay out of the Circle." She whispers quietly to Katya.

"Do what you must my dear. I want you to be safe! It is very risky, but if that's what it takes, I will support you and stand by your side!" replied Katya.

Jaslyn drove the wagon right to the orphanage. Miss Caroline's met them outside, understandably concerned about the children seeing the group in their current post-battle state. She asked, "What is going on?"

Rhi looked to Miss Caroline. "Do you have a child named Luca here? We are here to collect him." Her tone was neutral though also held a, do not question us, as well.

"Rhiannon, show some respect. Remember this is Miss Caroline who has done more for the orphaned children of Jader than anyone. Mother, we have found Luca's mother. They were separated by some bad people. We dealt with them. We wish to reunite Luca with his mother." Katya gave her a look that said best not to ask too many questions about it! She knew her mother trusted her.

Kit looked to Rhi when the dwarf had made her statement. Shook her head slightly. It had been a while since she had had to deal with a dwarf. Giving Katya's arm a slight squeeze, and speaking softly, so as to not be heard by Rhi. "Do not worry, all dwarfs have a gruff side. She meant no disrespect. For a dwarf, her tone actually shows respect. She expects Miss Caroline to respond in kind. Showing that she will protect the children. Not cave like some mouse."

Rhi glanced at Katya. Though she had not known the woman to long, she had proven herself to be a warrior and loyal to the group. Her voice softened a bit yet still held a little of the do not question us. "As long as you vouch for her, then I will trust her."

"P-please, Miss Caroline." Lilith dropped to one knee in front of the older woman and looked up at her imploringly. "Luca is my son. Please tell me he is here, and he is all right. Please let me see him."

Miss Caroline gave them all a stern glare, though her expression softened when she regarded Lilith. Turning to her daughter, she said, "Katya, the lives of the children in this orphanage are entrusted to

me. My responsibility, not my property. You know well enough that I would *never* hand a child over to *anyone* just for the asking."

"Bandits were holding this woman, Lilith, prisoner, and threatened to hurt her son, a child in your orphanage, unless she helped them, Miss Caroline. Show her the note you found," Kalian urged Katya.

Miss Caroline looked at the note and went pale. "This is about Luca? The child is here, yes. Healthy and well. A woman came here yesterday and claimed she wanted to adopt him. Her name was Agnola. Does she have something to do with the bandits Lady Seryl mentioned?"

"Yes she does. Very much so. She probably won't come back but perhaps this will clear things up mother." Katya gives her mother the note. "After you read it you will understand much better! Lilith is his mother."

"It seems that you have also averted a threat to the children here. Well then." Miss Caroline took Lilith's hand, and took in the younger woman's bedraggled state. It was unclear if she could support herself and Luca, or if she even had a home in which to raise him. Plus, Luca had come to the orphanage via the Chantry. "Stand up, dear. You may see Luca, rest up here, and we will discuss arrangements for you and your son."

Facing the large group of adventurers, Caroline said, "I am deeply grateful to you all, and I apologize for not inviting you in. This is a home for children, not a tavern. Luckily, Kalian's home *is* a tavern." Caroline was well acquainted with Kalian, he and her daughter had been friends for years. "Off with you now! You all need baths."

In a stage whisper, Miss Caroline added, "Except for you, Katya, this is your home. And of course you are always welcome to bring home a guest." She winked and glanced at Kithris.

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OOC [The note](#) says:

*Rossa,*

*The witch's kid is here.*

*More carers in house than expected.*

*Best to act when the warrior is away and kill all witnesses.*

*Ready and awaiting your command.*

~A