Flashback: Alexis & Hanska

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Flashback: Alexis & Hanska

# Part 1: Trials and Tribulations

([Theme: Tysolari](http://www.fileden.com/files/2008/1/22/1713713/Tysolari.mp3))  
  
Alexis woke up with a start. It was early as usual. He sat up and looked at the envelope by his bed that he had received yesterday. He hesitantly opens it and reads it.  
  
~~~  
Alexis,  
Having read your application and observed you in action on our training courses, I am most impressed with your potential. Your talents would be most welcome in the Tysolari military. You seem to have what it takes to be a fine officer, and I would like to formally offer you the position of Captain. Please come to the offices at 10am on the 28th Sulime to discuss your appointment.  
  
Regards,  
  
Major Riggs.  
~~~  
  
[So... four hours... four hours to do what?]  
  
He spends the next few hours sitting still on the bed, brooding and dwelling on his dark past.  
  
He finally leaves, arriving at the office building half an hour early. He heads to reception.  
  
**"Excuse me, Miss. My name is Alexis. I am here to speak with Major Riggs. He is expecting me..."**  
  
  
**"Indeed I was, but not for another half hour."**comes a jovial voice from behind him.  
  
Alexis turns and stands to attention, giving him the Tysolari Salute.  
  
**"At ease, Captain."**  
  
**"It's strange being called that."** Alexis states.  
  
**"Well, you'll get used to it. Come. Follow me."**  
  
The two of them walk along the corridors.  
  
**"We are assigning you to work with General Hanska. Have you heard of him?"**  
  
**"Can't say I have."** Alexis shrugs. **"But I'm new to Tysolari. I'm from... elsewhere."**  
  
**"I see. Well, I'll warn you. The General can be a bit... unorthodox at times... but there are few that could match his prowess in battle."**  
  
The Major stops them outside Hanska's office, and knocks on the door.  
  
Hanska had been busy with a mound of paperwork when a sharp knock sounded at the door. Annoyed from the interruption of an unexpected guest, Hanska moves to the door and opens it.  
  
**"What do you... oh, Major. What do you need at this hour?"**  
  
The Major salutes his superior, and Alexis does so moments later.  
  
**"Sir. I have been instructed by Colonel Kime to appoint the new captain here to someone capable of training him for the role. He suggested that you would be the best choice, given your combined wisdom and experience."**  
  
Hanska sizes up the stranger before him.  
  
**"He looks a little scrawny, don't you think? Are you sure he can handle the military, let alone being a Captain?"**  
  
[*Handle it? I've seen more combat than you could imagine.*]  
  
**"That is for you to judge, General. You are to assess his aptitude and competence. Now, if you would both excuse me, I have other matters to attend to."**  
  
He shakes Alexis' hand, before saluting Hanska once more.  
  
**"Good luck with your training, Captain."**  
  
The Major leaves the two alone. Alexis looks into the room at the General.  
  
[*I don't like this guy.*]  
  
Hanska watches Riggs depart and heads back into his office, not acknowledging Alexis until he sits back down.  
  
**"Come in. Take a seat."** He indicates the chair in front of his desk.  
  
He nods in thanks, and does as instructed.  
  
He continues working on papers for a few moments before he speaks again.  
  
**"What is your name?"**  
  
**"Bla... uh... Alexis, Sir."**  
  
He finally looks up.  
  
**"Alright then, Alexis. Tell me about yourself."** He goes back to sifting through his paperwork.  
  
**"I have been a fighter my whole life. I have seen many conflicts. I am not from Tysolari. I specialise in swords, and dual wielding is my forte. There really isn't all that much to tell beyond that."**  
  
He looks up again. He didn't like that the kid wasn't from Tysolari.  
  
**"Where *are* you from?"**  
  
He wasn't sure if he should mention his true origins. The pathways were dangerous.  
  
**"I'm from the north-west."** he says quickly, not exactly lying, but not being specific either.  
  
Hanska looks at Alexis for a full minute before continuing. He would find out later.  
  
**"So you use swords then? You'll have to demonstrate for me later. But for now, I have work to do. Report back here in 5 hours."**  
  
Alexis returns home for a few hours. He finds himself dwelling on the past once again, so decides to take his mind off it and kill time by doing some training until he has to leave.  
  
---  
  
He arrives outside Hanska's office half an hour early, but waits in the hall outside for the remaining half hour. He knocks on the door 5 minutes prior to the scheduled time.  
  
Hanska emerges from his office with a grin on his face and an air of lightness to him. He was in a visibly better mood.  
  
**"Alright Alexis, I hope you came prepared to show me what you can do."** Hanska looks Alexis over again, taking note that he had his swords with him. He continues to walk and indicates Alexis to follow.  
  
Alexis follows in silence, his expression cold and emotionless.  
  
Hanska leads Alexis into one of the training fields, set up specifically for training exercises.  
  
**"I've heard that you should be more than capable of handling yourself on the field of battle. We'll see how true these claims are."** He grins again. There was little else that Hanska enjoyed more than a good demonstration, whether it was by the one being tested or those helping to test.  
  
**"Ready yourself.**  
  
He draws both of his swords, spinning them both deftly around several times before gripping them properly. He stands upright; both blades point towards the floor.  
  
**"Ready then?** He calls out from a sealed room above the field.  
  
He gives a single, dispassionate nod.  
  
([Theme: Stalwart Leader](http://stordarth.shiningalpha.com/AP/Music/Alexis-StalwartLeader.mp3))  
  
From a nearby wall, directly ahead of Alexis, a rubber arrow is fired with a soft sound emitting.  
  
Hearing it, he deftly sidesteps the arrow, bringing one of his blades upward to slice it in half, before returning the blade to its previous position by his side.  
  
Without a warning, another arrow is fired, but from behind. At the same time, a fully armored soldier emerges from in front of Alexis and swings his wooden sword at Alexis' side.  
  
Alexis dodges the soldier's swing, arcing himself right back and placing his hands upon the ground to support himself. He kicks at the soldier's leg to distract him from the incoming arrow.  
  
The soldier grabs the arrow with his free hand and breaks it in half, tossing it to the ground. He raises his sword again.  
  
**"Enough, Neil. Thank you."** The soldier stomps off, frustrated for his failure. Hanska clears his throat and speaks again.  
  
**"Well Alexis, you've managed to surpass our first stage. Using your enemy to defeat your enemy, a wise decision."**  
  
He nods.  
  
**"It is always good to use everything at your disposal, even if they are not under your control."** he states with a wisdom that belied his apparent age.  
  
**"Stay where you are."**   
  
The field begins to change and the lighting drops to the equivalent of twilight. Artificial trees emerge everywhere, making the darkness more dense and casting slight shadows around the field. The ground shifts slightly, adding different levels to the field. A fire begins to engulf a tree some feet away, and all is silent as the fire burns.  
  
He walks towards the burning tree, undeterred by the heat of it. He looks around, wondering if anything might be nearby that could aid in extinguishing the flames.  
  
Three arrows come through the flames, making no sound over the crackle of the fire. Another soldier drops down from a tree across from the fire and throws a rubber dagger square at Alexis. The soldier springs from the tree and into the darkness.  
  
His eye sight sharp even in these conditions, he manages to see the arrows just in time to avoid them. Noticing the soldier from the corner of his eye, he begins to charge towards him, deflecting the dagger with his swords as he moves.  
  
The soldier keeps his pace, enough for Alexis to continue pursuit. The soldier quickly cuts sharply to his left as another arrow fires past his head. The arrow explodes only centimeters behind in the face of Alexis. A light brighter than the sun fills the area.  
  
His eye dazzled somewhat, he quickly brushes back his hair with a hand, allowing his other eye - unaffected by the dazzle because of said hair - to take over whilst his other recovers. Having seen the soldier turn left, he continues in that direction.  
  
The soldier had been waiting for Alexis to continue running, knowing how adrenaline will make one continue relentlessly. The soldier releases a branch he had been holding into the face of Alexis.  
  
The branch hits him square in the face, knocking him back. He rolls backwards, utilising the momentum from the blow instinctively, he winds up on one knee, looking towards the tree.  
  
**“Come out, come out, wherever you are!"**  
  
**"Enough."** Hanska calls down. Everything returns to normal and Hanska emerges onto the field, grinning.  
  
**"Alright then Alexis. If you are going to have any kind of leadership responsibilities, you will need to prove it now. You may be able to take care of yourself, but what about others?"** He leaves the field and goes back to where he can watch. The field once again changes, setting a scene for battle.  
  
The battle commenced well, and Alexis used the land to his advantage. However, his neglect to get to know his comrades soon took its toll, as one by one his allies were defeated. He fought on regardless, down to the final blow, before falling at the last hurdle.  
  
Hanska emerges once more from the place and comes onto the field as the other members re-enter.  
  
**"Well Alexis, I saw some good, but some very bad as well."** He smiles nicely as he says this, looking around the field and everyone present.  
  
**"Care to tell me what was going through your mind during the battle? And maybe what you think was done well and poorly?"**  
  
Alexis stands up from kneeling on one knee. He looks at Hanska with disinterest.  
  
**“I treated the men as disposable assets. Where I'm from... that was how things were done. I am learning that this is not how things *should* be done, though it is a lesson that will take me some time to truly understand.”**  
  
Hanska gets stern, not liking Alexis' attitude toward his allies.  
  
**"Yes. That is most definitely how things are done here. Your allies are to be an extension of yourself. A *non-disposable* extension of yourself."** He looks at Alexis a moment and then smiles again before speaking once more.  
  
**"Is there anything else you think you screwed up? And what did you do correctly?"**  
  
**“Because I did not see them as allies, I did not take the time to assess their prowess. That said, oft' times, combat is swift, and you don't always have the luxury of time to study the strengths and weaknesses of your allies. I purposely neglected to ask their specialty, and judged them at face value for this reason. Real combat is not kind, and training exercise or not, I treated this as I would a real battle.”**  
  
**"While I agree that combat can be sudden, you had ample time to learn basic information about your allies before you engaged. This would have likely ensured a victory. As it was, you almost made it out of that exercise. Knowing your own strengths is only a very, very small part of battle. You need to know your weaknesses, the strength and weaknesses of your allies and your enemies. However, you did show a good knowledge of your surroundings."** He turns to the men on the field.  
  
**"Please introduce yourself to your new captain. I know he has some polishing to do, but give him a chance or face cleaning the bathrooms for the next month."** he finishes, chuckling at the rest of his men, with a joking air.  
  
Alexis stands in silence, awaiting the introductions.  
  
The three men extend hands in turn to Alexis and state their names. The warrior introduces himself as Boyd. The archer announces his name as Archie, and the priest - whom Alexis had previously mistaken to be a mage, called himself Jedrick.  
  
He doesn't take the hands. He simply glances to each of them, and nods to them in turn.  
  
**“It's... nice... to meet you.”** he states in an awkward, flat tone.  
  
The three men look at Alexis like he was diseased and then look to Hanska. Hanska's expression is a mixture between displeasure and annoyance. He nods to the men for them to leave the field. He then turns to Alexis.  
  
**"We have... much to discuss."** he says unamused. He indicates for Alexis to follow him back to his office.  
  
He follows Hanska in silence back to the office. His mind is devoid of thought as he enters the office behind him.  
  
**"Alexis, take a seat."** He waits a moment before continuing.  
  
**"We have a lot to learn about how to treat people it appears. If you are to lead anyone, you will have to learn to respect them. If you do not show respect to those around you, then you will not be shown respect in return. When people do not respect you, they will certainly not follow you and that could mean death for everyone."** He lets this sink in for a moment. **"Do you understand?"**  
  
He stays silent for a long moment.  
  
**“I am beginning to.”** he states cryptically.  
  
**"I'm beginning to, Sir."** He states, correcting Alexis. Without waiting for a response, he carries on with the conversation.  
  
**"Now, I have an assignment for you."** He finally sits down and grins. **"You need to get out there and familiarize yourself with the men and women you will be working with the most. I suggest you learn more about them to better understand how to utilize them in combat. The three you... met earlier are not the full crew. The rest you can find at post 8. You are dismissed."**

# Part 2: People of Post 8

([Theme: Tysolari](http://www.fileden.com/files/2008/1/22/1713713/Tysolari.mp3))  
  
Alexis leaves the office. With little else to do, he decides to get right on with the assignment, and walks to his new station, post 8, to meet the lieutenants under his command.  
  
The door swings open as Alexis enters. The three men from earlier look up and nothing more. Still upset by Alexis' earlier rudeness, they ignore him. However, a young centaur woman and an elven girl approach him to greet him.  
  
The centaur speaks first.  
  
**"Nice to meet you, Captain. My name is April."**  
  
The elven girl nods after April introduces herself.  
  
**"I'm Daisy".**  
  
He nods to them in turn, giving them a mirthless smile that quickly fades.  
  
**“And you.”** he says with little enthusiasm.  
  
The centaur, not being deterred by the closed personality of Alexis continues on.  
  
  
**"So I've never seen you before. And... you are our Captain now?"**  
  
He nods again.   
  
**“Yes. Though I did little to deserve the role.”** he states matter-of-factly.  
  
**"...well, it is our duty to follow you either way."** she looks around at the rest of the group, indicating that they should not ignore their new Captain.  
  
He nods once more, smiling slightly; this one genuine.   
  
**“Thank you. I... hope I shall prove worthy of that duty.”** he says, his tone ever so slightly brighter.  
  
April smiles, happy that the Captain was opening up ever so slightly.   
  
**"How are you in combat, sir? I mean, how do you go about it?"**  
  
**“I fl...”** [*No... I can't fly anymore...*]  
  
He clears his throat to disguise his mistake.  
  
**“I use two swords. I also know a little trick... a form of... Sword Magic,"** he lies, **"which I use against tougher opponents to bypass their defences."**  
  
  
The centaur's eyes brighten up as the others fully turn their attention to Alexis, clearly waiting for him to continue.  
  
Feeling uncomfortable under the scrutiny, he coughs.  
  
**“I suppose you are waiting for a demonstration...”**  
  
Before Alexis can continue, a birdman flies in from seemingly nowhere and lands in front of the captain.  
  
**"Good afternoon! You must be our new captain, judging by the look on everybody's faces. My name is Ral. Nice to meet you."**  
  
He is a little surprised by the new entrant, but does not show this outwardly. He gives an affirming nod to the birdman. Noticing the awkwardness his behaviour was causing, but unsure how to go about alleviating it, he decides to keep things strictly business.  
  
**“What can you tell me of General Hanska?”**  
  
The group as a whole begin to grin. They hadn't been around Hanska as much as others, but they all felt the same. The birdman spoke up.  
  
**"General Hanska... well there isn't much to say. He is a General for a reason, make no mistake about it. He can be serious about his work sometimes, but he's generally great to be around. You just have to know when to be serious."**  
  
**“I am serious all of the time, so that will not be a problem.”** he states seriously; the comment amusing if only for the fact that he is being serious.  
  
Ral grins awkwardly, not knowing if Alexis is being serious or not.  
  
**"What are your impressions?"**  
  
**“Of General Hanska? I have little to go on, so I cannot honestly answer."**  
  
**"Fair enough."**  
  
Ral nods and drops back amongst the others of the group.  
  
Boyd looks to the other 2 that had fought with the captain earlier.  
  
**{"Jed... what do you make of him? Seems a bit... cut off doesn't he?"}** he whispers.  
  
The priest nods  
  
**{"Do you think it's because he has no idea what is going on?"}**  
  
Boyd shakes his head.  
  
**{"No... he handled himself well out there. Did you see that move he pulled on that guy? Training or not, that must have stung a bit. He just... seems to lack any kind of people skills. What do you think Archie?"}**  
  
The archer considers this comment for a moment.  
  
**{"What do you think we should do about that? Take his bed as he sleeps and put it in the goblin pen?"}**  
  
Boyd chuckles under his breath.  
  
  
**{"You know that wouldn't help matters, Archie, funny as it'd be."}** he shakes his head mirthfully.  
  
**“Something amusing?"** Alexis asks, spying Boyd's whispering.  
  
**"Uh... n...no sir. Sorry sir... did you have something to say to us?"**  
  
**“I did not, but it seems you have *plenty* to say. I am interested in precisely what."** he says flatly.  
  
Boyd shifts uneasily in his chair.  
  
**"We ah... were just... talking about that move you did... none of us have seen anything quite like it. Right guys?"**  
  
Alexis gives a piercing stare at Archie and Jedrick, awaiting their response.  
  
Archie looks to Jed and speaks for them both.  
  
**"Neither one of us have seen it either. What... what was it?"**  
  
He stares at them a moment longer.  
  
**“As I said. A rare form of Sword Magic."** He sheathes himself in his power once again, drawing his blades. Turning his attention to a barrel sitting in the corner, he swings the swords around him, sending out a wave of devil energy towards it. The impact turns the barrel into splinters quite effectively.  
  
The soldiers of post 8 all share in a stunned silence. Not knowing what exactly it is, but knowing it was impressive, they applaud.  
  
  
He feels a strange feeling as they applaud him.  
  
[*What... is this? Aiden said I would have new emotions...*]  
  
His mind trying to work out what it was, he smiles slightly at the display of appreciation instinctively.  
  
Not wanting to let Alexis have all the fun, Archie speaks up.  
  
**"You aren't the only one with some tricks,"** he says, grinning. Archie pulls an arrow to his bow. **"See that fly on the wall? Watch this!"**  
  
He lets the arrow fire and misses the fly by 6 inches. Ral doubles over with laughter. Jed chuckles.  
  
**"That will be coming out of your paycheck!"**  
  
Boyd roars with laughter at Archie's fluff.  
  
**"Hehehe. Keep practicing Archie! You're improving every day! One day, you'll get that fly for sure!"**  
  
Alexis stifles a chuckle, allowing it to come out as a cough to clear his throat.  
  
Archie hangs his head in shame and Daisy pats him on the back sympathetically. A few moments pass as they all calm down. April looks to Alexis and remembers his position.  
  
**"Sir, it's about time for patrol. I'm guessing nobody mentioned that to you before. Though, it does seem a bit pointless. Nothing ever happens..."** she trails off, day dreaming.   
  
He looks at April with a stern gaze.  
  
**“Duty is duty, regardless of its import. You would do well to remember that."** he advises coolly.  
  
**"Yes, sir!"** She replies with a wide grin before she makes her way to leave the group and begin patrol.   
  
**“Let's move out then."** he orders, as he follows behind April.  
  
The group go on their patrol with nothing noteworthy to report on. They say their good-byes and part ways for the evening. However, Hanska catches Alexis before he makes his way out.

# Part 3: Settling In

([Theme: Tysolari](http://www.fileden.com/files/2008/1/22/1713713/Tysolari.mp3))  
  
**"Alexis, do you have a moment?"** Hanska asks, slightly bouncing on his toes.  
  
He half turns, glancing sideways at the general. He gives a single nod.  
  
**"Oh good, come with me then, I want to know how things went today. In fact, you can start now."** He says cheerfully as he turns and heads back to his office.  
  
He follows the general in silence.  
  
  
**"Come on then, hop to it! How did the day go?"** His grin does not fade.  
  
He shrugs.  
  
**“They... seem... nice.”** he says, unsure quite what Hanska was after.  
  
**"Well that's a start. Did you learn anything about them?"**  
  
He shrugs again.  
  
**“A little. April is pleasant. Archie needs to practice his aim. Boyd needs to learn his place. Jedrick needs to dress more like a priest. Daisy needs to actually speak, and Ral... needs to learn to be more punctual.”** Though some of his observations might be observed as humorous, he is entirely serious in his words.  
  
Hanska laughed at the comments, knowing all too well how true each statement was.  
  
**"Do you think you will be able to have them follow you?"**  
  
He nods.  
  
**“They seemed impressed enough with my abilities. I believe I have earned sufficient respect to build a rapport with them.”** he states matter-of-factly.  
  
Hanska nods, half-pleased.  
  
**"It is a start. But remember, to be a leader, you must first be on the same level as those you are leading. For one day, I am glad to see you are getting along as well as you are."** He pauses before proceeding. **"How long do you think it will take you to build battle-ready rapport?"**  
  
**“I am still new to valuing the lives of others. It will take me some time, but I adapt quickly.”**  
  
**"Fair enough, Alexis. Come see me in 3 days, unless of course you need something before that. My door is always open. You are dismissed."** He smiles at Alexis before he returns to his work.  
  
Alexis returns home. His 3 days are quite lonesome. He spends it wrestling with his guilt. He is thankful for the time to pass, so that he can get out and take his mind off of it.  
  
---  
  
He returns to Hanska's office 3 days later, knocking on the door.  
  
**"Come in."**  
  
He enters the room, saluting the general.  
  
**"At ease, Captain. I hope you enjoyed your little break and had time to think about those under your watch. Speaking of Post 8, they have been wondering where you were. It seems you left a good impression on them. Well done. Why don't you go and see how they are?"**  
  
Surprised that he had left such an impression, he does not display this surprise outwardly. He simply nods, and heads over to post 8. He pushes the door open, and walks in.  
  
**"Captain!"**  
  
April's voice was easy to recognize through the chatter of the group. The rest turned, smiling or nodding in hello to the captain.  
  
**"Where have you been Cap?"**  
  
  
He looks to April, then to Jed. He nods to everyone; with a slight smile this time. It was as if he were - almost - glad to see them.  
  
**“I was... given the past few days off. I... trust you have all been well?”**  
  
The group nods again. Everyone had been fine over the past 3 days, albeit very bored. Daisy makes her way toward Alexis sheepishly and hands him something wrapped in a small cloth before retreating into the group.  
  
He unwraps the object, and looks at it. He holds the wooden, slightly scorched figure up to study it, and is surprised to find that it is a carving of him. He blinks before turning to Daisy with a look of mild surprise.  
  
**“You... carved this... for me?”**   
  
She blushes and silently nods. A few small cuts can be seen on her palms and fingers as she brushes the hair out of her eyes.  
  
He nods back.  
  
**“That's... nice of you. It is... a good likeness. Thank you.”** he notices the cuts on her hand, but does not say anything regarding them.  
  
Boyd speaks up.  
  
**"Glad to have you back captain. It's been boring as heck here, as per usual."**  
  
Alexis shrugs.  
  
**“So... what *have* you all been doing in my absence?”** he asks, curious.  
  
Archie grins.  
  
**"Playing duck-duck-goose of course."**  
  
April gives him a swift slap to the back of his head and answers Alexis.  
  
**"Well... during patrol we do play a little game..."**  
  
She stirs a little uneasily, hoping the Captain wouldn't get angry.  
  
**"We watch as the citizens and personnel walk by. Points are rewarded for different... races. +10 for Ratmen, +7 for Dragonmen, +5 for Catfolk..."** she trails off, feeling childish.  
  
He raises an eyebrow.  
  
**“So... patrol is more play time for you... I see.”** he says in an emotionless tone.  
  
**“Ignoring the fact that the game is inherently racist by attributing different values to different species, such frivolity may cause you to miss important cues to something actually *worthy* of your attention. I appreciate that I am new to this city, and perhaps do not yet accept its utopian nature at face value, but I see a patrol as a serious necessity to keep the peace. There will be time for... fun and games outside of that, but I would ask you to keep your mind on the reason *why* you patrol in future.”** he says with a stern, yet somehow soft voice.  
  
April bows her head sheepishly, not liking being reprimanded.  
  
**"Yes, sir."**  
  
The others look around like they knew nothing about the game. Daisy has a look of sadness towards the fact that her companions were such children.  
  
He checks the time.  
  
**“Speaking of patrol, it's time we got moving. Let's go.”** he says as he turns about face, his cape swinging outwards. He walks out of the room, expecting them to follow.  
  
The group follow Alexis to begin their patrol, though not in their typical fashion; a few inaudible whispers pass back and forth between the soldiers.  
  
Alexis leads the patrol through the streets of Tysolari. He pays particular attention to the alleyways on his rounds, asking the others to wait whilst he enters them alone. He discovers one or two people who are down on their luck, and he offers them a small handful of coins to buy some food, and suggests that they visit the Cathedral to get warmth and shelter from the elements. He tells them to ask for Aiden, and to inform him that Captain Alexis sent them. He does this a number of times, sometimes staying in the alleys for quite some time as he gains their trust before he returns to the patrol group on the main street.  
  
**“The alleys are clear.”** he states when he finally returns.  
  
**"You sure like those alleys. What's with all the trips?"**  
  
He looks at Archie.  
  
**“If it is one thing I do know, it is that evil prefers the cover of darkness to the light. Alleys are darker than the open street, and when you look closer into that darkness, you realise that the shadows cover a multitude of sins.”** He pauses. **"I take it you have never given close attention to the alleyways of Tysolari, then."**  
  
**"Not that I haven't, more that I don't linger too long."**  
  
**“Any reason in particular?"**  
  
**"Never saw any reason to do so."**  
  
**“Then allow me to give you a reason. The alleys are as important as the streets, and are to be included as part of our patrols from now on. That is not a request. That is an order. Am I understood?"** he asks calmly.  
  
Everyone in the group nods, fully understanding.  
  
**“Ok. The alleys are ok for today. Let's move on."** Alexis patrols the streets with the group, sending them into various stores and venues to ensure everything is in order.  
  
The group do as they are ordered with nothing to report back other than a new limited-time chocolate at a local vendor.  
  
As the end of their patrol approaches, Alexis muses as he leads the party.  
  
**“Hmm. It appears you were right. This *is* rather dull. Still, our duty it is, and our duty we shall perform. Let us patrol the park."**  
  
The group follow Alexis to the park, enjoying a moment away from the buildings. Some remember the park from their youth, when they had 'freedom'.  
  
Alexis looks at the children playing, and families having fun. The concept is alien to him, and his brow furrows with confusion at the scene.  
  
April approaches Alexis.  
  
**"Something wrong, Captain?"**  
  
He doesn't respond straight away.  
  
**“I'm... not used to this... seeing people... happy... unafraid..."** he trails off.  
  
April frowns softly.  
  
**"Well you better get used to it, Captain! This is your new life!"**  
  
She smiles at him, hoping to cheer him up  
  
He thinks for a moment, closing his eyes and breathing in deeply through his nose, before exhaling.  
  
[*No rage... no hatred... no desire to kill... I've never felt so at peace... and yet... something feels amiss...*] He stands still for a while in silent contemplation.  
  
**"Sir, we've been here a while. Shouldn't we... move on?"**  
  
  
Alexis snaps out of his reverie, blinking a while.  
  
**“I think that will do it for today. Let's head back."** he says, putting an arm forward to usher his companions to go first.

# Part 4: Opening Up

([Theme: Tysolari](http://www.fileden.com/files/2008/1/22/1713713/Tysolari.mp3))  
  
The group heads to leave the park when a small, weak voice is heard. Apparently a child had climbed too high in a tree and had no way to get down. With the only adults around being Elves, Dwarves, and Halflings, nobody was able to reach the young elf.  
  
Alexis turns upon hearing the voice, raising a hand to signal the group to stop. He approaches the tree and looks up. He speaks to the boy.  
  
**“Stay calm. We'll get you down."**  
  
The group had nothing of use to help the boy and none of them were tall enough to reach him.  
  
He turns to Ral.  
  
**“Can you fly up there to get him down?"**  
  
**"The branches are far too thick for my bulk, sir"**  
  
He looks to April.   
  
**“I need a bit more height. Might you give me a boost?"**  
  
**"I... don't think it would be enough, Sir."**  
  
He turns to Daisy.  
  
**“What spells do you know, Daisy? Anything we could use here?"**  
  
Daisy looks shyly to the ground and kicks a stone.  
  
**"Nothing that would be of assistance. But Jed might know something."**  
  
His gaze shifts to Jed.  
  
**“What is she talking about?"**  
  
Jed mumbles a spell and Alexis can feel his muscles loosen and a spring in his step.  
  
**"Try running up there."**  
  
He recognised the sensation, having been exposed to it before. He nods before dashing towards the tree, leaping gracefully up the trunk towards the branches.  
  
Alexis easily rescues the child. Even though he would have been able to reach him with no issue without Jed's help given time, the aid of the spell renders the difficulty of the task moot as he ascends and descends the tree with ease. The child is returned to his grateful parents and the group make to leave the park.  
  
He leads the group back to Post 8 in silence. When they arrive, he lets everyone in before him, and takes a seat to the side, where he begins sharpening his swords.  
  
The group talks amongst themselves. Such little stimuli had a very large effect on the group. After a few minutes, they part for their homes, all wishing him a good evening. Only one remains behind with Alexis.  
  
Not noticing the straggler, he continues his sword-sharpening.  
  
Daisy speaks up.  
  
**"Sir, are you... okay?"**  
  
He turns to Daisy.  
  
**“Hmm? Why do you ask?"**  
  
**"You just seem a little out of it..."**  
  
His face becomes puzzled.  
  
**“How do you mean?"** he asks, confused.  
  
**"I... you don't talk to us a whole lot, and seem to like being alone."**  
  
The question causes his expression to fall.  
  
**“I... don't really have... all that much to say. Not that would be pleasant to recount at least."** he says solemnly, looking away.  
  
**"Do you want to... talk about it? I don't mind."**  
  
He shakes his head slowly.  
  
**“I would not wish to bore you with my troubles. People have enough problems of their own to deal with. It strikes me as unfair when people make others shoulder additional baggage."** he states clinically.  
  
Daisy can't help but laugh a little, but she stifles it very quickly.  
  
**"The biggest trouble we have around here is being too bored. We all wake up, come to work, enjoy the evening and repeat. Nobody has problems here, and if they do... they are not as big a deal as people make them out to be."**  
  
Daisy was coming out of her shell a bit. She had spoken more to Alexis on this day alone than she had to everyone else collectively over the entire month.  
  
He looks at her with a weak smile that quickly fades.  
  
**"Let's just say that... I was not a nice person back where I came from, and leave it at that."**  
  
Daisy hesitates, realizing that pushing more would not be a good idea.  
  
**"I can't believe that, Sir. But I will do as you wish."**  
  
She bows and sets off for her home.  
  
Alexis ponders her parting comment, before returning his attention to his swords. He finishes after some time, and then goes about tidying the Post 8 area up a bit. As he organises his desk, he finds a note that catches his eye.  
  
[*Hmm... what's this? A fugitive?*]  
  
He looks at the note more carefully.  
  
[*Gilded paper... a council order? There's a description... female; early twenties; short auburn hair; armed and dangerous; approach with caution...*]  
  
He puts the note in with the rest of his files.  
  
[*I'll keep my eyes open. Still, doesn't seem likely to be a big deal... I'd have heard if anyone under incarceration were to escape. It's probably nothing.*] He puts the papers in his archives, and goes to leave for home.  
  
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An uneventful week passes. Alexis receives a note directly from Hanska to report to his office. Alexis obeys the order, showing up promptly.  
  
**"Alexis, so good to see you. How has your time been here so far?"** Hanska is in a particularly great mood this morning.  
  
**"I'm settled into the running of things."** he states in a neutral tone.  
  
**"Ah, come on now. Nothing more than that? How is Post 8?"**  
  
**"They all seem... like nice people."** he states again.  
  
**"Have you learned anything from them then?"**  
  
**"Such as?"** he shrugged.  
  
**"Things people learn from people!"** He grins, **"Acting around others, how our city expects you to act... *being less reserved...?*"** He emphasizes the last part.  
  
He shrugs again.  
  
**"I'm learning how each of them behaves. I also found out that Jed knows Support. As far as being less reserved is concerned... don't count on it."** he finishes dryly.  
  
He grins again.  
  
**"Ah, so you *have* learned Jed's ability now. Might have saved you in our first training exercise."** He laughs a bit and then continues.  
  
**"And regarding your reservations... well, that's not what I've heard."**  
  
He raises an eyebrow.  
  
**"You've spoken with Daisy a bit, yes?"**  
  
**"A little. I was beginning to wonder if she was capable of speech, if I'm honest..."** he says in a tone that suggests the potential for humour, without actually possessing the intention of being humorous.  
  
Hanska laughs again.  
  
**"You aren't the first one to question that! In fact, she really only speaks when she's forced to. What did you do to make her talk?"**  
  
He shrugs once again.  
  
**"Nothing that I'm aware of..."** he says, perplexed by the question.  
  
Hanska laughs again.  
  
**"No worries then. You are dismissed."**  
  
He raises a brow.  
  
**"That's it?"** he asks, having expected more, somehow.  
  
Hanska laughs again.  
  
**"Yes"** Hanska states simply, grinning from ear to ear.  
  
He shrugs one last time, before saluting the general and making his exit.  
  
[*I guess I'll go and see how they're getting on over there.*]  
  
He heads over to post 8 and enters quietly; so quietly that none of them would have noticed him immediately, until the sharpening of swords commences. He stops however, when he notices someone missing.  
  
**"Has anyone seen or heard from Daisy today?"**  
  
**"None of us have... we were hoping you knew..."**  
  
Archie trails off, sounding worried.  
  
He shakes his head.  
  
Boyd stands, clearly worried.  
  
**"I hope she's alright. It's not like her to miss her shift like this. She'd always let one of us know."**  
  
Alexis gets up.  
  
**"Where does she live? I shall pay her a visit and see if she's alright."**  
  
April writes down Daisy's address on a scrap of paper and hands it to him.  
  
He nods in thanks.  
  
**"You guys wait here. I won't be long."**  
  
Minutes later, he is at the address in question. He knocks on the door.  
  
A voice barely penetrates the walls.  
  
**"Come in..."**  
  
He opens the door and enters the house.  
  
Daisy can be seen lying on the floor, curled in a ball and shaking. Tear marks stain her face and eyes.  
  
He hesitates in the doorway; he recognises that she is in pain, but does not know how to react to seeing it. He gingerly approaches, crouching next to her. He holds a hand out, hesitantly deciding what to do, before he places it on her shoulder.  
  
**"What's happened?"** he says in a soft voice.  
  
**"I..."**  
  
She can barely speak. She points to her sweat-soaked chest. She was apparently in much pain as she cringes from moving just to point to her chest. She shakes again.  
  
He checks her for any sign of external injury, but Alexis finds nothing of note except that her clothes are nearly drenched with sweat despite the cool temperature of the house. Seeing that any kind of movement is uncomfortable for her, he hesitates to move her. He instead looks hastily for any kind of medicinal items that might help her. He finds none, and by the time he returns, Daisy is unconscious.  
  
He picks her up, and returns to Post 8 as quickly and as carefully as possible.  
  
**"JED! I need a hand here!!"** he bellows.  
  
Surprised, Jed jumps to his feet and attempts a healing spell. This does nothing to help Daisy. He looks to Alexis, helplessly. Seeing the failed attempt, Ral takes flight.  
  
**"I'll get help!"**  
  
Daisy stirs as Ral flies off. She reaches for Alexis' hand.  
  
He hesitates, but cautiously allows her to take it.  
  
**"Does no one else know what's wrong with her?!"** he asks anxiously.  
  
Boyd shakes his head.  
  
**"N...no sir..."** he whispers.  
  
Minutes later, Ral returns with an advanced Healer. She applies some medicine to Daisy which stops the shaking and keeps her breathing steady.  
  
**"She should take this medicine every 4 hours, while she is awake."** the healer says, procuring some medicine from her pouch and handing it to Alexis. **"She'll just need to be looked after for the next day or two. No need to have her leave her home. Call for me right away if something else comes up, but I highly doubt it will. Captain."** She nods to Alexis and heads out.  
  
**"Wait! What's wrong with her?!"** he yells.  
  
The Healer turns around to respond to the Captain.  
  
**"Just a reaction to something she ate. Easy to recognize when you've been around as long as I have. A bad reaction, but nothing to worry about."**  
  
He nods, and turns his attention to Daisy.  
  
Daisy looks weakly at Alexis and barely smiles. She mouths the word 'home.'  
  
His brow furrows as he nods. He turns to the others.  
  
**"Take care of things here for the next couple of days. I'm going to keep an eye on her whilst she recovers. Boyd, would you inform General Hanska of the situation?"**  
  
**"Aye, sir! I'm sure he'll be understanding. I'll go now."**  
  
Boyd leaves the room.  
  
**"I'll see the rest of you in a few days. If you need me, I'll be at Daisy's."** he picks her up carefully, and begins to leave with her.  
  
Alexis arrives safely with Daisy at her home. A few hours later, Boyd shows up, informing Alexis that the message had been delivered to General Hanska and that he was to remain with Daisy.  
  
**"Thanks Boyd. I'll see you soon. Drop by if you want to see how she is, or if you need me for anything."**  
  
**"Yessir!"** Boyd salutes eagerly before leaving.  
  
([Theme: Heart of Light](http://stordarth.shiningalpha.com/AP/Music/Alexis-HeartofLight.mp3))  
  
Alexis spends the next couple of hours sitting next to her bedside; watching over her as a silent vigil. Daisy eventually awakes from her slumber.  
  
**"Captain..."**  
  
He smiles with relief as she comes to.  
  
**"You're awake!"** he says as he gets up from his chair.  
  
**"Thank you for staying with me... you will stay, won't you?"**  
  
**"I've been ordered to, but... I was going to anyway."** he says, with a slight smile as he sits down on the bed next to her.  
  
Daisy's face lights up and some color finally returns to her face. She grabs his hand tightly and smiles.  
  
**"I was... worried for you. What happened?"** he asks, concerned.  
  
**"I really have no idea. I had breakfast and was starting to get ready when my whole torso had a shooting pain and then kind of locked up."**  
  
**"What did you eat?"**  
  
**"It was some kind of fish a new vendor was selling. It was really pretty so I thought it would be good..."**  
  
He smirks.  
  
**"Not everything that looks nice is good for you. Take me for instance."** he says with a chuckle.  
  
Though it kind of hurts, Daisy can't help but laugh at the joke.  
  
**"Well, I wouldn't say that..."** she blushes brightly.  
  
He pulls the medicine from the bag, not noticing her red face.   
  
**"Here. The priest that helped us said you need to take this every four hours."** He opens the bottle and offers it to her.  
  
She nods and takes the medicine.  
  
**"Aren't you bored?"** she asks, unashamed.  
  
He looks at her with a furrowed brow and a slight turn of his head, as if silently asking for more information.  
  
**"Just... sitting there."**  
  
**"I am a patient man. A few hours sitting means little. Besides, remember what I said. Duty is duty, regardless of how boring said duty might be. Bored or not, here I shall remain."**  
  
**"You say duty... but before you said you would be here regardless..."**  
  
**"Indeed I did. And that should tell you that I am not bored."** he says with a smile before continuing.  
  
**"Duty is not always an obligation. Occasionally, one can find value in something regardless of the duty with which one is charged."**  
  
Daisy cannot help but blush again.  
  
**"So what was your initial reason for wanting to stay with me?"**  
  
His expression blanks for a moment before falling.  
  
**"When you didn't show up I was... worried something serious had happened. I'm paranoid like that. I wanted to stay to make sure you get well, and that you don't relapse again. I... don't trust anyone else to do it..."**  
  
She says nothing but shifts to put her head on his lap, pleased that he was being so kind.  
  
**"...um..."** he doesn't quite know how to react to this. He awkwardly pats her on the back, and scratches his head.  
  
**"Captain, please tell me a story,"** she requests, drowsily.  
  
**"A... what?"** he says, confused.  
  
**"What did you do before you came here... to Tysolari?"**  
  
He swallows hard. He really didn't want to tell anyone of his time before Tysolari. *He* didn't want to remember it. He shifts uneasily.  
  
**"I... really don't..."** he begins, trailing off.  
  
Daisy simply looks up, a sad expression on her face.  
  
He looks back, his expression apologetic.  
  
**"You would hate me if you knew the truth. I... I couldn't bear that as well..."** he looks away.  
  
**"I don't know if you have noticed, but I'm not quite like the others."**  
  
She giggles.  
  
**"I won't judge you."**  
  
He lowers his head and sighs.  
  
**"You say that now..."** he says solemnly.  
  
**"Sir, excuse my tone but... I can see through you. I know you have things to hide. But I can also see a light in you..."**  
  
He looks at her with surprise.  
  
**"Then... what do you see?"**  
  
She sits up on her bed and looks into his only visible eye.  
  
**"This eye is full of darkness. I can see it easily."**  
  
She pulls back the hair covering his other eye.  
  
**"This one... Despite this dark wound, shines with the brightness of Mitula."**  
  
She rubs her finger down the scar.  
  
**"I don't know why you hide it so..."**  
  
His face pales.  
  
**"I'm sorry, I can't... if you knew the extent..."** he gets up from the bed, and walks to the door leading to a different room. He turns back.  
  
**"I really am sorry..."** he says as he leaves the room.  
  
She hangs her head in shame, crawls back into bed and drifts off to sleep, as tears slowly creep down her face.

# Part 5: Counting Blessings

He spends the night sitting in the room opposite, dwelling on his past, and on Daisy's apparent extra sensory observations of him.   
  
[*She can see part of what I am... can I trust her with my past? Everyone else that has known what I am has feared me, and most have tried to kill me... except Aiden... I... the last thing I want... is for her to hate me for something I cannot change...* ]  
  
He drifts off into an uneasy, uncomfortable sleep.  
  
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**“YAAAAAARRGH!!!!!!"** he yells as he jolts awake, a mere four hours after falling asleep. He falls from the chair and hits his head on the ground, dazing him.   
  
The scream brings Daisy literally out of her bed and onto her feet. She rushes to Alexis, craddles his head in her lap and calls for him to wake up.  
  
**"Captain! Are you ok?! Please be ok! Wake up!"**  
  
His eyes glazed over, he doesn't really know what's going on. He hears Daisy's voice, but mistakes it for that of another.  
  
**“...why... Mitula... why did you do this to me... death would have been... kinder..."** he slips back out of consciousness.  
  
Daisy is stuck between puzzlement and fright. She slides a blanket under Alexis' head and makes for the phone, calling for Hanska's direct line. Minutes later, Hanska arrives, far too large for the door. He nods to Daisy and picks up Alexis, removing him from her home and taking him to the cathedral. He leaves them with the priests on hand who know what to do. Hanska returns to Daisy to spend the rest of the evening calming her down.  
  
He wakes up, and realises he is not in the same place he remembers being in last.  
  
[*Ow... my head... I must have hit it... that dream!*]  
  
**“DAISY!!"** he yells, his concern banishing the niggling pain, and he sprints out of the cathedral towards her home.  
  
As the door bursts open, Hanska stands up.  
  
**"Quiet. I've finally been able to get her to rest... though I know it will please her to see you, it should wait until the morning. Are you alright?"**  
  
He rubs his head.  
  
**"Yes. I fell asleep on the chair. I must have fallen and hit my head. I'm sorry to have worried you, sir... and Daisy... I shall refrain from falling asleep in chairs in future."** he says in a deadly serious tone.  
  
Hanska grins   
  
**"Yes, I would stay away from chairs from now on. I will leave her in your care once more. Report to me in the morning."** Hanska departs.  
  
Alexis waves him off, and locks up. He enters Daisy's room quietly, with a look of sorrow. He quickly retreats to the other room, and lays down on the floor, using his cape as a pillow.   
  
[*Some help I was... at least that dream didn't come true...*]  
  
He drifts off into another restless slumber.  
  
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([Theme: Tysolari](http://www.fileden.com/files/2008/1/22/1713713/Tysolari.mp3))  
  
He wakes with a start, but not with the same intensity as the morning before. Four hours being the norm for his sleep time, he is awake before Daisy. He enters her room, and sees that she rests above her covers. Not wanting her to catch a chill, he uses his cape to cover her, and sits on the bed beside her, waiting patiently for her to wake up, which she eventually does, happy to see him as ever.  
  
**"You're back!"**  
  
He nods.  
  
**"How do you feel?"**  
  
He scratches his head.  
  
**"I was about to ask you that question."** he chuckles lightly.  
  
She giggles and sits up.  
  
**"I feel great!"**  
  
She gives him a hug before getting up and vanishing into the kitchen.  
  
Surprised by her spritely exit, he picks up his cape and puts it back on, before following her.  
  
Daisy serves up a small breakfast which they eat in silence. She looks at her clock.  
  
**"We are due at the post in an hour. I really need to freshen up. I'll only be a few minutes."**  
  
She puts the dishes in the sink and heads for the shower.  
  
Alexis decides to kill time by washing the dishes up for her whilst she showers. Realising that he hasn't freshened up for a while himself, he removes a bottle of cologne from his pack and sprays himself with it. He paces whilst he continues to wait for her.  
  
Daisy comes out 30 minutes later, fully dressed and smelling like the sea.   
  
**"I'm ready to go when you are."** she calls, as she looks for Alexis and dries her hair with the flame she has around her head.  
  
He nods to her, and opens the door for her.  
  
**"I'm sorry for worrying you yesterday. Sometimes my dreams are rather... animated."** he says quietly.  
  
**"It's ok. I worried you before, so I guess this makes us even."** she giggles.   
  
**"And if you ever *do* want to talk... I'll be here."**  
  
He nods.  
  
**"Thank you. I will keep it in mind."** he says as they leave for Post 8.  
  
They walk in silence for a while before Daisy speaks up.  
  
**"Captain... can I ask you something?"** she asks quietly.  
  
He turns to her, sensing the topic to be serious.  
  
**"What is it?"** he asks tentatively.  
  
**"When you fell, you came to briefly. You said something about Mitula. That she'd done something to you. Something that sounded bad. I didn't understand, because the goddess doesn't do bad things..."**  
  
His face blanks, and he doesn't answer.  
  
**"What happened?"**  
  
Alexis shakes his head.  
  
**"Mitula... what she did... was a good thing... but it left things... difficult for me..."**  
  
**"Because of where you're from?"**  
  
He nods.  
  
**"That said... had it not happened, I'd have never have met you, or the others. So it worked out for the best."** he says, his expression brightening somewhat.  
  
Daisy blushes slightly as she turns her gaze to the ground.  
  
They promptly arrive at post 8. Boyd stands up when he notices them enter, relieved to see Daisy.  
  
**"Daisy! You're ok!"**  
  
**"Y...yes."** she utters shyly.  
  
Alexis smiles as the other members of the group begin to move in their direction, eager to see that she was well.  
  
**"I'll leave you to settle back in for a bit. The General has asked me to pay him a visit."** he says as he places a reassuring hand on her shoulder.  
  
She looks back at him, smiling and nodding, before turning to the others to talk with them.  
  
He makes his exit and promptly arrives outside Hanska's office. He knocks on the door.  
  
**"Alexis! Come in!"**  
  
He opens the door, and gives a salute before entering.  
  
**"You have a very unique knock."** He says, grinning, **"How was the rest of your evening?"**  
  
**"Uneventful."** he states.  
  
**"And how is your head?"**  
  
**"It was only a minor bump. It's fine."** he says with little feeling.  
  
**"Does that mean you can lead in a training session?"** Hanska can't help but grin."  
  
He nods, unphased by the question or the grin.  
  
**"Okay then, hop to it! Gather your group and meet me here in 10 minutes."**  
  
Alexis promptly gathers the group together, and Hanska leads them back into the training room. Alexis takes the time to ensure that he knows exactly what his allies are carrying, and what abilities each possesses - Daisy blushing when he addresses her directly.  
  
The field was set, and Hanska gave the command for battle to commence.  
  
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The battle started well, but Boyd fell early on, and the force never fully recovered from the loss of their defender so early on. They were at terrain disadvantage the entire time, and struggled to take down each group due to their defensible positioning. Even when Alexis knew the odds were against victory, he pushed on with what resources he had left, squeezing out every last drop of efficiency he could. Throughout the entire exercise, he - subconsciously - defended Daisy at every turn, even choosing to take a hit that he knew would take him out of the fight in place of her; as if he'd rather have had it end early than see her come to harm, even if the harm was only training scuffs.  
  
Hanska walks onto the field with no expression. Those defeated walk out as well, chatting about the battle. Hanska looks to Alexis.  
  
**"Only a few mistakes. Losing Boyd that early to poor luck certainly hurt, but sending some of your comrades in too early was the ultimate failure here. Still, much improvement was made."**  
  
He sits up, holding his head.  
  
**"I still lost though..."** he says, clearly annoyed with himself.  
  
**"Consider your rapport with those under your command. Consider the experience of those I sent out to fight you. While you could have won, no doubt... I wouldn't have expected it."** He looks around at everyone, though not expecting them to speak up. **"You need to be polished up, yes. You'll get there though. Now head back to your post and get cleaned up."**  
  
His expression blank, he gazes at no one. He pushes himself up and rapidly walks out of the training area. He doesn't wait for anyone, quickly nursing his wounds and tidying himself up. By the time they arrive, he sits in his chair, sharpening his swords. He doesn't look up as they enter.  
  
The group walks in together, though they are no longer talking about the training exercise. Archie goes over to Alexis.  
  
**"No worries, Cap. We'll get them next time!"**  
  
He pauses in his sharpening, without glancing up.  
  
**"If this had been a real battle, we'd all be dead now. All of us. I let you all down."**  
  
**"We have plenty of time for that to improve if anything actually were to happen. And what is the likelihood of that, eh? Don't beat yourself up about it."**  
  
Boyd chimes in.  
  
**"Archie's right. That's the whole point of these exercises. To make sure something like this doesn't happen on a *real* battlefield. Don't let the minor mistakes get to you, Sir."**  
  
Then Ral.  
  
**"You're a good leader, Sir. You just need a bit more polish, like the general says. It'll come."**  
  
Though he fights it, he cracks a very slight reassured smile.  
  
**"Thank you. Your faith in me... it is appreciated."**  
  
Jedrick walks up to the Captain.  
  
**"Do you want us to stick around, Sir?"**  
  
He shakes his head.  
  
**"No, no you guys can go. I'm just gonna stay here and think about how to correct the mistakes I made."**  
  
Everyone says their farewells and leaves, with the exception of April.  
  
**"Sir, permission to speak freely?"**  
  
He looks up, intrigued.  
  
**"What's the matter?"**  
  
**"A few of us... well, ok, all of us... can't help but notice that Daisy likes you."**  
  
He nods with a smile.  
  
**"I like her too. She is a nice person. You all are."** he responds, oblivious to April's intended meaning.  
  
April giggles, shaking her head.  
  
**"No, I think you misunderstand, Sir. She 'like' likes you."**  
  
He looks at her with a raised eyebrow.  
  
**"Yes, you said already, except without the stutter initially."** he says, scratching his head. **"Was there anything else?"**  
  
She rolls her eyes, smirking at his clueless innocence.  
  
**"No, Sir. Nothing at all. Have a good evening!"** she salutes enthusiastically, still smirking, before trotting off.

# Part 6: Engaged!

([Theme: Tysolari](http://www.fileden.com/files/2008/1/22/1713713/Tysolari.mp3))  
  
The next few weeks pass slowly with nothing more to do than patrol and talk about town gossip.  
  
Towards the end of this lull, the rest of the group crowd around Alexis at the end of the day. They all look at him with grins on their faces. It takes him a while to notice that they are waiting for him to react to them.  
  
He looks up at them from his chair, passing his gaze over them.  
  
**“Is... there something wrong? You do all know that you're dismissed, right?”** he asks, puzzled.  
  
**"Yes, Sir, we know."** she smirks.  
  
He scratches his head.  
  
**“Then... why are you still hanging around here?”**  
  
**"I'd like to invite you out, Sir. We're all going to the Dragon's Rage to celebrate."**  
  
**“Oh? What's the occasion?”**  
  
**"I'm..."**  
  
**"Young Boyd popped the question finally! He's engaged!"**  
  
**"Yeah, finally got up the courage, and she accepted. So we're going out to get hammered!"**  
  
**"You two are complete jerks! Way to steal his thunder, guys!"** she gawps, half amused.  
  
**"It's ok. It's not like his aim with a bow will be any better with a few pints down him. Gotta let him have *something* good to talk about!"**  
  
**"Yeah, yeah, ask a girl to marry you and you grow a set from nowhere. Jackass."** he grins.  
  
The mood is high-spirited as the friendly banter passes back and forth. It eventually subsides.  
  
**"So, will you join us Captain? Laurelin is eager to meet you. She doesn't believe how good of a boss you are, and wants to see it for herself."**  
  
He looks at them all. This wasn't something he'd ever dealt with before. He was about to decline the offer, when his gaze falls on Daisy, who had a mild pleading expression on her face, silently asking him to go.  
  
**“Oh, Alright. Sounds like it might be fun. Will Hanska be joining us?”**  
  
**"We asked him, but he has a mountain of urgent paperwork that's been backlogged. He asks that we have a drink and a good time on his behalf."**  
  
**“Well then. What are we waiting for? Let's move out.”** he says, wording it as an order to serve as an ironic joke.   
  
The group head to the Dragon's Rage Inn. The atmosphere is already jubilant as the patrons chat, drink and dance as the group approach the bar.  
  
([Theme: Jubilance](http://stordarth.shiningalpha.com/AP/Music/Alexis-Jubilance.mp3))  
  
**"AH! BOYD! CONGRATULATIONS LAD!"** the barkeep gives him a hefty handshake.  
  
**"Thanks Kolgrim! Is Laurelin here yet?"**  
  
**"Not as yet, my boy. But it's a lady's prerogative to be late. You're gonna have te remember that now that you're a husband-to-be! And how be the rest of you?"**  
  
The rest of the group nod and show they are well.  
  
**"Oh! Kolgrim! I don't believe you've met our new Captain yet. I say new, he's been filling the role a few months now."**  
  
**"But of course! I should have known! Quite the tall one aren't ya? Not as big as ol' Hanska though! Speaking of big 'un, Why's he not here?! He loves a good knees-up!!"**  
  
**“It's nice to meet you, Kolgrim. Unfortunately, General Hanska has been unavoidably detained by work.”**  
  
**"That man works too hard!! Be sure to tell him to get himself in here soon as, aye?! OH! Boyd! She's just walked in!"**  
  
Boyd turns to the door to see Laurelin standing there. He eases through the crowd and gives her a big hug, before guiding her to the bar where the rest of them are waiting. The other members of the group hug her in congratulations; clearly already good friends.  
  
**"Here he is. Captain Alexis. We weren't sure we'd be able to drag him away, but here he is! Sir, this is my fiancé, Laurelin."**  
  
**"It's a pleasure to meet you finally. Boyd speaks very highly of you. In fact, they all speak highly of you."** Laurelin holds out a hand to Alexis.   
  
He takes the offered hand, shaking it.  
  
**“They exaggerate. I merely do what is asked of me.”**  
  
**"Boyd said you would say something like that."**  
  
**"Yep, he's as modest as they come."**  
  
**“Well, congratulations. I'm sure you will be happy together. Boyd's a fine soldier, and a decent man.”**  
  
**"Yes he is. That's why I said 'yes' to his proposal. But... he never mentioned you were so dashing. Afraid I'd chase after your boss, my love?"**  
  
**"I tend not to judge other men by their attractiveness, petal."**  
  
The entire group bursts into laughter at Boyd's humorous quip, and general conversation and laughter begins to ensue.  
  
**"Alright! Let's get this party on! Time to get so drunk that I see triple!"**  
  
**"You *do* know that seeing triple doesn't mean you're three times as likely to hit something right?"** Jed grins.  
  
**"Aaaah, shut your face, 'Mage.'"**  
  
**"I really hope one of you is going to carry me home. It's against the law to drink and fly."**  
  
**"I'm not drinking, so you can ride me if you like."**  
  
**"HEY-HEY! RAL! YOU'VE PULLED!!!"**  
  
**"... NOT LIKE... honestly!"**  
  
**"Hehehe."**  
  
The laughter and buoyant tone persists as the night draws on. Much alcohol is consumed, and much humour, dancing and merriment is had by all involved. Even Alexis allows himself to loosen up a bit, cracking a few jokes himself and getting into the spirit of the evening. He even breaks out his violin to play along with the bards, causing quite the cheer from the soldiers of Post 8, who had all wondered if Alexis had it in him to cut loose.  
  
As the evening draws towards a close, the soldiers of post 8 begin to filter out one by one, giving warm goodbyes to everyone before they depart for their own homes. Laurelin and Daisy disappear to the ladies room, leaving just Boyd and Alexis at the bar.   
  
**"Well? Was it worth coming out?"**  
  
He nods.  
  
**“I don't think I've ever had this much fun.”** he says as he raises his glass. **"To you and Laurelin."**  
  
**"I'll drink to that!"**  
  
They both finish their drinks.  
  
**"What about you sir? Do you have anyone tucked away?"**  
  
He looks at Boyd with confusion.  
  
**"You know. A girl?"** he pauses. **"...or a guy... you know, in case you aren't into girls..."**  
  
He sniggers, before shaking his head.  
  
**“I don't have anyone. I can't say I've ever thought about it.”**  
  
**"Well, it's no secret that Daisy likes you."**  
  
He looks at Boyd with a sideways glance.  
  
**“You're the second person to say that.”**  
  
**"Well, do you like her?"**  
  
**“Like I told April, I like you all. You're all nice people."**  
  
**"Yes but... do you 'like' like her?"**  
  
**“There's that stutter again..."** he replies, genuinely not understanding his meaning.  
  
**"No, you don't get it. Did people not get together where you're from? Let me rephrase. How do you feel when you see her?"**  
  
Alexis blinks, having not even considered this before. He goes quiet as he tries to recall how he felt.  
  
**"Well, give it some thought, Sir. Next time you see her, think about how you feel. See if anything feels different compared to normal. But if you like spending time with her, you should seize the day and do it anyway. That in itself might help you to better understand, Sir."**  
  
**“Thanks. I'll keep your words in mind."**  
  
The girls return from their absence. They leave the Inn, and after saying their farewells, Boyd leaves with Laurelin, leaving Alexis and Daisy alone. The party atmosphere now dissipated, the mood is quiet and calm.  
  
([Theme: Heart of Light](http://stordarth.shiningalpha.com/AP/Music/Alexis-HeartofLight.mp3))  
  
**"Wow! What a night! I haven't enjoyed myself this much for a long time."** she pauses, tilting her head.  
  
**"I'm glad you came. I thought you might say no, and then I'd have had no one to talk to. I don't know why, but for some reason... I don't feel shy around you."**  
  
Alexis beams at her.  
  
**“I almost declined. I'm so glad I didn't though. Was a good night. And I know what you mean. I feel like I can... tell you anything. But... that might be the alcohol. Hehehe."** he chuckles.  
  
Daisy giggles, being slightly under the influence herself.  
  
**"I'm glad you didn't too. It was nice to see you enjoying yourself instead of being all official all the time."**  
  
He simply smiles.  
  
**“It's... rather late. Do you want me to walk you home?"**  
  
**"But... don't you live in the opposite direction?"**  
  
He nods, still smiling.  
  
**“I do. It's fine though. I like walking at night. Looking up at the stars when the skies are clear, feeling the evening breeze, listening to the calming silence of the night..."** he looks up at the stars as he says all of this.  
  
She looks up at him as his gaze is distracted, her cheeks flushing as she listens to him romanticise - not just because of the alcohol in her system. She turns her head away to hide it.  
  
**"I... I like those things too."**  
  
**“Then let's do them together. It'll be nice to share the experience with someone I..."** he stops, his gaze falling to her as his expression blanks.  
  
Her gaze shifts to him. She smiles warmly at him, as if she knew how his sentence might have finished.  
  
His mind begins to ponder what Boyd had told him, and he thinks about how he felt at this moment.  
  
Without saying a word, he smiles right back.  
  
[*Boyd was right... I -do- feel different when I'm with her. Almost as if... nothing else matters... what does it mean?*]  
  
**“Let's get you to bed. It's not going to come to you!"** he beams cheerily.  
  
Daisy giggles mirthfully as she grabs one of his arms with both of hers, clinging to it for dear life as she rests her head on his shoulder.  
  
**"Lead ooooooon Captain!"**  
  
The two of them walk slowly towards her home. Daisy clings to Alexis' arm the whole way, as the two of them gaze upwards at the stars in silence for a while. They go by way of the park, and they sit down on the bench a while to rest.  
  
**"This is much nicer than doing it alone."** she says as she curls close to him for warmth.  
  
Noticing her shiver slightly as the night air begins to take on a slight chill, he wraps his cape around her.  
  
He simply nods in agreement with her observation. Some time passes as they sit together in a contented silence.  
  
**“It's getting cold. We should get you back."**  
  
She looks up at him sleepily, giving him a nod.  
  
He removes his cape completely to allow her to wear it and wrap it about herself. He wraps an arm around her shoulders to provide her with additional warmth as they continue to her home.  
  
They eventually arrive, and Daisy goes to open the door, before turning her head to him.  
  
**"It's pretty late... I don't want to send you across the other side of the city at this hour. Why don't you... stay with me tonight?"**   
  
He looks at her with a warm expression.  
  
**“Maybe I should. That way I can help if you have those pains again."** he says with a nod.  
  
She smiles back before opening the door to let him in. She follows, and locks up for the night.  
  
She prepares a warm drink for them before preparing for bed. The subtle haze of alcohol still in their systems, it takes them a little longer to ascend the stairs than normal. He waits in the room opposite for her to change into her nightgown before entering her room. She climbs into bed, and he sits on the bedside as he had done when she had been ill.  
  
**"Are you ready to share your past with me yet? As I said before, I won't judge you."**  
  
His brow furrows at the request.  
  
[*She knows there is more to me. She can see my darkness, yet she doesn't fear or hate me for it... I feel... that I can trust her with it.*]  
  
**“Well... it's a long story, but... I wasn't always a man."** he says with shame.  
  
Her eyes widen.  
  
**"You mean you used to be a woman?!"** she asks in shock, inebriation affecting her still.  
  
He blinks several times in confusion before the misunderstanding sinks in, and he falls back onto the bed laughing raucously.  
  
**“No no no! That's not what I mean! What I mean is..."** he pauses, his expression falling.  
  
**“I wasn't always human."**  
  
**"Oh. Teehee."** she giggles at her mistake, before furrowing her brow at his revelation.  
  
**"Then... what were you?"**  
  
He leaves a long pause, and it almost seems as though he isn't going to answer.  
  
**“I was a Greater Devil."**  
  
He goes on to explain his reign of terror on Grans, and how the goddess Mitula had taken his power away.  
  
**“So now you see... the monster that I once was... I don't deserve any of this... this job... my friends... your kindness... please... I couldn't bear it if you hated me..."**  
  
Daisy simply smiles.  
  
**"Sir, the only thing I don't understand,"** she begins, taking his hand, **"is how a creature so dark and evil, could somehow become the kindest, warmest, most gentle man I've ever known. I might not like what you once *were*... but the man that you *are*... I could never hate you."**  
  
He lowers his head, blowing out an embarrassed, nasal laugh.  
  
**“Thank you..."**  
  
**"You're welcome."** she says, tilting her head to the side with a smile.  
  
He loses himself as he spends an unknown amount of time gazing at her. The fixed attention causes Daisy's cheeks to redden, but she continues to gaze back at him, no longer embarrassed by it. He eventually remembers himself, and nods.  
  
**“We'd better get some sleep. We have an early start tomorrow."**  
  
Daisy nods and moves to get comfortable under the covers.  
  
Alexis stands up and moves to the door leading to the other room. He places his hand on the doorframe and turns back to her.  
  
**“Goodnight Daisy."**  
  
**"Goodnight, Captain."** she responds drowsily.

# Part 7: Getting Close

([Theme: Tysolari](http://www.fileden.com/files/2008/1/22/1713713/Tysolari.mp3))  
  
Alexis sleeps on the floor in the room opposite Daisy's. He is granted a rare blessing this evening, as he manages to sleep through the night without interruption from his troubled subconsciousness. He stirs awake as the rising sun beams through a gap in the curtains to shine on his face. As he gets up, he hears Daisy moving about in the other room.  
  
[*I'd better stay here. Sounds like she's getting changed.*]  
  
A few minutes pass before the door opens and Daisy walks in, fully dressed in her work robes, and still wearing his cape from the night before.  
  
**"Good morning, Sir. I hope you slept well."**  
  
**“I did, now that you mention it."** he pauses, noticing the cape. **"My cape suits you."**  
  
**"Do you think so? I thought so too but... it's a bit long for me. It'd get ruined for dragging along the floor. And I've always been more a fan of purple, myself. Maybe I'll get a shorter purple cape to go with my robes."** Daisy removes the cape and hands it back to Alexis.  
  
He simply smiles, before turning his gaze to the open doorway as he dons it once more.  
  
**“Are you ready to go?"**  
  
**"Yep."**  
  
She dashes past him with exuberance, and he follows her downstairs. The two of them head for post 8.   
  
When they arrive outside, Alexis stops.  
  
**“You go on ahead. I'm going to pay Hanska a visit. I feel bad that he missed the party last night."**  
  
Daisy nods.  
  
**"Good idea. You really do have a heart of gold under there."** she doesn't wait for a response. She simply waves and heads in to join the rest of the crew.  
  
Alexis makes his way over to Hanska's office and knocks on the door.  
  
**"Come on in!"** he says cheerily.  
  
Alexis walks into the room and salutes.  
  
**“Good morning Sir."** he says with a smile.  
  
**"Have a good evening?"** He grins knowingly and motions for Alexis to take a seat.  
  
He moves into the room and takes a seat. He spends a moment recalling the events of the night, and grins.  
  
**“I did."**  
  
**"Wonderful! Adjusting better to Tysolari?"**  
  
**“I feel more at home here every day."** he replies, nodding.  
  
**"Great, that is exactly what I wanted to hear. Is there anything you require from me?"**  
  
He turns his head.  
  
**“Not as such, just thought I'd check in. It was a shame you were backed up last night. You missed a great night. Kolgrim sends his regards."**  
  
He nods.  
  
**"Well I had many nights like that until all this damn paperwork became a mountain."** he chuckles, **"But I do wish I could have made it there. I probably should have. Oh well!"**  
  
**“Well, I'm sure there'll be another gathering you'll be free for at some point. They seemed keen to drag me out. Now that they've succeeded once, I dare say they'll try again soon."** he muses.  
  
**"And with much less dragging, I'm sure."**  
  
**“What makes you say that?"** he smirks.  
  
**"That goofy look on your face, for one."** He bursts out laughing.  
  
**“Have the others been talking then?"** he asks curiously.  
  
**"Just saying how well they've taken to you."**  
  
He looks down somewhat bashfully.  
  
**“I'm quite fond of all of them..."** he starts, trailing off.  
  
**"Well that's great to hear. I'm glad to know I put you in the right spot."** He doesn't catch his trail off.  
  
**“Did you have anything for me Sir? Since I'm here?"**  
  
**"Actually yes. I'm heading out to Forxis tomorrow. I'd like you to assist me."**  
  
**“Forxis? What will we be doing there?"** He asks.  
  
Hanska grins widely.  
  
**"Such impatience is most unbecoming of an officer. You'll find out tomorrow! Until then, keep up the good work."**  
**“Yes Sir. I'll be sure to report anything new."** He salutes the general before turning to leave, returning to post 8.  
  
**“Good morning everyone!"** he says cheerily.  
  
Everyone greets him in return, almost entirely in Unison.  
  
**"So, hell of a night, huh captain? Since when did you know how to let your hair down?"**  
  
Alexis looks at Archie flatly.  
  
**“My hair's always down."** he says in a serious tone. As Archie looks around awkwardly, Alexis laughs loudly.  
  
**“Hehehehe! Get it? Because my hair's always down in front of my eye?"** he chuckles.  
  
Archie looks at him with mock disdain, whilst the others all smirk at the joke.  
  
**"Not a bad attempt at humour."**  
  
**"I thought it was funny."**  
  
**"You always were easily amused."**  
  
**"...HOW RUDE!!"**  
  
**"Heheheh."**  
  
**"Well, fun as this is, we have a job to do. What's the drill today captain?"**  
  
**“Just a standard routine patrol again today I'm afraid. Shall we move?"** he says with a smile, his glance happening to land on Daisy.  
  
Daisy blushes and returns the smile to Alexis. Springing to her feet, she is ready to go before anyone else. As the rest gather their things, they all head out.  
  
He leads them out into the city.  
  
**“Given how quiet it's been, we're going to split up to cover more ground. Boyd, you go with Archie, and take care of the Government district. Jed, you and April take the merchant's district. Ral, you have aerial jurisdiction. Swoop over the city and give us a bird's eye view. Daisy and I shall patrol the residential district. Don't forget to explore the alleys, and if by some small misfortune you should somehow get into trouble..."** he hands them all a device, **"... these radio comm links will keep us connected. Call for back-up if anything happens. Any questions?"**  
  
Their body language and smiles tell Alexis that everything is understood. They depart in their designated directions.  
  
Alexis leads Daisy to the residential district, walking in silence for a good while as he keeps an eye out for trouble.  
  
**“How are you feeling now after your illness? Have you had any new pains, or is everything cleared up now?"**  
  
**"I feel great! Especially right now."** She moves much closer to Alexis, but doesn't end up touching him.  
  
Alexis smiles.  
  
**“Well, it's good to hear that you're out of the woods. But... especially right now? Why's that?"** he asks cluelessly.  
  
She turns away, blushing.  
  
**"Things are... going well for me."**  
  
Alexis continues to smile.  
  
**“I'm glad. You of all people deserve it."** he states.  
  
**"Oh... thank you."** Her grin holds about a dozen meanings behind it.  
  
They continue to patrol, and Alexis turns them into an alley so that he can check on someone.  
  
**“Zachary! How are you?"**  
  
**"WHA! Ge' outer 'ere ye no good... oh! Cap'n! How you be this fine day?"**  
  
**“I'm well. I thought I'd see how you were doing. Do you need anything? I brought some trail rations with me if you're hungry."**  
  
**"Bless ya, lad. It's nice t'know there be decent folk in the guard these days that don' look down on us."**  
  
Zachary looks to Daisy.  
  
**"Who be this enchantin' lass you be with?"** he says with a toothy grin as he tucks into the rations.  
  
**"My name is Daisy. It's very nice to meet you, Zachary."** she says, smiling warmly and extending her hand.  
  
The wily man reaches up from his seat on the floor to shake her hand.  
  
**"Quite a polite 'un you caught there, Cap'n. Easy on th' ol' eyes 'n'all."**  
  
Alexis looks at him with confusion.  
  
**“Hmm?"**  
  
Daisy giggles but says nothing.  
  
Zachary grins at the captain.  
  
**"Clueless, ye be. Mus' be no room in that brain o' yours fer all the kindness in there. This lass yer woman, boy?"** he says with a wink.  
  
Alexis' eyes widen with surprise at this.  
  
**“What?! N...no... she's a... friend... she works for me... I mean... I... don't..."** [*What is this feeling?*]  
  
**"So that's what the kids 'r' callin' it these days. You be a nice couple. Well Cap'n, thanks fer the food. Be seein' ya both."**   
  
Alexis, not quite understanding what was going on, furrows his brow in confusion.  
  
[*Couple? Does he mean...*]  
  
**“Uh... yeah... nice... seeing you, Zachary..."** he stands hesitantly, before beginning to leave the alley.  
  
Daisy bows and waves to Zachary then follows Alexis out of the alley.  
  
**"He was sweet."**  
  
**“He's a good man with bad luck. There are a few of them out here, I've found. We're supposed to arrest them, but I feel it too harsh a punishment. For many of them, they are here for reasons beyond their control. They need our help, not our condemnation."**  
  
**"Yes, I agree."** She grins at Alexis, happy to be spending time with him.  
  
He smiles back at her.  
  
**“I'm glad to hear that you feel that way too. Many people have their own problems to deal with. They wish they could help them, but they don't have the means. I do what I can in the hopes that other people will eventually follow my example."**  
  
**"What else do you intend on doing?"**  
  
**“I offer them shelter in my home if they need it. It isn't much, but it's all I can do."** he says, sounding faintly disappointed in himself for not being able to do more.  
  
**"Well it is better than nothing! You're trying to make their lives better! And Zachary really appreciates your help. So don't sell yourself short."** she smiles at him warmly.  
  
The rest of the patrol flies by, and his force regroups with nothing untoward to report. They return to post 8 for debriefing.  
  
**“Another job well done. You may go. See you tomorrow guys."** he says cheerily.  
  
Everyone leaves but Daisy. She approaches Alexis.  
  
**"Sir, I would like to make you dinner. Can you come by tonight?"**  
  
He looks at her with surprise, before smiling.  
  
**“Oh... well... I... I'd like that. I will be there."** he responds, somewhat nervously.  
  
**"Great! Come round in about two hours. I'll be waiting."** she waves goodbye, and leaves to get ready.

# Part 8: Honesty

Alexis heads home once Daisy leaves, and hangs up his cape. He changes into his formalwear - an outfit that looks very similar to his white travelwear, but is silkier and more flowing. It seems to shimmer in the light of the sun as it shines through the windows of his large house, slowly drawing toward the horizon.   
  
He heads down to his study before departing, and removes the covering sheet from his easel. He takes a moment to look over the painting.  
  
[*I hope she likes it.*] he thinks to himself before rolling it up. He climbs out of the study, leaves the house - making sure to lock the door behind him - and walks to Daisy's home. He knocks on the door.  
  
After a few moments, Daisy answers the door while putting the finishing touches on her hair.  
  
**"Come on in! Dinner is almost ready!"**  
  
He follows her in, closing the door behind him. He continues to follow her.  
  
**"Just a minute. Make yourself comfortable. I just need to finish getting changed."** She runs back upstairs into her room.  
  
Nodding to her before she goes, he heads into the living area and takes a seat, where he waits patiently - and somewhat nervously.  
  
([Theme: Heart of Light](http://stordarth.shiningalpha.com/AP/Music/Alexis-HeartofLight.mp3))  
  
A moment later, Daisy returns from her room. She walks slowly down the stairs, her hair had been done in such a way that it flowed wavily down past her shoulders, and she wore a bright blue dress that seems to make her shine from head to toe.  
  
Alexis looks up at her, his mouth smiling and slightly agape at how pretty she looked. He felt a nervous rush of warmth as he whispers breathily to himself.  
  
**{“Wow...”}**  
  
She smiles, having not heard him. She notices that he is carrying something, and looks at it curiously.  
  
**"What's that you've got with you?"**  
  
Almost forgetting he was holding something, he looks around for a moment, confused, before remembering.  
  
**“Oh, this... ah... it's a little something I've been working on. I wanted to... do something for you, since you carved that figurine for me... I hope you like it.”** He holds the rolled up paper to her with both hands.  
  
She continues to look at it with mild curiosity and surprise.  
  
**"For... me? Thank you! Can you unroll it for me? I want to see it from a proper distance."** she says with a smile as she backs away from him a bit.  
  
He nods.  
  
**“Very well.”** He ensures that he has hold of the corners, and allows gravity to unroll it for him.  
  
The picture is a portrait of Daisy. The colours are vibrant, and the attention to detail is such that she could almost be forgiven for thinking herself looking in the mirror. Her expression in the picture is one of calm happiness.  
  
**"Oh captain!"**  
  
Daisy is frozen to her spot, completely unable to move as she looks at the painting. Small tears of happiness form in her eyes. She utters a quiet, barely audible 'thank you.'  
  
**“Much like your figurine, I think it's a good likeness. It's not perfect, I know...”**  
  
She regains her composure.  
  
**"But it *is* perfect! I will have to get an appropriate frame for it though. I don't have any the right size."** She beams. **"Now, dinner! Before it gets cold!"**  
  
**“Right! Wouldn't want that! Lead the way.”** he says, beaming back.  
  
She leads him into the dining room.  
  
**"Take a seat, I'll bring our plates out."**  
  
He takes a seat and waits patiently for her, smiling to himself all the while.  
  
She returns with a plate for each of them containing a large steak, an assortment of vegetables and a dinner roll. She also pours some red wine and takes a seat opposite Alexis.  
  
**“Thank you. It looks great. I hope you didn't go to too much trouble.”** he compliments as he appreciates the aroma.  
  
**"Nah, no trouble. Well... it certainly makes things easier when you can cook things anywhere you go."** she says with a wink as she begins her meal.  
  
**“Yes, I suppose that's true. That Blaze spell is handy to have. Burn goblins... dry your hair... cook a meal... all in a day's work for Daisy!”** he chuckles jovially.  
  
She giggles at the humour with a nod of agreement.  
  
He takes her starting as a cue to begin himself. He picks up his knife and fork, and begins to use them - quite deftly, and with a graceful manner - to begin eating.  
  
**"Hmmm, mine is a tad cold. How about yours?"** She snaps her fingers and a small flame hovers above her plate, reheating her food.  
  
He finishes his mouthful before speaking.  
  
**“I would say it is just right.”** he says as he continues to eat.  
  
She simply stares at him, resting her chin on her hands as she daydreams about him; until the smell of burning meat brings her back to her senses.  
  
**"Oops!"**  
  
She wafts away the flame and smoke, before letting out a soft giggle.  
  
**"Well it's only a little bit burnt. It's ok."**  
  
He chuckles.  
  
**“Here, let's split them down the middle and share them out. That way you don't have to eat an entirely burnt meal.”** he says kindly as he offers his plate to her.  
  
**"Are... are you sure? I don't mind, really..."**  
  
He nods.  
  
**“You made it. It wouldn't be fair for you to not taste it as it should be.”** he smiles.  
  
She blushes slightly and takes his plate, dividing the burnt and unburnt dishes up, and sharing them out. She passes Alexis his plate again, and continues to eat. The meal passes with small conversation, many smiles, and bashful glances. Once finished, she looks at him with a beaming smile.  
  
**"How about some dessert?"**  
  
**“I believe I have enough room left over.”** he says with a grin.  
  
Daisy vanishes for only a minute and then returns with two large slices of vanilla pudding pie, topped with chocolate, caramel, and cookie bits.  
  
He had never seen a dessert like this before. Prior to his change, he did not need food. But even after coming to Tysolari, he had only eaten small, bland meals. He took some time to study the dessert, speaking in an undertone mutter to himself as he identifies the individual components.  
  
She looks at him with a puzzled expression.  
  
**"Is everything okay?"**  
  
He doesn't respond until he finishes identifying everything. He looks up and nods with a smile.  
  
**“I've never seen a dessert before... usually I eat small bits of fruit after a ration pack to serve the same purpose.”**  
  
She lets out an amused giggle.  
  
**"Well you are in for a treat then!"** She takes a small bite of the dessert, grinning as she watches him, eagerly awaiting his reaction.  
  
He tentatively takes a spoonful of the pudding, and looks at it for a while. His expression curious, in an amusing kind of way, he gingerly puts it in his mouth, allowing it to sit still on his tongue as he assesses the flavours.  
  
**"What do you think?"**  
  
He nods slowly in agreement as he begins to chew. Swallowing the first mouthful, he begins to relay the experience of the flavours analytically; not really conversing, more thinking aloud.  
  
**“A somewhat firm yet crumbly texture... a mild, neutral flavour accentuated by the varying degrees of sweetness attributed by the toppings... the various flavours blending in a complimentary fashion...”**  
  
Daisy simply watches in amusement as he seems to go into his own little analytical world.  
  
**"I've never heard it described so eloquently! But do you like it?"**  
  
He snaps out of his musing, and looks directly at her.  
  
**“This is perhaps... no... definitely... the best thing I've ever tasted.”** his gaze remains fixed on her for a brief moment, before he remembers himself, and returns to the dessert, eating it rather more readily now that he had acquired a taste for it.  
  
She smiles, elated with his answer. She continues to eat, and once finished, clears the table. She places all of the dirty dishes in the sink to be cleaned tomorrow, and returns to her seat once more. She says nothing; she just gazes at Alexis, smiling in silence.  
  
The eating out of the way, he looks around the room. Having never been invited to dinner before, he had no idea what to do now that the eating was over. He does not notice her looking at him immediately, but when he eventually does notice her gaze, he feels a nervous shiver course through him as he returns it in kind, smiling all the while.  
  
**“Is... everything alright?”** he asks softly.  
  
**"Everything's perfect."** the two of them spend several minutes just looking at one another in silence.  
  
**"Are you still hungry?"**  
  
He shakes his head.  
  
**“I think this meal will see me through until the end of tomorrow.”** he jests as he takes a sip of the wine she had poured.  
  
**"Is there anything else you would like to do?"**  
  
He shrugs.  
  
**“I... hadn't really thought about it... what would you like to do?”** he asks, open to suggestion.  
  
She grins devilishly.  
  
**"I know something we can do, but you'll need to wear something a little more comfortable."**  
  
**“This suit is quite comfortable. What did you have in mind?”**  
  
**"You just wait right here. I'll be back in a few minutes."** Daisy heads into her room.  
  
Not knowing what to expect, he continues looking around the room, casually drumming his fingers on the table.  
  
Daisy comes back, her hair now pulled in a tight ponytail and wearing a tank-top and loose-fitting pants.  
  
**"If you want to change, we can stop by your house?"**  
  
He looks at her new attire.  
  
**“What are we changing for?”**  
  
**"You will see! We just need to be able to move a little easier."** she smiles.  
  
He stands up, finishing his wine.  
  
**“As you can see, these are plenty loose enough for whatever it is you have in mind.”** he says as he moves away from the table.  
  
Daisy leads Alexis out and locks the door behind her. They make their way out of the residential area and into the entertainment district.  
  
Alexis follows in silence, though he does look around with curious confusion, wondering what it was they were doing here.  
  
She leads him into an arcade in the middle of the district. She had clearly been here many times as she ignores almost everything around her, eyes set on a specific game. Lucky for them, the game is open. They reach the game and she gives him a sly look, inserts coins and motions him to grab his joystick.  
  
He looks around as he follows. When she gets to the arcade machine, he hesitates.  
  
**“How does this work?”**  
  
**"Push those buttons and move this stick. And kill those aliens! You'll get the hang of it!"**  
  
**“Aliens?”** he says, scratching his head. Shrugging, he does as instructed, taking in any instructions or hints that may be present.  
  
The night continues as the two defend the world from alien invaders. After Alexis gets the hang of it, they beat the game and move on. They end up spending the next few hours playing a myriad of games. As they leave, they see an advertisement for a new game.   
  
~~~  
*Coming soon:*   
  
  
~~~  
  
**“Well, that was certainly one way of whiling away the hours.”** he says mildly.  
  
**"I hope it didn't bore you too much."** She blushes but it cannot be seen with all the other colors around them.  
  
**“Not at all. On the contrary. I appreciated the distraction. And your company. As long as you enjoyed yourself I'm happy.”** he says with a smile.  
  
She brightens up at this, blushing further from his compliment.  
  
**"Of course I did! Now how about we go to the park?"**  
  
He nods, and walks with her to the park. They sit on the same bench they had the night before.  
  
Daisy curls up against him as she had done before, and the two look at the night sky again.  
  
**"Alexis... do you think... that when people die, they live on? Somewhere else?"**  
  
Alexis sits in silence as he thinks about the question.  
  
**“I hope so.”** he says with a light sigh.  
  
**"Why only hope so?"**  
  
Alexis rests his head on hers.  
  
**“Because... because then the people... that I hurt in my old life... it means they'll have a second chance to live. It means that maybe one day they might...”** he trails off.  
  
Daisy shifts her head to look up at him.  
  
**"Forgive you?"**  
  
Alexis nods slowly.  
  
Daisy places a hand on his cheek, turning his head gently to look at her.  
  
**"If they can see even a fraction of the light that I see in you, I'm sure they will, if they haven't already."**  
  
Alexis manages a very weak smile.  
  
**“You sound so certain...”**  
  
**"I have faith in the Goddess. She brought you here, made you a better man. She does everything for a reason. Remember that, Alexis."**  
  
He nods, smiling.  
  
**“I will. Do you... think that... maybe she brought me here for you?”**  
  
Daisy looks back at him, nodding her head mildly, her smile beaming.  
  
**"If she did, I can think of no better gift. Except one thing..."**  
  
She pulls herself up a little, their gazes meet, and she throws all doubt and inhibitions to the side as she places her lips upon his.  
  
His eyes open wide with surprise, not sure how to react. In the end, instinct takes over, and he allows his eyes to drift closed.  
  
They stay like this for a couple of minutes - though it feels considerably longer for the both of them as the rest of the world falls away. When they part, she returns her head to his shoulder.  
  
**"Before we go... will you finish telling me about your past? Where you came from? Why you're here? I want to know it all. Everything that makes you you."**  
  
Alexis hesitates. He hadn't even trusted Aiden - the closest thing he had to a best friend - with this information. But something about the way he felt right at this moment made him divulge everything - his origins, his role in the war of the devil kings, his time in Arc Valley, and the reasons for which he was unleashed upon the world of mortals once more. He left no details out, telling her everything. He lowers his head once he is done.  
  
When he's finished, she turns to look at him with a sorrowful expression.  
  
**"You... you've had to endure all of that...? And you've carried that burden alone all this time... no one to turn to... how lonely that must make you feel..."**   
  
He looks at her sympathetically.  
  
**“It's alright. I'm... not alone anymore. I've got you.”**  
  
She looks back at him, her smile returning, her eyes in a misty condition.  
  
Alexis wipes a few of her tears away with his thumb. He follows her previous example, and places his lips upon hers, sharing in a long, tender kiss. She puts her head on his shoulder again, and he rests his head on hers.  
  
Daisy drifts off into a contented sleep, the combination of their time in the arcade, the long conversation and his comforting hold finally taking their toll on her.  
  
He sits for a while, listening to her light breathing as she sleeps, before deciding to get her home to ensure she is kept comfortable. He picks her up and carries her home, whereupon he carries her upstairs and takes her to her room. He lays her gently on the bed, and covers her with the blankets. Watching her sleep for a while, he thinks about the events of the night, smiling happily to himself all the while, before reluctantly turning to leave.  
  
She turns in the blankets to get more comfortable, waking just slightly.  
  
**"Alexis... please... stay..."**  
  
He turns back, and sits on the bed next to her.  
  
**“I want to. But I have to leave early with the General tomorrow... we have a long journey to Forxis...”**  
  
She reaches out and takes his hand, looking at him pleadingly.  
  
**"Please..."** she smiles softly, her eyes gazing at him longingly.  
  
He wonders what to do, but in the end, he nods. She shuffles over and lets him get under the covers. She backs up to him, and he instinctively holds her.  
  
**"... thank you... goodnight captain..."** she whispers sleepily as she half turns in his arms to kiss him.  
  
**“Goodnight, Daisy...”** he whispers back, returning the kiss. The pair drift off to sleep.

# Part 9: An Old Friend

([Theme: Tysolari](http://www.fileden.com/files/2008/1/22/1713713/Tysolari.mp3))  
  
Alexis once again slept the whole night through without so much as a flinch. When the morning came, he opened his eyes, and seeing Daisy's still-sleeping face caused him to smile to himself. He spent one or two minutes just watching her, before carefully and quietly getting up.  
  
He uses her shower to ready himself for the long day ahead, and returns to watch her sleep some more, all the while not understanding why he felt the desire to - or indeed anything he was feeling at this moment.  
  
Part of him wanted to wake her and share the morning with her before he had to leave, but he also didn't want to disturb her. He didn't have time anyway. But as he leaves, he hears her stir awake.  
  
  
**"You're leaving already?"** she says sleepily as she sits up.  
  
He stops, once again going back to sit on her bed next to her.  
  
**“I have to go very soon. Hanska and I have an early train to catch. It will take a lot of the day to get to Forxis. We'll likely be back here this time tomorrow if we can get the late-night train tonight though.”** He says softly as he holds her hand.  
  
Daisy almost lunges at him, throwing her arms around him anxiously.  
  
**"I wish you didn't have to go..."**  
  
**“I know... I wish I could stay too. But it's not a long errand. We'll be back before you know it.”**  
  
Daisy nods happily. She just pulls away from the hug, and kisses him for a long moment.  
  
**“I have to go. If I wait any longer we might miss the train.”** he hugs her one last time.  
  
**“I'll see you soon.”**  
  
Daisy tightens her grip on him as he says this.  
  
**"You will. I'll be waiting for you, Captain."**  
  
Alexis pulls away, and after gently kissing her forehead, moves to the door. He stops, turning back to smile and wave to her, before he disappears downstairs, and leaves the house.  
  
He briskly moves towards Hanska's office with a spring in his step, knocking enthusiastically on the door.  
  
[*I wonder what this assignment is about.*]  
  
**"Come in!"**  
  
Alexis walks in and salutes.  
  
**“Good morning Sir!”** he says in his cheeriest ever tone.  
  
Hanska wastes no time, being too excited for formalities.  
  
**"Are you ready to go?"** He asks as he gets up and finishes packing his bag.  
  
Alexis nods.  
  
**“Yes Sir. Though I am curious as to what it is we'll be doing.”**  
  
He leaves the office and locks the door. He moves down the hall quickly with Alexis.  
  
**"Do you want me to tell you now, or have it be a surprise?"** He grins, hardly containing himself.  
  
He grins  
  
**“Something tells me you would be more pleased with the latter, so I'll humour you.”**  
  
He chuckles.  
  
**"Good because I wasn't going to tell you anyway!"** With this he laughs louder, drawing some attention to the pair, though they pass too quickly to be too much of a disturbance.  
  
They make quick work getting down to the train station and get on the next train heading to Forxis, giving Alexis at least a little new information.  
  
**"Don't worry, we have the biggest room on this thing."**  
  
**“I'm not worried. You're the one who needs the space.”** he quips with a grin before entering the room and taking a seat.  
  
**"You would have worried if I was basically crushing you against the window."** He laughs and takes a seat. The train sets of for Forxis.  
  
He chuckles. nodding at the truth in the statement.  
  
**“A fair point, Sir.”** He takes a bit of time on the journey to sharpen his swords.  
  
Hanska takes out a book of papers and blank sheets. He reviews some data and begins to write, looking up to see where they are every once in a while.  
  
Alexis, hearing the scribbling, looks up curiously.  
  
**“Sir, what's that you're doing?”**  
  
**"It's all part of our little trip here. I'll fill you in and get your opinion on our ride back."**  
  
He nods, leaving a fairly long silence.  
  
**“Sir... can I ask you about something?”** he asks as he gazes out the window.  
  
Hanska sets down his pencil to give Alexis his attention.  
  
**"Sure."**  
  
He continues looking at the scenery outside the window.  
  
**“I've been... feeling.... a little strange... lately... around Daisy... not bad or anything like that... strange like... nervous... but also... entirely calm... I can't explain it very well... I don't know what to make of it.”** he asks, his thoughts clearly laboured with the many pauses.  
  
Hanska raises an eyebrow.  
  
**"Daisy brings the best out of everyone it seems. I've had reports of her just being around can change perspective for people. You'll find what you need soon."**  
  
Alexis turns his head to Hanska.  
  
**“I'm not sure what you mean. What will I find?”**  
  
**"A balance in your life. You've begun to settle in and get comfortable. You'll fully be there soon enough."**  
  
**“Yes. I think you're right. Things have... never been better. Last night we had dinner, went out to the arcades, saved the world from 'aliens'... and... she uh... what do you call it... when people put their lips together?”**  
  
Hanska says nothing and stares at Alexis briefly before he goes back to his writing, trying to forget what he just heard.  
  
Surprised by Hanska's silence, he blinks.  
  
**“Sir? Is... something wrong? Did I say something out of turn?”**  
  
**"No. Enjoy the scenery. We'll be in Forxis soon."** He says this without lifting his pencil.  
  
Alexis looks at him briefly, before returning his gaze to the window. He doesn't say anything else for the remainder of the journey. He thinks about how much Daisy would enjoy the view, and finds himself wishing she was there with them.  
  
The pair soon arrive in Forxis. While it is smaller than Tysolari, it is clearly a heavily populated city and many different peoples can be seen around the train station and within the city. The feel of magic hangs heavy in the late evening air.  
  
**"Welcome to Forxis, Alexis!"** Hanska's mood has once again become very cheerful.  
  
**“You've been here before?”** he asks.  
  
**"Yes, of course. I've been all around this continent. One of the perks of my position."**  
  
**“This place... I sense it's power. Much magic is focused here...”** he states absently.  
  
**“So... what *are* we doing here?”** he asks calmly.  
  
**"We are paying a visit to an old friend of mine. Considering the time, he won't be in his office... we'll head to his home."**  
  
**“Lead the way then.”**  
  
As the two of them meander through the city, they pass by the Arcane University. Alexis stops suddenly, turning to look at it with curiosity.  
  
[*That aura... could it be...? Vallon?*]  
  
He turns to see that Hanska is already pulling away, and abandons his musings in order to catch up.  
  
Hanska and Alexis make their way through the city, looking at the new sites and people walking about. Hanska gets turned around more than once but isn't taken too far off track. Eventually, they arrive at a large home.  
  
**"Here we are."** He rings the doorbell and shortly after, an old wizard opens the door.  
  
**"Olórin, it's been a long time!."**  
  
The wizard looks surprised to see Hanska though he doesn't show it well.  
  
**"Hanska, it's nice to see you. What brings you to Forxis?"**  
  
**"A beer for one."** He smiles.  
  
The wizard remembers himself.  
  
**"Oh yes, come on in... and who is your friend?"**  
  
Alexis holds his hand out to the old mage.  
  
**“Good evening. I'm Captain Alexis. Pleasure to meet you, Olórin.”**  
  
**"And to you. Come in, come in!"**  
  
Everyone gathers in the living space after Olórin brings drinks.  
  
**"What really brings you here, Hanska?"**  
  
**"I have a proposition for you. I feel like it has been too long since those under my command have had any practical training. Sessions against Tysolari's drones is one thing but they need a smarter opponent."**  
  
Olórin raises an eyebrow.  
  
**"What are you getting at?"**  
  
**"War games."**  
  
Alexis listens to the conversation. He says nothing, taking a sip of his drink.  
  
**"I guess no harm can be done. A little practice never hurt anyone. But I must warn you, we've become more advanced up here since your last visit."**  
  
**"As have we."** he says with a brief look at Alexis.  
  
He returns the General's glance.  
  
**“So... how does this work then?”**  
  
**"Well, we will have to work out the details... but basically, you will be leading a group of soldiers into friendly combat with the forces that Olórin can assemble."**  
  
Olórin nods in agreement with Hanska's description.  
  
**“I see. It sounds like just what I need. I think I'm ready for it.”**  
  
**"And where will we be having this? How many men... fill me in."**  
  
**"There is a nice place for this type of exercise pretty much halfway between our fair cities. As far as units, well, what do you think, Olórin? Alexis?"**  
  
**“Whilst I would prefer to fight alongside my post 8 allies, I will be able to fight with whomever is available.”**  
  
**"Well I can't pull too many away from their studies or responsibilities. How does a series of these sound? Maybe every few months.... We could do 10-15 each?"**  
  
Hanska looks to Alexis.  
  
Alexis nods.  
  
**“That sounds reasonable.”**  
  
Hanska finishes his drink and stands up.  
  
**"Well it was nice to see you again Olórin. I will be in contact."**  
  
Alexis stands up as well. He bows fairwell, and moves to follow Hanska out.  
  
Olórin chokes on his drink a bit as he tries to speak  
  
**"Now don't be so hasty!"**  
  
Hanska pauses.  
  
**"What is it, old friend?"**  
  
Olórin hesitates.  
  
**"Have you heard any new information?"**  
  
Confused for a second, Hanska pauses. After a moment he understands.  
  
**"No, nothing new... and I'm not holding out hopes anymore."**  
  
With a saddened look on his face, Olórin nods and shakes Hanska's hand before smiling and shaking Alexis' hand as well.  
  
**"I hope to see you both again very soon!"**  
  
Alexis follows Hanska out. He pauses for a while.  
  
**“Sir, pardon me if I'm overstepping my bounds, but... what is it you've given up hope with?”** he asks delicately, sensing it was a potentially touchy subject.  
  
Hanska smiles.  
  
**"A matter that shall remain between Sir Olórin and I... speaking of him, what did you think?"**  
  
**“He seems like a decent man. You go back a fair way then?”**  
  
**"Yes. He was a bit of an older brother to me while I was growing up. He eventually moved out here though after deciding his talents were better served teaching those with similar abilities."**  
  
Alexis nods.  
  
**“I see. So he was an influential figure for you. I imagine it's good to have someone like that in one's life.”**  
  
**"Depending on the influence."** he says smirking.  
  
**“Are you saying he was a *bad* influence?”** he smirks back.  
  
**"Only sometimes."** he laughs, remembering an event from his childhood.  
  
**“Still, you turned out alright. You do something you believe in, and you're good at it. I've learned a lot from you even in my short time here, so he must have done something right.”** Alexis states honestly.  
  
Hanska is taken a little aback.  
  
**"Thank you, Alexis. I'm glad I've been able to help you acclimate."**  
  
**“I just hope I can get passed my previous errors in these war games. Still, I am much more confident now.”**  
  
**"We will have to see. I don't know exactly who I'll be sending for you to command. Some of Post 8 likely but others as well. Even though you have rapport with Post 8, you will still do fine with others since you've learned to value people as a whole."**  
  
He nods, scratching his head as one person in particular springs to mind.  
  
**“So... what now?”**  
  
**"Well unless you want to explore the city, we will head home."**  
  
**“Perhaps one day I will, but right now, I just want to get back.”** he says with a hint of eagerness in his voice.  
  
**"Okay then, lets head back to the station."**  
  
The two head back and wait a bit for the late-night train. Once it arrives, they begin their trip back. Given the time of the journey, the two have no trouble at all catching up on sleep, waking up the following morning refreshed as the train arrives at the station. The two of them disembark.  
  
**“So, when can I expect to hear about this?”**  
  
**"Well, it will take some time to get the logistics together but I would expect within the next year."**  
  
**“That should be plenty of time to prepare myself. Did you need me for anything else, Sir?”**  
  
**"No. Thanks for coming."**  
  
**“Of course Sir. I'll take my leave now. I'm going to head to post 8. Daisy will want to know how the trip went. I... can't wait to see her..."** he mutters this last part more to himself than Hanska.  
  
*Hmm...* Hanska thinks to himself. He says nothing.  
  
**"Well, I'll see you later Sir.”** he says as he remembers himself, saluting the General.  
  
Hanska reluctantly returns the salute before heading for his office.  
  
Alexis jogs through the city towards Post 8. Before he gets too far, a familiar voice calls out to him.  
  
**"Captain! Over here!"**  
  
Alexis slows down to a stride, walking over to Boyd.  
  
**“Good morning. I was just heading over to the post. How are things with you and Laurelin?”**  
  
**"Things are fine! She really liked you, by the way. Said you seemed like a decent man."**  
  
**“I'm glad I was able to make a good impression. What are you doing out this early though?”**  
  
**"Oh, I started the patrol a little earlier today. Laurelin and I are going out this evening, so I wanted to get out a bit sooner. You... don't mind do you Sir?"**  
  
**"Not at all. It's good to see you being proactive. You'll make a good captain yourself one day.”**  
  
Boyd smiles, pleased with the compliment.  
  
**"OH! Yes! So... how did it go?"** Boyd nudges Alexis with a knowing wink.  
  
**"Oh, the trip was fine. I met one of Hanska's old friends.”**  
  
**"Not that, silly! Your date with Daisy!"**  
  
**"Oh... uh... well... it was... nice...”** he stutters bashfully.  
  
Boyd chuckles kindly at his awkwardness.  
  
**"You two make a really nice couple. You seem to make her really happy, and if I'm not mistaken, she makes you happy too."**  
  
Alexis just smiles to himself.  
  
**"I hope she's feeling better."**  
  
Alexis looks at Boyd with a furrowed brow.  
  
**"... what? is something wrong?”**  
  
**"... she... came in yesterday morning but wasn't feeling well... we sent her home to rest."**  
  
Alexis' throat tightens and his eyes widen with worry as thoughts of the dream he'd had some time ago return to him. Without a word, he breaks into a sprint, leaving Boyd where he stands as he charges for Daisy's home.  
  
[*Please be alright!*]

# Part 10: Heartache

Alexis arrives at Daisy's house as if he had flown there. He tries the door, but it's locked. He tries to remain calm in spite of his nagging worry, and knocks on the door several times.  
  
**“Daisy? Daisy are you in there? It's me."**  
  
When he hears no answer, he runs around the house, trying to look into the windows to see if he could see anything. When he gets around to the kitchen window, he sees the dirty dishes that they had eaten from the other night. His worry ever-growing, he activates his comm.  
  
**“Post 8, Daisy is missing. Those on patrol keep an eye out for her. Exercising protocol and entering her residence."**  
  
He barges at the door with his shoulder repeatedly, and he manages to create some minor cracks in the wood. He kicks at the handle, but his foot goes through the wood, wedging his leg awkwardly.  
  
In angered desperation, his devil aura flares and expulses outwards, turning the door into little more than splinters, which fly everywhere, becoming embedded in the walls and scattered around the room.  
  
Alexis enters the house and searches the ground floor first. As he makes his way up the stairs, he detects a faint but familiar odour; an odour that had once brought him a sadistic glee, but now made him sick. He powers up the stairs rapidly, and rushes into her room. Daisy lay on the bed, her back to him. He walks over, and sits on the side of the bed. He gingerly puts his hand on her shoulder.  
  
**“...Daisy?"**  
  
He gently rolls her onto her back. He checks her over. Looking for any signs of injury, he finds none, but when he checks her pulse and breathing, there is none to be found. Her face is completely at peace; her eyes closed. He stops dead, his expression horrified as he realises the worst.  
  
[*Oh no... please Mitula, no...*]  
  
([Theme: A Light Extinguished](http://stordarth.shiningalpha.com/AP/Music/Alexis-ALightExtinguished.mp3))  
  
Alexis is shocked to his core, not knowing how to react, or what to do. He looks numbly at her.  
  
He activates his comm again.   
  
**“I need a medical team at Daisy's residence immediately! Ral! You're the fastest! GO!"** he says with rising urgency.  
  
**“Aiden showed me how to resuscitate someone... I have to try..."**  
  
He begins to perform CPR on her.  
  
[*I should have stayed... I shouldn't have left her alone...*]  
  
Alexis attempts CPR for several minutes... to no avail. A team of medics and priests arrive soon after, and try more advanced medical and magical methods of revival.  
  
All of their efforts prove futile.  
  
**“Isn't there *anything* we can do?!"**  
  
One of the medics turns to him, and shakes her head ruefully.  
  
**"She's been gone too long I'm afraid... I'm so sorry for your loss, Captain..."**  
  
Alexis looks at Daisy, holding her hand. He is at a loss for what to do.  
  
**"We need to examine her, Captain. Her cause of death needs to be established."**  
  
Alexis looks blankly at the medic. He is clearly in shock.  
  
**“...ugh... yes... I'm... I'm sorry... do what you have to do..."** he says, his gaze blank and unfocused.  
  
The medical team transport Daisy to the morgue. Alexis insists on going. When they arrive, the coroner gets right to work, citing that the examination would take the best part of the day, given the unusual circumstances surrounding her death.  
  
Alexis takes a seat outside the office. He does not move, he does not eat, he does not sleep. He does nothing but wait for news, staring blankly at the wall opposite him.  
  
The others return to normal duty, Boyd heading the post. Ral sets off to fetch Hanska and tell the news.   
  
What might seem like years to Alexis is only a few minutes until Hanska arrives. He walks right past Alexis without a word, and into the coroner's office.  
  
Alexis, noticing Hanska, stands and salutes.  
  
The action goes unnoticed by Hanska though it is because he is determined, not being rude.  
  
Alexis moves to follow him.  
  
Alexis manages to see Hanska just as another door closes behind him, this one with a large keypad and lock. The door clicks shut before Alexis can even realize where Hanska was going.  
  
He stops and blinks. He returns to his seat, blankly staring at the floor, his mind empty. No more than a minute passes, when Alexis hears the sound of the windows vibrating and feels the floor shake; the origin coming from the room Hanska had entered. Though he looks at the room, he doesn't know what to do with himself. He continues to sit, unable to process what he was feeling.  
  
A few minutes later, the coroner appears and signals for Alexis to follow him. Alexis quickly jumps to his feet to follow him, passing Hanska as they move.  
  
Hanska walks out of the room with the lock, his eyes as red as his shirt. He takes no notice of anything else and leaves the office.  
  
He follows Hanska with his gaze, until he leaves. Not understanding what was happening, and realising that thinking about it did not help, he returns his attention to the coroner.  
  
The coroner and Alexis sit on opposite sides of a desk. The coroner is clearly shaken despite looking fine before.  
  
Alexis sits in silence, his expression blank and lost.  
  
**"A nasty... a very, *very* nasty parasite has taken the life of Daisy."**  
  
He doesn't speak for some time; the shock still making everything feel numb.  
  
**“... what can you tell me? Did... did she suffer?"**  
  
**"Well... I hate to say it, but this is about all I know. There were no outward signs of this and there is no way she could have known about it. It basically ate away at her vitals. Given how you found her, she likely died in her sleep, so she wouldn't have felt any pain. She will have gone quite at peace. In my 90 years, I have seen nothing like this. Parasites, yes... but this is completely new."**  
  
He again struggles to take it in.  
  
**“... isn't... isn't there... something we could have done...?"**  
  
**"I'm sure if it had been an identified parasite it would have been easy to deal with. For now, we will work on a cure. If this can get to somebody in the middle of the city, everyone is at risk. Keep this hush though, there is no reason to agitate anyone else."**  
  
Alexis slams his fist on the table; he too causing the windows and floor to shake.  
  
**"A cure won't bring her back!"**  
  
He pauses, breathing hard.  
  
**"I want to see her."**  
  
The coroner shakes his head.  
  
**"I'm sorry, son. But no one is to see her."**  
  
**"I'm not asking!"**  
  
He turns around and slams the door behind him. When he sees the door with the padlock, he remembers Hanska's eyes as he'd left.  
  
[*She must be in there.*]  
  
He moves to the door and finds it had been left open; the closing mechanism having become stuck just enough to hold the door open. He walks into the room.  
  
He enters the room, and in the centre, Daisy's body lay, covered entirely by a white sheet. He gingerly walks over to where she lay, and reaches out to grab the sheet at the side where her head was. He carefully pulls it back. She looks just as she did when he'd found her; peaceful, but gone.  
  
He looks down at her lifeless face, his expression once again blank and lost - but inside, his mind was wracked with a powerful sorrow he had never endured before - this was worse than the pain of the guilt he carried for those he had killed - worse than the hate he felt for himself - and he didn't understand it. He places his hand to the side of her face, and stroked her cheek with his thumb.  
  
**"You were the only one in this world who could see and accept me for what I was... I... I finally felt like I wasn't alone anymore... when I was with you... you made the world brighter just by being in it... and my life seem worthwhile... and now... now everything is dark... I'm... all alone again... Mitula... why....?"**  
  
A solitary tear falls from his eye as he stands over her, splashing on her forehead.  
  
He bends down to kiss her forehead softly.  
  
**"Goodbye..."** he whispers, his face and eyes red as he leaves the building and heads for his home.  
  
He closes the door and takes off his cape, dropping it to the floor as he walks aimlessly into his training room. He draws his swords and begins to attack the training dummies, at first using precise movements, which gradually devolve into enraged, brutal swings. He growls angrily as his strikes become more savage; his voice getting louder and louder with each one.  
  
**"GRRRAAAARGGHHH!!!!!!"**  
  
He throws his swords away, and his aura flares with unbridled ferocity.  
  
**"WHHYYYYYYY?!?!"**  
  
He bellows, raising his fist to the heavens with a burning hatred as his power explodes with fury in all directions, turning the training dummies into splinters, and shattering the mirrors that encircled the room into little more than dust. He drops to his knees, angrily punching the floor repeatedly, denting the concrete. He does this until his gloves tear, and his knuckles bleed.  
  
Exhausted from it all, he falls forwards. His anger giving way to sorrow, he cannot summon the will to do anything, and he falls asleep where he lies.  
  
A day passes, and Boyd turns up at the house looking for Alexis. Having heard the news, he was concerned when his friend hadn't turned up.  
  
**"Sir? Sir are you in here?"**  
  
Boyd searches the ground floor of Alexis' house, finding him face down in the training room. He looks in shock at the mess, wondering what could have happened. Boyd rushes over to check on the Captain, worried that something might have happened to him.  
  
**"Sir? Wake up! Are you alright?!"**  
  
Alexis doesn't move.  
  
**{“...Boyd..."}** he whispers weakly.  
  
**"Sir, are you alright."**  
  
**{“...she's gone..."}**  
  
Boyd looks at the captain with sympathy. Daisy's death had been hard on all of them, but Boyd knew of Alexis' feelings for her - even if Alexis himself did not understand them. He places a hand on his shoulder.  
  
**"Sir... I know how hard this must be... I know how much you cared about her... how close you two were... but Hanska's asked for you back at post 8. I wish I didn't have to bother you with this, but it's urgent. People are beginning to talk. Rumours are spreading. There hasn't been a death like this in Tysolari for a long time. We have to do damage control amongst the other posts and the civilians and calm them down."**  
  
Alexis slowly sits up.  
  
**{“Why her... why not me... why am I spared, when she... so pure of heart... why is life so cruel... please Boyd... tell me why..."}**  
  
Boyd is at a loss.  
  
**"I wish I had an answer that would bring you comfort Sir, I really do..."**  
  
Alexis wipes the tears away and blinks several times. He gets up in silence, and begins to walk for the door. He drops to one knee; he hadn't eaten since his last supper with Daisy, and was still fatigued from everything. Still becoming accustomed to the frailties of humans, the thought had not even entered his mind considering recent events.  
  
**"ugh... I feel... sick..."**  
  
Boyd walks after him, picking the captain's swords and cape from their resting places, and hands them to him.  
  
**"Let me help you."**  
  
Boyd lifts the ailing captain to his feet, and supports him until they reach post 8.  
  
**"How are you today, Captain?"** It is clear she is trying to act as if everything is normal.  
  
He looks at her, but cannot bring himself to speak. His gaze is hollow - unnervingly so for any who look directly at him. He sits in his chair and doesn't speak a word to anyone.  
  
Boyd walks over to April.  
  
**{"He's not doing well. We all knew there was something there between them... we could all see it... losing her is killing him far more than it's hit us. I imagine I'd be the same if it had been Laurelin."}** he whispers.  
  
**{"And here I am pretending as if everything's alright... I'm so stupid... but how else are we supposed to act?"}**  
  
Jedrick chimes in.  
  
**{"We still have a duty to do..."}**   
  
he turns to look at the captain.  
  
**{"... you know... having seen him, it's almost like... he doesn't understand what it is he's feeling... his emotions seem uncontrolled... like he can't handle them."}**  
  
**{"Now that you mention it, his training room had been completely smashed to pieces. He must have done that. I've never once seen him angry... but if you saw that room... and the state of his hands... I thought he'd been attacked by something..."}**  
  
Jedrick rubs his chin.  
  
**{"That would make sense with my findings... ever since he showed up, I've felt strange... I didn't know why, but I directed my holy symbol towards him today. It's like nothing I've ever seen. I can sense when people are good or evil, and they give a mild aura... but when I point it at him... the aura is staggering... and it is both good *and* evil. That was no 'Sword Magic'. There is far more to the captain than we realise."}**   
  
Alexis had gotten up and moved behind them as they'd talked.  
  
**"We need to go."** he says in a flat, emotionless tone before turning to leave the post.  
  
The group look amongst each other, worrying if he'd overheard them, but follow regardless.  
  
The group split up, listening for the sounds of talk about the incident, calmly diffusing any worries they find. Alexis goes off alone to alleviate the vagrants' concerns. He holds it together for the most part, until he finds Zachary.  
  
**"Cap'n! Good te see ye 'gain!"**  
  
Alexis looks at Zachary blankly.  
  
**"Hello... Zachary."** he says in a monotone.  
  
**"You ok? You don't look so good. And... where's tha' lovely lass ya wer' with th' other day?"**  
  
The mentioning of Daisy's absence is all it takes for his resolve to crumble. He lowers his head, clenches his fists, and scrunches his eyes.  
  
**"She's..."** he can't bring himself to say it.  
  
Zachary however doesn't need him to. With the circling rumours and Alexis' state, he works it out for himself. His cheerful expression drops.  
  
**"...aw no... cap'n... me 'eart goes out te ye... she truly were a good soul... how're ye 'oldin' up?"**  
  
He slumps against the wall, sliding down into a seated position, his hands gripping his head.  
  
**"I don't know what this is... what to do... I hurt in a way I've never suffered... and nothing can make it stop... I just want it to stop... I... I just want her back..."**  
  
Zachary shambles over to him, placing a hand on his shoulder.  
  
**"It's 'orrible when bad things 'appen te good folk. But the grief will get easier, and the pain will fade. Might'na seem like it now, but this takes time te 'eal. Ain't no spell that'd ease it, 'cept maybe a memory charm to wipe 'er from yer mind, but then ye lose all the good times ye shared too. And ye don't want that."**  
  
He puts his head back against the wall.  
  
[*So... this is... grief... the thing I've subjected... so many innocent people to... I only ever considered the physical pain... I never knew that this... this was what I was doing to those who survived... gods... it hurts... it hurts like nothing else... forgive me...*]  
  
**"The rumours... the rumours are false. She died suddenly of natural causes. Be sure... to tell everyone you know... there's no truth in them..."** he pushes himself up and tries to compose himself.  
  
**"Aye, I will lad. You gonna be ok?"**  
  
He turns to leave the alley.  
  
**"I... don't know..."** he leaves the alley to continue his patrol alone.  
  
The post 8 crew reconvene, but Alexis is nowhere to be seen, until they spy him coming out of Daisy's house just as they were about to look for him.  
  
**"Sir? Where've you been?"**  
  
He doesn't answer immediately, he just holds the rolled up painting of Daisy he'd collected from the house, staring at it blankly.  
  
**"I've... been informing the less fortunate... on the falseness of the rumours."** he says, distracted.  
  
**"A messenger was here looking for you. General Hanska has asked to see you. You'd better go. We're done here anyway."**  
  
Alexis nods, feigning a smile. He leaves the group, and heads to Hanska's office. He knocks on the door; his unique knock recognisable.  
  
Hanska calls to the door.  
  
**"Come in."** His voice is flat.  
  
Alexis enters the office and closes the door behind him. He salutes.  
  
This goes unnoticed by Hanska. He isn't paying attention properly. His attention is set to his desk.  
  
He looks at the general.  
  
**"Sir, I... the rumours... have been quelled as best as we can manage. This should... ease public tension..."** he reports.  
  
Hanska looks up.  
  
**"What are you talking about."** Again, a flat response.  
  
He pauses.  
  
**"Daisy's... passing, Sir. Soldiers on other posts... her death was so sudden... the city hasn't... seen anything like this for a long time... fear was spreading, Sir."**  
  
Hanska's jaw clenches before he responds.  
  
**"They will get over it."**  
  
He looks at the general solemnly.  
  
**"If... if you didn't call me here for the report... what is it you wanted, Sir?"**  
  
**"I want you to do your job and do it right. She may be gone but your duty did not go with her."**  
  
Alexis' eyes flash angrily.  
  
**"Nor did yours. Do you not care about the panic this might have caused if left to spread?"**  
  
**"It will not. I know this city better than you. Everything is fine."**  
  
Alexis slumps against the wall and slides down it, his hands clutching his head.  
  
**"Except everything isn't fine... everything's far from fine... she's gone... and no amount of consoling from others does a damned thing to ease the pain... how can the gods allow such pain to happen to good people?"**  
  
**"So they can learn to appreciate what they are given. You have been given a shot in this city and you have the right people in your corner. You had better learn to appreciate your position."**  
  
He nods, but lowers his head to his knees.   
  
**"It hurts... it hurts so damned much... far deeper than even the most grievous physical wound... I have never known pain like it... how do we get past this?"**   
  
**"Time heals all, Alexis."** He says this with no sympathy but as a fact of life.  
  
He looks sternly at the General.   
  
**"You're wrong. Time destroys everything."** he retorts with a knowing authority in his voice. He stands up, composing himself and looking at the rolled up painting in his hand briefly.  
  
**"I should go. If there's nothing else..."** he says bitterly, not looking at the General.  
  
**"Just get back to work and make sure you do your job. Carry on as usual and you will soon feel better. Dismissed."**  
  
His eyes flash again, his fists clenching this time.  
  
**"Carry on as usual? April... Ral... and now you... Daisy's dead! DEAD! And we're expected to carry on like nothing's wrong?!?"**  
  
**"DO YOU EVEN CARE?!?"** he yells through gritted teeth as his eyes shift.  
  
Hanska is on his feet almost instantly and in the blink of an eye, he has Alexis up by his shirt, lifted nearly to the ceiling. He peers deep at Alexis and then drops him from the same height as he leaves his own office.  
  
He stares back at the General, a mixture of anger and grief. He manages to land on his feet when he's dropped. He is about to pursue the half giant, but he's so enraged that he can't think clearly.  
  
**"GAAAAAAARRRRGH!!!"** his power explodes uncontrollably, destroying the desk and sending bits of paper work flying all about the room.  
  
He breathes erratically as he calms down, before leaving the office.  
  
He returns to post 8 and awaits the return of the patrol in his chair.  
  
**"S...sir? What did... the general want?"**  
  
Alexis grits his teeth.  
  
**"I'm... going away for a while... I need help to deal with what's happened... help that only one person can provide now..."** He gets up and begins to walk towards the door.  
  
**"Sir... we all miss her... it was a shock for us all..."**  
  
Alexis clenches his fists so hard that his knuckles crack loudly.  
  
**"Then why are you all acting like nothing's happened?! Daisy is dead! I'll never hear her voice again!"** his head lowers.  
  
**"She'll never laugh again... smile again... hold me again... I'll never get to hold her hand and walk with her again... kiss her again..."**  
  
The other members of Post 8 finally catch on to why he was handling it so hard. He wasn't simply fond of Daisy. He had fallen in love with her. Boyd walks over to Alexis and stands beside him, placing a comforting hand on the distraught ex-devil's shoulder.  
  
**"Take all the time you need, sir. I'll inform the general what's happening. Get your head together. I'll take care of things here."** he says sympathetically.  
  
Alexis nods slowly. He gives them all one last, mournful look before he leaves post 8, and heads to the cathedral. Only Aiden would be able to help him through this extremely painful time.  
  
Boyd meanwhile, heads to Hanska's office, and knocks on the door. He finds that the door has been left open, and he looks in to find no sign of Hanska - and an almighty mess.  
  
[*Did... did the captain do this too? When he loses it... he must -really- lose it...*]  
  
Boyd begins to tidy up the mess, putting the papers in order. He gets the help of one of the janitors to remove the destroyed table and to bring a new one in. The office looks almost as good as new, when the general returns.  
  
Boyd salutes when he enters.  
  
**"Sir, are you... are you alright sir?"** he asks gently.  
  
Hanska ignores the question.  
  
**"What do you need?"**  
  
Boyd pauses, and decides to get to the point.  
  
**"It's Alexis, sir. He's gone away. He said something about... only one person being able to help him. I assume he means with his grief sir. I will keep things in order in his absence."**  
  
**"Good. You'll do fine."** He turns his attention away from Boyd.  
  
Boyd hesitates, before speaking again.  
  
**"Sir, forgive me if I'm overstepping my bounds but... your office was always open whenever we had problems... recent events have hit us all... if you want to talk... just know that you don't have to do this alone. We're here if you need us, Sir."**  
  
Hanska does not reply.  
  
Boyd nods, taking the silence as his cue to leave the general in peace.  
  
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Time passes slowly for everyone, and on the day of Daisy's funeral - which was delayed due to the nature of her death - the mood amongst the soldiers of post 8 was sombre. April couldn't help but cry. Boyd and Laurelin watched in poignant reflection. Boyd looked at Laurelin, and it killed him to think what it would be like to lose her; and he realised just how hard it must have been for Alexis. Jed stood in solemn silence, whilst Archie comforted April.  
  
Alexis turned up a little after everyone else. He stood behind them in plain clothes and a hooded cloak to disguise himself. He did not make his presence known. No one saw him; or if they did, they did not recognise him.  
  
Hanska stood away from the funeral, a large hat obscuring his face from everyone else. It was quite obvious that it was him though, considering his size. Just before the end of the funeral, he is seen leaving, without saying a word to anyone.  
  
Alexis doesn't move from the spot for quite some time after everyone else has left the scene. Once alone, he steps up to the headstone and kneels in front of it until the night draws in. Priests of the Cathedral have to pry him away from the site, so that Aiden can begin the process of helping Alexis to move forward.  
  
That evening, Hanska files his retirement papers, giving much up but knowing it had to be done. He had once loved his job but the time had passed for him to stay.

# Epilogue: Back to the Beginning

2 months have passed since Daisy's funeral. Alexis had retreated to the cathedral for the entire time. He sought to understand how things like this could be allowed to happen, asking advice and confiding in Aiden, and others within the church. With Alexis and Hanska gone, Boyd manned the post in their stead, reporting to Major Riggs for the time being.  
  
([Theme: Bittersweet Memories](http://stordarth.shiningalpha.com/AP/Music/Alexis-BittersweetMemories.mp3))  
  
Alexis stands at Daisy's graveside, holding the small carving she'd made for him. Time seemed to have healed his wounds, and he no longer appeared to feel the pain so much anymore, yet he seemed unable to let go - as though clinging to something that he could no longer reach.  
  
**“...it's me again. I thought I'd stop by and tell you the latest. I'm going back to the post today. It's going to be strange without you, but I know you'll be with me, watching over us from Mitula's side. You're in a better place. I know that now. If... if I think about you simply being on another island, it makes it bearable. I just have to wait a while before I can see you again. I just have to take care of things here first, just as you have to take care of things where you are. Once our duties are finished... I'll come for you."**  
  
He smiles, looking to the sky.  
  
**“I'll see you again someday. Until then, take care of everyone up there. And avoid colourful looking fish, OK?"** he says jestingly.  
  
Hanska had been approaching the site himself, but at the sight of Alexis, he turns, hoping to have not been seen himself.  
  
Though not seen, the loud footsteps of the half giant give him away, and Alexis turns, catching sight of him.  
  
**“Sir?"**  
  
Hanska hesitates a second.  
  
**"How are you, Alexis? Feeling better?"** There is no emotion behind these questions.  
  
He nods slowly.  
  
**“You?"** he responds, equally devoid of feeling.  
  
**"Yes. I was due for some peace and quiet. I think I'll keep it this way."**  
  
**“So it's true then. I had heard a rumour you had stepped down."**  
  
**"Yes. My time is up with the military. For now I'm enjoying the down-time. Do you want to get a drink?"**  
  
He smiles.  
  
**“That sounds like a good idea. It's been a while since I went to the Dragon's Rage. Kolgrim will be missing me."** he chuckles.  
  
Before they depart, he takes one last look at the gravestone.  
  
**“Sir... why did you retire?"**  
  
Alexis only receives a glare and the back of the half-giant as Hanska continues to walk, at a quicker pace.  
  
Unsure what the silence meant, he doesn't say anything more, he simply walks to catch up and heads to the Dragon's Rage Inn.  
  
They walk in silence for a while as they head towards the inn.  
  
**"And what have you been doing these past weeks?"**  
  
He stays silent and in thought for a while, hesitant to answer.  
  
**“I've... been at the cathedral."** he says ambiguously.  
  
**"Doing?"**  
  
**“Learning to cope with what happened."**  
  
**"Oh. Well that's good..."** he trails off.  
  
**“How are you coping with it?"** he asks compassionately.  
  
**"Fine."** Another annoyed response.  
  
Detecting the annoyance, Alexis decides to step up.  
  
**“Come on. What's really bothering you?"**  
  
Hanska stops and stares at Alexis. His eyes flash.  
  
**"Maybe I should get home."**  
  
Alexis stops and looks at him, shaking his head.  
  
**“If I've done something, I would sooner you simply come out and say it. Harbouring negativity towards me is only going to fester. Believe me. I know. So speak your mind. I can take it."**  
  
His voice grows.  
  
**"The only issue I have with you is that you do not know when to shut the hell up."**  
  
He walks up to his old mentor and places a hand on his shoulder.  
  
**“My apologies... I did not mean to anger you. I just want to help... if that is better achieved leaving you be, I will respect that. Now..."** he says as he tilts his head towards the tavern, **"...first round's on me."** he says with a very slight smile.  
  
Hanska walks into the tavern and orders a gallon of dark lager, sitting on a large comfortable stool.  
  
Alexis orders a glass of red wine and sits on the stool next to him.  
  
**“So... what are you going to do with your retirement?"**  
  
**"For now, work on projects that I've been putting off for far too long."**  
  
**“Sounds intriguing. What are you working on?"**  
  
**"Trains."** he says simply.  
  
Alexis smirks.  
  
**“Trains? In what capacity?"** he asks, interested.  
  
**"Models. It is kind of hard though..."** He holds up his massive hands.  
  
He huffs a nasal laugh and takes a drink of his wine.  
  
**“They don't make them in your size then?"**  
  
**"Heh."** He downs the rest of his drink and motions for the barkeep to bring another.  
  
He finishes his wine, and asks for a water.  
  
**“I could help perhaps. I have nimble fingers."** he says as he holds up his much more lithe hands.  
  
**"I appreciate the offer but... it's one of those things someone does alone. A time to be in your own world. And right now, that's what I need..."**   
  
He nods.  
  
**“Fair enough. I'm like that with my paintings. I can appreciate the need for solitude..."** he trails off.  
  
Hanska catches himself trailing off too much.  
  
**"And now what will you be doing without me around?"** He manages a grin, mocking Alexis slightly.  
  
He turns away at Hanska's question.  
  
**“I guess... I guess I'll try to carry on as normal..."** he trails off again, knowing that saying it and doing it were two totally different things.  
  
**"You know how to contact me if things get crappy."** The drinks were lightening his mood. He notices that Alexis is drinking water.  
  
**"Hey! This isn't a time for *water*!"**  
  
He looks at Hanska, blinking.  
  
**“But... I *always* have a water between my drinks. Helps to keep my head clear... but then..."** he pauses thoughtfully,   
  
**“...a clear head hasn't been ideal lately... Kolgrim, hit me with some Brave Cider."**  
  
**“You sure, Cap'n? That stuff's hard as anythin'”**  
  
**“Yes. I'll take a pint."**  
  
**“We're only allowed to serve halves...”**  
  
**“What am I gonna do, arrest you?"**  
  
**“Suit yerself, but dun go blamin' me when you can't walk outta here.”** Kolgrim grins as he pours the drink.  
  
**"That's better!"** Hanska downs another, almost full drink and gets another.  
  
**"CHEERS!"**  
  
He holds his pint up to clink glasses, and then downs the cider in one.  
  
**“I canno' look...”** Kolgrim says as he shakes his head.  
  
Hanska grins and waits for Alexis' reaction to the drink.  
  
He slams the glass down, and shudders as the familiar kick of it hits him.  
  
**“That always hits the spot..."** he says as he grins.  
  
**"GET HIM ANOTHER! AND ME!"** His yell turns the heads of many others in the bar and is met with cries of the same. It wasn't every day that the people around town got to see a General and Captain being so outward with their drinking.  
  
He goes for a hobgoblin this time; one brave cider was enough to knock lesser men unconscious. He once again holds his glass in the air for a toast, before downing that in one as well. Slamming the glass on the table again, and feeling the light buzz of alcohol dulling his senses, he pats Hanska on the shoulder.  
  
**“We ssshould dun this agessss ago."** he slurs slightly.  
  
Hanska laughs loudly.  
  
**"Yes, that probably would have been a good idea!"** His buzz was good but he still had full control. The alcohol was enough for him to forget his troubles.  
  
Alexis orders another drink for them, and takes this one a little more slowly.  
  
**“Tiss' shame you retirin'. You... good man, Hanska. Will... miss yooou round the offices..."**  
  
**"Well it was fun while it lasted! But it won't be long until I'm not even thought of!"** The last drink was kicking in. Hanska was starting to speak in different pitches.  
  
**“Dun say tha... you bin... a big inspration te me y'ave. And no' jus' cus you's half-giant neither. Hehehe."** he chuckles.  
  
Despite the terrible joke, Hanska nearly falls off his chair laughing. He only stays balanced thanks to another patron sitting next to him... who ends up on the floor.  
  
Alexis bursts out laughing at the sight of the man falling over.  
  
**“Whoopsss... Ssssorrryy! You ok, down ther'?"**  
  
The man, being extremely drunk seems to think it was his fault for falling over. He sits down and orders another drink.  
  
He turns back to his own drink and sups some more.  
  
**“Bu' serioshly. You's helped me. More than you knows. You remember how I wass.. when I firs' came here?"**  
  
**"Oh yus. I hope you appreci-ate human life naow"**  
  
**“I do... I defin'ly do... it's precious... more than I ev' knew..."** he trails off as thoughts of Daisy enter his mind, his expression becoming solemn as he takes another drink.  
  
In this time, another drink has come and gone from Hanska. Another is ordered. He doesn't get why Alexis has a sad expression. He slaps him on the back.  
  
**"Don't beso glum! 'm not movin'! Just tired."** he laughs, **"Retired!**  
  
He smiles weakly as he sups some more, but his thoughts remain on Daisy. Noting that Hanska seemed touchy on the subject, he keeps it to himself, and tries to put on a happy face.  
  
The night continues and the bar begins to thin out. Despite being a little loose on his feet, Hanska helps Alexis out of the bar and eventually to his home.  
  
**"You'll be okay?"** Hanska asks clearly. The walk had sobered him up considerably.  
  
The cool night air had cleared his mind somewhat, and by the time they arrived, Alexis was able to stand on his own. When Hanska asks, he nods unconvincingly.  
  
**“I... will have to be. The city needs me to be."**  
  
**"Hm. If you say so. You know where to find me if you need anything."** He sticks out his hand.  
  
He takes the hand and shakes it.  
  
**“I do. I have your number."**  
  
**Then farewell. Enjoy your time in Tysolari, Captain."**  
  
**“Enjoy your retirement, sir."** he gives the former general one final courtesy salute in respect.  
  
The former General returns the salute, before disappearing into the night.  
  
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Contact between the two is limited; they only speak once in the following few months. Hanska spends most of his new found free-time with his trains, reading, and walking around his empty house. The days pass slowly, and over time he becomes more and more restless; his mind and body yearning for something more to do.  
  
Alexis meanwhile, goes back to his duties. Post 8 feels somewhat hollow to him without Daisy, but he perseveres for the sake of his other soldiers. One day however, Boyd does not show up after leaving the night before. Visions of Daisy's demise flood his mind as he rushes to Boyd's house. When he speaks with Laurelin, and she tells him that he didn't return home, Alexis launches a full investigation into his disappearance, contacting Hanska for help with the matter. Alas, all trails go cold, and Boyd is never found. He knows that Boyd had never left the city, and must still be somewhere, but he lacks anything to go on that would lead him to finding him.   
  
When the decision comes from higher up to close the case and file it as 'Unsolved', Alexis fights tooth and nail to overturn the ruling, but he knew he had insufficient evidence to continue. When he breaks the news to Laurelin, she becomes distraught and angry. She blames Alexis for not caring, for not doing enough, and calls him all manner of hurtful names. Alexis can do nothing but take it, and he leaves Laurelin to her grief with a heavy heart, cursing himself for not being able to spare her from it.  
  
Alexis distances himself from Post 8 for the next months prior to Aiden's expedition, choosing to patrol Tysolari alone.   
  
  
On one particular day, Alexis takes a break from the capital, and takes a stroll in the woodlands south of the city. It is here that he encounters an unexpected - and unwanted - individual.  
  
**"L... Lord Bladestorm?! What are you doing here?"**  
  
**“Oh no – Til’i’q... I'd forgotten I'd sent you here...”**   
  
**"Master? I beg of you, please... have mercy... there was no suitable weapon to be found here... wait..."**   
  
As the devil gets closer, it senses something amiss.  
  
  
**"Master... is something wrong?"**  
  
**“No...”**  
  
**"Yes, I see it! You are damaged, my Lord! We must return you to Grans Island immediately!"**  
  
**“No... I have something more important for you to do.”**  
  
**"Of course, Master. What would you have me do?"**  
  
**“DIE!!”**   
  
**"MASTER?! NO!!! AAAAAAIIIIIEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!"**  
  
Alexis' power incinerates the worn-out scout devil where it stands. He stands in stunned silence for a while, as if trying to process what he'd just done.  
  
[*My only hope is that Daxion will forget about this one... Either way... I can't risk it...*]  
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Unable to handle the combined loss of Daisy and Boyd, and unnerved by his encounter with one of his former subordinates, he eventually files for compassionate leave, which is granted by Colonel Kime.  
  
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He gathers the remnants of the post 8 crew together.  
  
**“I have some news. Given the events of the past year, I no longer feel fit to be your commanding officer."**  
  
**"You're not leaving us too, are you Sir?"** April says sadly.  
  
**“For the time being, I am. My mind isn't what it once was... I feel... lost... a failure... my head is clouded and my thoughts scattered. I can no longer focus on the things I need to. So, I'm going away. Some of you may have heard about an expedition that a friend of mine is putting together. I'm hoping a change of scenery will help me to find myself, and give me a new sense of worth."**  
  
**"How long will you be gone?"**  
  
He shakes his head, shrugging.  
  
**“My leave is fairly flexible. I can come and go as I feel comfortable. The Lieutenant-Colonel has been very gracious in that regard, and has taken recent events into account. As for how long I'll be gone for... I guess it depends where this expedition takes me. April will be in charge whilst I'm absent. Can I trust you to recruit new lieutenants whilst I'm gone? We're looking fairly thin on the ground."**  
  
**"Of course, Sir."**  
  
**"You damn well better come back. One of these days I'll get that fly, and you won't be here to see it if you're gallivanting across the world, now will you?"**  
  
**"Archie, stop kidding yourself."**  
  
**"It's a good job I like you."**  
  
**"I'm touched."**  
  
The friendly banter lifts the remainder of post 8's spirits just a little.  
  
**“Has anyone spoken with Laurelin?"**  
  
**"I... I did Sir."**  
  
**“Has there been any change?"**  
  
April shakes her head.  
  
**"I'm afraid not Sir. She just needs time. You mustn't blame yourself, even if she does. You did everything you could to find him. You did your best. One day she'll see that."**  
  
Alexis turns his head away.  
  
**“My best wasn't enough."**  
  
There is an awkward silence.  
  
**“Until we next meet, farewell. It's been an honour serving with you."** he salutes them, and they salute in return. He turns slowly about face, picks up the figurine and rolled-up painting from his desk, and leaves.  
  
As he heads towards the door, he takes a seat in the reception area to gather his thoughts. He hadn't been able to look at the painting for some time. He was afraid doing so would start him off, but today he felt compelled to look. He unrolls the painting and stares at it. As he does, the sound of hooves can be heard behind him.  
  
**"Sir. I'm glad I caught you."**  
  
Alexis turns toward her.  
  
**“April? What is it?"**  
  
**"I almost forgot... Daisy... she... asked me to give you this."** April holds an envelope out to the captain.  
  
**"She popped in whilst you were away with the General and asked me to give it to you when you got back. She... said she wasn't feeling well, so we sent her home to rest... and with what happened... I forgot to give it to you. I'm sorry Sir."**  
  
Alexis takes the envelope.  
  
**“It's alright. Thank you."**  
  
Alexis stares at the envelope. April watches briefly, before deciding it best to leave him be.  
  
He hesitates to open it, but in the end, he realised that this was Daisy's last message to him. He takes a deep breath, and opens it.

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([Theme: Heart of Light](http://stordarth.shiningalpha.com/AP/Music/Alexis-HeartofLight.mp3))

***To my dearest Captain,  
  
Thank you for staying with me last night. I couldn't have asked for a better end to such a perfect evening. Even as I write this, I'm eagerly waiting for you to return. I've never felt like this with anyone. I can't explain it, I just feel so much more alive when you're around.  
  
I've had such a wonderful time these past few days, and I'm looking forward to so many more moments with you. I didn't know if you felt the same for a while, but after last night, you confirmed it for me. And you've made me happier than I ever thought I could be.  
  
I wasn't sure I'd be able to say all of this to you without messing it up, so I decided to write it down. I'll be sure to tell it to you next time I see you, but I'm writing it now because if I don't I feel like I might burst.  
  
I love you, Alexis. With all my heart. I just want to shout it out so that everyone knows. But I won't. Not until I hear you say it too.  
  
I'm feeling a little tired, I guess last night wore me out. I'm going to leave this with April, since you'll probably head straight to the office when you get back. I admire that about you; your devotion to your duty. I'm going to take a nap. Wake me up when you come over. I can't wait to see you.  
  
  
All my love,***

***Daisy.***

~~~  
  
Alexis finishes reading the letter, and tears well up in his eyes. His emotions are mixed; he feels once again the pain that her death had brought him, but it is a dull, distant ache underlining the joy and comfort this letter brought him.  
  
He nods to himself. He folds the letter and takes one last look at the painting, and he smiles before rolling it up and putting it into his pack.  
  
He walked from the army barracks, a slight smile adorned his face as he gazed at the gorgeous blue sky above. He took a deep breath of crisp, breezy air, and sighed.   
  
[*I hope you can see this sky from where you are. I know you'd love it.*]  
  
**“To be free on a day like this... makes everything worthwhile."**