

“THE INSPECTION”

A Tale of the Inquisition

By Z.O.B. Industries



Snow fell in thick, heavy drifts around Skyhold. Down below, in Ferelden, the autumn had come in earnest: harvests were being hauled in from the fields, old battlefields covered in fallen leaves and forgotten.

And in Skyhold, a few heroes still remained... because some of them didn't *have* homes to return to, for the harvest festival. Sera, for instance, had remained. She insisted on getting drunk every night with the soldiers—an unusual decision for her, but it kept the reserve regiments in very good spirits. The Inquisitor, Varric, Dorian and the rest had departed... all except for one very serious, very rigid soldier. Manning her post, despite the season, despite the fact the war was over.

“They're out there,” muttered Leliana, staring gloomily from the Inquisitor's balcony. “Somewhere. The darkspawn, just waiting to strike again. And Corypheus... How do we know we *truly* defeated him? And Solas—”

“Oh, Maker's sake,” said Josephine, standing in the door. “Come inside, Leliana. You'll catch your death.” The dark-skinned, golden-sleeved financial manager of the Inquisition looked annoyed... and a little worried. Leliana was her friend, and things weren't right lately. Not at all.

Leliana shivered. It was true, the winter wind bit her viciously out of doors, especially this time of year. And she was much less... Battle-ready than usual.

In the aftermath of the War of the Anchor and Corypheus' demise, once the embers of Solas' betrayal had cooled and they'd all adjusted to the Inquisitor's newly maimed state... well, there hadn't been a whole lot to do. And so, the Inquisition found itself resting on its laurels. The new Divine, Cassandra, had ordered the Inquisition to become a peace-keeping force and act as her protector. Therefore, the vast facilities of Skyhold had begun to empty even before the First Day holiday approached. By now, the whole place was a ghost town... and Leliana was bored.

There was a saying among dwarves: “Clever folk get up to mischief when not given mischief to do.” Leliana could identify with that. As her spy networks became less and less necessary, the whole of Ferelden and Orlais more and more unified, the spymaster had found her skills in less demand. On the one hand, this was a blessing. On the other... it was also a curse.

As a child, Leliana had possessed a fondness for sweets. It was such a deeply buried weakness, and so little-known, that she never needed to purge it from records or assassinate anyone who knew of it. But it *did* remain, all through the war. And now, with the world mostly at peace, and the Inquisitor gone... well, Leliana had begun to over-indulge.

The once-trim and grim spymaster had been overeating. She'd acquired a wider rump, softer features and she was *furious* about it. Endless sparring matches with Dagna and Scout Harding in the courtyard didn't seem to melt the pounds off her, and even strict diets didn't seem to lighten the load on her rump. As such, Leliana was now in a constant state of flustered annoyance and embarrassment, as she continued to order larger and larger clothes.

The fact that Skyhold's 'queen of spies' had gone to pot could not be allowed to get out. It was a disaster, a massive and grave mistake that she scrambled to conceal at every turn. However, though she *could* hide her widened “assetts” from the world at large, she couldn't hide them from the soldiers posted at Skyhold. The militia-men called her “Big Red” behind her back: a reference both to the color of her hair, and apparently, to the size of her arse.

“I'm coming, I'm coming.” Leliana came inside, closing the broad bay windows and latching them. The cold air was walled out by panes of elven glass, and the plush décor of Skyhold seemed to embrace her with warmth as she entered. Shivering, she pulled one of the Inquisitor's prize furs from the bed and draped it around her shoulders. “Can't we get this damn castle any warmer?”

Josephine chuckled. “My dear, if we light any more fires, the place might burn to the ground. Come downstairs—the cooks have prepared us a nice holiday feast. Something filling, for those of us too busy to go home.”

“What? No—not food. I can't.” Leliana's eyes fell on a nearby mirror, and she quickly looked away. To her own hyper-critical gaze, she appeared a chubby mess. A plump disgrace to the Inquisition... and a shame to her former lover, the Hero of Ferelden. They rarely spoke anymore, and Leliana couldn't help but think the newly expanded breadth of her rump might have something to do with it.

“Leliana! Come now. The cooks worked very hard on that feast...”

“Surely you jest. Josephine, I can't let a single bite pass my lips—not in this state!”

The Orlesian banker rolled her eyes. “Oh, please. You can't possibly be referring to your...”

“My revolting waistline? Yes, I can.” She shuddered. “If the Inquisitor makes one of her surprise visits, and sees me like this... Not only will she fire me, I will *die* of shame. No, I can't eat anything else today. I had half a roast nug this morning, and that's it. Nothing else for me.”

Josephine sighed, rubbing her forehead. As the Inquisitor's personal handmaiden and manager of state affairs, it was her job to corral the... *unpredictable* friends and allies they'd gained in their travels. Leliana was the most loyal, the most die-hard soldier in the entire Inquisition. But right now, she was also an enormous pain in Josephine's rear.

“Okay. I have an idea. There's an official test of fitness in the Inquisition... A sort of 'physical.' If I give you that test, and you pass, will you come eat with us? And stop acting like some sort of saint, refusing food and drink, and neglecting your friends?”

“I'm doing no such thing!”

“I understand your concerns, Leliana. Truth be told, I've put on a little... winter weight, myself.” Under her dark olive skin, Josephine felt a blush building. “This is the third outfit I've had let out this month, alone. But I'm not moping around in some kind of personal... pity-festival.”

Leliana raised an eyebrow. “You don't look like you've gained a pound.”

“Trust me. I am sucking it in, *constantly*, these days.” She exhaled, and Leliana blinked—Josephine's loose-fitting blue-and-gold dress suddenly seemed much tighter. A soft, round paunch bloomed underneath her corset, and in the light from a dozen candles Leliana could see smooth fat deposited under her chin as well. Was that... a double chin? On Josephine? Truly, this was a sight for the ages.

The courier and assassin sighed, pulling down her lavender hood. Her red hair was mussed and tangled from days of overwork. “Fine. But we've got to be quick. I have ravens coming in from Antiva and Tevinter—those mages might be quiet for now, but they never rest. How do we do this?”

“Well, you're not going to like the first part...”

“Spit it out!”

“First... You need to take off your clothes.”

Right. Of course. Josephine had performed similar tests on courtesans, spies and others, making sure they were fit for duty. A chubby spy was not exactly capable of slipping out a window or seducing a slender elf or burly Qunari, after all. With regret, she began to undress... and soon stood fully naked before Josephine, blushing a deep crimson.

“This is ridiculous. I don't remember the test being *this* embarrassing.”

“That's because you never had it performed on you. I assure you, all the girls you tested were quite upset.” Josephine circled her, making notes on a piece of parchment. “Hmm... Yes, yes. I can see your point. You definitely look different.”

Leliana, for her part, shivered and did her best to stand still. She was taller than Josephine, but very differently built. Where Josephine was a decadent, curvy Orlesian waif, Leliana was Ferelden and as sturdily built as an apple-cart under her clothes. That solid frame had taken on nearly forty pounds of excess fat, which swelled her pale belly and inflated her rear like some sort of obscene dwarven fertility-idol. She reflexively covered her breasts, the only part of her that *didn't* seem to get bigger as she grew, and one hand snuck down to cover the bright-orange fuzz of her crotch. She yelped when Josephine smacked her hand with a money-counter's abacus.

“Ow! What was that for?”

“I have to be able to see *everything*, remember? Otherwise the test can't be objective.”

Leliana stared daggers at her friend, picturing the million ways she could torment the girl: psychological warfare, poison, sending thugs to steal her jewelry. None of them would compensate for the shame she felt, right now. “If I didn't know better, I'd say you were enjoying this.”

“Who says I'm not? You are an impressive specimen, after all.” She flicked several onyx beads across the abacus. “Yes, yes... Quite soft, in a couple places. I can see why you're concerned.” She reached out and cupped the dangling dome of Leliana's pot-belly, eliciting a squirm and a gasp. “This in particular looks like trouble. You've been sneaking ale again late at night, haven't you? I always told you, drinking never helped your work...”

“It helps drown the guilt, at least,” grumbled the red-haired dilettante, turning away as Josephine jiggled her lily-white love-handles and squeezed the broad curve of her buttocks. “Really, stop that. This isn't even part of the test—I've read the directions!”

“Just checking you've still got muscle in there, at all...” The teasing was worse than the grabbing, somehow. Leliana felt extremely vulnerable, and even more so when Josephine produced a pair of calipers and began pinching the fat all over her body.

“Oh, come on! That's just... ow, my *bosoms!*”

“Yes, and quite plentiful bosoms they are. Not as impressive as Cassandra's, but then, not all of us can have her 'special gifts.’”

“Special...” Leliana paused. “Wait. You've seen Cassandra's breasts? *When?*”

“Wouldn't *you* like to know.” Taking a few more notes, Josephine handed her underclothes back to Leliana. “Here you are. Don't worry, the torture is over. I've reached a verdict.”

“Which is?”

The parchment crinkled as Josephine peered at it. “You've put on weight. Lots of weight. But... I don't think your appetite is to blame. It's your age, dear.”

A terrible, stern expression crossed Leliana's face. “If you call me fat *and* old, I will have the Inquisitor's secret agents throw you off the castle tower. I mean it.”

“Calm down! What I mean is, we've been at this job a long time... and the stress has taken its toll. On myself as well. Neither you nor I are elves—we're getting older, Leliana. Not quite barren in the womb just yet, but... this is what happens as a body begins to age. Your hips get wider, your belly rounder. Weight comes on more easily, and comes off with more difficulty.” She shrugged. “In a word, you're not greedy or lazy. You're just tired, and you've been working too hard for too long. Your metabolism is slowing down as a result.”

“Maker preserve me... You're right.” Leliana sat on the Inquisitor's bed, stunned. “All this time I've been berating myself... but the hours we work, the madness of trying to run everything behind the scenes. The fear and the nightmares.” She sighed. “I guess it's just a miracle I'm not even *fatter* than this.”

“Maybe.” Josephine sat beside her, putting a hand on hers. The variation in skin-color seemed strangely complementary, under the candle-light. “But better loyal and fat, than skinny and a layabout. You've done well, friend. Never abuse yourself—we've got plenty of enemies to do that for us. Remember?”

The Fereldan sighed. “That's quite true...”

Silence descended. The two women took a moment to recall all they'd been through: the battles, the brutality, the chaos of a war they'd never asked for. Then Josephine squeezed Leliana's hand, and pulled her to her feet.

“Come on. Our feast is waiting downstairs... and our ale. Let's not allow the chill of winter to steal our spirits.” She winked. “Even if it *has* stolen our waistlines.”

Leliana smiled reluctantly, feeling the old joys of comradeship once again. After all she'd done for the Inquisition, it sometimes felt like her body was hollowed out... just an empty shell, to be filled with food and wine whenever it was hungry. But she'd forgotten how loyal her comrades could be, and how much *fun* it was to trade barbs with a witty girl like Josephine. Although she would find a way to get revenge for all the poking and prodding, *that* was for certain. Maybe an appetite enhancer in Josephine's drink, one of those old Dwarven recipes... Yes, that would do quite nicely.

“Very well. Let's go,” she said, pulling on the rest of her clothes and brushing her chin-length hair from her face. As she did, she felt the softness of her own cheeks, the plumpness and smoothness of them. *By the Maker... I really am going soft.*

But as she watched Josephine's wide rear wiggling down the castle staircase ahead of her, she thought maybe "soft" wasn't the worst thing to be.

At least she had *friends* to get fat, along with her.

That was... Something.

