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**Narrative Design set in BioWare's *Dragon Age* Universe:
Outline of *THE GIFT***

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Note: this work is speculative in nature, utilizing the details of BioWare's *Dragon Age* universe as a foundation. This story outline is not a professional work or in any way endorsed by EA or BioWare. I created this outline as an exercise in story development for games.

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STORY OUTLINE: THE GIFT

Story Setting

Tevinter Imperium, Carastes, 9:25 Dragon (according to Andrastian Chantry calendar)

Player Character

The player is 17-year-old Cremisius/Remi Aclassi, daughter of a struggling tailor who makes aprons and other basic work attire. Cremisius is bound by an arranged marriage and, at the start of this story, has not yet realized that she is transgender. Therefore, until a specified turning point in the outlined story, the player will use female pronouns.

Additional Characters

- Mother/Sisenna Aclassi: 38; human; assists in family shop
 - long, thin blond hair that is always tightly curled into a bun
 - piercing blue eyes
 - 5'4
 - very thin due to constant concern about her appearance
- Papa/ Metilius Aclassi: 45; human; tailor of basic garments who owns his own shop
 - neatly cropped hair the color of rust
 - sagging brown eyes
 - 6'0
 - lean and hunched from years of hard work
- Master Milnas: 47; dwarf; owner of the Violet Emporium, one of the most expensive proprietors of fine goods in all of Carastes
 - long, braided brown hair covered in sculpting oil and thick, robust brown beard
 - shrewd brown eyes
 - 5'4
 - broad and sturdy although quite rotund due to an almost unhealthy love for figs
- Foryne: 40; human; extremely wealthy and powerful magister of the Altus class
 - short black hair that is perfectly coiffed in the latest style
 - cold black eyes
 - 6'4
 - lean with perfect posture
- Mariah Eldron: 51; human; wealthy wine merchant from Nevarra
 - shaved head
 - cunning brown eyes

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- 5'10
 - plump but graceful and fierce in her gait
 - Ben/Emilia Eldron: 21; half-dwarf/half-human; son of Mariah; Remi's fiancé
 - curly, shoulder-length blond hair and sparse, patchy beard
 - kind brown eyes
 - 5'7
 - stocky dwarven build about which he is self-conscious
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The following sections (I-III) contain the story outline of "The Gift":

I. Wedding Eve

Morning

1. Encounter 1

The day before her wedding, Remi gazes at herself in her bedroom looking glass and debates cutting her hair very short. The player talks to herself, evaluating the pros and cons of cutting her hair and her ambivalence about her upcoming arranged marriage to Ben, the half-dwarven son of a wealthy Nevarran wine merchant named Mariah Eldron.

- a. Goal: establish Remi's personality (laid-back, assertive) and frustration with identity.
- b. Setting: Remi's room in her parents' run-down wooden house in the Soporati quarter of Carastes
- c. **Major player choice:** decides whether or not to cut her hair.
 1. *Cut Hair:* long hair shorn to the shoulders.
 - Likes who she sees in the mirror a little more.
 - Establishes strong-willed, feisty personality.
 - Mother furious when she barges into player's room and sees the results.
 2. *Don't Cut Hair:* hair stays same length.
 - Still dislikes who she sees in the mirror.
 - Establishes meek but frustrated personality.
 - Mother suspicious that player was doing something to sabotage the wedding when she barges into player's room and catches player holding knife.
- d. Emotional beat: The player begins debating which is more important: duty to her family or duty to herself to express her true identity.
- e. Sample dialogue

REMI

(frustrated, sarcastic)

Brains and brawn don't carry much weight when you got
nothin' but breeze between your legs.

2. Encounter 2

Mother rushes the player into the kitchen, where Papa is already sitting and finishing up his breakfast. If the player cut her hair, Mother scolds the player as she dishes out breakfast and is generally harsh and terse with the player. If the player only threatened to cut her hair, Mother mocks the player for considering it.

- a. Goal: establish Remi's diametrically opposed relationships with her parents. Her mother is obsessed with tradition, wealth, and power, while her father simply wants what's best for his family.
- b. Setting: kitchen of the Aclassi house
- c. **Minor player choice:** player decides how to respond to Mother's high-strung attitude. Regardless, Mother shares additional information about player's betrothed, such as his appearance and anecdotes about his expensive lifestyle.
 1. *Provoke Mother further with sarcasm:* Mother emphasizes that such unladylike behavior will not be tolerated when she assumes the role of a wealthy merchant's wife.
 - Further establishes strong-willed, feisty personality.
 2. *Pretend to be sorry:* Mother is too self-involved to notice that the player is not telling the truth, but the player expresses exasperation by rolling her eyes at her good-humored father.
 3. *Be sorry:* The player apologizes to avoid exacerbating Mother's wrath.
- d. Emotional beat: Through interactions with her parents, the player remembers why she is torn between helping her family and running away to live her own life.
- e. Sample dialogue [if player cut her hair]:

MOTHER

(enraged, practically shrieking)

What have you done, nugling? Shorn like a sheep! What blighted
slaver would even have you now? Festis bei umo canavarum
[Tevener for "you will be the death of me"].

3. Encounter 3

Papa pulls player aside to discuss player's thoughts about upcoming marriage before she departs for her Preparation Day [Tevinter tradition invented for this story]. Papa wants to make sure that Remi is happy with the arrangement, but he also seems to already know that she is not. He makes a reference to a time in her childhood when he would angle his shaving mirror so that Remi could pretend to shave with him. Papa asks the player how she feels about her marriage, if she's happy in general, and if she likes being a girl. After the player finishes her chat with Papa, the player is all but pushed out the door by Mother. After Mother's interruption, Papa asks if she will pick up a gift for her husband [Tevinter tradition invented for this story]

that Papa ordered from the Violet Emporium, sister store to the Black Emporium. According to this invented tradition, a Soporati woman gives her husband-to-be a gift that symbolizes productivity and the start of a fruitful marriage that will hopefully produce a magical child.

- a. Goal: establish the close relationship between the player and her father and give the player the option to start to discover her true self. Recounting this touching childhood moment with the shaving mirror foreshadows and gives emotional impact to the story's conclusion.
- b. Setting: foyer of the Aclassi house
- c. **Major player choice:** Papa asks the player directly if she likes being a girl. After all responses below except iii, Papa follows up with the question, "Do you want to be a boy?" However, the player will not have time to answer before Mother interrupts.
 1. *Say you don't like being a girl:* This would be the player's first admission to anyone that she knows that her gender identity does not match her anatomy. Papa is surprised by her admission but not by its subject matter. He does not specifically label her as transgender but follows up with a question (see above).
 2. *Say you do like being a girl:* The player may give this response, but when Papa asks her why, she can't follow up with much supporting evidence. He expresses his skepticism and follows up with a question (see above).
 3. *Say you haven't thought about it:* This response enables the player to dodge the question altogether for now. Papa may give her a knowing frown but doesn't push further.
 4. *Say nothing:* Papa tries to gently nudge the player towards an admission by following up with another question (see above).
- d. Emotional beat: The player chooses whether or not to reveal her true self to her father – to anyone – for the first time.
- e. Sample dialogue:

PAPA

(hopeful, understanding, encouraging)

Ah, my dear Remi...what greatness awaits those who dare gaze
upon their own reflections!

Afternoon

1. Encounter 1

The player picks up Papa's gift from the Violet Emporium, one of the most expensive stores in the city. The store is extremely busy, and, due to her status as a Soporati and society's view of her as a woman, she is ignored. The player finally does get the attention of the shopkeeper, but he insists that she needs to give him some other kind of payment besides the money Papa already paid. In response to this sexual harassment, she is approached by a dashing Altus magister, radiant in the gold, black, and silver of his ceremonial attire. The magister introduces himself as Foryne, and he offers to assist the player with retrieving her package; the

player determines Foryne's method of persuasion. Foryne then performs that action(s), some of which eventually convince Master Milnas to retrieve the package from the back room.

- a. Goal: introduce the player to Foryne and the power and authority that magisters wield in Tevinter society.
- b. Setting: interior of Master Milnas' shop, The Violet Emporium
- c. Major player choice: player decides how she wants Foryne to get the shopkeeper's attention. The attitude behind the player's choice influences whether Foryne wants to buy the player or marry the player later.
 1. *Foryne uses passive magic*: Foryne levitates all other patrons so that the player is the only person who the shopkeeper can help. Foryne will later ask to marry the player.
 2. *Foryne uses violent magic*: Foryne sets the building on fire and only extinguishes the flame after the shopkeeper agrees to help the player. Foryne will later ask to buy the player.
 3. *Foryne threatens to exercise his political power*: Foryne will later ask to buy the player.
 4. *Player asks Foryne to surprise her*: randomized outcome (selected from one of the other choices). Foryne will later ask to marry the player.
- d. Emotional beat: The player grapples with frustrations that can accompany her gender and class, further informing her decision about whether or not to be open about her trans identity.

2. Encounter 2

After the shopkeeper disappears in the back room to track down the gift, Foryne makes a pass at the player. Depending on how she has interacted with him up until this point, he will either hint at marriage or at purchasing her as a slave. Foryne feels threatened by any displays of confidence or power, so the more sarcastic and spiteful Remi has acted, the more Foryne is inclined to buy her; the more meek and reserved she has acted, the more he is inclined to court her. Regardless, the player lets the fact that she is engaged slip and excuses herself to go about the remainder of her Preparation Day duties. Foryne is not pleased.

- a. Goal: show that Foryne may not be the charming man that he initially seemed to be.
- b. Setting: entrance of The Violet Emporium
- c. **Minor player choice**: the player decides whether or not to encourage Foryne's advances.
 1. *Encourage Foryne [if pursuing marriage]*: flirt with the magister shamelessly. Upon his return with the gift, Master Milnas reveals that the player is getting married. Foryne is displeased and will pursue purchase later.
 2. *Confess betrothal [if pursuing either]*: explain that player is getting married tomorrow and she must unfortunately decline any courting. Foryne will not be happy but will pursue marriage again later.
 3. *Challenge Foryne [if pursuing purchase]*: deflect odd questions about whether or not the player can cook and sew. The player declines "whatever you're offering,"

murmurs something about how she should be getting to her fiancé, takes the gift, and leaves in a huff. Foryne is intrigued and will pursue purchase later.

- d. Emotional beat: The player gains courage to stand up for herself and be more transparent about who she is. She also learns the negative things that can happen when a person shows their true self.

Evening

1. Encounter 1

The player meets her husband-to-be at a very uncomfortable dinner at Mariah Eldron's extravagant mansion. The player wonders what exactly Mariah's family is getting out of marrying into her family, and once the dinner is over, the player and Ben are left alone to get acquainted. They exchange pleasantries, but Ben eventually discloses that he is transgender, explains what that means, and says that he would prefer to spend his life living as a female named Emilia. His mother and Tevinter society would never allow it, and so this marriage is meant to be one of convenience so that Ben can live his life and take over his mother's business without threat of a scandal.

- a. Goal: introduce character who has known who they are for a while and who gives the player the vocabulary to express who she really is.
- b. Setting: first floor library in the Eldron mansion
- c. **Major player choice:** the player decides how to embrace her trans status. Regardless of her response, she agrees to keep Ben's secret.
 1. *Excitement/liberation:* the player lets go of years of repression and tells Ben that she feels the same way. They're both relieved that they are at least marrying someone who understands, even if they can't live as openly trans people.
 2. *Fear:* the player is terrified by the entire concept and by how familiar it sounds. She is not ready to accept that either of them is trans, so she excuses herself and returns home to think about everything Ben has said.
 3. *Denial:* the player knows that she feels different but isn't ready to accept how she has always been. Part of her is relieved that her husband seems like he won't be demanding.
- d. Emotional beat: The player learns about the concept of being transgender, and, in so doing, realizes that she is trans herself. Here, she decides whether she's ready to admit it.
- e. Sample dialogue:

BEN/EMILIA

(bashful, sheepish)

I-I've always quite liked the name "Emilia." I suppose, well, that's the name I'd prefer – if you don't mind.

2. Encounter 2

Around the stroke of midnight, the player wipes the frost off of a cold glass window to watch Mother convene with a tall, hooded figure in an ill-lit alley across the street. Mother carries only a lantern, so the

player cannot see the other figure clearly. She can only overhear sentence fragments and the clinking of gold leaving hands, but Mother seems to be planning some dark task.

- a. Goal: further show that Mother has questionable ethics and foreshadow that the marriage may not go as planned.
- b. Setting: alley across the street from the Aclassi house
- c. **Minor player choice:** whether to move in closer to hear more but risk getting caught
 1. *Stay put and only hear a little:* the player only hears the sound of gold clinking and her name and Ben's name amidst muffled whispers.
 2. *Creep forward once:* the player hears additional words to fill in the whispered sentences, such as: slave, wife, cancelled, never know.
 3. *Creep forward twice:* the players hears broken sentences that don't quite give the details of the dark deal away.
 4. *Creep forward three times:* the player has been too bold. The player doesn't hear any additional words; instead, Papa catches her and directs the player to bed.
- d. Emotional beat: The player is testing her courage and trying to take control of her future.

II. Wedding Day

Afternoon

1. Encounter 1

The Soporati elite, several representatives from wealthy Nevarran families, and even some Altus mages attend the player's wedding. Right before the ceremony begins, Mother reveals to the crowd that Ben is transgender by bringing forward a wild-eyed witness. The public revelation is such a scandal that the wedding is cancelled and the Eldron family business is nearly immediately ruined. The Imperial priest refuses to marry the couple.

- a. Goal: establish how intolerant Tevinter society can be and show that Mother values gold over all else.
- b. Setting: Imperial chantry of Carastes
- c. **Major player choice:** the player decides whether or not she wants to stand up for Ben. Regardless, Ben's family is shamed by the court of public opinion and the engagement is dissolved.
 1. *Lie – insist that Ben is not trans:* the player denies the allegations, stating that she, as his fiancée, would certainly know it if Ben was trans. The crowd is not interested in her defense.
 2. *Defend Ben but don't reveal personal trans status:* the player stands up for Ben but does not reveal own status. Mother points to the player's action as proof that trans people are cunning enough to manipulate others.
 3. *Defend Ben and reveal personal trans status:* the player stands up for Ben and for being trans by revealing that she is trans as well. The crowd can't process this

additional information, and Mother hustles the player out of the building, exclaiming that her daughter is just confused.

4. *Remain silent*: the player bears silent witness but does not defend another trans person in order to protect herself. She may feel guilty, but she felt like she was keeping herself safe.
- d. Emotional beat: The player learns that gold and tradition are more important to some people than identity, honesty, and standing up for others. Doing the right thing doesn't guarantee a happy ending, and defining "the right thing" to do is sometimes difficult.

2. Encounter 2

In the face of this scandal, Foryne offers to make the player a deal. The magister visits the player's home and either proposes marriage or offers to buy the player in exchange for her family's financial stability. It is made clear that Mother made a deal with Foryne to sabotage the Eldron wedding because Foryne had offered more money.

- a. Goal: establish general distrust for magisters and force the player to choose her family or her identity; she cannot have both.
- b. Setting: foyer of the Aclassi home
- c. **Major player choice**: the player decides whether or not to accept Foryne's offer to save her family from poverty.
 1. *Agree to be his wife [if proposes marriage]*: in order to spare her family the shame of poverty, the player agrees to marry Foryne. She is internally distraught, especially if she has publicly announced her trans identity; Father can tell.
 2. *Refuse to be his wife [if proposes marriage]*: the player cannot bear to live the lie, even though her family will not be able to survive without the income. Foryne, enraged, offers instead to buy the player. Mother quickly agrees.
 3. *Agree to be his slave [if proposes slavery]*: in order to spare her family the shame of poverty, the player agrees to become Foryne's slave. She is internally distraught, especially if she has publicly announced her trans identity; Father can tell.
 4. *Refuse to be his slave [if proposes slavery]*: the player spits on Foryne's boots in response to his proposal. Foryne makes a remark about how the deal is already done as he hands Mother a sizeable pouch of gold.
 5. *Stay silent [if proposes either]*: the player accepts whatever is proposed by saying nothing, delaying the need to make a firm decision.
- d. Emotional beat: The player believes she has made her final decision about her fate and the fate of her family. Regardless, she leaves the encounter believing that she will be bound to Foryne forever.
- e. Sample dialogue:

 FORYNE

(*thoroughly amused*)

Precious creature, you thought you had a choice in the matter, did you? By the Maker, that is genuinely sad.

Evening

1. Encounter 1

At the stroke of one, the player happens upon Papa in the foyer. He is wide awake, rocking softly in a rickety chair in the room's coziest nook and staring fixedly at the front door. Papa asks Remi if she is happy with marrying (or being sold to) Foryne. No matter what Remi claims, Papa knows that she will not be happy until she is allowed to be her true self.

- a. Goal: give the player one more opportunity to choose between her identity and her family by incorporating her father's wisdom and opinion into the decision.
- b. Setting: foyer of the Aclassi house
- c. **Major player choice:** the player chooses between starting a new life and doing her duty to her family. Regardless, by the end of this encounter, the player receives the Gift from Papa, chooses the new name, "Krem," and uses male pronouns when referring to himself from that point on. The gift is a shaving kit, which calls back to the story her father mentioned about how he helped Krem pretend to shave.
 1. *Accept Papa's offer to let her leave the family and start over:* the player agrees to leave and start over somewhere else, although the player is reluctant. It is clear that the family will have to find some other way to make ends meet.
 2. *Refuse Papa's offer to let her leave the family and start over:* the player insists on remaining with the family to shoulder their financial burden. While Papa lets the player believe they have made this choice, the player awakens the next day on a cart bound for a military academy in Trevis.
 3. *Threaten to kill Foryne:* the player vows to kill Foryne, but Papa reminds the player that this is not a long-term solution.
- d. Emotional beat: The player makes their final decision between family and identity