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WARNING: May contain coarse language, violence, gore or sexual content. Reader discretion is advised.

Chapter 8. "Wounds"

He awoke from his nap to a tapping on his door. "Vilkas," he heard Shari say through the door. "Er...Viktor?"

"Vilkas," he said as he sat up.

Shari carefully opened the door and stepped into the room. She stopped just in front of the counter behind her.

"Vilkas," she said and looked up at him. "I wasn't sure if you were awake. I'm sorry for waking you," she said as if anxious. She looked down and was fidgeting her fingers along the ribbon around her waist.

"It's no trouble."

"I was going to ask if salmon was alright for dinner. I planned on serving it with broccoli and a cheese sauce," she said, still not looking up and still fidgeting with the ribbon.

"It's your home," he said frankly.

"I know, it's...just," she said, trailing off to being barely audible.

"Something troubles you?"

She clenched the ribbon in her hands. "Yes," she said. "I can't stop thinking about last night."

He looked at her in confusion. "She must be struggling with it? Her muscles are protruding through her fur," he thought as he looked at her arms. "But you," he began to say, matching his expression. "Doctor-patient."

She slightly, yet rapidly, shook her head. "That's not it," she said, clenching and pressing down on the ribbon. "I was humming...and dancing this morning. I was told several times during my errands that I was..."glowing"..."

Her top lip curled up to expose a bit of her teeth as she clenched her eyes closed. "I've even been thinking of you and lu...lusting for you," she said as if disgusted with herself. "I'm so ashamed of myself." She began to tremble. "I...think...you...should..." Her words became inaudible.

"I understand," he said quietly as he looked down at the blanket.

He finished her sentence for her as he pushed the blanket off and placed his feet on the floor. He stood and walked around the cot. He grabbed his knapsack in his hand and turned around. He looked at her as she looked back at him with horrified eyes. Her mouth was slightly open and her jaw quivered.

"Where's my sword?" He asked as he walked toward her. He stopped just in front of her waiting for a reply. Her expression remained the same as she continued to stare at him. "Hmmp," he grunted and made his way out of the room. "I'll find another." He walked into the dining area and turned toward the door.

"-ait...WAIT!!!" She yelled as she ran toward him.

He grabbed the door handle and pulled the door from the frame when he felt his right shoulder pull back. He glanced back and saw she was pulling his hand towards her.

"Wait," she said, her voice trembling as if she were about to cry. "Don't go. Your wounds...."

He let go of the door and hung his pack on the handle. He grabbed the cloth and ripped it from his chest. He tossed the bandages to the side. "They'll be fine," he said and reached for the handle. He got the door open a few inches.

Shari grabbed him around the waist. He could feel her press into his fur. She was squeezing quite hard. "Not...just...those," she barely got out as she sobbed into his back.

"What?" He thought as he didn't know what she meant. He stared at the door in confusion.

"The wounds...in...your heart," she said, her words stuttering to a whisper.

"My...heart," he said, unconvinced.

"Yes. I haven't healed...your heart," she said and sniffled.

"No," he said and grabbed her right arm. "You've done enough. I'm only causing you grief," he said plainly and started to pull her arm from his waist.

"I'm sorry," she sobbed. "I'm surrounded by people but I feel so lonely. I know I'm being selfish and only causing myself grief, but I want you to stay. I want to help you learn more about life and heal your heart."

"I don't understand," he said and let go of her right arm only for it to slap back against his waist.

"You promised not to leave this house without me," she said and sniffled. "I need to teach you how to live."

Her words sparked the memory in his head. "Did you not just tell me to leave?"

"Please stay," she pleaded and sniffled. "I didn't mean it. I'm frustrated and I said something I shouldn't have. And when you grabbed your things and walked to the door, I panicked." She sobbed for a moment. "Please...don't leave."

He sighed and bit his bottom lip. "Help me understand why you would say that. What does 'glowing' mean?"

He felt her grip soften. "It's a saying people use to describe people that have...recently...had sex. Uh, intercourse. The, um, thing where lovers try to make children."

"And 'lust'?"

Her grip tightened. "A strong urge for a companion...for sex. I...um...have been thinking about your penis and imagining it inside of me...my vagina."

"Your...vagina?" He asked, confused.

"Are you," she started with disbelief. She sniffed and sighed. "It's like a sword and a scabbard. Men have swords. Women have scabbards. Put them together and it's sex or intercourse. Mating for ferals."

"I understand. And...you want that...with me?"

She squeezed even tighter. "N-no. It's just that I'm sexually frustrated. Which means it's been a long time since I've been in the same bed with a man and I crave it. Especially when I'm like this: Menstruating...er...ovulating...when I use the pine smell to calm me down. I can only push away that feeling when I...mmm....masturbate. Like last night, against your leg."

"And 'masturbate' is..."

"Masturbation is when a woman uses her fingers on her...vagina and men use their hands on their penis to relieve sexual tension...the craving for sex."

"So that's what she meant," he thought and applied the thought to what she did for him. "What does it feel like to be 'lonely'?" He asked, his tone softening.

Her grip eased. "It's like I said," she said and wiped her face on his back. "I have a lot of people around, but I feel alone. I don't have someone to talk to every day. Everyone is too busy to talk. I have no one to share this house with. And, again, sometimes people are too busy to stop by. It makes you feel sad. Like something is missing in your heart."

"And when I leave, how will that change?"

She slowly dragged her arms from his waist and stepped back. "It won't," she whined, sounding deflated.

"And how are you planning to 'heal my heart'?"

"I want to listen to your life story and help you understand what you felt and what you maybe should have felt in those situations. And I get that you've never had time for 'love' so I want to help you understand that. And proper etiquette when talking with others so that, maybe one day, you can get a house of your own here and live happily for the rest of your life." It was quiet for several moments. "I think that's a good start at least."

"Fine," he said with a serious tone and pushed the door closed. "I don't understand how that works. But, next time you say you want me to leave, I will."

He turned to look at her. She was wiping her eyes. She placed her glasses back on her nose and looked up at him. She clenched her hands together and held them just below her chin. "Promise me you won't leave the house without me and promise you'll let me heal the wounds in your heart." She dropped her head onto her fists. "Do that and I promise I won't tell you to leave in or out of frustration."

He looked at her in earnest. "I understand...doctor."

"Please call me Shari," she said. She looked meek as she lowered her hands down and fiddled with the ribbon. "You really need to rest and not work so hard because you aren't fully healed from your injuries. Really, you shouldn't have been able to leave the cot let alone work like you have the last few days. And your fever is still around and you don't want to make it worse. Plus, you don't want to re-aggravate your *new* injuries that..." Shari babbled.

He took a step towards her. She continued to babble but changed to a more sad and apologetic tone and expression.

"That I really shouldn't have inflicted upon you. I realize that you're a grown man and can make your own decisions but you still have a child's mentality - again no offense - that I feel like I took advantage of and I'm truly... deeply sorry for. And I want to make sure you leave here healthy. But I also want to make sure that you can live here happily like a normal person and not like the mercenary you were. And..." Her voice started quaking and tears began to fall from her eyes. "Even though we started off rough I really enjoy your company. And I feel like we are kind of alike in our ways of straightforward thinking. And...oh!"

Shari startled as he stepped in and wrapped his arm around her back to her left shoulder and squeezed. Her shoulders were so narrow compared to his arm.

"Vilfas, I hant breef," her muffled voice came from in his fur.

"Oh," he said and loosened his grip.

"You're trying to comfort me," she said and turned her head, resting it upon his chest. "Thank you. I seemed to be losing myself and babbling."

"Yeah. I wasn't sure if it was okay."

"Yes... and maybe no," she said and freed her arms from his abdomen. She wrapped her arms around his back and sighed. "Just this once," she muttered.

"Yeah," he said and wondered about something. "When do I let go?"

"If you feel the other person do this," she said and released her grip and started to step away.

"Oh," he said and let go of her, holding his arm up.

"Not yet!" She exclaimed and stepped back into him, wrapping her arms around his back.

"Right," he said and wrapped his arm around her shoulders again.

She sighed and rubbed her head into his fur. They stayed like that for several minutes.

"I suppose this is normal," he thought. "She held me like this, but I never pulled away. I guess maybe it's because I didn't know better. But, somehow she seemed to know every time."

"I don't understand this," she finally said, snapping him from his thoughts.

"How so?" He asked, a bit confused.

"I'm usually a bit standoffish around men. But, I somehow feel a bit at ease when I'm with...er...near you. I feel safe because of your strength. I feel like your mentality leans toward innocence. I do fear your anger, but I know it's not aimed at me." She sighed. "I don't know if that makes sense."

He thought for a moment. "Maybe," he said and was distracted by her ear twitching under his jaw. He moved his muzzle between her ears. "I feel as if you won't harm me. I feel as if the people here are the same. I feel as if you won't lead me astray. I feel as if you can heal anything. I feel..."

"I think that's enough," she said, her voice unconvincing.

He noticed his chest felt warmer. He could also feel her fingers quiver.

"I think you were just copying me, but at the same time," she said and stepped back as her hands slid along his back.

He lifted his arm to let her free, but she stayed there. "I'm confused," he thought.

"I think you actually meant everything you said." She looked up at him with drying tear tracks in her fur. Her eyes were slightly bloodshot and puffy. But her smile made his heart skip.

"Y-yeah," he said as he felt his face warm and his heart rate quicken.

"Do you mind if I ask you some questions about your life over dinner?" Her expression softened to kindness. Her eyes sparkled with the light shining on them.

"Not at all."

She smiled wide and nodded. "I'll get started on dinner," she said and turned away. "I need to get changed first."

"Could I," he began and felt like he was saying something strange.

Shari stopped and stepped back - her front half blocked by the corner of the hallway wall. He looked at her as she patiently waited for him to finish.

It felt foreign to him. It felt like he was about to be swallowed by the underworld and become a demon's plaything. It hurt his jaw. His chest ached so much it felt as if his heart was being ripped out. "Help?" He finished. It came out so quiet that he wasn't sure she heard it.

Her eyes lit up and she wore an angel's smile. "First dishes and now dinner. I may have to hire you as a personal butler." Her eyes fluttered and she walked into the washroom.

He stood there with his arm still in the air. "A what?" He thought and brought his arm down to his chest where it was returning to normal inside. He could faintly hear her walk into the bedroom while quietly humming. A new feeling was filling his chest.

He took his knapsack off the door handle and placed it next to the door. He picked up the bandages from the floor and placed them in the waste bin by the counter.

He made his way to the table and sat while trying to figure out just how he could help her.

She made her way out of the bedroom. She was wearing a light purple, sleeveless shirt that had straps of about two inches holding it up on each shoulder. It was tucked into gray, loose fitting, thin cloth trousers held up by a thin rope hemmed into the waist. Her hair was still in the bread bun. She had washed the tear tracks from her face.

She held her arms behind her back as she walked from the hallway. She shuffle-skipped as she swung her right arm out and lightly touched the end of his nose. He pulled back his head with a confused look on his face. She opened the cooler box and pulled out the salmon and vegetables. She placed them on the short counter next to the stove before closing the cooler.

She used a short rod with a flat piece of metal attached in the middle to shove the ashes of the stove into the ash tray underneath. She placed fresh wood, tinder and a few dried corn husks in it. After a few strikes of the striker, the flame slowly came to life.

"Um, could you," she thought out loud as she scanned over the ingredients using her right index finger as it panned from her left to right.

She snapped her fingers and grabbed a medium-sized wooden bowl from a cupboard above the small counter. She placed the bowl on the larger counter next to the cooler and wash basin. She poured some water into the bowl and placed it next to the basin. She reached back into the cupboard and grabbed a flat metal sheet with holes punched through it. She placed that next to the bowl and closed the cupboard. She twirled around to face him. Her eyes were a bit larger than normal and her lips were slightly puckered.

"Have you ever washed and cut broccoli before?" She asked sweetly, keeping the expression.

"Is she talking to me like I'm a child?" He thought as he looked at her trying not to emote his thoughts. "I...have not." He said honestly as he looked over at the bowl and strainer, then down to the floor. It felt like something like a gas was leaving his body as his chest and back tightened. His hand fell with his forearm resting on his thigh. He stared at his hand as he slightly flexed his fingers.

"Well, I can show you. It's really simple," she said with a playful tone.

"Shari," he said slowly as the tightness in his torso turned into a pressing feeling, like a weight pressing on his shoulders and back.

"Hmm?" She hummed as she tilted her head to the right and evened out her lips.

"It feels like something left my body and now it feels like a weight is pressing down on me," he said as he continued to stare at his open hand.

"Hmm," she said as if she were thinking.

He glanced up at her. For some reason his eyelids felt heavy but didn't obstruct his vision. He watched her chew on her lip as she glanced to her right. She suddenly looked at him. At first her expression showed an analytical approach. He watched as her expression slowly changed to one of shock.

"Oh...OH!" She exclaimed and brought her right hand's fingertips to her lips. "I totally sounded condescending just then, huh?" She opened her mouth and clamped down on her fingers. She nibbled on those digits for a moment before removing them and resting them on her bottom jaw. "I'm sorry, sweetie. Oh no." She turned her hand and clamped down on her first digit. "Galling you swee-dee wah gin-a gonda-shending, doo." She removed her finger and held the hand just under her jaw. "I hope you don't think I've been talking to you and calling you 'sweetie' as if I'm talking to you like a child. I'm not intending to. And, it's a term of endearment." She dropped her hand against her thigh. "Ahh...I'm so awkward right now."

Shari turned towards the counter and brought her left hand across her stomach, placed her right elbow in her left hand and placed her right hand against her forehead. She let out a hefty sigh.

He stood and walked up behind her. He stepped into her and wrapped his arm around her waist and rested his jaw on her head. He felt her prolongate a gasp and tremble in his arm and against his body. He felt her tail brush up against his leg and into his crotch.

"Vil-kas...puh-lease...I-et...g-ho," she stammered, the trembling increasing in intensity.

He quickly withdrew his arm and stepped away from her. He watched as she nearly doubled over with her hands on the edge of the counter. Her neck craned down

and her head was down by her chest as she slowly breathed heavily with mouth agape. Her tail had fluffed out and was slowly swaying back and forth.

"Shari," he began. He felt that weight come back on two-fold. He felt his shoulders slump and he drooped his head, arms, and tail. His face slightly contorted as he brought his hand up to his chest, his fingers tense.

Shari shivered and cleared her throat as she straightened up. She stepped over to him and placed her right hand on his. She looked troubled. "I didn't mean to scare you," she said calmly. Her expression briefly changed to analytical before returning to looking troubled. "That's not it, is it?" She asked calmly. "Are you perhaps disappointed? Perhaps ashamed?" She asked as if going down a checklist. "Sweetie, you haven't any reason to feel ashamed," she deduced as her expression softened to her kind look.

He glanced up at her with a look of confusion.

"You shouldn't feel shame that you've never done something before. You should feel in your chest and maybe down your spine a feeling of warmth and, most often, tingling. You should feel proud that you're learning a new skill. Something you can even use for survival if you choose...to..." She slowly looked to her right and down.

He felt the weight lift from his shoulders as her hand warmed his.

She glanced at, then looked at him properly. "And you shouldn't feel shame for my sudden," she said and glanced to her left. "Predicament." She glanced back at him. "That situation - you hugging me from behind with your whole body, arm around my waist and head atop of mine - was very erogenous to me. That means you viewed it as a friend comforting another, but my body expresses that differently." Her kind expression became even-keeled as she blinked a moment and sighed. "It's one of my fantasies or desires to have a lover hold me unexpectedly like you just did."

He felt that weight slowly press back onto his shoulders as he looked back down at the floor.

"You didn't know. Just put that aside into the 'women are complicated creatures' category in your mind. You did nothing wrong," she said calmly. "It can also mean when other things like a certain touch in a certain place or a nibble on the ear. Those are 'erogenous zones'. Your whole body tingles and it arouses you. Meaning it can begin or increase the desire for sex."

"I didn't mean..."

She patted his hand. "I told you it's fine. You didn't know." She looked at him intrigued. "...somehow just noticed you aren't wearing a shirt and now that I think about it I should check your wounds," she murmured as her eyes scanned his right shoulder.

She moved her hand from his and placed it on his collarbone as she stood on her tip-toes looking at his shoulder. She looked confused as she circled around his back and placed her hand next to where she scratched him.

"You seem to heal surprisingly quickly," she muttered as she circled around to face him. "Do you mind going and putting on a shirt," she said and muttered, "I suppose your only shirt."

"Yeah," he said and slowly turned. His feet felt heavy as he slowly moved into the other room. He pulled on the lined shirt and buttoned it up before returning to the kitchen.

Sheri had pulled on and tied an apron and was placing the broccoli stalks into the wooden bowl. She glanced over and used her left hand to motion him towards her. He followed her nonverbal cue and stood next to her. She grabbed one of the stalks and held it in her hand.

"Take one of the stalks and plunge it a few times, then swirl it in the water. Then use your hand to gently brush off any dirt over the florets. Then gently tap the stalk on the lip of the bowl and place it onto the cutting board," she audibly and visibly instructed. She took a step to her right and motioned for him to come close. "Now you try."

He stepped to his right and grabbed one of the broccoli stalks. He dipped it into and pulled it out of the water a few times, then swirled it in the water. He paused as he looked down at his right hand. Shari looked up at his eyes then followed his eyes. She grunted and slapped her forehead. He looked at her in confusion, then hefted his arm up to the counter. He looked to and from the stalk and his right hand. He glanced over as she growled and dug her palm into her forehead. In a 'Aha!' moment, she pulled her hand away from her forehead and glanced behind him.

"Wait here," she said and jogged into the other room.

She opened a cupboard, hesitated and closed it. She jogged back towards him carrying a padded block of wood. It was about a foot long, about a foot wide and about four inches thick. One end was flat and wooden. The other end had a padded, crescent shape to it. She placed it on the counter next to the bowl.

"Try resting your forearm near the elbow in this. See if it helps," she said as she stood back. She had her hands on her hips, fingers facing back as she looked at the operation.

He lifted his forearm into the device. It hovered his arm too far above the bowl to use for washing. He adjusted his arm until the elbow was in the device. His forearm drooped down to where his hand was in the water within the bowl. He very carefully slid the bloom across his wet fingers and lifted the stalk out of the water to inspect it. He considered it clean and tapped the excess water from the stalk. He placed the stalk on the cutting board and resumed washing.

"I'm so glad," she whispered.

He glanced over to see her smiling widely. He could just barely feel her hands clasp around his thin arm. He looked over at her beaming face.

"Thank you for helping me, sweetie" she said, oozing with honesty and kindness. "This means a lot."

"Yeah." He could feel heat in his face and ears.

"I'll have to teach you about common pleasantries," she admonished and let go of his arm.

She turned away from him and pulled on a drawer. It creaked open to reveal dinnerware and other implements. She grabbed a common chef's blade and a filet blade. He was less familiar with the filet knife, but had seen it used a few times. The drawer creaked shut. She placed the filet knife next to the fish and the chef blade next to the cutting board by him.

"So, once you're done with that, take the knife and hack off the good bits from the stalk," she said and held one of stalks in her left hand and the chopping knife in the other. She held the stalk down with the flat of her palm and curled her fingers in. She held up her hand in that way so he could see. "It's called a 'cat's paw' or just simply 'smart'." She placed her hand back on the stalk. "Now carefully chop the branches from the tree." She used the knife in a quick fashion to hack off each floret. "If you see a leaf just pinch it off and throw it away," she said as she demonstrated a few times. She continued until all of the mini stalks were cut from the main stalk. She set the stalk and the knife aside. "Let me know when you're done," she said and returned to her work station.

He washed the remaining two stalks and set them on the cutting board. He moved in front of the cutting board. He surveyed the battle and mentally implemented her method. It seemed time consuming.

"Gah!" He exclaimed as a severe pain shot through his head. He dropped his head and brought his hand to just under his left ear by his eye socket. Images flooded his mind of doing this very thing in another setting.

"What's wrong!?" Shari shouted in concern as she stepped over by him with the filet knife in hand.

"I've no idea, but it seems it's gone," he said and let go of his head.

"Look at me," she demanded.

He turned his head and looked at her. She stepped under his head and stared into his eyes. She stepped back and set the knife down by her cutting board. She stepped towards him and reached out her right hand to the small window above the sink.

"Turn towards the window and keep your eyes open," she said.

He did as instructed. He could see the dampened light coming through the cloth as Shari continued to stare at him. She nudged the cloth aside. The light struck his face and left just as quick since she didn't hold the drape.

"Your pupils dilated normally. I don't think it was anything serious. Could be nothing. Could be remnants of your fever," she listed off. He looked at her. "Let me know immediately if you feel dizzy...er, if the room seems to spin or your head feels like it's floating like one of the seeds from those white, poofy flowers. Understand?"

"Got it," he said as he nodded.

She tilted her muzzle to the side and looked at him intently. After a brief moment, she returned to her work. "It may be my imagination, but it seemed like you were talking differently. Not blunt like usual. More...casual. Meh," she said and shrugged before returning to her work.

He shook it off as he grabbed the arm propping board and placed it to the right of the cutting board. He grabbed a stalk of broccoli and held it, bloom down, while he

rested his right hand on the end of the stalk. He pinched off the leaves around the florets before grabbing the knife. He quickly and precisely moved the blade against the stalk through the branches.

"Where were we," she whispered. "Right," she muttered. "The 'condescending' word means that I speak to you as if I'm better than or superior to you in some way. I really didn't mean to come across like that."

He tilted the stalk and continued carefully chopping the florets from it.

"A 'term of endearment' such as 'sweetie' just means I'm calling you something other than your name in a lo-...caring fashion. It's kind of like a nickname. I'm not very good at them so don't feel offended if I call you and Socorro the same thing. It just means I care about both of you and that's a way to convey that," she explained. She chuckled. "But you're not on his level of 'sweetie'. He's way cuter so I mean it that much more when I call him that," she said mockingly and chuckled again.

He let the stalk fall and 'cat pawed' it with his right hand. He chopped off the remaining florets. He turned the stalk around and chopped off about an inch from the end. He moved his right hand and cut the stalk in half. He positioned the blade at the end of one half of a stalk and lowered the blade in the middle. The blade pierced the outer hull of the stalk. He moved his right hand on top of the blade and quickly forced the handle down with his left hand causing a loud chopping noise to ring out in the quiet.

"What is all that racket?" She asked as she turned and stepped next to him. "Hold up," she said quizzically. She looked up at him and they made eye contact. "What's all this? Yours looks better than mine, but you're also hacking up the stalk. Why?"

He looked from her to the cutting board. "I...I'm not sure," he said. "It just...popped into my head after that sharp pain left. I don't know from where, but it was like I knew how to do this."

He looked at her. She looked from him to the cutting board several times. "Is this like a sword skill or survival skill that suddenly clicked with you or something?"

"I've no idea. I just finished washing them like you showed me. Then I looked at the cutting board, the knife and the broccoli and thought about how to approach it with what I have taking into account my strengths and weaknesses. Then I mentally applied your method and it just...seemed like a lot of work and a lot of waste. That's when the pain pierced through my skull."

She looked at him as he was explaining himself before she checked him. Her expression went from concern, to acknowledgment, to outrage and to the bewildered one she currently wore. "Dinner's being delayed. I'm examining you *right now*," she said and moved around him.

She walked up to the wash basin and grabbed the jar of vinegar and citrus. She unscrewed the cap and poured some of the liquid on her left hand. She scrubbed her hand and rinsed it off. "Go sit on the cot," she demanded as she walked into the hallway.

It sounded like she splashed some water. He confirmed she was washing her hands as he walked past the washroom door and into the room. He sat on the edge of the cot and waited to be looked over. She came into the room and to the cupboard. She pulled something out and placed it on the counter across from him. She then left the room.

He looked at the object. It was a pair of glasses with arms that clamped together with magnets at the ends of the arms. The lenses had cones attached.

She walked into the room with a lit candle and placed the candle carrier on the counter. She took off her usual glasses and strapped the new pair around her head and face. She grabbed the candle and walked in front of him. The new glasses had magnifying lenses built into the metal cones.

"Tell me if the light hurts your eyes," she said as she leaned in.

She was just a few inches away from his eyes with those cones. He could see her eyes through the lenses. He felt the breath from her nose brush across his muzzle. It caused his body to tingle and his heart to noticeably beat. She passed the candle near his left eye several times. Then by his right eye.

She hummed as she backed away and blew out the candle. She placed the carrier on the counter and followed with her strange glasses. She placed her other glasses on her nose and placed her hands on his head behind his eyes.

"Again," she said as she massaged with various strength. "Tell me if you feel any pain or it feels like something in your head doesn't feel right."

She moved her hands to under his jaw near his neck and pressed in as she moved her delicate fingers. She dragged her fingers down his neck along his

esophagus to his collarbone. She turned his head and poked around the base of his skull on both sides. She finally took her hands and tugged on his ears.

"Nothing?" She asked as she stroked his ears.

A shiver ran up his spine as she massaged his ears. "No. Nothing," he said as he looked in her eyes.

"I don't get it," she said and stepped back. "I can't just knock you out and root around your brain to look for tumors or clots." She placed her hands on her hips and sighed. "Let's eat. If anything changes you let me know immediately, okay?"

"Understood."

They walked out into the kitchen and continued to prepare for dinner. She had him stand by as she showed him how to clean, debone, filet and season the fish. Then she showed him how to cube a block of cheese to make the sauce. She praised him for showing her that the stalk of the broccoli still had some good bits in it. He felt that sensation she talked about. It made him want to do this again.

She showed him how to slice the stalk and cut the stems off the florets. She told him how the stems need to boil longer than the florets. She had him set the plates and utensils out on the table. She added a bit of milk to the cheese sauce as she stirred it. After draining the broccoli, dinner was completed.

"Thank you for your help, Vilkas. Everything went a little quicker than usual," she said as she served him a filet of the salmon.

"Yeah," he said and scooped up some of the broccoli.

She glanced at him as she spooned some of the cheese over his broccoli. She served herself a helping of broccoli and cheese.

"For tonight, could you tell me how you lost the claw on your hand and right foot?" She asked as she stabbed some broccoli.

"Not much of a story," he said swallowed a bite of the fish. "The first toe claw came off when a deflected maul struck it. The claw on the third finger was pulled out as I was grabbing someone's tunic and they pulled away. The tunic ripped but the claw caught on a necklace. It didn't sell for much."

"Well that was anticlimactic," Shari said and stuffed some fish in her mouth.

"Don't want to bore you," he said and tried some of the broccoli and cheese. He hummed and said, "This is good...the fish, too."

"Hmm-hmm," she chuckled and wore an accomplished grin. "Thank you. But your stories don't bore me. I've never heard tales of battle and heroism." She swallowed and glanced over at him. "Just drunkard tales when I help father at the pub. Like dick measuring contests. I don't think you'd stretch the truth like they do after a few pints."

"Dick...measuring?"

"Yeah. Like I said, it's when someone stretches the truth to make their accomplishment sound bigger than it really was."

"So...not actually measuring their penis?"

Shari chuckled and stabbed more of the broccoli. "No. Though it wouldn't surprise me if they dropped trou one day."

"That's," he began and shook his head.

[Shari](#) belongs to [Celeste](#)