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

Chapter 16. "Not Welcome Here"

"Here's your clothes," Shari said bitterly from the door of the washroom as she held out his clothes.

"Thank you," Vilkas responded as he rinsed and rang out the cloth.

"Hold on a second. Let me see your hand," she said with concern as she walked in the room.

He held up his hand after hanging up the cloth. She held his clothes in her right arm and carefully took his hand in hers.

"Your claws are broken. This one is cracked through. And you have several cuts." Shari looked up at him as if in pain herself. "I'll get the clippers and a file. I'll clean and bandage the wounds and the cracked nail. I'll be careful when clipping it. I'll get something to help with the swelling in your eye and lip." She looked down and gently squeezed his hand. She sighed. "Again, I'm really sorry this happened. I'll make it up to you. I promise."

"A delicious breakfast will do," he said as he reached for his clothes.

"Let me fix your hand first." Shari hummed and smiled as she looked up at him. "Gold-hearted wolf," she whispered and went into the other room.

He followed her into his room. He sat on the bed and held up his hand. Shari had him turn up his right hand and placed the clippings on the palm pad. She used a cleaner and glue on his broken claw to hold it together. She wrapped up his fingers and went to the cupboard. She grabbed an ointment and rubbed some into his eye and around the suture in his muzzle. She put the jar back and left him to get dressed. He walked into

the dining area and saw the other three sitting at the table. Tangi must have moved everything back.

"You owe me a table," Shari pointed out.

There was a plank partially sticking up from the rest with a cloth wrapped around it.

"I covered it up. No way can I eat with claws and blood on the table," Valeska said and stuck her tongue out. "Ick."

Valeska was sitting by the stove facing the wall. Tangi sat by the door facing the counter. Shari was sitting next to him. Vilkas took his usual spot next to Valeska.

Tangi looked over at Vilkas with a bigger sneer than usual. He leaned in and said, "I'm not happy I had to close the pub for this."

"Daddy, you closed it so you could take care of your daughter," Valeska chimed in.

Tangi continued to stare at Vilkas as he pressed his lips together and leaned back into his seat.

Dinner consisted of a pot of chicken and vegetables with noodles in a chicken broth, a large bowl of salad with various vegetables and a fruity vinegar dressing, plus there was thick sliced bread with butter or a honey butter spread.

Vilkas watched the others as they all started with the salad. Tangi held out the bowl towards Vilkas. Vilkas took the strange utensil from the bowl. It had two fork-like bottoms with loops at the top where you place your fingers. The middle had something punched through it so each side moved when you pinched or flexed your first finger and thumb.

"I wasn't holding it for you," Tangi snapped.

Vilkas looked over at him.

"Daddy, he can't...", Shari began.

"It's fine," Vilkas interrupted and placed the tongs back in the bowl. He took the bowl from Tangi and held it as he maneuvered his right arm onto the table.

“Urk...mmm,” came from Tangi as he seemed to realize Vilkas’ predicament. Tangi glanced away from Vilkas with an apologetic expression.

“It’s fine,” Vilkas said as he moved the bowl into his weak hand. He served himself some of the salad and passed it over to Valeska.

Valeska looked distressed as she took the bowl from Vilkas. “I’m sorry, but that makes me uncomfortable.”

“Val!” Shari lashed out.

Vilkas glanced over at his right arm and sighed.

Valeska looked over at Shari. “I said I’m sorry. But I didn’t mean...”

“It’s fine,” Vilkas said and pulled his right arm off the table.

“What I meant was...”

“I said it’s fine!” Vilkas raised his voice as he turned to Valeska with an irritated look, his lip quivered as he struggled to keep his fangs hidden.

Valeska shook and leaned away from him with a frightened look. He glanced over at Shari. She looked disappointed. He closed his eyes and breathed through his nose. He reopened his eyes and gave her a calm smile. He glanced down and looked back over at his plate as his smile faded.

“I’m sorry for getting angry and showing my fangs, Valeska” Vilkas said with remorse. “I’m sorry for getting angry and showing my fangs, Shari.”

Shari sighed. “It’s okay. You’re getting better at it and that’s all I can ask of you. You can’t change in a week. My sister was just trying to say it will take some getting used to, you know? It’s like looking at a blind man’s eyes or a soldier with a missing limb. We feel uncomfortable around things that are foreign, or different, than our own. I’m sure the more she’s around you, the less you’ll see her eyes wandering to your arm. It just takes time.”

“I understand,” Vilkas said and grabbed his fork.

He glanced up and over at Tangi. He was looking at Vilkas with narrowed eyes and his left eyebrow slightly raised. Vilkas looked back down at his salad and felt that 'shame' feeling. He closed his eyes and lowered his ear to his head.

"Sweetie, you don't have to feel ashamed. It was just a misunderstanding," Shari said.

Her words made him feel slightly better. It was Tangi's look that pained him more.

"Yeah," Valeska said. "I'm sorry. Um...w-would you like the dressing?"

Vilkas looked over at Valeska. She was holding out the bottle with the fruity and sour smelling dressing.

"Thank you," Vilkas said and took the bottle from her. He held the bottle over his plate as he looked at it.

"Have you had that before?" Shari asked.

Vilkas glanced over at her and shook his head. "No. I don't think so."

"Just be careful and pour it out over your salad. If you go in a circle from the outside in with it barely coming out," Shari said as she made a spiral motion over her own plate. "When you get to the center, it should be more than enough."

"I understand," he said and tipped the bottle over his salad until the contents drizzled out. He mimicked the spiral pattern over his salad like Shari showed him and tipped the bottle back upright.

"Good," Shari affirmed. Vilkas glanced over at Shari. "Now hold it over to my father and ask him if he would like some," she said as she held her own arm out halfway across the table towards Valeska.

He nodded and looked over at Tangi. His eyes were narrower and his eyebrow slightly higher.

Vilkas held out the bottle to Tangi. "Would you like some?"

Tangi's eyebrow raised to its peak. "Yes. Please," Tangi said and grabbed the bottle from Vilkas. "Thank you." Tangi didn't sound completely sincere with his words.

"You're welcome," Vilkas said and looked at his plate as he reached for his fork.

Vilkas stabbed at some of the salad and brought it up to his mouth. His nose twitched at the tart fruit smell and the sour vinegar smell. He carefully placed the bite into his mouth and used his lips to pull the food free from the tines.

"Mmm," Vilkas winced and held the back of his hand up to his mouth as his wound stung. He immediately moved the food to the other side of his mouth.

"Oh!" Shari exclaimed. "I didn't think about that. If the vinaigrette hurts your mouth, I can trade you plates. I haven't put any dressing on yet."

"Mmm," Vilkas hummed and began to chew as he pulled his hand away. "It's fine. It's strange but it tastes good."

"Alright, Shar'," Valeska said. "I can't be the only one here wondering why you're treating him like a child. What are you? His mother?" Valeska asked and chuckled.

Vilkas forcefully stabbed his fork into his plate, causing Valeska to gasp.

"Valeska Berger! Please shut your mouth if you have nothing nice to say!" Shari scolded. "Sweetie, just ignore her. She's just ignorant, but she can be nice, I swear."

"Sorry," Valeska muttered and began eating.

Shari sighed. "Look, like I said earlier, his mother died when he was very young. He has the body of an adult, but his mind...more-or-less shut down after that. He was able to learn very little from her before she...died. He was sold into slavery. They were good people, but they were attacked. He was placed in a mine for several years with barely any food. One of the slavers damaged the nerves and muscles in his right arm so it never properly developed. We're about up to that point. All I know right now is that he was trained to fight and has been traveling and fighting until he came here. He didn't get to grow up with parents or a family."

"That's horrible," Valeska whimpered.

"Mmm," Shari hummed as she began to eat. "Basically, he's trying his best to learn from me what we grew up learning."

“So, body and thoughts of a warrior with the mind of a child,” Valeska affirmed. “I see why you speak to him like that and have to explain things so thoroughly to him. He really doesn’t know any better.”

“That’s a blunt way to put it, but yes,” Shari said, sounding less than thrilled with her sister. “Like I said: He’s been slowly opening up to me. He trusts me and listens to me. Call me a mother figure if you like, but we prefer to be called ‘friends’.”

“That’s not what it looked like to me,” Valeska muttered.

This time, it was Shari who forcefully slammed her fork into her salad that made everyone look. Shari looked coldly at her sister.

“I’ll be quiet,” Valeska murmured and continued eating.

Everyone was finishing up with the salad and the soup was being served. Shari buttered and passed around slices of the bread. They enjoyed the meal in relative silence.

“So why does he have to stay here? I’m sure he’s used to living like a feral,” Tangi said plainly.

“What a disgusting thing to say,” Shari retorted. “Though it makes me ashamed to call you my father when you say things like that, good luck offending that one.”

“Shari says I’m nearly half feral anyway,” Vilkas said between bites.

“Even so, he’s actually very polite and thoughtful when he’s not angry,” Shari added. “But we’ve been working on that, too. That’s why he knows it’s impolite to shout and show anger and fangs around me.”

“Should I have given you a feral horse? Seems easier to train to me,” Tangi said vehemently.

“You’re one shitty comment away from being told to le-...!”

“Shari!” Vilkas interrupted as he looked over at her.

She was glaring at Tangi with her upper lip curled on the side showing her back teeth. She glanced over at Vilkas. Vilkas dropped his spoon next to his bowl as he

bared his teeth. He brought his hand in front of his muzzle and used his first finger and thumb to pull down his lip. He lowered his hand and smiled.

“You really expect me to sit here and listen to his old man disrespect my frie-...”

“Shari!” Vilkas interrupted again and repeated his pantomime.

She glanced back at Tangi. She slowly lowered her lip and huffed as she turned back to her food.

“You could learn a thing or two from Vilkas,” Shari muttered as she grabbed her spoon.

“Shari, why are you so worked up protecting this guy?” Valeska asked. “You were pretty loopy from the fever, but is it because you’re...”

“AH! No-no-no-no-no do *not* say what I think you’re going to say,” Shari blurted as she waved her hands in front of Valeska.

Tangi tossed his spoon onto the table. All eyes went to him. He placed his elbows on the table and rested his muzzle behind his cupped fists as he stared at Vilkas.

“I *will not* allow this story to repeat,” Tangi stated. “After dinner, he will either pack his shit and leave or he’s staying with me at the pub. These are the only options I will allow. He *will not* be staying here another day.”

Vilkas’ expression turned to concern and he looked over at Shari. She stared into her bowl as she slowly set down her spoon. She slowly brought her hands up into her hair and balled them into fists.

Vilkas looked back over at Tangi. “I’m not allowed to leave until Shari says it’s okay. I prom-...”

“This charade has gone on long enough,” Tangi interrupted.

“But, Shari is my doctor and I am her patient. I can’t leave until she heals my wounds and my heart,” Vilkas pleaded.

“Vilkas. Please calm down,” Shari muttered.

"How touching. Just like you were touching my daughter," Tangi sneered.

"Vilkas! Please calm down," Shari muttered as she began sobbing.

"Shari?" Valeska said with concern.

"I just want to be able to keep being friends with Shari," Vilkas said honestly.
"Nothing more."

"VILKAS! Please calm down!" Shari cried.

Vilkas looked over at her. She was rocking in her seat. Her eyes and exposed teeth were clenched. Her face and lips were contorted as if she were in extreme pain and tears streamed down her cheeks.

Tangi slammed his fist down onto the table. Shari shrieked and Valeska gasped. Vilkas stared intently at the large shepherd.

"I will not allow my daughter to cohabit with another abusive '*friend*'!" Tangi shouted angrily, his expression both calm and enraged.

"I don't understand!" Vilkas pleaded.

"VILKAS! Please calm down," Shari cried as she began to breathe heavily through her mouth. "Vilkas, please calm down...please calm down, Vilkas...please calm down," she hysterically repeated.

"Shari!" Valeska shouted and stood from the table. She knelt down next to Shari and placed a hand on her shoulder and her thigh. "Shari, *you* need to calm down."

"He's only safe here...he's only sa-...here..."

Shari collapsed into Valeska's arms. Vilkas shot up from his seat and clenched his fist as he looked on in concern.

"SHARI?!" Valeska screamed as she held her sister in her arms

"Shari!" Tangi exclaimed as he turned towards her. "Shar-bear?"

"What can I do?" Vilkas thought as he began to dig through his memories.

He moved from the table, into his room, and over to the cupboard as the other two tried to comfort and wake up their loved one. He sniffed and looked through every jar and bottle. He closed it and moved to the cabinet with all of her drugs. He growled as he pulled out container after container and smelled them.

He brought one container up to his nose from the second shelf and placed it separate from the others. He looked in the drawer under the counter top of the cupboard and pulled out a needle. He grabbed them both and moved out into the dining area. He placed them by Valeska.

"Use a bit of this," Vilkas said and went to dig through more cupboards.

"You trying to kill her?" Tangi snapped.

"She used it to calm me when I fell. Use," he said and tried to remember. It was difficult because his eyes were fuzzy at the time. But he recalled the smell of the relaxing medicine as soon as his nose passed over the lid. "She drew back about an inch," he recalled. "So use about half that to be safe. And make sure to push some out before you use it. And push it in her body slowly."

"How do you know all this?" Valeska asked as she stroked Shari's head.

"I...remember things," he said and grabbed a familiar jar. "Found it," he said and placed it on the table. "Hold this under her nose. It is both calming and might wake her up."

"That smells like a pine tree. She uses it when she's...during lady days."

"Just help my friend. I'm too much of a meathead to do this gentle stuff."

Valeska looked at Tangi. They both looked at Vilkas.

"This first," Tangi said and grabbed the jar of shredded pine. "If she wakes up, we confirm what he just said about the other thing."

Tangi pulled off the top of the container and held it under her nose as Vilkas watched while clenching both of his fists. Shari began to groan as her nose twitched.

Vilkas sighed and walked into the hallway. He grabbed his night clothes and placed them into his knapsack. He placed the cap on his head and pulled on the sleeve,

then tied up the sling. He lifted the rope over his head and settled it on his shoulder. He walked out into the dining room. Shari was sitting up.

“Yeah. You can...use that, but...I’m fine,” Shari said weakly.

“Where are you going?” Tangi demanded as Vilkas reached for the door handle.

“I don’t think staying at the pub is a good idea right now,” Vilkas said calmly. “Tell Shari ‘I’m sorry I broke our promise’, but it seems I’m not welcome here.”

Vilkas opened the door.

“Wait,” Valeska called as he closed the door behind him.

He sighed and felt...afraid. He hadn’t felt this feeling in a long time. He turned towards the forest. He groaned and turned back towards the ruined town. He sighed uneasily and began to walk that way.

“VILKAS!!!” He heard Shari scream.

He grabbed his chest as he continued to walk away from his only friend.

“VILKAS!!!”

“I’LL HOLD HER! YOU GET THAT SHIT IN HER!” Tangi bellowed.

“VIL-KA-HAS!!!”

“CALM Down Shari!”

Vilkas shuffled his feet as he felt his heart squeeze in his chest. He clenched his teeth and willed his feet to move past the pub and to the intersection. The streets were deserted this time of night.

“Where does Seppo live again,” he thought as he looked around.

He smelled the air, but nothing smelled like him. He brought his hand to his chest and squeezed his hand into the tunic. It felt like his insides were leaving him...like he lost something important. He fell to his knees and howled with all his might. His hand trembled with anger and pain while he gasped air back into his lungs. Tears began to stream down from his eyes.

"Alida," he thought while composing himself. He turned to the left and slowly lifted himself from the ground. He trudged down the street as he sniffed each passing store. He was finding it hard to breathe. He finally found a familiar scent. He turned and slid his feet up to the door. The image of his mother entered his mind. That feeling of love and loss pained his heart as he reached out and gently tapped the door.

"Now who could *that* be?" A familiar voice asked.

The door slowly opened and a plump pantheress stuck her head out.

"Vilkas?" She said in shock. "What're you doing...why are you all...why are you crying, dear?"

Vilkas clenched his teeth as he felt the tears stream faster down his cheeks. "I'm sorry for being angry at you, Alida. I'm sorry to bother you, but I've nowhere else to go," Vilkas said politely.

"Oh, dear, please...come in," she said and opened the door. "Rochus, honey," she called behind her. "We have a guest."

"Eh? Angry mountain man, is it?"

"Behave, you insufferable old man! He apologized and needs a place to rest."

"Bah! Send 'em on his way to the pub."

"You know there's no room left there."

"Fine!" Rochus grumbled. "As long as he pays."

"Or, *you* can sleep outside and *he* can stay."

Rochus grumbled again. "Fine."

"Come in, dear. Let me take your bag."

"Thank you," Vilkas said and shuffled into the house. He handed the rope strap over to Alida. "I don't want to trouble you. I know I left you in a bad way. But I don't know where Seppo lives and I don't know anyone besides Shari that well."

"Oh, you know Shari? Such a sweet girl. How is she?"

"She has the fever I had."

"Well that's not good. Is that how you know her? You became friends quickly."

Vilkas suppressed his irritation for saying that. "Truth is...I was injured on my way to the village. She patched up my wounds and I've been staying with her until I recover." It wasn't a complete lie.

"So that's why you said you were okay. Well what happened, dear?"

"Her... father wasn't happy I was living with her and told me to leave." That wasn't a complete lie, either. But he had to protect himself and her.

"I see. He is a bit of a grump... like someone I know," she said and glanced over at Rochus.

"Hmph," Rochus grunted.

"They both have thick skulls but are mushy inside. Oh, listen to me go on... come in and sit. Are you hungry?"

"No, thank you. I don't feel like eating right now," Vilkas said and made his way to the table.

Rochus was sitting on the far end drinking tea and reading a book.

"Would you like something to drink?"

"Yes, please," he said as he sat at the table. Rochus glanced over and back to his book.

"Will tea be alright, dear?"

"Yes, tha-...yeah." Vilkas stopped himself as he remembered Shari's prior warning.

"What do you take it with?"

"What does that mean?" He thought as he went back to when he had tea with Shari. He gambled with, "Honey and lemon...?"

"Coming right up."

Alida went to the stove and grabbed a cup from the cupboard. She used the tea strainer to scoop some of the tea from the container and placed it into the cup. She poured water over it and brought it over to the table. She returned and brought back a jar of honey, a spoon and a small bottle. She walked over to a chair and grabbed a cup from the end table next to it.

Vilkas saw their house was decorated more than Shari's. Children's artwork was plastered over the wall across from him. The stove and a long counter were next to it with the pantry in the corner. Their cooler was next to that on the wall to the left. To his right was a sitting area with chairs and end tables between the sets of two. Several doors were down a hallway splitting the sitting room.

"Do you feel like talking, dear?" Alida asked sympathetically as she sat across from Vilkas in one of the high-backed chairs.

Vilkas stared at his cup as the tea seeped through the strainer holes.

"It's alright, dear. I bet you still don't feel all that good. And it looks like you've had a rough night," Alida said and took a sip of her tea. "Did Shari fix you up? That looks like her handiwork. She's such a good doctor. I'm sure you're well on your way to being fit as a fiddle." Alida was silent for a moment.

Rochus glanced over at her for a moment before he returned to his book.

"You look like you're hurting inside, too. I understand, dear."

Her voice was so...motherly. She was speaking so kindly to him. It was almost as if her voice were made of sweets.

"You were forced out of her care. You became friends and now you're worried you won't be able to see your friend again."

Vilkas looked up at Alida and felt his eyes water. Tears began to fall from his face as he nodded. The compassion he read in her face and eyes made him feel safe enough to open himself up like this.

Alida reached out and tapped the table in front of her. "It's alright, dear. You're in a new place with a bunch of strangers. The one person you felt you could trust was taken from you. You feel lost and confused."

Alida pulled back her hand and reached into her dress. She pulled out a handkerchief from her pocket and placed it on the table in front of him.

"Don't worry, dear. She's not lost forever. It'll take some time for tempers to cool."

Vilkas slowly grabbed the handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"Are you quite finished coddling the man?" Rochus asked as he set the book on the table. "I'd like to know when he's taking off the disguise."

Vilkas shot his surprised look over at Rochus. Rochus was looking over his glasses as if studying Vilkas.

Alida sighed and glared at Rochus. "Will you behave? It doesn't matter what secrets he hides, he needs a safe place and someone to lean on."

Rochus looked over at Alida. "I just need to know what kind of man I'm allowing in my house. You said he was a traveler from another city and that man is no simple traveler. Those scars on his hand and that cut on his lip are clearly made from a blade. And no traveler is as fit as this one. That arm probably isn't even broken. That is no cast made by our Shari."

"I understand your concern. But that doesn't mean you can sit there tearing apart this young man. He seems to have lived a troubled life and finally found a place with good people to surround himself with. I'm sure he will let us in as he feels more comfortable. Now is not the time to press the issue."

"I'll keep that in mind as I'm running for my life from this rampaging monster because of your meddling. He's a grown man. Get straight to the point and quit babying him."

"I'm not babying, I'm establishing with him some secure surroundings. Attacking head-on will raise his defense and we'll get nowhere."

"Please don't be angry," Vilkas said quietly as he closed his eyes and hung his head. "Please hide your fangs." He slowly pulled off the cap and set it on the table.

The other two were finally silent so he could process his thoughts.

“Shari was helping me. She was teaching me to fit in. She was healing my wounds. She was healing my heart,” he said as he untied the sling and placed it in the chair next to him.

Vilkas looked up. Alida was looking at him with a warm smile and comforting eyes. Rochus was looking at him with intrigue. Vilkas pulled off the sleeve and placed it on the sling. Vilkas sighed as he closed his eyes again.

“I’m not from here. I’m not a traveler.” He opened his eyes and looked at the two sincerely. “I came here to die.”

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