

Chapter 19:
Glif 28th, Firthda
Year 10,053 AE
(Somewhere Unremarkable; Okatako)

It had rained almost all night so far, so everyone had bunked down in the storage caravans instead of under the stars like they preferred to do.

Ka'harja could understand why they always slept outside now; it was crowded in the overfilled wagon and he was lucky not to get a foot in the face whenever Lif rolled over. And someone had farted, which was not pleasant. He'd much prefer the crisp, outside air to this.

Plus, he couldn't concentrate with the boys' snoring next to him. He needed to clear his head after what had happened that morning; he couldn't stop thinking about Coff. He felt like an idiot. Coff had avoided him all day after his rude goodbye. And it had been such an awkward day that Ka'harja had decided it was better to bunk down with the other caravaners instead of sleeping next to his mother in Coff's caravan, where the healer would be....

Not that it mattered if Coff was straight but— He still would have been a good friend. They'd gotten along so well... and Ka'harja had ruined it in one stupid moment.

One. Stupid. Moment.

And he'd lost his best chance at making a friend.

It's fine, Ka'harja told himself. You've had a hard month. That's all. It's going to be alright— He probably won't even remember what happened in a day or two.

'Coff?' Stars' voice rung out clearly in the quiet of the night, louder than the boys' snoring but not *too* loud. It was followed by a short, rapid knock on the caravan next to the one Ka'harja was in. 'Coff, are you awake?'

'We both are now!' Distro's voice responded playfully.

'Coff!' Stars exclaimed anxiously as Coff's door clicked open. 'I'm really worried. Ever since I had Little Demon I've been having trouble peeing— Koko said I should talk to you about it. And— She said I should wait until morning but I can't sleep because my head is being hakalika and making me have worried basaka, and I just want advice. I don't mean to be dreankot.'

There was a loud grumble from Coff and a snort, like he was trying to wake himself up.

'I'm sorry,' Stars muttered.

'It's fine,' Coff said with a yawn. 'Do you m-mean that you're we-wetting yourself or that— Or that you're struggling t-to go a-at all?'

Stars sighed. 'I sneezed and had to change my pants.'

'That's p-pretty normal after giv-giving birth,' Coff said, relief in his voice. 'But come inside and I-I'll show you some exer-exercises to help strengthen y-your pelvic floor.'

Ka'harja sighed as Coff's door closed and he flopped back down. He hadn't even realised he'd sat up to listen. His head hit hard against his pillow and he groaned.

He missed *his* bed. And he missed his house. And he missed shoving his mother out of bed in the morning— And he missed sticking his head in the empty porridge pot while she banged against it with a spoon to see how long he could handle the noise before having to lay down. And he missed moving the table just ever-so-slightly further away from the wall so that when she would lean back she'd fall over.

He missed being home.

He didn't mean to sniff, but his chest was tight and he felt sick. He heard Trat roll over and held his breath, trying not to be heard, but he saw a shadow sit up and knew he had been heard.

'Mate, you alright?' Trat asked. 'You're not crying... are you?'

Ka'harja shook his head, scared that if he spoke he'd say the wrong thing— It didn't matter, though, because he had to breathe and the moment he did a loud, ugly sob escaped him and the rest of his body decided to give in to his head.

'Aw man, nah!' Trat exclaimed, tripping over Lif in his attempt to crawl next to Ka'harja. 'It's alright. Hey, hey. Relax man. It's okay! It's okay. Hey...'

Lif snorted awake and looked around. He pushed himself up when he heard Ka'harja and shuffled over. 'Fuck, you alright?'

'What's wrong?' Trat asked, putting an arm on Ka'harja's back. 'Why are you crying?'

'I'm not— Crying!' Ka'harja snapped, crying into his pillow. 'I'm fine! It's okay— Nothing'th wrong!'

The words barely came out. His chest tightened and his eyes were streaming tears down his face and his tongue felt too big for his mouth again. He bit it, trying to stop his lisp from coming back. Always when he was upset. It always came back. Just like every other bad memory always came back.

The two boys looked at each other for a moment, then shuffled to the other side of the caravan and sat, whispering amongst themselves for a moment.

Ka'harja tried to stop himself from sobbing, but he couldn't get his body to behave. His tears soaked into his pillow and he cursed at himself for being such an embarrassing wreck.

'Hey,' Trat's voice was closer than before, and Ka'harja looked up, flinching when he found the man was next to him again. 'I know that they say drinking doesn't help, but... well, it always helped me.'

A long moment passed before Ka'harja realised that the boys were holding a bottle of Melberry out to him. He took it gratefully, though he didn't say anything in fear it would come out as an incoherent mess, and took a long drink.

'Lif, open the door,' Trat said gently. 'Some air'll do us all some good.'

'No, it'th fine,' Ka'harja managed, biting his tongue to stop his lisp. 'I... I think I'll go out for a walk.'

Lif nodded, and held the fabric sheet to the side so Ka'harja could pass easily. 'If you need to talk...'

'I know,' Ka'harja muttered, sliding out of the caravan and nodding to the boys. 'Not now. Thank.... Thank you.'

'Hey,' Trat muttered, sticking his head out of the caravan. 'Ka, man? It'll be alright.'

I know it doesn't feel like it... but it *does* get better. Trust me.'

Ka'harja gave a curt nod and bit his lip. He wasn't sure how true that was, but instead of arguing he just turned away and made his way around the dark caravan.

He wasn't sure how long he walked for. Whether it was five minutes or five hours— He couldn't tell. He couldn't think straight, and so he just let his legs carry him wherever they thought was best.... He headed down to the river, which he followed downstream for a while before turning around and slowly trudging back to the caravans. He passed them and went upriver a little further; only stopping when he saw a pair of silhouettes in the distance. The shadows were covered in faint glowing dots that blurred into a beautiful swirl as one picked up the other and spun them through the air.

A weak smile found the corners of Ka'harja's mouth as Annanyn let out a happy squeal and the couple disappeared into the river.

At least some things in the world were still good. There was still love. And family. And his mother.

Ka'harja turned on his heels and headed back to the caravan.

He hoped his mother was still awake. Maybe he could talk to her? He wasn't sure what about, but he knew she could help. Just being in the same room as her made things feel better. And even if she was asleep, maybe Coff would let him sit on the floor for a while and drink. Or cry.

Or both.

It wasn't long before Ka'harja managed to find his way to Coff's caravan. He knocked lightly on the door and waited patiently. After a few moments he took in a deep breath.... He wasn't sure he'd knocked loud enough. But he also didn't want to wake anyone if they were still asleep. Should he knock again?

He flicked his tail anxiously and pricked up his ears to listen. He could *definitely* hear voices inside the caravan. But that might just be his mother sleep talking... no! It was two people, at least.

He let out his breath and knocked again. Harder this time.

Within moments Coff was at the door and Ka'harja felt himself blush with embarrassment as he remembered their conversation earlier that day. For a moment he and Coff just stared at each other. Then Coff motioned for him to come in.

At first he hesitated, but then Coff motioned again and mumbled something and Ka'harja quickly pulled himself up the steps into the healer's home.

Sitting on Coff's bed was Stars. She grinned widely as Distro lay about on the other bed, pulling faces.

'I didn't have a weak bladder when *Ka'harja* was born!'

Ka'harja caught the end of their conversation and laughed loudly.

His mother jumped, then grinned when she realised who it was. 'Oh, Ka! We were just talking about you!'

'So I heard,' Ka'harja snickered.

'I don't think Stars understood the joke,' chuckled Distro, turning back to the girl. 'He's adopted, hon. I didn't give birth to him.'

For a long moment Stars stared at Distro curiously. Then her grin returned and she clapped her hands. 'OH! I get it! I get it! Mip mip, Kekik Distro!'

'Your mother's s-something,' Coff shook his head and laughed as he picked up some books from his desk and began to reshelve them. 'She's got s-some gr-great jokes. She's been good company. I'm almost s-sorry that she's getting better— I mean— B-Because she won't be keeping me company any-anymore, n-not because I want her to be s-sick!'

'No, no, I know,' Ka'harja reassured the healer as he dropped the books in his panic. He bent down to help Coff collect them and they bumped heads. '*Fuck!* Sorry.'

'It wa-was m-m-my f-fault,' Coff muttered, collecting his books into a pile and sliding them next to the bookshelf. 'I-I'll just do it later. It's not a pr-problem....'

There was a moment of quiet as the two shuffled awkwardly in place.

'So, you get along with my mum?' Ka'harja asked, forcing himself to grin. 'I'm glad about that. She's not always the most agreeable person. She kicks in her sleep, and there's never enough butter in the mashed potato.'

Coff laughed. 'Oh, y-yeah, she's been pretty critical of Coborn's c-cooking, actually.'

'She adds too much salt!' Distro exclaimed defensively. 'If she would just ease up with the seasoning her food would be great! But apparently a "drop of citrus" means "chuck a whole grapefruit in and hope for the best" in her mind!'

Ka'harja rolled his eyes. 'She doesn't add enough flavour, if you ask me—'

'I think she cooks really well,' Stars interrupted loudly. 'She's cooking for a lot of people, and all of them like different things. It's really hard for her to get it right and I don't think you should make fun of her when she's just doing what Sken tells her to do. That's bwab.'

A surge of guilt made Ka'harja's face fall, and he wrung his hands. 'You're right. Sorry.'

'I'm not the one you need to be sorry to. You're not making fun of *me* behind *my* back,' replied Stars. Then she frowned and wiggled uncomfortably. 'Coff, how long do I have to do these for? Can I stop now?'

'J-Just a few every d-day until your pelvic floor strengthens,' Coff told her, and Ka'harja remembered why she'd been to see the healer. 'Just do what— Do whatever you feel like you can h-handle.'

'My back hurts, too,' Stars sighed. 'And my legs.'

'That's not un-unusual e-either, but l-let me see,' Coff muttered, walking around Stars so examine her back. He moved to touch her too fast and she jumped off the bed with a fearful cry— Which scared Coff, causing him to slip and fall on the floor.

'I thought— I thought you were going to hit me!' Stars exclaimed, dropping to her knees and helping Coff off the ground. 'I'm sorry! I didn't mean to get scared and shout! I'm really *really* sorry!'

'It— It's okay,' struggling to his feet, Coff flicked his tail against Stars and folded back his ears. 'It w-was my f-fault entirely. I sh-should have let you know what I was— Wh-Wh-What I was d-d-doing.'

Stars shook her head, and took a deep breath. 'You're looking after me. I should know that you're not going to miita me.'

'It's not always that easy,' Distro remarked. 'It's been nine years and Ka still flinches when people raise their voice. Shit happens, you don't have to feel bad about it.'

Stars stared at Distro for a long moment before nodding and sitting back on the

bed. 'I'm still sorry.'

'I know,' Coff muttered, sitting behind her and examining her back carefully. 'Let's talk about something to get our minds off it, al-alright?'

'Okay. What about?'

'Well, C-Coborn said you didn't eat your second lunch yesterday,' he commented. 'Wh-Why didn't you get y-your food?'

Ka'harja felt a twinge of jealousy at that; he'd *love* to have eight meals a day like Stars and Dena... even if it was just a cup of weird soup with vegetables and calcium powder.

Idiot! He thought as he shook his head. *They're sick. They need it.*

'I can get my own food,' Stars said simply. 'I'm a kekik, not a berr, and not to be bahi but I am getting very mip at looking after myself. I caught a bird yesterday instead of getting something from Coborn.'

'You shouldn't eat...' trailing off, Coff sighed again and pressed his hands against Stars' lower back, trying to ease out the tension in her muscles. 'Co-Coborn's cooking you sp-special food, remember? With lots of nutrients t-to help you gain weight and— And make milk? Even if you get other f-food I still want you eating what sh-she makes you.'

'Okay, I'll eat it. But it doesn't taste as good as her normal food-' Stars cut off with a yelp. '*Miita!* Mup miita! That hurt!'

'S-Sorry, I... I'm no good at-at th-this,' Coff admitted, backing away from Stars and raising his hands submissively. 'But I-I'm really n-needing to get the— The— The tension out of your b-back.'

'Let Ka'harja do it!' Distro's suggestion was so loud and sudden it made everyone jump. 'He gives me massages all the time. He knows what he's doing.'

Coff glanced to Ka'harja, who felt a shiver go up his spine.

'Sure,' Ka'harja agreed. 'I'll do it.'

'Thanks,' Coff muttered as Ka'harja slipped into place behind Stars. 'I appreciate the help.'

'Lie down on your stomach and relax,' Ka'harja told Stars. 'It'll hurt a bit at first so try not to tense up again, okay?'

Stars nodded before lying down obediently.

Ka'harja pulled her shirt up to her shoulders, then spoke gently; 'I'm going to have to pull your pants down a bit so they don't get in the way. Are you alright with that?'

Shuffling nervously, Stars glanced awkwardly up at her friend. 'Okay, but don't try to have sex with me. I don't want mup'kata.'

'Hey, I'm gay, remember?' Ka'harja pet Stars' calf before giving her pants a gentle tug. 'Guys only.'

'You— You're gay?' Coff asked, his voice laced with shock and... was that excitement?

No, just wishful thinking, Ka'harja thought with a sigh. *He's already said he had a girlfriend before.*

'That's right!' Stars exclaimed, the anxiety in her voice completely gone. 'He's gay! He doesn't like girls at all! I'd forgotten that!'

‘What— What k-kind of guys are you i-into?’ Coff asked.

Ka’harja opened his mouth to respond, but was cut off by Stars.

‘He likes small men!’ she told him. Then she gasped excitedly. ‘You’re small, aren’t you Coff? Ka’harja! Is Coff the sort of man you like? Do you want to have sex with Coff?’

Ka’harja just laughed and didn’t dare look to see Coff’s expression as he ignored the question completely and began massaging Stars. ‘Does that hurt?’

He’d hope it was a no, but Stars let out a squeak and so he relaxed his grip. He’d found the source of the tension, at least. Now he just had to ease it out without hurting her.

‘Five minutes and you’ll forget you were ever sore,’ Ka’harja promised. ‘Let’s pass the time with jokes?’

‘Yi, I have one,’ Stars muttered, obviously trying to hold back a pained whimper. ‘What goes thump, screech, crash?’

‘I don’t know,’ Ka’harja saw Coff out of the corner of his eye and felt guilty as the man sorted anxiously through his books. He waited for Stars’ answer for a while, and when she didn’t give it he cleared his throat. ‘Stars?’

‘*I forgot the answer,*’ she whispered.

Distro laughed loudly, snorting as she did. ‘A rock thrown at a harpy!’

Ka’harja felt Stars shift underneath him. ‘That’s it! *That’s* the answer! Mip mip, Kekik Distro!’

He didn’t think it was very funny, himself, but he chuckled as Stars and Distro began to share more jokes together. He was glad his mother knew how to distract Stars; he felt her relax and was finally able to work out her muscle tension.

‘Okay, I have one,’ he grinned. ‘If two heirs are fighting to the death for the Heck’ne throne, is it called *Gra’ga-who da Prophet?*’

For a moment the room was silent. Then Stars began to tremble underneath Ka’harja. Slowly, her giggles rose out of her until she laughed so hard tears streamed down her cheeks and she went red in her struggle to breathe.

‘Who da Prophet!’ she panted, burying her face into Coff’s pillow and snorting loudly. ‘Gra— Gra— Ga— Who—’

‘You’ve fucking killed her,’ joked Distro.

‘When you’re done I’ll tell you a knock-knock joke,’ Ka’harja said, patting Stars on the shoulder.

Stars took a deep breath in through her nose and managed to bring her laughter down to a muffled giggle. ‘What’s a knock-knock joke? How do they work?’

‘Well, first I’ll say, “knock-knock” and then you ask me, “who’s there?”’ Ka’harja explained. ‘Did you get that?’

‘Yep!’ Stars wiggled happily under Ka’harja and he had to pin her down to stop her flinging him off her back. Her ears twitched excitedly as she asked him what happened next.

‘Then you repeat what I say, but add “who” at the end, you got that?’ Ka’harja told her, carefully sliding off her back to sit beside her. He felt his tail give a wag and shifted so it was under his leg; he didn’t want to embarrass himself with such a childish expression. Not in front of Coff.

'I think I understand!' Stars giggled, rolling over. 'Then you give me the answer, and we laugh?'

'About right,' Ka'harja gave a cough to clear his throat. 'You think you're ready for the joke?'

Stars nodded happily. 'Yes! Please tell me the joke!'

'Okay, well.... Knock-knock—'

'Come in!' Stars blurted. 'Oh— Na, wait— I ruined it, didn't I?'

Ka'harja was too busy laughing to answer.

'Don't laugh at me!' Stars snapped, sitting straight up and pressing down her ears. 'I'm not a joke! Stop it! Stop laughing! Broja'kar!'

'You're right, I'm sorry,' taking a deep breath to calm himself down, Ka'harja put a hand on Stars' knee. 'You're not a joke. You're my friend. And you made a mistake which was really funny and cute and completely okay to make— But I shouldn't have laughed about it.'

'It makes me feel bad,' Stars muttered, looking away. 'My mistakes aren't funny.'

'I'm sorry,' repeated Ka'harja, guilt turning his tone serious. 'I'm not trying to make you feel bad.'

Stars just sighed and let the room fall quiet. The only sound was Coff's anxious shuffling.

After a moment, Coff looked up from his books. 'Stars? H-How's your back feeling?'

'Much better,' Stars smiled, her ears flicking up happily. 'Thank you, Ka'harja. I really appreciate it a whole lot. Sorry that I ruined it.'

'Hey, no. I'm glad you told me I hurt your feelings. Means I can avoid doing it again,' Ka'harja told her as she leapt off the bed and sprinted to the caravan's door. He flinched when she ran straight into it with a loud *bang*, and he swore he could feel the force of her collision shake the bed. 'You alright?'

She stumbled for a minute, rubbing her face with all four of her hands. 'I think so.'

'Try turning the handle,' Distro suggested flatly.

'I did try, but I went too fast,' explained Stars, her cheeks flushing red (with a blush or a forming bruise, Ka'harja wasn't sure). 'Goodnight Distro. Goodnight Ka'harja. Goodnight Coff.'

'Night!' Distro called after Stars as she slipped quietly out the door.

After Stars had left, the room quieted down. Coff went back to sorting his shelves and Ka'harja sat down next to his mother, who fiddled with anything and everything she could reach from her spot on the bed— Including the falcon statue they'd gotten from the goblins a few weeks before.

'This is really well made,' Distro commented, running her hands along the smooth surface. 'It's almost hard to believe they carved it themselves. I would have guessed they'd just frozen an actual falcon— Except the for the face. I don't think there's a bird alive that looks like this.'

'Well, they *were* goblins,' Ka'harja joked as his mother passed him the statue and reached for the pile of books Coff had dropped. 'Pretty good considering the only birds they'd have gotten close to would have been dead.'

Distro laughed and pulled a diary-sized book from the pile. She played with its lock

absent-mindedly. 'I like to call her Winona, after that famous human that trained those birds to carry messages. She's been keeping me company whenever Coff goes out.'

'She t-talks to that thing all n-night,' Coff muttered, holding out a hand. It took Ka'harja a moment to realise he wanted the statue. 'I-I've thought about th-throwing it out or smashing it. B-But it just feels wrong to do— I-I t-traded my ponytail for it, so...'

'She makes a good night-light,' Distro commented, still playing with the book's lock. 'I honestly love her. If you don't want her I'll take her. She'll be like a weird friend who I can tell all my secrets to.'

Coff chuckled and turned around to talk to Distro, but the moment he saw the book she was holding he let out a choked gasp and lunged at her. 'NO! D-Don't pl-play with that! That's my pr-private— No! Nobody's allowed to r-read that!'

'What, did you write it?' Distro joked. 'Or is it an erotic novel with a super-embarrassing kink?'

Coff's expression as he hugged the book made it clear that it was both, and Distro laughed so hard she fell out of bed.

Ka'harja found it hard not to chuckle at first, too, but when Coff turned he saw the hurt in his eyes and forced himself to stop, wiping his nose with the back of his hand and sniffing. 'What's the kink?'

Coff fumbled with the words as much as he fumbled putting the book away. After an agonising minute he turned back to Ka'harja and shook his head. 'It's— Nothing. D-Don't w-worry about it.'

'Come on, Stars told you mine!' Ka'harja said playfully. 'And whatever it is, it can't be as embarrassing as Baku's love of getting beaten up.'

'Well, uh, when you p-put it l-like that...' a humoured smile turned the corners of Coff's mouth, and he blushed. 'I l-like... t-tall people. R-Really t-tall people. Woven-tall people.'

'Opposite for me,' Ka'harja laughed. 'I love short guys. I mean, what's the point of having a boyfriend if you can't pick him up?'

'So Stars said,' Coff's blush grew, and he wouldn't meet Ka'harja's eye. 'Short guys.... Short guys like me. Me... a short guy... who likes tall people. And you're a tall guy. Who likes short guys.... Short guys like me....'

There was a tense moment between the two. Ka'harja wondered if... maybe Coff was implying.... No, he *couldn't* be!

He'd had a girlfriend before.

He *absolutely* wasn't implying that!

Ka'harja pushed the thought to the back of his mind and shrugged at Coff. 'Yeah.'

'Y-Yeah....'

'Yeah.'

And that seemed to be the end of the conversation, as neither Coff nor Ka'harja continued it.

Instead they just stood there. Looking at each other and not saying anything.

Nope....

Not saying anything—

'KA'HARJA!' Distro's loud shout cut through the tense quiet and both boys let out

their own loud cries of surprise.

Ka'harja covered his ears and Coff slipped over in his shock, landing on the floor with a crash and knocking down another pile of yet-to-be-sorted things.

'Great Star, Mum!' Ka'harja gasped, pulling his hands away from his ears and trying to make his tail fur lie down again. 'What was that for?'

'I want a drink,' she replied, simply. 'Tell the kinky doctor I'm well enough to drink again.'

'I think that's up to him to decide,' Ka'harja sighed, helping the healer to his feet. 'Coff?'

'NO!' Coff snapped. 'Not until y-you're completely better!'

'Fine,' Distro grumbled and rolled over in bed. 'Get me a book, then.'

Ka'harja gave her the first one he grabbed:

A Complete Guide to Chino Flowers and their Medicinal Benefits: By Colour.

Rolling her eyes, Distro opened it and settled down, leaving Ka'harja and Coff standing awkwardly together.

Ka'harja's thoughts jumped around in his head as he tried to recall what they'd been talking about before. But he couldn't remember; instead all he could think of was how cute Coff was.

I bet I could pick you up, he thought to himself. *You're so small I could throw you like a ball. You're only up to my hip. You'd barely even need to kneel to—* Ka'harja forced himself to stop thinking before he'd completed the thought and turned away.

'Uh, so...' Coff swallowed, and rubbed his arm anxiously. 'Is the s-scar on your nose from the same in-injury that bent the bridge?'

Ka'harja gave a start and turned back. 'What? Oh, no. The scar is from a scratch I got while trying to break a branch in half as a kid, and the crooked bridge has... always been like that, I think. I mean, I got punched in the face a few times by my father but he never broke it or anything. At least, I don't think so? I probably wouldn't have known either way.'

'Oh, s-sorry. I didn't mean t-to—'

'It's fine,' Ka'harja gave a weak grin and shrugged. 'I'm going to head back to bed.'

Distro flung the book at her son. 'Don't you dare leave me here alone!'

'That bed's way too small to share! I nearly crushed you last time I slept in it!' Ka'harja groaned. 'What am I meant to do? Sleep in Coff's bed?'

'You can if you w-want, it w-wouldn't bother me,' said Coff. Then he blushed and began to stutter as he realised what he'd said. 'I-I mean because I'm not sleeping tonight! I have too much s-study to do! M-My bed's going to be empty anyway and I—I mean, y-you're free to u-use it.'

Dammit, Ka'harja just wanted to get out of the healer's room and get away from the awkward situation, but there was no way he could get out now without looking like an arse. So instead of arguing he just climbed into Coff's bed and watched as the healer settled at his desk nearby.

Ka'harja had two choices: roll over and stare at the wall, or continue looking at Coff's hips, which were only about a meter away from his face. Ka'harja's exhaustion was finally catching up to him, however, so he didn't bother moving and stared with half-

open, tired eyes as Coff began to study.

'Goodnight, Sweetheart,' Distro joked. 'You have your big boy's bed at last. No more sleeping next to mummy.'

Ka'harja snickered, and let out a yawn. 'Shut up, Mum.'

Distro's laughter soon turned into a snore, and Ka'harja felt himself begin to drift off as well. He was almost asleep when Coff let out a loud sigh and turned in his seat, leaning over Ka'harja to grab something off the head of the bed. He got distracted and froze, turning the pages of a book and muttering quietly to himself

Ka'harja had to bite his lip to keep himself from grinning, and jokingly thanked the non-existent gods for the fact that Coff's chair was the same height as his bed.

Then he remembered what he'd seen of Coff the day before and rolled over, trying not to imagine what the rest looked like.

'Sorry,' Coff mumbled, grabbing the book and quickly stepping back to his desk. 'I — Th-Thought you were asleep.'

I nearly was, until you shoved your dick in my face, Ka'harja thought, giving a grunt to acknowledge Coff. *Not that I'm complaining about that....*

Soon, Ka'harja felt himself drifting off again. The gentle turning of pages and quiet clanking of glass and metal was soothing; it reminded him of when he was young and went to bed in the early evenings, falling asleep to the sounds of his mother's potion making.

'That's not right— Dammit—' Coff swore, and then a smell somewhere between a rat's fart and stagnant water wafted into the air.

Ka'harja closed his eyes and imagined his first attempt at cooking. Distro had interrupted him halfway through and snapped at him for sneaking into the kitchen when she'd told him not to. Ka'harja had argued with her, and she'd decided to let him finish... provided he ate the soup he made. No matter how bad it tasted.

This smelt like his soup had tasted.

Chapter End.

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