

# Chapter 62: That Took an Unexpected Turn

I barely stopped myself from laughing into Leski's mouth. How had I gotten myself into such a strange situation? Flirt that I was, people usually knew how flexible I was in my preferences and tastes within an hour or so. Under normal circumstances, Leski would never have questioned whether I'd be opposed to her kissing me.

Was I any better, though? Seeing her tension as fear. Denying my own attraction to her, even as it had grown. Not realizing that she returned it. When was the last time that had happened? I blamed horrid circumstances and a fatigue-dulled mind for my complete moron of a moment.

But... but she was *kissing* me. I should probably-

Right as I was prepared to enjoy that kiss, Leski pulled away, climbing off of me with her chin tucked to her chest, and I snatched her wrist before she could get any further away.

"Where do you think you're going?" I said. "You wouldn't do something like that, just to leave me wanting more, would you?"

Her wide eyes met mine.

"You're not...?" Leski asked.

"Gay?"

I could see where she might have gotten that idea but...

"No. Well, yes, but also no. I-"

Clicking my tongue, I pulled her closer, resting my hands on her hips when she stopped in between my knees.

"I've never cared about gender or what parts a person has. I'm attracted to the *person*, although good looks certainly help," I said. "All I want is to make them happy in every way possible. So."

It took far too much effort to get to my feet, but I managed it, tilting Leski's face toward me once I was there. I took a moment to simply enjoy the sight of her before lowering myself to her level.

With our lips a breath from touching, I asked, "Leski, unHoused. Am I right in thinking that you want me?"

After blinking rapidly for several seconds, Leski almost spoke before pausing.

“What about-?” she started before biting her lip.

She was holding something back. What was the matter? Did something about this feel wrong to her? Had I upset her or... Mother Time forbid, had I been wrong about what she was looking for?

I didn't know why she was hesitating, but whatever had caused that reaction, it was a sign to back off. With a sigh, I started to pull away, but Leski placed a hand on the back of my head.

“It doesn't matter,” she said.

Rising to her toes, she crossed the distance to me. I didn't know why it surprised me when her lips met mine. Perhaps it was because I hadn't been able to read her since... since I'd met her, actually. She baffled me.

As if aware that my thoughts were distracting me, Leski pressed her face into mine while her hold on my head turned firm, and I was reminded of similar things I'd done to Korix when he wouldn't respond to me. Shit. I was turning into him.

With a hand on the small of her back, I pulled Leski to me, but before my snarled thoughts could release me to an instinctual dance, she drew back, placing a hand on my chest. Panting slightly, she licked her lips and met my eyes.

“I want you, Zaeden. I really, really do. I've been wanting to try all of... this—”

She waved an unsteady hand up and down my body.

“—since you kept up with me at the Founder's Day Ball.”

Lifting an eyebrow, I drawled, “But...?”

Huffing, Leski flipped a strand of hair out of her eyes.

“But you left a hospital just a few hours ago!” she said. “I don't want to mess with your recovery.”

Mess... with... my recovery. I didn't understand. Yes, I was still sore from my fight with Korix, but what did that have to do with anything? I'd dealt with worse than this while participating in *far* more vigorous activities than sex before.

Leski must have seen the confusion on my face. Gently, she prodded the bandage still covering my chest, below my ribs, and I was both tired and knocked off-balance enough to hiss, hunching away from her fingers.

When she gave me a significant glance, I hesitantly smiled at her.

“You shouldn’t worry about that. I can handle it,” I said. “Besides, I was about to trigger an adrenaline burst. That should help with burying the-”

Leski jerked away from me, although she still stayed close.

“You were planning on using an adrenaline burst for sex?” she shouted.

Wincing, I rubbed my ear.

“Originally, it was for if your questioning ran long, but... yes, if things continued the way they were going, I would have triggered it,” I said. “It’s fine. I’ve only used two today.”

“Two? What the-? Are you-?” Leski said before clutching her head with one hand and flinging the other toward me. “Do you want to die? Adrenaline bursts are dangerous!”

...Why was she getting so upset about this? People used adrenaline bursts all the time.

“They’re only dangerous if used excessively. I never go over five in twenty-four hours and definitely never sustain them for longer than the recommended time,” I said with a shrug. “They help on missions that require lengthy stakeouts.”

Gasping, Leski mouthed ‘five’ a few times before shaking herself.

“Well, *ok*. I understand what you’re trying to say,” she said, “but did you think about what I might want when it comes to... this?”

She wavered between us.

“I want you, yes, but I also want you to enjoy yourself just as much as I intend to. How can you do that if you’re fighting off exhaustion and pain from the absolute *thrashing* you got today? I just... no, Zaeden. I won’t do that to you, not even if you’re ok with it.”

She’d... made a good point. I hadn’t thought about whether my physical condition might affect her in a negative way. It was an interesting thought. I’d have to consider it and whether I should apply the idea to other, similar situations.

But in the meantime...

As my lips slowly rose into a smirk, I crossed my arms.

“So, you’re saying you want to wait until I’m feeling better, which is so nice of you,” I said. “Does that mean I get to practice my seduction techniques on you until then? That could be... fun.”

Choking, Leski started turning a bit red before I relaxed with a soft laugh.

“I wouldn’t be that mean,” I said. “I appreciate how considerate you’re being, truly. And if you want me to heal, I’d love to get started on that as soon as possible. So, let’s try something else, yes? I’d

like to take a shower before bed, get all this filth off. Would you help me with that? Not in a sexual way. More, I don't know if I can finish the task without falling asleep."

At that, Leski turned even more red, swallowing hard, but she soon nodded.

"I think that's a good idea," she said.

Gently, I took her hand, raising it so I could kiss her knuckles before reversing my grip to clutch it tight.

"Thank you," I said.

I didn't wait for her to reply, leading the way to a washroom instead. Throughout the length of my shower, Leski was quiet, leaning against the vanity's counter while she traced my every move through the glass between us.

I didn't know what to do with that. It felt nice, sure—since when had I found another person's avid attention anything but gratifying?—but as had become a theme with Leski, I didn't know what she was thinking. I tried not to focus too hard on that, letting myself believe that only desire had her occasionally sucking in a gasp.

Soon enough, I was done and clean, and *Mother Time*, I'd needed that. It felt like I'd finally released today's stress, if only a little.

Again, Leski made no comment while I got dressed and showed her to a spare bedroom, but after glancing inside, she hugged herself.

"Can I... sleep with you?" she asked. "Please."

"Um."

The idea of granting that request made me a little wary. I hadn't determined what had disrupted my sleeping pattern at Niklaus' estate, although I had my theories, and unknowns like that bothered me.

Tonight, however, I'd need to sleep long and deep. Plus, I had nothing time-sensitive facing me in the morning, merely a day of research. If I overslept, it wouldn't hurt anything, and I could always set an alarm to make sure I woke up at a reasonable hour.

"Why not?" I said.

Once we were in my room, Leski hopped onto my bed, and I started my nightly routine. I could feel her stare burning into my back, but I wouldn't let it stop me from finishing my task. If I didn't make myself secure before bed, the only way I'd sleep was if I started a dream sequence, and I'd rather not do that.

"Are those traps?" Leski asked when I reached the door.

“Among other safety measures,” I said. “Are you ready for bed?”

With her brow furrowing, Leski hesitantly nodded, and I returned to what I’d been doing.

“Good. The door’s alarmed for the night, so if you need to leave the room, wake me up,” I said. “I’ll let you out.”

Finished, I shuffled to bed with a yawn and slipped beneath the sheets. Everything was catching up with me, making a hard crash imminent. When my head hit the pillow, I almost tripped into sleep’s embrace, but Leski shifted beside me.

“You truly are the *Lokke Vitras* to come,” she said.

“That’s right,” I said, batting a swell of irritation down. “Get comfortable, please.”

Turning off the lights, I huddled beneath the sheets, thinking that the day was finally over, but Leski slid to my back, pressing herself against me, and I stiffened. Draping an arm around my waist, she walked her fingers over my every recent site of injury before slumping. Hugging me to her, she breathed me in.

“Goodnight, Zae,” she said into my back.

And I was frozen. What did I do? Could I enter sleep, an already vulnerable state, in such a weakened position?

She shifted against me, and for some reason, that reminded me of my unHoused days, when I’d slept like this more often than not.

Nothing had ever hurt me then, and I remembered how nice having someone against me throughout the night had felt.

It took a minute with every instinct screaming denial, but I relaxed, backing into Leski. She made a contented noise, and I closed my eyes.

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