



Emhyr's experiences of courtship are limited, but even compared to the day he attempted to win Pavetta from her other suitors while still afflicted with a curse that robbed him of his human wits and human shape, he cannot help feeling that whatever just happened was a singular disaster.

He would like to be uncertain about exactly *what* just happened, but he cannot cling to that pleasant illusion for more than a few stunned moments. Geralt was perfectly clear.

Geralt has been raped before now, by the relatively subtle coercion of the powerful, and he took Emhyr's carefully-calculated overture to mean that he was about to be raped again. With *Cirilla* as

hostage to ensure his meek surrender, of all the vile ways Emhyr can imagine anyone, let alone himself, forcing Geralt to do anything.

Emhyr had intended the opposite effect when he stole one of his rare unscheduled hours to try to speak to Geralt privately. He had thought it essential to speak to Geralt without an audience—in either sense—and to present himself as informally as he possibly could, precisely because it was meant only as a first invitation to parley.

This first move was to be a soft approach, nonthreatening and even deniable, though he had judged the effort to be redundant since Geralt has never seemed in the least cowed by Emhyr's authority. Still, Emhyr had been willing to make efforts, even unnecessary efforts, in his pursuit of Geralt. And he had thought such a pursuit would not be wholly unwelcome, or unexpected, after the way Geralt watched him this afternoon.

Emhyr hasn't spoken much to Geralt since Cirilla retrieved him from the road, and only partly because of how rarely they see each other in circumstances