

Cassandra

It was almost dawn after all the cleaning up of the feast was done and everyone else went to sleep. In the cool morning breeze of the fall, Peter, the leucrotta, looked at Cassandra and said, "Would you like to take a walk, just to unwind?" The wolf nodded and followed Peter on the little path leading deeper to the forest.

They walked, side by side, silently, for a very long time. When the sun was almost directly above their heads, Peter looked at Cassandra and suggested that they sat and rest for a little while.

As soon as they sat down, Peter said, "Cassandra, you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to, but I have been wondering what made you come to this forest."

Smiling, Cassandra said, "Well, I have actually been meaning to tell someone about it but I had not seemed to be able to trust anyone. You seemed distant enough from anyone so I might as well tell you...."

In the next ten days, Peter listened to Cassandra's story intently -

When Cassandra was only a little wolf cub, her mother was constantly sad. Sad to such an extent that she seemed to have seen no joy and hope in anything in life. So she went away to a nearby forest to see a healer. While she was away, Cassandra and her brothers and sisters were sent to live with their Aunt Dana, a stern old wolf who yelled at the cubs as soon as they became just a little playful.

When the snow finally melted and all the leaves were on the tree branches, Cassandra's mother came back to pick them up. She looked awful and within days, she told Cassandra that the healer made her realize that her life was a failure and that she saw no point in living. Cassandra tried to understand but before she could grasp the full meaning of her words, her mother's floating dead body was found by a fox who was passing by the lake one early morning. It broke Cassandra's heart that she had lost her mother this way.

Immediately after her mother's death, Cassandra and her siblings all went back to live with Aunt Dana again. In the next while, Cassandra developed a profound dislike to the healer, the healer she had yet to meet. A few months later one day after dinner, when Cassandra was helping with the cleaning up, Aunt Dana suddenly told her that her

grandmother Margaret also committed suicide after seeing the same healer. Aunt Dana told Cassandra that nobody knew what went on in the healer's hut or what the healer said to either her mother or her grandmother. All anyone else ever knew was that they both went to the same healer, came back and then killed themselves. At that moment, Cassandra's dislike of the healer became pure hatred, she decided that she was going to visit the healer herself.

When the snow was falling again, Cassandra set out on her way. She got to the healer's hut a couple of weeks later. The healer was a gentle old man, who graciously invited Cassandra for tea. Cassandra asked him what he said to her mother and grandmother. The healer told her that he could not reveal what had been said in the "individual listening" sessions even after people's deaths. He said that he was very sorry that both of them decided to end their lives. Cassandra, newly out of her cub-hood, decided that something had to be done about the healer and the method. She killed the healer and then set out to eliminate the "individual listening" method. She searched out the healers in practice and pursued them to change. Most of them did. For the ones who wouldn't leave or switch to another method of healing, she simply killed them, so far.

At that point, Peter felt he had to say something, but the anxiety of saying what he was about to say made his mouth dry. Nevertheless, Peter took a deep breath and said, "But Cassandra, what you have been doing with me was part of what would happen in the 'individual listening' sessions, would you really want a whole group of people listening to all this in the last few days? Or, would you want me to go around telling everyone what you just told me?"

Nodding, Cassandra let her tears drop, "Yes, I realized that. I've been asking Emma a lot of questions about what she actually did when she was still practicing individual listening, and I understand that I mistakenly blamed the healer for the deaths he, perhaps, had no control over. Not only that, I blamed the method itself instead of trying to figure out what could be the most beneficial for people in the method. And I killed people for it. I am a terrible, terrible criminal, even though I have no plans to kill anyone anymore, would you like to kill me?"

Peter looked at Cassandra with his deepset leucrotta eyes and said that perhaps she could tell him some more about her feelings and her thoughts.

In the next 30 days, Peter made gentle and yet acute observations and insights into Cassandra's psyche. The wolf talked, contemplated with the leucrotta, and finally realized that the way she could help the matter was neither to end her own life nor to blame

herself for the rest of her life. She still felt ashamed of what she had done. But she told Peter that from then on, she was going to help restore the method and make sure people get the most help all methods could ever offer.

While the healing center was setting up its individual listening program and the system of minimizing individual healer's mistakes, it was a well known fact that Cassandra, one of the healers-in-chief, and Peter, the leucrotta, met every other day. They always sat by themselves in a far corner of the forest.

The gossips went both ways, some claimed that the leucrotta was Cassandra's first wounded "individual", others were certain that Peter, in this duet, was the healer.