She knelt on the floor, carefully picking up the shards of glass. Why did it have to be this one that broke? Gilraen bit back the tears that threatened to overwhelm her. At home everything was made of much more solid materials, wood, pewter and earthenware, not this fragile flimsy glass! Even after two years living here, she had not become accustomed to being surrounded by such dainty objects, though until now, she had managed to avoid breaking any and prevent Estel from doing so either.

For something polite to say, Gilraen had admired the glass vase when a well meaning Elf had
brought the flowers to her room. The Elf had gravely informed her that the vase was two thousand years old and had belonged to Master Elrond's wife.

"I'm sorry, naneth." Estel gazed at her wide eyed. "I didn't mean to break it. I'll help!"
Before she could stop him, Estel had reached out a chubby hand to pick up a shard of glass. It cut through his tender flesh and the little boy screamed as blood dripped from the wound.

It was the last straw for Gilraen and she burst into tears. Her child was hurt and blood was dripping on to the carpet, no doubt as old and priceless as the vase to its owners. She tried to staunch the wound with the skirt of her gown, simple homespun of her own weaving. She had insisted on continuing to wear her own clothes for most of the time, rather than the elaborate and impractical garments they had given her.

"What is the matter, Mistress Gilraen?"

To her horror, Master Elrond appeared in the open doorway. She hardly knew the Master of Imladris, though he had always been gravely courteous to her on the few occasions that they did meet, but she did know that he was very wise as well as being ancient and powerful. That they were dependent on his charity was hard enough to bear and now they would be even further indebted!

"He is only a little boy. He didn't mean to break your vase!" she said defiantly, wiping away the tears with her sleeve. "I will not have him punished."

"I am not concerned about the vase, Lady Gilraen, but about your son. He is hurt is he not?"

"He has cut himself. Could you tell me where I might find a bandage?"

"I am a healer. If you would permit me to tend the cut? I have healing supplies in my chambers."

Surprised at this mild reaction, Gilraen could only nod mutely. She scooped up Estel in her arms and prepared to follow Master Elrond to his chambers.

"I will carry him, he has grown rather heavy for you, my lady."

"He will get blood over your robes!" Gilraen protested, looking doubtfully at Elrond's elaborate silk garments.

"They can be washed. I have known far worse."

"Master Elrond is going to make your hand better," Gilraen told Estel. She finally permitted Elrond to take him.

"The children of Men grow so fast," Elrond remarked as she walked along beside him. "It seems but yesterday that I was fostering this little one's great grandsire! I think I will take him to my workroom." He led the way to a cluttered chamber with shelves piled high with books and jars filled with potions. Bunches of drying herbs were hanging from the walls. Gilraen had some healing knowledge and recognised many of them. This room actually had a homely, lived in feel about it, unlike the pristine chambers that she and Estel had been allocated.

Elrond indicated a chair where she might sit and put Estel down. The child clambered on to her lap. He had stopped crying and was watching everything wide eyed.

Elrond poured some water into a bowl and put it to heat on a small brazier. He then busied himself selecting a salve and bandages.
"Let me see your hand, Estel," said Master Elrond.

Estel shyly held out the bloodied palm.

"It is just a little cut. It will not need stitching. Tell me, Mistress Gilraen, are you content here?"

"My son and I have everything we need, thank you."

Elrond looked thoughtful. He carefully cleaned and bandaged Estel's hand. The little boy did not cry again and only wriggled a little. His bright eyes studied the room intently. With his good hand he pointed at a bunch of drying herbs. "They are dandelions!" he said.

"Indeed they are!"

"And that is comfrey!"
"You have a bright boy here, Mistress Gilraen. He is brave too."

"He is interested in herbs," Gilraen said proudly. "I have told him the names of those we see when we walk in the gardens, and he remembers them all."

"I think Estel is now old enough to begin some simple lessons," said Elrond. "Would you permit me to teach him, Mistress Gilraen. Would you like that, Estel?"

The little boy nodded.

"I would be honoured, Master Elrond."

"I will see him tomorrow then. Now I must return to mixing some potions. You will find the blood and the glass have been cleaned from your carpet, Mistress."

"I am truly sorry."

Elrond smiled. "This child is only four years old. There are bound to be some accidents with one so young!"

Gilraen returned to her chambers with Estel's bandaged hand clutching hers. It seemed that Master Elrond was not so fearsome after all and he, the wise Elf Master of lore, thought her boy was clever. Her heart felt lighter than it had in a long time.

A/N This story was written for the BTME 2011 "Lothlórien" Challenge to write a story beginning with the sentence."

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