

Chapter 6 - Tea

Hess decides to keep lunch pretty light after such a big breakfast, so they make a batch of leek and potato soup to be served with warmed bread rolls and butter. He starts laying down the ground rules now all the raw ingredients have been measured out.

“Alright, you’re working in my kitchen now, which means you obey my rules.” Ember nods, and listens intently. “First things first, fur. We don’t want it in the food so we do our best to keep it that way. Which means you’ll need to wear a sort of bonnet to keep as much of your head and neck fur from falling off. Next, long sleeve aprons. As much of a crime as it is to hide this perfect body of mine, we need to keep the fur away and we don’t want sauces and stuff getting on us. Thirdly, tail-ties. I don’t want that thing swinging around knocking shit over.”

Hess leads the other wolf to a store cupboard and pulls out two of each of the items and hands half over. Ember takes them, pushes his face through the bonnet which clips over his ears; ties the apron around his neck and waist; and then pins his tail down to one of his legs.

“Two more things. When I tell you to do something, I don’t want any questions or long answers, just get it done and get it done quick. All I need to hear is a ‘yes chef’.”

“Yes chef” Ember says, saluting. Hess raises an eyebrow.

“I know you’re being cute, and I love it, but this leads me onto my final point. There are a hundred different ways you can maim or kill yourself in this room.” He furrows his brow and points at the black wolf. “You take it seriously or I kick you out.”

Ember’s expression drops and he nods gently. “O-ok, y-yes chef”

“Don’t worry, the most dangerous thing I’m letting you near today is a knife. A very sharp knife, mind you, so watch yourself alright?” Hess pats him on the shoulder and sits him down at the table. “I want you to start chopping up all these potatoes into small chunks and drop them into this bowl of water. No need to peel them.”

With a firm “Yes chef”, Ember sets out to complete his first task as best as he can.

Over the next hour, the soup is cooked under Hess’s strict guidance and then left in a metal vat to stay warm. Next is the croutons and the bread rolls are brought out of the bread cupboard ready to be warmed. While everything is prepared, the utensils, pots, knives, cutting boards and anything else that was used is washed, dried and put back to their rightful place. All the surfaces are cleaned and wiped down and then the floors are swept. With ten minutes before noon, all the bowls are warmed in a special drawer, and the table is set by Cal. The bread rolls get thrown into the oven to heat up and the vat is put on the serving cart, ready to be taken through.

“Alright, that’s about it. The bread can be taken out in a minute and put on the center of the table, and then all that’s left is to call the master. So, I’ll go put the butter out, and I’ll leave you the important task of pressing that little button over there that says ‘lunch’ at exactly 12pm.”

“Yes chef” Ember says, wandering over to the board nailed to the wall.

It has four bulbs and a switch under each one with a label attached. ‘Breakfast’, ‘Lunch’, ‘Dinner’ and ‘Emergency’. He looks up at the clock mounted directly above and watches the second hand spin around, past 11:59. He readies his thumb over the correct lever switch and watches the clock intently. When the hands all align in one successive jerk, he pushes the switch down and the bulb illuminates. Not expecting it to spring back up, he quickly pushes it down again and holds it for a couple of seconds before letting it go.

“Sorry, I should have said to hold it. It’s only the emergency switch that isn’t sprung.” Hess says, having watched from the sink to make sure he did it correctly, without interfering directly. Ember

turns and sees that the brown wolf is naked again and he instructs him to be the same. "Prep clothes off and get to your place. The master will be down in a minute."

"Yes chef" Ember says, and pulls himself out of the wrappings, placing them down on a chair and heading to the door.

"You can drop that now by the way" Hess adds, carrying the basket of bread out to the table.

"Oh, right." Ember adds sheepishly and steps through the door seeing Voigt and Cal already in their places.

"It smells so nice, Hess" Cal says, turning his head back to try and see what it is, but the lid is on the vat still.

"Leek and potato soup. But I can't take all the credit anymore, now I have a personal sous-chef"

"You're right; Ember, congratulations on a fine-smelling dish"

"Thanks, Cal" Ember flusters.

"Fine-smelling dick too" Hess adds and gives a dirty 'heh heh' causing Cal to tut.

Ember and looks down at his empty bowl to avoid further eye contact. The croutons have been places in a little ramekin on the side-plate, and everything looks very well presented on the table, as usual. "Your presentation skills are really good"

"Isn't he a dear?" Cal sighs and leans over to kiss Ember's cheek.

The doors open and everyone stands to attention, even Ember which surprises him, but he doesn't really mind. He's letting pride get the better of him this time because of all the hard work he's put into this meal. Alek walks over to the table and is seated by Cal who then brings the trolley over. He removes the lid and dunks a ladle inside to pour in a full serving into Alek's bowl.

"Leek and potato soup, master. Prepared with assistance from our new member." Cal says, giving Ember a subtle wink. He then takes the trolley around the table and serves everyone else and then himself before sitting down.

"It smells wonderful." Alek says, lifting his spoon and submerging it into the liquid. Everyone else remains still and observant, waiting for permission to begin. Alek blows gently and sups on the spoon, tasting it, and then takes in the rest. "And tastes even better. My compliments to the chefs" he smiles and gestures for everyone to join in. "How well does he work under you, Hess?"

"He's pretty good, master. He forgot a couple of times to say 'yes chef', but did everything like I told him to" he responds, guzzling down a couple of spoonfuls.

"It's good to hear you're getting along well with my wolves" Alek adds pleasantly and sprinkles in a couple of croutons.

"I enjoyed it, m-" Ember clears his throat and swallows another mouthful, raising a smile on the human's face.

"Very good" Alek turns to his right. "Voigt, please give me some good news." The grey wolf grimaces somewhat and lays his spoon down to pause eating.

"I've managed to find the cause of the problem, master; there was a bad joint underground which has leaked. Over the years, the water mixed with the minerals in the soil, corroded the joint shut and slowly ate away at the metal leading it to burst. I'm hoping I can remove the offending pipe and replace it but the nut is welded on pretty tight. I've soaked some WD40 all over it inside and out and I'm hoping I can hammer it loose after lunch. If that fails I'll have to saw the pipe clean and thread it."

“So ...” Alek draws out the sound, twirling his hand expectantly.

“Sorry master. If I can get the nut off, I can replace the pipe today. If I can't, I'll need to go into town to get a longer replacement pipe, and it'll take me all day tomorrow to saw, thread and reconnect.” Voigt dips his chin apologetically.

“In that case, Ember will assist you with your tasks this afternoon, just in case you can't remove that nut and have no time to finish the rest of your duties before Saturday.”

“Yes master” says the older wolf, resuming his lunch, dunking some freshly buttered bread in.

The rest of the lunch conversations continue on in a similar way as breakfast. Alek asks about the work being done and to be done by the wolves in preparation of the weekend. Eventually, the breads are all dunked and eaten, and the vat is 2/3 emptied which Hess says will be enough for a starter for tomorrow's main meal. With that, the master stands up and turns to Cal who seems ready to answer a question that wasn't asked.

“Yes master. What would you like today?” He says, now also standing.

“English Breakfast, thank you Cal. How's the weather Voigt?”

“Clement, master” the grey wolf promptly replies.

“Hm, then I'll have my tea outside today.” Alek turns to look towards the new wolf. “I wonder; are you fond of board games? Cal and I like to have a game after lunch over tea, and you're welcome to join.”

Ember shifts his eyes towards Cal who looks expectantly back. “Uh, yeah, I guess so. I've not really played many except chess or checkers.”

“Well, they won't do for three players. Cal, go get the Chinese checkers board, would you please.”

“Yes master” the white wolf bows slightly and walks out of the room.

“Do you know how to prepare tea, Ember?” Alek asks cautiously.

“Well, yeah. Hot water and a teabag, it's not that hard.”

Voigt reddens, lowering his brows at Ember, but Alek merely smiles. “Hess, would you please show our new wolf where the tea making facilities are?”

“Yes master” he responds, eyeing up all these used bowls, looking desperate to start washing them.

“Please put out the table and chairs for me Voigt, I'll be back in a few minutes.” Voigt confirms the instruction and goes off to perform his task. Alek turns away from the table and walks towards the doors leading out.

“The dishes will have to wait” Hess sighs, and gestures Ember to follow him into the kitchen, chuckling. “Hot water and a teabag he says”

“What? Is that wrong?” Ember asks, incredulously.

“Come on, I may not be a tea snob, but I know how to make the stuff; and you should too.”

Hess leads the wolf into a corner of the kitchen with a kettle and several shelves of small, cardboard boxes with various labels. He reaches up to the top shelf and picks out the one labelled ‘English Breakfast’, before putting it down on the counter.

“Ere, fill this up would you?” Hess says, passing Ember the kettle.

The black wolf takes it to the sink and runs the cold into its opening. He puts it back on the base and switches it on. In that time, Hess has also pulled out a large teapot and the plastic bag from the cardboard box. Ember is then given said bag and a teaspoon.

“One per person and one for the pot” Hess instructs.

“Is that what you do with loose leaf?”

“No, I just felt like saying that.” He retorts.

“Alright smarty. So how many are having tea?”

“Three, including you. So, four spoons.”

Ember nods, portioning the leaves into the pot and closing up the bag. Hess puts it and the box back on the shelf and pours in the the water, before it starts to boil. He then pulls out three cups and saucers and stacks them on a tray with the tea, followed by a small jug of milk and a pot of sugar.

“There you go, your first pot of tea” He says, grinning like a child.

“You did most of it”

“Yeah, but you supervised.” He picks up the tray and gives it over. “Now go on”

Ember takes the tray over to the door, pushing it and himself through to the dining hall. Cal is waiting by the door leading out to the narrow hallway and waves him over.

“Manage ok?” Cal asks, not sounding as patronising as the words imply when the wolf steps closer.

“It’s just tea. But yes, it’s all here.”

“Good good, come with me” Cal says, leading the black wolf to the utility room for the boots. “What size shoes are you, dear? Oh, here put the tray down on this table.” Ember does so.

“I’m size 10, Voigt gave me your shoes last time.”

“Ah, I’ll just go bare then.” Cal hands over his own boots and goes to open the door.

“You sure?”

“Yeah, we’re only going to be on the flagstones anyway.”

“What about any clothes?”

“The master prefers me to be naked during tea, I imagine he will prefer this for you too.” Cal smiles and winks. “Now come on”

Ember smiles meekly back, quickly putting on the footwear and picks up the tray again to follow the butler. They step outside and Cal shuts the door before leading Ember around the house the same way Voigt took him earlier. Alek is already seated on a cushioned chair at a large, round, glass table at the back of the house overlooking the garden. In the centre is a dark-stained wooden hexagon, with a six-point star shaped into it with evenly spaced round divots.

Around the edge of the board is a ring of different coloured marbles and in two of the triangular points of the star are ten marbles of the same colour; blue on one, and green on another. Alek has

redressed since lunch into something smarter but still casual, and is looking out over the garden. His eyes wander over at the pair of wolves and smiles welcomingly.

“Come here Cal” Alek says, patting the chair to his right, which the wolf sits down in promptly.

The human strokes his hand on the side of Cal’s face, petting the fur and combs the thick tufts at the back of his head. The wolf sighs contentedly and leans into the attention as Alek starts to close the gap between them. Ember’s eyes widen as he watches their lips connect and start invading each other’s personal space. Cal moans softly through his nose, eyes shut and with a hand working its way up Alek’s leg. The tray wobbles a little as the wolf still standing starts to feel arousal trickling down his chest, belly and groin.

The kiss breaks and Alek looks over at Ember. “Don’t you want to put the tray down lad?” He smirks, lips and cheeks flushed from the kiss. “There’s a table here, behind me so we can keep it out of the way.”

“Would ... you like me to serve, master?” Cal asks breathily, cock throbbing under the desk.

“No, he can do it. What colour would you like for your marbles? Orange, to match your eyes?”

Ember works his way around the table and finally puts the tea back down. “Y-yes please” he responds, surprised to hear his eyes mentioned, and setting down cups and saucers on the round table. He picks up the pot and pours equally between the three. Cal is picking out all the orange marbles from the ring around the board and placing on the equidistant point.

“Sugar? Milk?” Ember probes, a little too casually for Cal’s liking, noticeably stalling as he sets the third place. Alek continues to look out into the garden, watching Voigt work in the distance.

“One sugar and milk please. Cal has it the same way. Thank you”.

Ember prepares the drinks and finally takes his place at the point of the orange marbles. He looks down at the board and then at the other two. “How do you play?”

“It’s quite simple; very similar to checkers. You move one marble at a time, with the goal of getting all of them to the opposing triangle point. You can jump any number of adjacent marbles, but unlike checkers, the jumped marbles stay where they are. There’s no taking, it’s simply a race.” Alek explains, providing some visual aids by placing some in the centre manually.

“Oh, that seems quite easy” Ember lights up.

“Deceptively so”. Alek chuckles and moves his first marble. “We go clockwise, so it’s your turn next Ember.”

“Oh, ok then.” Ember ponders his first move and then copies what Alek did.

They take it in turns for a few rounds and the middle of the board gets quite messy with marbles. Cal is clearly winning having two pieces in his home already. Alek makes a long string of jumps getting one of his marbles almost corner to corner, putting him dangerously close to catching up, so Ember assumes. He, however, still has three in their starting positions and only having made two of his marbles to just past the centre.

“Not as easy as it seems” Alek says confidently, placing his second to last marble in the home.

“Got that right” Ember grumbles, his chin slumped into his palm with the elbow on the table. His tea barely touched.

“I’m sorry master, but I have to insist-” Cal interrupts and Alek simply puts a hand up.

“It’s ok, have you forgotten the improper behaviour Hess showed for the first week? How much he cursed, even at me?” Alek calmly knocks his last marble into place with a prideful grin, winning

the game. "Voigt was quick on the uptake because of his background" Cal stays silent, ruminating on this for a moment and then dips his head.

Ember frowns at the both of them. "What did I do?"

"Nothing at all; Cal is a little jealous because he thinks I'm favouring you." Alek says, sipping the last of his tea.

Cal stiffens and flusters, quickly getting up so that he can pour his master another cup.

"Jealous? What a daft thing to be jealous of." Ember scoffs, picking up his cup and gets it no further than an inch off the table before he's met with a deadening stare from Alek.

"I would advise, wolf, that you don't make fun of my Calvin." Alek utters with a powerfully quiet tone that courses through the black wolf's body.

"I-I ... m ... s-sor-ry" he shudders, trapped in a state of anxiety. The few moments of being frozen from this scrutinising stare feels twice as long, but the effect diminishes suddenly and the tea drops back down to the table. He breathes easier but is still met with a dangerous stare from Alek. Cal, or Calvin, is looking away, clearly upset. "I didn't mean it like that."

"It seemed very clear to us" Alek points his finger as if leading his words to go in one direction alone. "I want to explain something very plainly to you, Ember. I love my wolves, I care about them and respect them, and they treat me with respect in kind. So when you address me so casually as though I was your friend, it offends my sweet Cal and it offends me. I have let the omission of my proper title slide and will continue to do so until you are ready to accept it, but I will not abide impoliteness."

Ember's lip quivers and shifts his focus between each of Alek's eyes, feeling a strong sense of meaning emanating from them through the words. But he doesn't sense magical persuasion at work here, just pure, regular, emotional feelings. He looks up again at Cal and softens his face in concern, feeling a terrible guilt curdle in his stomach.

"Sorry Cal. I'm not ... ready to call your master my own." Ember stands up to make his apology more heartfelt, "But that doesn't mean I should imply that his favour is not worth having." He walks around that able to close the gap between him and the white wolf. "I spoke without thinking."

"Damn right you did" Cal replies and licks his teeth in thought, letting a smile grow on his face. "But ..." he adds, pondering with a now very mischievous grin. "I couldn't be mad at such a pretty face."

Ember stops his advance and drops his arms to his sides. "What?"

"Don't think I didn't notice you get a stiffy when you watched us make out"

Cal steps forward, reaching out to run his hand down Ember's chest and around his tight stomach. The black wolf shifts his eyes nervously, trying to step back but the other wolf holds him still. His cheeks flush red and only manages to tear his eyes away when he hears laughter.

"He's embarrassing you" Alek explains, putting his marbles back in their starting place.

"Isn't he cute when he gets all flustered?" Cal continues, pulling away from the wolf and kneeling down next to his master, planting another deep kiss on his lips. He makes sure that they're being observed and pulls away. "See, master, he's getting off on it." He says wiping his lips and gesturing to Ember's chub; the wolf to whom it belongs feeling like an exposed criminal.

"Alright alright, you're playing rather unfairly" Alek interrupts with a wave of his hand. "I think he's learnt his lesson. Both of you sit down before I make you."

Alek finishes putting all the marbles back and leans back in his chair. Ember covers his cock and shuffles back to his seat, keeping his eyes averted, as though it does anything to hide his shame. Cal makes sure his master has a replenished drink and joins them at the table.

"Sorry to embarrass you, dear. I don't think you meant any real harm, but I wanted to make sure there were no hard feelings" Cal smiles as sweetly as ever.

Ember gulps as he tries to will his penis back into the sheath. "I ... appreciate that ... thanks."

Alek laughs again and allows Ember to start the next round. The three of them manage to get through a couple more games until 1:50. Ember makes his move, disappointed at the amount of straggling marbles and leans back into his chair, thankful of the parasol that was recently erected. Cal daisy chains his last marble into place and claims his second victory, looking very pleased with himself, but humbly so. They all shake hands and Alek starts to collect the marbles into a bag when Ember stops him.

"Er, wait ... please. If you have to go, can you leave the game here? I'd like to play with Cal a little longer"

"I'm sorry, my boy, but it's time for Cal's session." Alek stops putting the marbles away and lays the bag down. "Why don't you help Hess with the food delivery? It'll be due soon and I'd rather Voigt focused on the fountain anyway."

"Oh, yeah ok" Ember starts helping put the marbles away and zips the bag shut with the ribbon ties.

"You two seem to get on quite well, so I'm happy to have you work together more often if you like?"

Ember flusters a little and shrugs a little. "I-I guess."

"But I do think it's important that you spend some time with the others as well so you can get a better idea of what you'd like to do as a more permanent role. You can be a sous-chef of course, but I'm keen to have you experiment before we set that in stone."

"Thank you, m-" Ember shuts his mouth right again before he says it, still fighting the battle against this subservience. But not wanting to seem rude again, he bows his head.

"Very good, please take the board in and put it on the dining table, I'll have it put back correctly later. Then, you're done helping with the delivery, put some outdoor clothes on and go assist Voigt with his tasks."

"You'll have to pick out anything that fits you in the utility room." Cal chimes in, picking up the board with the bag on top and hands it to Ember. "Don't worry about the tea set either, I'll do that when I get back"

"Yes, we'll have to see about getting you your own clothes tomorrow. Anyway, I'll see you later. Cal, come with me."

Alek leads the white wolf away in the opposite direction, presumably to another door that leads back to the main hall, leaving Ember to go and catch up with his head chef.