

Chapter 14 - Magic

"Hello again, Ember." Alek greets cheerfully, looking up from writing on some paper. "Sorry to have turned you away like that, I just didn't want to take up too much of the others' time while they're waiting for us to finish. Come, sit."

"Thank you, master."

"If it still makes you uncomfortable, you can drop the title if we're on our own. At least for a couple of days."

"No ... that's alright, master," Ember dips his chin. "I should learn to get used to it."

"Good boy." Alek smiles and gets back to writing on the paper.

Ember wriggles a little in his seat when he gets called a good boy, and then tries to look to see what the human is doing. With a special kind of pen, he seems to be writing symbols on a square piece of paper, seemingly unconcerned that the wolf is watching. Ember gives up trying to understand the strange language and looks around on the desk instead to see that it's changed considerably since he was last sat in this chair. There is a large, metal contraption with a long lever that looks like it's used for stamping or pressing things. Next to it is an elevated metal crucible with a lit candle under it and a pile of blue wax melts in a small box.

When Alek finishes writing, he scrunches up the paper, sets it down in the shallow dish above the candle and uses a little wooden stick to set it on fire. It burns very quickly and leaves a grey ash in the basin. Then he drops in one of the beads and they both watch as it begins to liquify and suck up all the ash until it glitters, with a little assistance from a tiny metal spatula. Alek stands up and insists the wolf do so as well.

"I don't know if he told you, but Voigt offered to stand guard while this happened." He says, gesturing the wolf to lean forward. "I told him I wouldn't need his assistance and I believe that to be true."

The small key in Alek's hand drops into the lock and with a quick turn, the collar springs off and is caught before it clatters to the table. In an instant, a sense of freedom washes over the wolf's body, tingling his fur. He doesn't feel like he needs to worship this human anymore. He no longer feels the urge obey, and most importantly, he no longer feels repulsed by the thought of leaving.

However, in that moment, counter-reactions start flaring in his brain. Reminders of his recent past flash into his vision as a warning, disparaging the notion of returning to it. The empty cabin, the mindless wandering, the shitty job, the emotionless one night stands ... The very idea of running away, now leaves him with a sense of guilt for throwing away the best thing that's ever happened to him. Abandoning the first people who genuinely seem to care about him and discarding the gift of their generosity makes him sick to his stomach to a point where convince himself that the collar is off and that this isn't another of Alek's magical influences.

Making a final decision that will determine his future, he sits back down and smiles at his master.

"I knew I was right to trust my instincts." Alek says proudly and places the collar on his desk before sitting back down. "Just be careful with the leather."

Ember tilts his head and follows Alek's gaze as he looks down. He yips and quickly grabs his semi-erect penis just before a glob of pre drips down onto the chair. The touch alone excites his penis further so he has to let it go and keep it propped up on his legs so it doesn't attempt to leak on the floor. Now that there is no longer a resistance against his orgasms, the urge to masturbate has now skyrocketed. Thankfully, the presence of the human is providing enough formality, that he feels it would be inappropriate, especially since he knows there would be negative consequences to those actions. Instead he decides to distract himself by focusing on what Alek is doing with the collar.

He flips it over, unhooks the silver plate with the pair of pliers and pulls it off. He then places it gently and strategically on the baseplate of the press and pulls down the lever until a new sigil is plastically formed into the metal. Then he slides out the plate with the new mark and dabs a cotton bud soaked with a clear liquid into the impression before drying it with the other end. In very little time from that point, as though there was a sensitive window, he picks up the metal dish with the shiny blue fluid with a pair of tongues and pours it in. The liquid fills out all the corners inside the mould, but to be sure, he holds it over the candle until the silver heats up a little bit and allows the wax to form a better bond to the metal.

"There we are. That looks good to me." Alek says, admiring his work and places it down on the desk to cool before blowing out the candle.

"What is all this, master?" Ember asks curiously, realising only after the fact that he no longer needs to say 'master', and still did it anyway.

"Spellbinding. I write the spell I want on the parchment, burn it and then bind the ashes to a shellac that keeps it suspended and acts like a conductive layer. Then I lock it into the collar by pouring it into the grooves of a newly pressed symbol." Alek takes the stamp out of the press and puts it into a little box. "The symbol means nothing to do with the spell, I just choose one that looks good and it allows me to catalogue what spell is attached to a collar. The shellac solidifies pretty hard, so it's not going to come out, but just to be sure, I always put on a thin coat of clear, UV-cure resin."

"So, that stuff you were writing was the new spell? And now it's just ... inside the collar? What's stopping me from picking the shellac out or breaking off the silver bit?" Alek raises an eyebrow and the wolf presses his lips together. "Not that I would ... master." He adds defensively.

"You wouldn't be able to. This first symbol -" Alek points, "- is a protection spell. Once the lock is engaged, the collar can't be damaged. It's got a couple of other enchantments in there too, like that it can't rust and is waterproof etc.; but generally, once it's on, it's unbreakable."

"It's really interesting, master. We had a little bit of magic in our camp, but only wellness, crop growing and simple protection stuff." Ember pauses and smiles darkly, "Not that it did then any good I suppose." The human nods and smiles sympathetically back.

"How did your tribe magician do that then?" Alek asks conversationally, trying to distract from the topic of their death.

"I don't really know. I saw her do a lot of stuff with sticks, burying them and sticking them in the ground and stuff, but I never understood it."

"Sounds like channelling. Trees are excellent conduits of magic, like a wire for electricity. But because of the rings, you can also trap spells in them which can then seep out into the ground. You can do it with root vegetables too and -"

"Oh yeah!" Ember interrupts with a snap of his fingers. "She used to create potato vines by burying them in like a perimeter and they'd all mingle and share the same branches. It made the magic stronger she said."

"I don't know about that," Alek twists his face into a perfect visage of incredulity, which quickly shifts to a skeptical agreeability, "unless she somehow coded it to be receptive to other nearby magical vessels. Which ... would be impressive if she did. I would have liked to have learnt what she knew."

"Sorry, I don't know."

"Don't be, it's curious to me. Spells can be made aware of things it's connected to, that's how the collars work. They pass through it and into you. Surprisingly, once you know the ... connection method, coding the brain isn't too difficult."

"That's scary to think." Ember winces, suddenly realising just how dangerous this collar could have been if Alek had ill intent. "How do you know all this stuff anyway?"

"My aunt taught me." He leans back in his chair. "My mother always said it was good to have a magician in the family, so I learnt when she didn't have the knack. It's actually my main trade; and by that I mean, it's my private-facing trade. And by *that*, I mean no one knows what I do publicly, but among the right people, I'm a magical contractor, and among fewer people still, I'm a cum distributor." He laughs and pulls himself forward over the desk with his forearms planted on its surface.

"So ... people hire you, for magic stuff?" The wolf knits his brows in curiosity.

"Have you ever seen a celebrity with a piece of jewellery that they never seem to take off?" Ember shakes his head, "Then they're good at hiding it. My work can be hard to come by because the spells I make are typically permanent. Some back alley magician will sell you a trinket that'll work a few times and break or slowly fade, but I'm paid good money to make sure that doesn't happen. The problem with that is that it never needs replacing unless the vessel is destroyed or lost." He splays his hands and plants his chin into his palm, supported by the elbow.

"Surely if you're that good, you should get lots of clients?"

"Magic is the worst kept secret. No one knows about it, unless you want to know about it. It's never talked about because it's never allowed to be talked about. Anyone who does can just be brushed aside as a lunatic."

"I'm sure people have come close to knowing though."

"Anyone who believes in magic is a fool." Alek smiles and lifts his head back up. "You know my aunt taught me how to code spells so they only work for the buyer, so even if someone were to steal a magical item or resell it, it would basically no longer work; thus propagating the superstition."

"Huh, I see. And I guess whoever buys it would be a fool to show it off too, because it would make them a target either for ridicule or theft."

"Quite. So, it's purposefully very difficult to get to me, and more-so to commission me for work. Despite how well it pays, I have to be particular about who I work for."

"What about our collars? Don't people know that they're magical? Or do people just assume all your wolves like wearing them for you?" Ember laughs, struggling to think which scenario is more believable to common folk.

"To anyone dumb enough to ask, and to anyone I care enough to answer, they're magical. But, the whys and hows are left ambiguous. It's nobody's business but mine why my wolves are always in wolf skin, naked and all wear matching collars. And those that *do* know, also know to leave a powerful man his secrets."

"Are you a powerful man, master?" The wolf smirks cheekily.

"No ... but I can seem it, with the right persuasions." He grins back.

The wolf titters softly and idly fiddles with his fingers on his lap. Nestled in the back of the chair, his mind wanders back to the conversation with Hess just before, and as if on cue, Alek breaks the silence.

"I have something I'd like to ask you, Ember," The wolf gulps and straightens his back. "And by that reaction, you might know what I'm going to ask."

"Uhh ... Hess told me some things"

"Has he indeed. And what things did he tell you?" Alek opens a drawer on his desk and pulls out another collar. This one is thicker, jet black and decorated with metal studs down the length. It uses a traditional buckle, unlike the trunk-lock-style of the other collars that just click together. He lays it on the table for the wolf to see.

Ember whines softly when he looks down at the new collar and then back up at the human. "N-no specifics, master. Just that ... you err ... like to play with us ... when we don't have the collars on."

"Those collars, yes." He looks at the brown one he'd just upgraded. "But I trust he didn't attempt to dissuade you."

"No no, he err ... encouraged it." Ember keeps his eyes down, still fidgeting his hands and being very careful not to touch his cock which has remained half-hard since the collar came off.

"Good. In that case, would like to join me in my bedroom? There's no pressure, but I would very much like to have a little fun with you, before the collar goes back on." Alek watches as the expression on the wolf's face moulds and flexes as he tries to think about what he'd like to do. "We can stop at any point."

"Alright ... ok, I want to." Ember nods, convincing himself with a deep breath and looks down at his penis, which has realised what's about to happen and getting visibly more excited. He hears the buckle slide against wood as the human pushes the black leather collar over. "Does this one have spells too?"

"What a clever wolf you are. Why yes, it has a couple. None that would have you lose your ability to stop what's happening of course, but they do add a few ... enhancements."

"Like what?" The wolf asks with a spike of concern.

But instead of replying, Alek gestures to the collar and watches happily as it is slowly taken. He stands up, walks around the desk and assists in buckling it on. Instantly, Ember feels some of his concerns slip away, to be replaced with a mild, euphoric haze. He doesn't feel hindered in any way, and instead feels revitalised, like one would after a good nap.

In addition, the needs of his dick feel considerably more urgent. In fact all sexual needs seem more demanding now, as though the fact that his sex life has been so mundane up to today has finally caught up with him. He needs release, and he's willing to do anything the master says to attain it. He has no idea if this collar also denies orgasm, but by the sound of it, Alek probably wouldn't want that anyway. However, he still decides to err on the side of caution and prevents his hands from wandering as they desperately attempt to touch the now very firm shaft.

"Come with me, wolf." Alek commands and tugs on Ember's D-ring, getting him up out of the chair.

"Yes master." He responds eagerly, and is lead across the office to the door on the side wall.