

Chapter 24 - Rundown

After washing his hands of the blood, Ember finishes putting away all of his new clothes, folding his new favourite scarf neatly in a drawer. He leaves the borrowed clothes on his bed to remind him to be returned, not wanting to go into Cal's room when he's not there. Not wanting to be late, he shuts his door, quickly but safely descends to the ground floor and into the dining room with a minute to spare. He stands behind his chair saying his hellos to Hess and Voigt, both of whom voice their concern about the attack.

"Oh I'm fine, really. It stings, but it stopped bleeding by the time we got back."

"I'll have a look at it after lunch," Voigt insists.

"Thank you," Cal interjects cheerfully. "I've had a look myself, but I'd prefer a professional take a look. Only the best for our new friend."

Ember feels his skin warm at that, and fidgets his fingers on the tall back of the chair. He's distracted from the mild embarrassment when Cal sighs and shakes his head.

"Today's going to be pretty busy in preparation for tomorrow. I'll need you both back down here by 1:30 at the latest, will you be done with him by then?" He asks Voigt.

"It doesn't take me that long to stitch a wound Cal," comes the playfully sardonic response.

"You're going to be alone in a room with a very cute and nosey wolf. I'm adding a safety half-hour." He chuckles and looks at Ember who refuses to meet his gaze.

"I'd need an hour," Hess sniggers.

"You wouldn't if you could cum," the older wolf retorts with a hearty laugh and receives a punch to the arm for the transgression.

The doors open and Alek walks in, silencing the wolves. His very casual clothes being uncommon enough to make Ember notice.

"Ham and cheese toasties with bacon salad and crisps," Cal says, serving the master his portion. The rest are seated and invited to start also.

"Lovely. How did your outing go with Ember? Did you manage to get everything?" He asks, taking a bite of his toastie and being disappointed there isn't any sandwich pickle so he quickly grabs the jar and smears some inside.

"Yes master, we got him a whole new wardrobe including a suit to be delivered tomorrow morning. I was able to get Voigt's pipe and Hess's foods in good time as well."

"That's great, how do you like your new clothes, my boy?"

"I love them, master, thank you." Ember bows his head courteously as he speaks.

"We did incur a small incident however." Cal adds, turning to Ember. "A rock was hurled at his head and cut the skin. It's stopped bleeding, but Voigt will kindly inspect it after lunch."

"It upsets me to hear that, Ember. I'm sorry that happened."

Ember feels a compassion rise up from his belly and wants nothing more in this moment than to rain gratitude down upon his master, as though he should be absolved from any blame. But before he has chance to reply he speaks again.

"Was it that usual fellow?"

"No, a small group of teenage boys." Cal confirms.

"Little twats, the lot of 'em. They're the reason I don't like goin' into town." Hess pipes up. "I'd have battered 'em if I were there."

"Then I'm glad you weren't, Hess," Alek says, reproachfully. "The last thing we need is the town witnessing one of you attacking a child."

"Sorry master, I didn't mean it. It just riles me up."

"I know my wolf, I know." He smiles to show the apology was accepted and moves on. "So Cal, let's get onto the boring stuff. Give our new member the rundown for today."

"Yes master." Cal puts down how sandwich and turns his chair a little. He speaks addressing the table, but while looking at Ember. "At 1pm today, we're due to receive a large number of temporary staff for a rehearsal. Mostly butlers and other assistive staff whom I will be managing and Hess has already spoken to me about dropping his sous-chefs down from two to one."

"Is that going to be enough?" Voigt interrupts.

Hess nods and points his finger at the wolf across the table.

"Kitchen's not big enough for four anyway." He explains, with crumbs falling out of his furry moustache.

"Yes, Ember will be among his staff for the event." Cal says, returning his attention to the black wolf. "So, two sous-chefs including you, who will be helping to prepare the bulk of food today and then again tomorrow morning for the rest."

"I-I don't know if I'm ready for that." Ember mutters worriedly.

"I say you are, and it's my kitchen." Hess thumbs his chest proudly and nods again, freeing another rain of toast particles from his fur around his mouth.

Ember responds with a quiet "Yes chef" which makes Hess smile.

"Anyway, I will be showing all of the staff their duties today. That way, they can show up an hour before the guests, get into positions and be ready for people to arrive. It'll also save us having to make extra food for them."

"So, I'll just be helping Hess tomorrow? Why did I need the suit?"

"That's just until dinner is served at 3pm. After that you'll be my assistant, meaning you'll be shadowing me and doing everything I say without question. Chain of command is extremely important in front of our guests, so I cannot have you talking to me at all unless I speak to you directly." Cal looks sternly at Ember when a smile attempts to creep on his face. "I'm serious. If you need my attention, you'll tug on my blazer at the side or signal by wiping your thumb on your lips." He gestures.

"Is it really that strict." Ember asks incredulously, looking around at the others who all nod, including the master. "Yikes, alright."

"Don't worry, he'll give you at least three more lectures on it before the guests arrive." Hess smirks scoffing the last of his toastie and grabbing another from the platter.

"It is very important," Alek inserts. "If there is a lapse in the chain of command, especially from my wolves, it would reflect negatively against me for not training you properly. It's a shame I have to thrust you into the deep end of it so soon after your induction, but I have every confidence you will do well."

"Thank you, master."

Cal continues on.

"The guests are usually expected to stay until about 6pm, by which point Hess will be starting to make our dinner, so it'll be a bit later than usual. I'm sure he won't mind doing it himself if you'd prefer to wind down after everyone's gone; I know it'll be stressful for you dear."

"I hate cooking after a banquet." Hess mutters moving his food around. "But yeah, I'll just have something easy prepared, so I can just do that on my own."

Ember is about to butt in again to preemptively offer assistance, despite knowing that he will be very drained, just like Cal said, but he's cut short.

"Now, in addition to the help, we will have a small security detail lead by Voigt, and a classical trio who will be in the corner over there providing entertainment. After food, several guests will leave, but some will loll around in here, and others may wander the garden and have coffee. But don't worry, as Hess put, I will be lecturing you and everyone else again at 2pm today when all the temporary staff have been accounted for and assigned their duties."

"It's worth noting, Ember," Alek says, gently pushing his plate forward so he can link his fingers on the table, "that these staff members are of course all human and very much aware that you are werewolves. They have done this many times before and are welcome in my home."

"Why do you say it like that?" Ember tilts his head curiously.

"Because you may find it in yourself to become defensive of this mansion or myself, when someone unfamiliar to you is in it. I want to make it perfectly clear to you that everyone who will be entering this house, who get through Voigt and Cal, is expected to be here."

"Oh ... I see. Another quirk of the collar?"

"More of a side effect of the proximity spell. I call it the guard dog effect." Alek chuckles quietly to himself.

"Humph," Hess mumbles. "Not a dog."

"Anyway, I just wanted you to be aware of it. Additionally, and I'd expect it should go without saying, but they should not see you naked. When you're done with your bath, please just dress casually and rejoin us here in the dining room."

"Yes master."

"OK then. Now, Voigt." Alek turns his head to the grey wolf. "Give me the good news."

"The pipe is perfect, exactly to specification. I'll fit it as soon as I'm excused by Cal and we should have a functioning fountain."

Ember finds it unusual the way Voigt worded that, almost as though Cal is his superior.

"Excellent." Alek sighs with relief and finishes up the last of his salad and crisps. "Unfortunately," he looks back at the black wolf, "due to you being promised a bath, I now can no longer see you at 1pm for you to show off your drawings ... assuming you've made some?"

"Yes master."

"I'm sorry master," Cal butts in, "I didn't know there was a set time he had to -."

Alek holds up a hand, cutting him off.

"It's quite alright Cal, I'm happy for him to enjoy some relaxation, after what happened in town. Plus, I could exactly make the new collars today, so there's no rush for the drawings anyway." He turns back to Ember. "You can come to me in the evening after dinner."

"Yes master."

"Good boy."

"Will you be having tea today master?"

"Yes I don't see why not."

"We've also got plenty more cake left and we wanna serve it with ice cream since Ember got attacked." Hess says.

"How thoughtful. Just normal black tea today with milk today I think Cal."

"Yes master."

While Alek sits and sips his water, the plates are cleared and tea is made simultaneously. It sits brewing in the pot as the wolves make their way back to their seats but Cal who wheels the trolley out. He serves the dessert and pours those who want it, a mug of tea alongside.

Everyone tucks into their food, Ember feeling considerably happier now since he got struck by a rock. Although he'd not openly admit it, he's never had an opportunity to taste ice cream with cake, especially not with such smooth and rich vanilla flavour. He devours it in seconds and hums, licking his lips.

"That was really nice. Way better than with cream," he admits, eyeing the chunk of cake still left on the tray and the tub of expensive-looking ice cream.

"Cal my boy, I think the pup wants another serving." Alek grins.

The white wolf notices the clean bowl and smiles sweetly at the face showing a nervous agreement.

"Aw, well certainly dear, you can have some more. It is your cake after all." He gets up and transfers another generous slice and dollop to the dish. "Right which of you two want the last slice?" Cal turns to the wolves at the other side of the table, seeing that they too have also finished.

"I'd prefer Hess to have it." Voigt grins widely taking the empty dish and handing it to Cal. The brown wolf gulps, looking down at his belly, pressing against the edge of the table. "Eat up, lad."

"Yes sir," Hess whimpers quietly and finishes the second helping easily. Alek smiles at the exchange and sips his tea.

When they all eat up their dessert and the tea is drunk, the master finally takes his leave.

"Right you," Voigt addresses the black wolf, "come here and let me have a look at you."

Ember scoots around the table and is made to sit in Voigt's seat so he can inspect the wound.

"Tell me the truth doc, how long does he have left?" Hess jokes, putting on a sobbing voice but he's quickly silenced by a swift smack over the head. "Ow! Stop hitting me."

"Stop giving me reason to." Hess grumbles and rubs his head. "It's deeper than I thought it would be," Voigt continues after inspecting the impact point. "I'd like to stitch it so you don't open it up when you're in bed."

“Oh ... alright. Will it ... hurt?” Ember asks nervously.

“No pup, I’ll numb the area. It’ll just feel a bit weird.” He excuses himself to go run Ember’s bath and retrieve his medical bag.

“Is he a doctor or something?” Ember asks standing back up to help ferry dishes to the kitchen.

“Mhm. I think he was a paramedic?” Cal asks turning to Hess for confirmation.

“Yeah for the Royal Army Medical Corps.”

“I drift off when he starts talking about it honestly.” Cal admits quietly to Ember.

“Oh neat. What’s he doing here then?” Ember laughs and the other two look at each other.

“That’s not really something we feel comfortable talking about.” Ember’s face drops, realising it mustn’t be a pleasant topic. “You’re better off asking him, but don’t push him if he says no, alright?”

“Oh ... yeah alright.”

“You may as well go up, it doesn’t take long to fill up. Feel free to use some of my bubble bath.” Cal wags his tail, thinking about it. “It’s violet scented.”

“Heh, thank you. I’ll catch you guys later.”

“Remember I want you down here by 1:30, so try not to be too long ok?”

“No promises.” Ember grins back at Cal cheekily and scurries off.