

Like the winds howl

A dark red puddle of warm blood has formed around the canine's dying body. Without proper medical help, he will most probably perish within ten minutes. The Mistress squats beside him and timelessly runs a paw through his hair. The wolf produces a soft, quiet moan and his arm twitches lightly. I see the fox speak, but no words leave her mouth. The wolf's head goes up and down slowly, as if he is nodding. The other slave who entered right after me is still kneeling on the floor, watching blankly.

"You there, clean this mess up. Bring him to floor B, room 39. Be swift as the wind if you want him to live..." The Mistress speaks calmly and monotone as always. "...and if you let him die, please take care of the remains."

While Aeon's savior lifts him onto his back and walks out, he leaves a track of fresh blood. The Mistress sits back onto her throne, bearing a satisfied smile. The bodily fluids have reached my knees by now and start to paint my fur crimson red.

"And you, my dear writer, go back to your room. You have the rest of the day—What am I saying? Take the rest of the week off and study the general rules of the household. Expect a test within a few days."

The words are a relief to my ears. The sphere in the room has become quite grim and silent after what happened just a few moments ago, Mistresses' authority cast over me like darkness, its shadow ensnaring my limbs and keeping me in place. I listen right away, however, and break myself loose. It feels like the weight of my legs has increased greatly since I knelt down. The Mistresses' smile reminds me of a demoness. Our eyes lock a last time as I close the door, her fierce, determined eyes glancing at me.

A tremendous weight drops off my shoulders as I enter my room. The room, usually feeling like some a cage, now feels warm, comfortable and cozy. My own room. I never valued it more than when I first came here. I feel energized again and grab one of the sheets stacked on my desk. The sheets are full of rules every slave has to know through and through. As I read every rule over and over and try to imprint them into my mind, I wonder what the Mistress meant with "Test". Test? What test? I have never had a test before, so I have got no clue what it could be about in the first place. Is she going to test my knowledge of the rules?

Around two hours later, two knocks on my iron door break me out of trance. Just as I get into a good meditation position and put my mind to rest, someone has to disturb me. I sigh, open my eyes and swing my legs in a smooth motion off the blanket, then walk to the door on a relaxed pace.

"Come in." I say, trying my best to suppress the annoyed tone. Having a big mouth at higher ranks will assure me of punishment. Heck, I should be happy they don't enter without permission!

The iron door opens with a soft creak. A furred body slumps in, carefully closing the door behind him. His left arm is covered in bandages and is put into a sling. The right side of his body is also patched up thickly. A couple of plasters are dotted all over his torso as well. I recognize the creature as a wolf. Wait, that's... That's the fellow I met at the Mistresses' quarters today! That's the fellow she completely wrecked! I can't believe my eyes; I assumed he died shortly after. I quickly get behind the wolf and help him sit down onto my bed. He is breathing difficultly and looks like he is about to exhale for the last time.

"W-What happened to you...?" I stutter, sitting down next to him.

"The Mistress sent me..." His breathing becomes worse, and I give him a couple of pats on the back, trying to comfort him.

"...She wants you to... To..."

Aeon cannot finish the sentence. Tears rapidly well up in the corners of his eyes and turn into rivers flowing down his cheeks. These aren't tears of sadness. The wolf clearly regrets the actions he had committed to the one he should praise like a God. I give him a moment to catch up on breath, stroking his back to calm.

"Shh," I silence him with a finger on the lips. "What does she want me to do?"

Aeon avoids eye-contact and stares quietly at his feet for a while, trying to control himself. After a couple of minutes, he answers.

"R...Ri...Riku, you are ordered to put me to sleep..." His eyes starting to tear again as he speaks.

"Put you to sleep? That's not a problem, I guess? You can borrow m—"

Then Aeon suddenly interrupts me. The wolf's voice loud and clear.

"For eternity, Riku! I have sinned too much to be allowed to live anymore, I... I have to die!"

He screams, completely out of control again. I can hear his heart pound in his chest.

Is there no way I can calm this lad, I wonder? Tears keep running down Aeon's eyes as I desperately search for an alternative. I never saw an execution with my own eyes and now I had to assassinate someone myself? Is this *really* the test the Mistress has given me?

I run a paw through my hair. There must be other options, there *have* to be. I agree, what Aeon has done is considered a felony among the slaves. One must have a death wish to oppose the Mistress in an unarmed brawl. I have never seen her take her out anyone with just her hands, until today. On one hand, I feel like Aeon has to be punished greatly for his deeds. There should be no exceptions in the rules, otherwise there wouldn't be need for them. On the other hand, he has paid with many broken bones and bruises, already. He suffered the last two hours tremendously. Wouldn't it be a greater sin to execute someone like that in the first place? The Mistress has, according to Aeon, given me that task. And whatever she says is right. She never lied to any of us. While I'm in deep thought, the wolf mutters to himself. From what I can decipher, he is singing a song all pups, whelps and hatchlings are taught at the age of six. Aeon repeats the lyrics over and over and gradually increases the volume, until I am able to hear him clearly. His voice contains melancholy, the tone on which a man would speak right after something horrible happened. But I also sense he is forcing the sadness into his voice, unconsciously. The eerie song sends a chill down my spine and I shiver. Aeon whispers the last words of the song and then sits still, staring at the only candle that is lit. The flames lick the air and make our shadows dance on the wall behind us. The hot wax drips on the thin metal plate below the candle. After a long silence I gather enough courage to talk.

"Aeon, I believe you if you say the Mistress has given me this command. I trust you for telling me the truth and I rely on her that she has made the right decision. Aeon," My voice is calm and controlled, my eyes locked on his. "How did she want me to put you to sleep?"

A wolf's voice responded almost immediately, as if he accepted his fate and had no point in waiting any longer. "Asphyxiation. The Mistress came to room 39 around an hour after my beating. I was there and she gave me this." The wolf sticks out his right arm and opens his paw. A leather hood unfolds. He must have kneaded it inside his tight grip; otherwise he wouldn't have been able to make it that small. I examine the hood carefully. It's a perfectly cut leather mask without any holes, except for the head itself. The snout and eyes would be covered entirely upon wearing. As I examine the hood, Aeon puts another thing onto my lap. It's a long string. There's no doubt. Aeon has to be suffocated using the hood I am holding and the string has to prevent him from removing it. I notice the sadness has vanished from the lupine's eyes.

"I am ready, Riku. Please, let's get over it. I am sorry you have been assigned to do this, and I have the deepest regrets of my actions, but what has been commanded needs to be done. If you don't, Riku... We might meet an even worse fate. Don't worry, I... I have enjoyed this life a lot. Serving Mistress was the best thing that could ever happen to me. I wish everyone in the world could feel the happiness I felt over the past ten years. You have to go on Riku. Keep in mind that you need to grab all the chances you're given and give everything when you have to."

With that, the silence falls again. Aeon takes a deep breath. His words are like a hammer to my face. I have to fight back the tears that try to push themselves out of my eyes. No, I have to be strong. I have to pass this test and go on, that's what Aeon and the Mistress want. I grab the hood and slide it over Aeon's head. It fits perfectly, the contours of his face visible and the leather pressed against his fur tightly. I quickly wrap the string around his head with complex knots to ensure the hood won't come off soon. As Aeon tries to inhale, a small dent forms at his snout. There is no way he will be able to breathe now. His breathing becomes harder and more difficult, body parts start twitching and his only usable arm, the right, claws desperately at the hood. I watch with remorse, for this had not been mandatory. The wolf produces growls, groans other guttural noises but gradually stops moving after three minutes. I can hear his last breath escaping, the last bit of life finding its way out of Aeon's body. He is *dead*.

I gaze at the wolf's body like a deer trying to hide from predators by freezing its own body. A minute, half an hour, an hour passes. My lips are starting to become dry and cracked but I cannot get myself to lick them. The hood still covers Aeon's head, the string is still wrapped tightly around his neck and his right paw is still resting at his chest. Then I blink and suddenly grasp what I had done. Strangely, I feel no guilt. I am not feeling any emotion at all. My heart is blank and contains nothing anymore. Am I too sad my mind has paused itself or are my actions really justified? Then, almost subconsciously, I reach out for the wolf. I pull off the string in one smooth motion and tug the hood off his head. A peaceful face meets mine. Aeon's eyes are closed and all of the muscles in his face are relaxed, as if he is satisfied. The emotions that had been erased are slowly coming back as I glance at his face. He is actually pretty handsome. I run a paw down his still-warm body and smile.

"I will never forget you, Aeon." I mutter to myself.