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At the end of the dinner, the attendees separated into alphas and omegas. They retired to the common room to either fix their clothes and makeup or enjoy another cigarette. Even the Duchess retreated to her room to catch her breath. After the break, the party would continue until the wee hours.

Aeroc purposely went to a room other than the common room. He didn't mind the gender-segregated common room for casual chit-chat, but he didn't want to face that man in there. After catching his breath in the other room, Aeroc decided to use the excuse of not feeling well and return quickly. First, he had to summon a servant in the Duke's service and ask if he could borrow a carriage.

"Was the wine too strong?"

Aeroc wasn't usually a big drinker. Today he had three glasses. Usually, that was not too much for him. Even right now, he was still not drunk. He just felt feverish and his mood was bad. Aeroc decided that he would find a servant after cooling off by the window for a while. The duke's house was on the outskirts, far from the city center, surrounded by a vast forest. The breeze from the forest cooled his flushed face and stuffy insides.

Creak.

Just then, someone opened the door and entered the room. Leaning against the window and staring out into the dark forest, Aeroc thought it was a servant. Either the Duchess was looking for him, or someone in the common room was curious about his whereabouts.

"I am not feeling well, so I will rest here for a while before returning back home."

Aeroc said without looking back. But the servant didn't answer. Was the servant insisting on escorting him to the common room? Aeroc turned his head towards the door, annoyed. Suddenly, there was a man he recognized, a man he wished he could erase from his memory. It was Bendyke.

"Are you feeling not well?"

Bendyke stepped closer and casually held out his hand. It was a gesture that meant this man would help Aeroc if he was having trouble walking, but it was so awful that he avoided it. An alpha might lend a shoulder to an alpha, but they wouldn't reach out first. Did he think of Aeroc as a fragile omega? Either way, it was clear that Bendyke was looking down on him. What's more, the way that man used casual speech to him was unacceptable.

"You're just a despicable human being with a penchant for insults."

Aeroc snapped coldly, and Bendyke withdrew his hand. His eyes flashed, but his demeanor was impassive. His irrational reaction was beyond Aeroc's comprehension.

"By whose will are you here?"

"I'm here because I was invited."

"I don't remember inviting you to this room."

"This is the duke's house, and I am the duchess's guest. I wanted to check the estate, and she gave me permission to do so. You, yourself, were late, rude, and sneaky, even during breaks. For a high-ranked aristocrat, the Count of Teiwind is far too selfish."

"I'll be the judge of whether it's improper or not."

Aeroc scowled at the presumptuousness. Yet Bendyke didn't flinch. Come to think of it, Bendyke had dared to use the informal speech "you" against Aeroc. On the streets, he was a lunatic, but here he was pretending to be an intellectual. An intelligent man should have recognized that a gentry without a title could not treat a high-ranking aristocrat, a Count, with such disrespect.

"Don't call me by you. You're just a country baronet's second son."

Aeroc mobilized his unimportant knowledge of Bendyke that he got during the dinner. There was no one else there and Aeroc felt quite drunk, so he made that childish attack. He must have taken the insult from that man to his heart. But the lunatic remained unperturbed and calm.

"I'll be a viscount soon."

"How ridiculous. You say that as if a title is a rolling hat."

“It’s hard to get, but not impossible.”

Aeroc snorted at the absurdity of it all. Then Bendyke shoved his hands into his trouser pockets and assumed an ungainly posture. It was not a posture befitting an aristocrat, but his arrogant demeanor accentuated his extraordinary physique and rugged strength.

“I can either take the patronage of a clan that has no suitable heir, or I can put the extra effort into creating a new clan.”

“Ha.”

If they had no offspring at all, like the Duchess, they would pass the title on to a relative, or give it to a foster child. If they had only an omega child, they would pass it on to the alpha-in-law. Such was the case with Viscount Westport. Westport was passed to Marlena Westport, and while her husband was the current head of the family, she held most of the real power. The Westports were known for their omegas, and alpha offspring were rare enough to warrant generations of alpha-in-laws. Even this time again, the Viscount of Westport, who had two Omega sons, Rapiel and Ariel, was secretly looking for a husband to bring home. An Alpha with a good education, from an aristocracy, capable enough to run the clan, but without a title. Bendyke would fit the bill.

“So you approached the Duchess to become an alpha-in-law, you shameless bastard.”

“Is that what it sounded like?”

Bendyke smirked, Aeroc didn’t understand what was so funny.

“I’m actually interested in something else.”

With that, Bendyke stalked over. His piercing gaze made Aeroc jump back. But the other man had closed the gap between them to a single step. The bastard had too long of a leg. Damn it.

Aeroc’s back touched the window sill as he stepped back, and he tried to move aside, but Bendyke was cunningly hindering his movement. He stood within striking distance of getting his body crushed by the slightest misstep. He tried to show his resistance by turning his head as far as it would go, but it had no effect against the unyielding opponent. What else could he do, he thought, should he scream to attract attention? But what if someone saw this? His pride wouldn’t let that happen. Damn it.

“Your face is red.”

Bendyke’s large hand brushed against Aeroc’s cheek. Goosebumps raced down his spine, reliving the horror of the day. His head ached from being overly tense. Whatever his intentions, the other man hadn’t tried the same tactics as previously. Instead, he unleashed a different kind of violence, one that was far more crude and insulting. With no intention of hiding that at all, Bendyke stepped closer.

“It’s not your business. It’s because of the alcohol.”

The only defense Aeroc could think of was to blame the alcohol. His opponent’s thighs, as strong as a stallion’s, pressed against Aeroc’s lower body. His eyes darted dizzily in all directions, searching for an opening to escape from within the granite fortress of his opponent’s arms. However, that only helped the opponent to notice how frightened and flustered he was.

“I don’t think you’d get feverish from three glasses of fruit wine.”

He spoke as if he knew Aeroc’s drinking capacity. True to his word, Aeroc was indeed not weak enough to get drunk on two glasses. However, the other man didn’t give Aeroc time to wonder how he knew that fact. Bendyke shamelessly slipped his arms around his waist.

“As always, you’re thin.”

Did Bendyke mean his waist? Sure, it was thin compared to Bendyke’s muscular frame, but objectively speaking, it wasn’t looking weak enough to warrant anyone’s concern. Aeroc had enough meals and exercised, he was also rather in good shape.

“Let me go.”

“You should increase the size of your meal.”

His tone of concern was too sincere to be pretense. Truly, Bendyke seemed like a madman. No, he was really a madman. His moods were completely unreadable. One minute he was raging like a rabid man, the next he was calm as a saint born on the planet of rationality, and now he was lusting like a dog in heat.

Aeroc totally couldn’t make head or tail why the madman was doing this to him. A primal fear of an entity he could not logically fathom washed over him. His frozen body trembled intermittently with fear of the unknown. His tense vocal cords were about to let out a grotesque scream. The larger man, both

relatively and absolutely, was quick to recognize Aeroc's intent. A large hand touched the corners of Aeroc's mouth.

"Are you trying to scream again?"

Madness flashed in the dark eyes. Aeroc's blood ran cold. His breathing became more ragged and hot as his fingertips grew numb. For the first time, Aeroc realized that the sensation of fear was similar to sexual tension. Despite the terrifying opponent, the heat of their close bodies sent an inappropriate shiver down his spine.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"No."

"Then why are you trembling like this?"

"I'm not afraid of you, I'm afraid of your insanity."

Aeroc stared at him with a killing glare, while also firing back at his words. The other man's expression hardened slightly. He continued to stare at Aeroc for a while, and then slowly retreated away.

"I see."

"I'm sorry," he apologized, meekly understanding Aeroc's words. There was a hint of melancholy in his confident demeanor. He almost seemed like a bratty alpha who'd been dumped on his first confession. Aeroc wondered if he was crazy for feeling that way..... This was terrible.

"Your face is pale."

It was at this point that Bendyke unleashed his malice, offering unsolicited kindness. He insisted on escorting the reluctant Aeroc to the front door. When he realized that the Teiwind carriage had not yet arrived, he offered Aeroc a ride in his own chartered carriage. Aeroc wanted to refuse, but his legs were too weak to do so. The hand, which had been violent previously, moved gracefully to help Aeroc climb into the carriage. The excessive kindness was an insult, but it felt so natural that Aeroc didn't have time to refuse. Even after the hand was offered, Bendyke held the cold hand for a short moment. He kissed the back of Aeroc's hand, obviously not intending to play the polite servant. Aeroc could clearly see Bendyke's lips curling into a smile against the sensitive skin.

"See you next time, Count."

Upon returning to the estate, Aeroc felt sick to his stomach. He hadn't slept well because his nightmares kept him awake. Two bottles of medicine later, when he was finally awake, he found several unsolicited letters.

Aeroc replied with a polite apology to a letter of regard from the Duchess, who was worried about his sudden return. And for the mail addressed from [K. B.], Aeroc tore the envelope to shreds and threw it into the fireplace.

From then on, Aeroc avoided Bendyke thoroughly. His pride was hurt, but more than that, his fear was bigger. Further exposure to the man's incomprehensible madness and the gaze that slithered like a black snake towards his ankles until his inner thighs almost could make him scream like a neurotic child.

That's why Aeroc thought he wouldn't have gone to that man's office unless he wasn't really in big financial trouble.