

Never a Gentleman

Hunt Club – Book 5

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CHAPTER ONE

Peace and quiet and no distractions made banker Victor Knight a very happy man. He flipped the page over, made note of expected expenses of his latest investment opportunity, then patted himself on the back for finding this gem among the detritus. At this rate, he'd be done with his calculations and home before night fell. Could his life be get any better?

"May I join you, Mr. Knight?"

Victor glanced up from his business papers and blinked at the Earl of Beecroft, where he hovered beside his table in the quiet dining room of the Hunt Club. The corner of the man's mouth curved upward as he stared. They'd had little to do with each other in past years, mostly because the earl came and went from Town rather frequently. They had spent an hour or more together earlier that day at Lord Norwich's residence though they had not spoken at the time. Which now seemed odd to Victor and perhaps a touch rude.

Determined to be more agreeable, Victor returned his scattered papers to the folio he carried, set them behind his back on the chair to keep the contents confidential, and smiled up at the man. "Yes, of course. By all means join me."

Lord Beecroft took the chair opposite, leaned back while a footman set a heaped plate before him. "I am much obliged to you," he murmured. "I can't stand sitting at a table alone when there is good company begging for more." He then dug in without another word.

Victor glanced at his neglected plate with little enthusiasm. More than likely the meal was cold, but he made himself eat a little more just to be polite. Between slow mouthfuls, Victor studied Beecroft openly. The earl was tall and broad in the chest, rather well known about Town, and extremely easy on the eye. His dark hair curled up at his collar, a little longer than was fashionable and his clothing was first rate. He was a man of means, a heavy signet ring on his right hand and gold pocket watch fob chain gleaming brightly at his waist, but he was not at all showy like some of his class.

"A devilishly tricky business today," Lord Beecroft muttered.

Victor glanced around them discreetly to see who might linger nearby. There was only Marcus Bright, Viscount Hambly, in sight but he was too far away to overhear this conversation. Victor hoped he kept his distance. The matter Lord Beecroft referred to had concerned the health of a Hunt Club member and thus required absolute discretion and the absence of harmful speculation on his part. Victor wasn't about to indulge in idle gossip when it concerned the succession of both titleholder and heir of the Norwich estate. He'd been present as a witness only, as a surety that no further harm would come to father and son. He'd not been asked to do more than that small favor. "It was."

He picked at a few of his favorite tidbits in silence, casting the odd glance at Lord Beecroft when he said nothing more on the matter. Victor had endured his fair share of odd exchanges

with titled lords over the years, and he was strangely comforted by Beecroft's silence. As Beecroft finished his meal, he called over a footman. The earl requested their glasses be refilled with claret and he sat back with a contented sigh as if he planned to stay awhile. "Lovely weather we are having lately."

"Very warm indeed for this time of year," Victor replied as he reached for his refreshed glass and sipped. "I cannot remember it being so warm in September."

Lord Beecroft blue eyes creased at the corners as he smiled and the affect on Victor's senses was immediate. It struck him suddenly that it had been ages since he'd kissed a man. "I should have begun with the weather," Beecroft mused. "But usually that just makes me sound daft instead of impressing my companion."

Victor's face heated though he did his best to ignore it. "Why would you wish to impress me?"

"The better question is to ask why wouldn't I?" Lord Beecroft pushed his plate aside, a wry smile twisting his lips. He leaned forward across the table, a devilish warmth lighting his eyes, and slowly stroked one finger against the back of Victor's hand. "Do you know it's been rather difficult to catch your notice?"

Victor winced. His preoccupation with work had turned many a lover toward another when he didn't pay them enough attention. It wasn't that he was cold or indifferent. He just lacked the ability to balance a love life and work life to anyone else's satisfaction. He may as well be honest with Lord Beecroft before this conversation went any further. "I have heard that complaint before."

"Not a complaint. Every man has his own priorities. I admire dedication, Mr. Knight. You work long and diligent hours at your bank, but since subtlety hasn't worked in the past I'll be direct." He caught Victor's hand and held it. "I'd like to invite you to play."

Beecroft's hand was warm and surprisingly rough for a well-to-do lord.

"Play?" It took a moment to gather his wits largely because he was unused to being touched by a man in public. When he understood what he was being offered, his cock stirred to life. A night with Lord Beecroft's arms around him was unexpected. "Oh."

"Yes, *oh*." Lord Beecroft's gaze narrowed, focused directly on his face. His brow rose and he sat back, his touch sliding away. "Care to spend a few hours in bed with me?"

Victor had never been propositioned so directly before and he had to admit he was tempted. He wasn't the most popular of fellows. He was too serious, and as Lord Beecroft had mentioned, rather absorbed in his work at all hours of the day and night.

He studied Lord Beecroft carefully but could detect no trace of hesitation in his invitation. His smile was open and friendly and that appealed. The man wanted him and quite frankly, now that he was faced with the opportunity, Victor had to admit he wouldn't mind being tumbled. His collection of dildos and plugs might do for the odd night, but of late they lost their allure. Why not? Lord Beecroft had asked nicely. He nodded. "I'd love to."

"Excellent. I promise you will enjoy my company." Lord Beecroft clapped his hands and jumped to his feet as if on a spring. "I'll see Marinari about a room and meet you upstairs. Yes?"

"Yes." Victor was rather surprised by Beecroft's obvious enthusiasm for bed sport. It made him feel rather more desirable than he had felt in a while. A foolish grin tugged at his lips in response. "I'll see you soon."

As Beecroft hurried away, Victor couldn't help but notice that the earl was nicely proportioned and clearly fit. He drew in a shuddering breath, stunned that he'd gone from expecting an uneventful night to meeting for a tryst in less than a quarter hour. He barely knew Lord Beecroft and here he was about to indulge.

He stood and collected his folio from the chair, fumbling through the papers to make sure he'd not jumbled them too badly in his haste. He hadn't finished his calculations and for a brief moment he was tempted to complete them before he headed upstairs to join Beecroft. It wouldn't take long.

When he looked up, Lord Hambly stood next to him, a disapproving scowl on his face. "I see you're still *working*," he said, scorn tingeing his words with a hard edge.

Victor ignored the complaint. During their time together, Hambly had griped about his work so often that he was no longer made uncomfortable. A lord with very few responsibilities of his

own, Hambly hadn't been able to accept Victor's work was important to him and had become more of a nuisance than a desired companion. He'd become so difficult that Victor had needed to end the relationship. "It's nice to see you too."

The viscount glanced him over; heat and desire clear in his expression. "I miss you, kitten."

Victor grimaced at the nickname. He'd hated the way Hambly had frequently made him feel low because of his preference to be the passive partner in bed. He made decisions every day in his work and when he was with a man he didn't want to discuss to the point of angry argument about what they would or would not do together. "It's over. Why can you not accept that?"

Hambly crowded him. "Because you belong with me."

Victor shook his head at Hambly's refusal to see the truth and shoved past him. Sexual relations between them had always been fraught with tension and Victor felt no regret over ending things last year. He didn't want to fight with a lover because he wouldn't fuck them. He was sick and tired of men who couldn't be affectionate during intimacy too.

He hardly knew Beecroft, but something in the way he smiled gave him hope that he might be the sort of man he needed in his life. At least for tonight.

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