**Disguised as Retribution**

by **convoluted_path**

**Summary**

Aimeric had betrayed them all. Men were dead because of him, and others were mourning their losses. The soldiers wanted their pound of flesh.

The Prince was persuaded to allow it.

**Notes**

An AU about what if Laurent had decided to allow the men to have their way with Aimeric that night at Ravenel instead of listening to reason.

This covers my kink bingo squares for Orgies/Gang Bang, Public Use/Free Use, Public Sex, Forced Orgasm, Humiliation, Bondage, and Watersports. And a big extra warning for **rape/non-con.** I think that plus any additional info in the tagstells you about all you need to know about the kind of content that is in this fic. It's *not a happy fic.* So avoid like crazy if that's not your thing. Please. For all our sakes.
Jord had actually been relieved when the Prince told Aimeric coldly, "Luckily for you, you're more useful to me alive. For now."

What a fool he'd been. The relief hadn't even lasted a full hour.

It wasn't the Prince's idea. Not that that was much consolation when the Prince had ultimately taken up the men's call for retribution and not only approved it, but made it official. Jord had tried to protest, but the further darkening of the Prince's expression with every word that fell from Jord's mouth made it clear that he was only making the Prince angrier, and more determined to follow-through rather than less.

Even Aimeric told Jord to just shut up already, apparently aware that Jord wasn't helping his case. Or possibly just not wanting to have to be forced to listen to Jord's voice anymore now that there was no underlying reason for it. Jord didn't want to believe that, but...

It didn't matter, he told himself. Jord still felt something for Aimeric; it didn't matter if it was returned. And even if he hadn't, Jord knew that this was wrong. That alone would have been enough to make him want to defend Aimeric, even if no one else seemed to think they should.

Jord thought to go to the Prince's slave. To Damianos, he remembered. The Prince trusted him, even though Jord now knew that the trust was grossly misplaced. The Prince listened to him, usually. Jord could threaten to reveal Damianos's identity unless he talked the Prince around and put an end to this horror. But Jord had already heard Damianos speak up against this. The Prince hadn't listened. Had silenced him and sent him from the room before he could further express his objections with the kind of near-brutal disregard that Jord hadn't seen the Prince direct towards his slave since they were back at Arles, when the Prince had still obviously hated the Akielon and wanted him tortured, if not dead. There was unlikely to be any help coming from that direction. The Prince wasn't of a mind to listen, even to the man who had become his closest confidante. And the Prince had already made his opinion on Jord's cries for leniency known. If he found out that Jord was trying to use his slave against him like that, Jord didn't like to think about the consequences for Aimeric. Or himself, though Jord found he cared about that less than he probably should, by comparison.

So there wasn't much Jord could do but allow himself to be swept up in the tide of men making their way outdoors to see to Aimeric's 'official punishment'. Maybe he would be able to talk the others out of participating if appealing to the Prince himself wasn't going to work.

There was a public whipping post permanently installed in the courtyard of Ravenel. Apparently servants had been sent ahead, for a fire was lit nearby, illuminating the square and casting harsh shadows over the faces of the people who were gathering there. Jord knew that people tended to congregate like this, eager, whenever a criminal was lashed. Jord knew that people tended to congregate like this, eager, whenever a criminal was lashed. Jord had never spoken up against that because it was just the way of things. Misdeeds did deserve punishment, and a lashing was something that a man could recover from. Even when it was nearly to the death, apparently, as Damianos had recently proven. But this was different.

The bloodlust building among the men was markedly more intense than when a public whipping took place, or even when there was a much rarer and therefore more anticipated execution. Jord hated that this was being welcomed by many of his fellow soldiers as much as he hated that the Prince was allowing it at all. But the others felt that Aimeric had wronged them personally, and betrayed them and their fallen friends alike. They wanted their vengeance.

As the men around him shifted restlessly – eager to get on with it, especially those who'd been interrupted in their attempt earlier – Jord heard Orlant's name slide off more than one pair of lips, as well as the names of others who had died in the clash that Aimeric had just had a hand in arranging. Jord felt the pain of that betrayal as well. He did. Jord had considered Orlant to be his closest friend
for nearly five years. But that didn't erase what Aimeric had been to him. Or what Jord still felt, even now. He was the only one who seemed to still feel anything less than completely negative towards Aimeric, though. Jord got the impression that even Damianos wouldn't have objected had the Prince decided on execution for Aimeric rather than this. He had seemed to only be advising against it not because he pitied Aimeric, but because he felt it was dishonourable to treat prisoners in such a way, and because he feared that some of the men would look at the Prince differently for allowing such barbarism. Jord's opinions about the Prince would certainly be altered if he didn't halt this before it could begin, the way Jord was still holding out some tiny hope would actually happen. The men from Ravenel who hadn't been betrayed by Aimeric personally also seemed uneasy about the fact that the Prince would go quite this far, though most of them seemed to content themselves with simply not taking part personally. The other men, though, seemed more inclined to praise the Prince for not going easy on their traitor than to condemn him for his cold mercilessness.

Aimeric was brought out immediately after the rest of the men were assembled, half-stumbling behind two larger soldiers from Ravenel whose names Jord hadn't yet learned. He was blindfolded. Jord hoped that would make things better for Aimeric rather than worse. It might be a relief not to have to see the familiar faces of men Aimeric had served alongside twist near-unrecognisably with hatred as they took their pound of flesh. But this way they would probably blur into each other, an endless nightmare of unseen assailants.

Aimeric was forced to his knees in front of the post, and his wrists were secured into a set of manacles that had been attached to the pole. There was enough slack in the chains for Aimeric to get as far as about five feet from the pole. And to allow him to lie flat on the ground, though Aimeric would hate doing that, Jord knew, for Aimeric despised the idea of rolling around in the dirt; the other guards had always mocked him for being more precious about that than the Prince was. But Aimeric wasn't going to have any opportunity to avoid it this time, from what Jord had gathered of what was about to take place. A little dirt was about to be the least of Aimeric's problems anyway, if this couldn't be headed off the way Jord was hoping for.

Aimeric hissed out something that Jord, standing at a distance, couldn't catch because it was so quiet. The Prince, who was standing right beside him – not even quite outside the reach of Aimeric's chains, proving he wasn't afraid of Aimeric at all – clearly heard and understood his words. He seemed mostly unmoved by them, though. The Prince had burned through his fiery rage in the audience hall. Now all that was left, at least on the surface where Jord and the others could see, was ice.

"I don't think you're really in a position to complain," the Prince said to Aimeric. "You are obviously intent on whoring yourself out. So I've arranged exactly that for you. It's more fitting than going under the lash, don't you think? And I'm sure you wouldn't prefer any punishment that would mar whatever prettiness you've managed to hold onto over the years, would you? You couldn't even try to convince yourself that he'd still want you then."

Jord's chest somehow managed to simultaneously feel both hollow and tight at the reminder of the admission that the Prince had managed to pry out of Aimeric's mouth.

Turning away from Aimeric, the Prince announced to the crowd of men that Aimeric would remain bound there until sunrise. Short of causing permanent physical damage to him, they were all free to do as they pleased until then. There were more than a few unsettling laughs peppered around the crowd at that. Obviously there were men who already had some ideas in mind and were looking forward to enacting them.

The Prince turned on his heel, striding towards the entrance back inside the interior of the fort. As Jord had expected – and been hoping for – the Prince was apparently disinterested in actually
overseeing the proceedings now that he'd arranged them to his liking, in much the same way as he had rarely sought out the more extreme entertainments in Arles.

On his way back inside though, the Prince made a point of passing right by Jord, for whom he had a few specific words to spare. It was an order: "Stay. Watch. And remain silent."

Jord felt like his stomach had just dipped down somewhere in the vicinity of his ankles. The Prince knew exactly what Jord had been planning. Of course he did. The Prince had long since proven his intelligence and perception. So unless he wanted to disobey a direct order – and Jord knew that he would be made to sorely regret it if he did so, and Aimeric would likely suffer for it as well – Jord wasn't to interfere. But he had to remain there and bear witness for the entire time Aimeric was to be chained there. And while it was certainly late enough that those guards who weren't on duty until the morning hours would have been shortly about to settle into the barracks for the night if not for this disruption of their routine, sunrise still had to be many hours away yet.

A single minute of this would have been too long, in Jord's opinion. But hours on end of it...

Nihel was the first man to take a step forward out of the crowd. Nihel had been bedding Gael, Jord recalled, who had been among the dead at Hellay. They'd both joined the troop together at Chastillon. Jord couldn't say he knew how long the two of them had been together before that. Long enough, it seemed, that Nihel's grief was strong. And it was fresher than those who'd been close to Orlant. He obviously had no intention of waiting to claim his turn.

Aimeric was no longer wearing the full accompaniment of layers expected of a soldier, having been stripped of his armour and livery back when he was first detained. He was, however, still laced into trousers and undershirt. Nihel didn't bother with the time and effort of undoing those laces. Instead, he withdrew a blade from the sheath at his hip and set about cutting away Aimeric's clothing instead. Nihel wasn't particularly careful with the knife, Jord could tell, for more than a few visible dots and trails of red appeared on Aimeric's skin as it was roughly bared. Jord flinched along with Aimeric every time, though Jord wasn't sure whether all of those cringes coincided with cuts or whether some of them were more to do with Nihel's hands touching Aimeric's newly-naked strips of skin.

Jord's hands had been the last to touch Aimeric like that, though far more softly. It was like Nihel was overwriting all the care Jord had shown Aimeric's body with every harsh squeeze. Jord couldn't look away from it, and not just because he'd been unequivocally ordered not to.

Once Aimeric's trousers and undershirt were hanging off him in tattered strips wherever they hadn't been entirely cut away, Nihel seemed to decide that he was satisfied with his work. Jord breathed a quiet sigh of relief to see him put the knife away. He was less relieved to watch Nihel walk a crescent pattern around Aimeric's kneeling body until he arrived directly in front of Aimeric's face. Judging from the movements of his head, Aimeric seemed to have been able to follow Nihel's progress despite the blindfold stopping him from seeing anything; he was probably able to hear the heavy thump of Nihel's booted footsteps even over the suggestive calls of the crowd. So Aimeric recoiled backwards slightly when the man ended up in front of him, obviously having a fair idea what was about to be expected of him now.

"Where do you think you're going, little traitor?" Nihel sneered. "Don't want my cock in your mouth? You really sure about that? You can either get my cock nice and wet with your tongue, or it'll go up your ass dry."
There was a long moment when Aimeric's jaw remained clenched shut. Jord hated himself for thinking it, but he hoped that Aimeric would give in to that much out of self-preservation. If this couldn't be stopped, all Jord could really hope now was that Aimeric would come out of this having sustained as little damage as possible, and that meant taking the opportunity for whatever amount of preparation he was going to be allowed. Though it admittedly might be better for Aimeric's state of mind if he at least put up something of a fight from the outset. Jord couldn't be sure.

Eventually, Aimeric did open his mouth, though he did it in a way that was obviously grudging at best.

"If you even try to bite down, I'll remove your teeth with my fist, pretty boy," Nihel warned. That would go against the Prince's rules, but Jord didn't think Nihel would be worried enough about that in the heat of the moment to restrain himself. So Jord held his breath, hoping Aimeric wouldn't risk himself like that, as Nihel first pushed his cock inside Aimeric's mouth.

Not even when Jord had rarely been present for some of the more extreme performances while on duty in Arles had Jord seen a man fuck another man's mouth the way Nihel did. The sound of it was obscene, and Jord worried that Aimeric would choke and bite down by accident. Aimeric didn't do that, thankfully, but nor did he even bother closing his lips around the width of it. The whole thing bore absolutely no resemblance in any way to how Aimeric had sucked Jord's cock when he'd gone to his knees for his Captain.

Nihel withdrew his cock for long enough to slap Aimeric hard across the face, impacting the same cheek that was bruised where the Prince had clocked him with a goblet last night.

"At least give it a proper suck, you whore," Nihel said. "Or I'll make you regret it."

Aimeric put in a little bit of effort, and though it was still a much worse job than Jord knew him to be capable of, apparently it was enough to satisfy Nihel's need for Aimeric to make himself a more active participant.

Soon enough, Nihel pulled out of Aimeric's mouth and circled around behind him. He lowered himself to his knees right behind Aimeric and shoved at Aimeric's upper back until he was leaning forward, braced on his arms with his ass pushed up high in the air. Aimeric tried to squirm away while Nihel was lining himself up. Jord suspected it was mostly on instinct; logically, Aimeric had to have known it wouldn't do him any good, the same way Jord knew that bursting through the crowd and kicking Nihel away from Aimeric himself wouldn't help. Nihel grabbed Aimeric's hips harshly, not letting him get away.

The first hard thrust pushed a shocked shout from Aimeric's lips. It had obviously hurt more than he was expecting. Nihel didn't even give Aimeric a second to adjust before surging forward again, and again, despite the fact that Aimeric hadn't been stretched at all in preparation and that the spit on the cock would have been barely enough to lessen the burn of it. This wasn't like a pet performance, where it was only meant to look forced. It was the real thing.

The crowd was going wild calling out to Aimeric about how much he must like being made a real man's bitch and other variants on that trend. Jord could see Aimeric shaking his head, possibly in denial of those claims. Jord could see men all around him taking out their cocks and stroking them to hardness half in preparation for their own turn and half just because they seemed to be enjoying watching Aimeric get reamed too much not to take proper advantage of the sight.

As Nihel even further increased the speed at which his hips were snapping forward, Jord heard Aimeric make a series of sounds that were, to Jord, heart-wrenching. Jord didn't doubt that he was crying now, though the blindfold was of a dark enough material that it didn't show the tears it must
"Shut up, it can't be that bad," Nihel said. "You took the Regent's cock when you were probably half
the size you are now and loved it, didn't you? So this should be easy for you."

There was a smattering of laughter, but also disgusted noises. Jord empathised with the latter. He had
to swallow down on the taste of bile at the words, which were far more explicit than the Prince's
reference earlier.

After Nihel came – fairly quickly after he'd begun, but that was no surprise given how furiously he'd
been fucking Aimeric, and how riled up he'd been even before he'd started – Nihel said, "Look on
the bright side. The next cock will go in nice and easy now that I've opened you up and made you
nice and sloppy with my come. Say thank you to me for doing such a good job of preparing you for
the others."

Aimeric resisted. Jord knew how proud he could be. He was born in a class above most of the men
here, and likely unused to having to thank lowborn men for anything. A kick to the ribs changed his
mind, though.

"Thank you," Aimeric gritted out.

Nihel laughed, though cruelly. "I bet you'll even enjoy it now that you're all open and ready. Though
by the end of the night you'll probably be so stretched out that you'll barely even feel it anymore."

Nihel might have finished fairly quickly, but that didn't mean there was much of a respite. Once he
stepped away, tucking his cock away, his place was quickly taken by another soldier, this one
apparently from Ravenel since Jord didn't recognise him. He grabbed both of Aimeric's ass cheeks,
his thumbs pushing inwards almost far enough to touch the rim, and shoved his cock inwards
without even bothering to guide himself. He must have been half-drunk, for it took him a few tries,
but Aimeric's groan made it clear when he succeeded.

Remy, one of the men who'd made the trip south with them from Chastillon, apparently too worked
up to wait for his own chance at Aimeric's ass. He stepped forward and worked himself to
completion at Aimeric's side while the other man was still fucking Aimeric. Remy's come splashed
against Aimeric's mostly-bare back, and he let out some half-panting laugh of what sounded to Jord
like triumph.

"Doesn't look like much of an aristocrat all dirtied up like that, does he?" Remy said as he tucked
himself back into his pants. "Is this how he looked for you, Jord?"

Aimeric reacted slightly to hearing Jord's name. He knew now that Jord must have been present,
watching, Jord understood with a fresh wave of shame. Even so, Jord couldn't bring himself to
confirm his presence by responding.

The next man who couldn't hold himself off didn't content himself with coating Aimeric's back, but
instead shoved his cock into Aimeric's mouth while another cock was still thrusting into his ass. Jord
had the brief and unsolicited thought that Aimeric took the second length readily, falling into an easy
rhythm between the two men almost like it was something he was used to doing. But then he
reminded himself that nothing about this was done readily, or easily. He silently cursed at himself for
letting himself think like that for even a moment. Aimeric was just doing his best to get through this,
was all. That was what Jord wanted; for Aimeric to do whatever it took to preserve himself. Even if
started to look a little too similar to willingness for comfort after a while.

Jord hated every second of watching man after man step up to Aimeric's increasingly slumping body,
sometimes two at a time, but the worst by far was seeing Rochert eventually approach Aimeric. Rochert wasn't like that. He wasn't a rapist. But Jord remembered all the time Orlant had spent helping to dry Rochert out and keep him off the drink. Rochert had owed a lot to Orlant, and had been even more horrified than most of the men to learn that Orlant had supposedly betrayed them. Then he'd been equally gutted to realise that they'd been misled about that; that he'd been too willing to believe the worst of Orlant, and had bought into what in retrospect should have been an obvious lie. Jord suspected that taking part in this might be some kind of self-punishment for Rochert as well as making Aimeric pay for taking a friend away from him.

Rochert dragged Aimeric to his feet, heedless of the fact that Aimeric's legs were shaking under him, fatigued. As best as he could within the confines of the chains binding Aimeric's now-chafed wrists, Rochert turned Aimeric to face the majority of the crowd head-on.

"Look, he's hard," Rochert proclaimed.

The parts of Aimeric's face that weren't covered by the blindfold were red. It might have just been with the exertion of being fucked relentlessly for what must have been about three hours by then. Or it could have been with embarrassment. Because yes, with Aimeric no longer mostly curled in on himself, it was impossible to miss now. He wasn't fully erect, but his cock certainly wasn't soft either, and it wouldn't take much to get him the rest of the way there. Jord didn't know what to make of it, because he knew that sometimes men got hard from stimulation that wasn't meant to be pleasurable, or even from nothing at all. But Aimeric had never been quick to arouse, at least not with Jord.

Having shown off Aimeric's shame to the rest of the men – those who hadn't already disappeared off to sleep now that they'd already taken their pleasure – Rochert didn't just let Aimeric drop back to the ground. Instead, he made Aimeric wrap his arms around the whipping pole to hold himself up, and then stood right behind him. Rochert was slightly taller than Aimeric, so when he thrust hard inside it looked to almost lift Aimeric off his feet. Aimeric clutched harder at the pole, trying to hold himself up on the balls of his feet.

Then Rochert did what no one else so far had done: he reached around to take Aimeric's cock into his hand and started slowly stroking.

Aimeric tried to twist away from Rochert's hand as his cock further thickened from the attention. It was the only sign of struggle Aimeric had shown since early on, when he'd seemed to acknowledge that it was easier to just let it happen. Rochert kept it up, though, even once Aimeric was fully hard. He even slowed his own rhythm down. Jord could only assume that he intended to make Aimeric come before he did.

"Stop!" Aimeric ground out. It was the first word he'd said in a long while, after his tone had grown flat and uninterested, and the men had subsequently grown quickly tired of making him ask to be fucked or thank them for treating him 'the way he deserved'.

"Is that what Orlant said when you killed him?" Rochert asked, and Aimeric didn't speak again after that, clearly realising that Rochert wasn't in the mood to be reasoned with.

It drew out for far longer than any of the other soldiers. Rochert practically stopped moving at some point, just letting Aimeric do the work, thrusting back onto his cock and forward into his fist. Rochert wouldn't let Aimeric speed up, though, keeping him in check despite his far-too-obvious desperation.

Eventually, Rochert said, "If you want to come, you'll have to beg for it."

Aimeric buried his face against his own bicep. Jord suspected he might have bitten into his arm to gag himself. He still arrived at a point where even that could apparently no longer contain him,
though, for he turned his head and choked out, "Please."

Rochert finished him quickly after that, obviously satisfied that he'd proven his point, and only took a minute or so to follow himself, shoving himself hard upwards into Aimeric's ass in a way that managed to keep Aimeric's now-lax body draped against the past. Once he'd climaxed and stepped back, though, Aimeric slid down the thick wood until he was crumpled at the base of the post, looking every inch like Damianos had when he'd been whipped to the point of collapse except that his back was intact. Though apparently Aimeric, unlike Damianos, was still conscious, for his shifted slightly, trying to get his weight off his already much-abused knees. The chains clinked loudly as he moved.

"See?" Rochert said, loud enough for everyone else to hear even though he was addressing Aimeric. "The Prince was right. You're nothing but a whore, are you? Look how much you loved it."

Aimeric panted, still trying to recover. Jord couldn't see his eyes, with the blindfold covering them, but given the downturn of his lips and the way his head was hanging low, Jord would bet that he looked ashamed of having wanted it in any way. Of having asked for it without having actually been ordered to do so.

Jord watched Lazar saunter up once Rochert stalked away. Lazar had always disliked Aimeric, so it was surprising to Jord that he hadn't taken his turn earlier. He'd seemed content with lazily watching other men do so instead. But now Rochert seemed to have put an idea in his head.

It was far too soon for Aimeric to get hard again, if he could even manage to do so at all, but Lazar pronounced with utter surety that he'd make Aimeric come a second time before he was done. He seemed to like the idea of taking advantage of Aimeric's current oversensitivity in the meantime. Aimeric was too exhausted to try too hard to get away from Lazar's fingers, but what struggle he did show to get away from the sensation seemed to re-excite a lot of the men, many of whom had looked like they had been growing bored and considering taking themselves off to their beds before Rochert had introduced this new game.

Aimeric did get hard again after maybe twenty minutes. Lazar didn't bother drawing it out as Rochert had then, probably at least partly because Aimeric wasn't as hesitant about it the second time, surely knowing that he wasn't going to be allowed to stop until he'd come no matter how long he put it off. He looked to Jord's unhappy gaze like he was enthusiastic as he fucked himself forward into Lazar's hand while Lazar whispered a stream of something undoubtedly filthy into his ear. It took much less time than the build-up.

"I bet you can manage a third time, right?" Lazar said once he was done with Aimeric. "Maybe even a fourth?"

It was a challenge to the rest of the men present as much as a taunt for Aimeric's ears.

It took a long time, but they did manage exactly that between them all, though the fourth time there was no leftover evidence of Aimeric's orgasm. Unlike the earlier ones, it had been wrung out of him entirely unwilling, Jord thought. It had sounded like it had hurt as much as it had felt good. Jord knew he must be a terrible person for feeling any measure of gladness over that.

"All used up," had been what the man who'd made Aimeric come that last time had said. Jord hated the way that sounded; like Aimeric was just an object, and one that now had no purpose. At the same time, Jord also privately thought that 'used up' was an understatement judging by how Aimeric looked.

Aimeric completely sagged like a marionette with cut strings and curled in on himself after that, as if
that would protect him when sunrise must have still been an hour or so away yet. He'd mainly been restricting himself to low grunts or moans for the last few hours, but a high whimpering sound pried itself out of his throat when someone approached him then. He couldn't take it, clearly.

"It's my turn," Jord called out before he'd even had time to process the idea. But once he said it, he knew it was the only thing that made sense. Aimeric needed a break at the very least, and Jord was the only one disposed to offer him one.

"Going to have one more go for old time's sake, are you?" someone called out. Jord wasn't sure who. Jord didn't answer. He just walked forward until he was stepping around in front of Aimeric.

Carefully, he kneeled down in front of Aimeric. Aimeric must have heard him, because although the rest of his body remained still, he turned his head towards Jord. Then he opened his mouth and tilted his chin upwards, ready. He'd taken too many blows to the face for being 'too slow' by now not to react like that, Jord knew, but it still hurt Jord to see Aimeric offer himself like that, near thoughtlessly.

Jord had to force words past a sudden strangling tightness in his throat. "No. Aimeric, no. That's not – it's me."

Aimeric obviously hadn't been cognisant enough to pick out Jord's voice when he'd called out, but he recognised it now, sagging slightly. Jord took the recognition as a good sign that Aimeric hadn't mentally broken down as he seemed to have done physically at this point. Jord hoped, though, that his reaction was in relief rather than being out of disappointment that Jord too was going to join in on this travesty in any way.

"It will be over soon," Jord tried to reassure him, even though that was stretching the accepted definition of 'soon'. "I know it's terrible, but you'll get through this, and then you'll be left alone, I promise."

Jord hoped the Prince didn't make a complete liar out of him.

"Get on with it!" someone shouted. "If you're not going to fuck him, let someone else have a go."

Jord sputtered, unsure what to say. He'd had no intention of molesting Aimeric when he'd been walking over. He didn't want to violate him the way some of the others had done. But neither did he want to go back to his place and watch someone else do it.

"Might as well," Aimeric finally spoke up, his voice an unrecognisable croak. "You're just another cock to me, you know. Nothing more."

Jord jerked away, shocked.

It wasn't the first time a thought like that had crept into Jord's mind so far tonight, but it stung to have Aimeric himself voice it. Jord hoped that it wasn't true – that Aimeric was only saying it for the benefit of those listening in, or that otherwise he was just trying to protect himself by breaking ties with Jord, but honestly… Jord really couldn't say for sure anymore. He'd thought he knew Aimeric, but he'd also once thought that Aimeric was loyal to the Prince, and then that Aimeric had only betrayed the Prince because of a deeper loyalty to his family. He'd been wrong.

Maybe Jord didn't really understand Aimeric at all.

"Get on with it," was snapped again, but this time it came from Aimeric.

Better that it was Jord, who would at least be kind about it, than someone else. That was what
Aimeric was surely thinking. Could Jord really refuse that?

Jord shifted Aimeric onto his back, where he could just lie there and let Jord do all of the work. Jord wished that he could say that when he pulled his cock out it was entirely soft, but that would be a lie. After he braced himself over Aimeric's mouth and slipped the tip past Aimeric's lips, it didn't even require that much sucking from Aimeric to get it the rest of the way to hardness.

Jord would like to think that Aimeric gave him a far more thorough treatment than any of the men before him. But maybe he was biased. It was certainly a far slower occasion than the others who'd used Aimeric's mouth.

He drew it out as long as he could, wondering if he could even make it all the way to dawn without the others getting annoyed and making him relinquish Aimeric for their use while there was still time. He had the feeling that Aimeric was purposefully doing the same. It helped that Jord wasn't really one for public performances, despite it being considered normal in Vere, so the constant reminder that they were being watched by over a dozen pairs of eyes of those men who'd stuck around all night put a slight damper on his arousal, keeping him in check when otherwise he might have already come into Aimeric's mouth a while ago.

Eventually, though, it was too much for him to hold back any longer.

Aimeric swallowed it down like a –

Jord stopped that thought before it could complete. He might have been listening to people contemptuously calling Aimeric twenty or more different words for 'slut' for hours, and watched them treating him like that as well, but Jord didn't need to join in on thinking of him as a 'practised whore', even in the privacy of his own mind. Regardless of what Aimeric had done, he still deserved that much respect from Jord in particular. Or so Jord kept reminding himself.

Jord lingered as long as he could manage, but eventually he had to step to the side or otherwise he'd have been pushed away. Someone replaced him. Jord pointedly didn't look to see who. He didn't really want to know at this stage. Before he'd been taking note of who was participating, because he'd been appalled when he saw anyone who he'd thought would never do anything like that to someone who had once been counted a friend, or at least a compatriot, step up. He'd been judging them, thinking that he could never look at them the same now. But after what he'd just done, coupled with the fact that he'd just been standing idly by the whole time before that, Jord wasn't even sure that he himself was any better than the rest of them. He'd done it too, hadn't he? For a better reason than the others, he wanted to believe, but then, that was subjective, wasn't it? He didn't know what was in the other men's thoughts any more than they knew that he'd been thinking about how to spare Aimeric worse the whole way through (or almost the whole way through).

By the end, Jord was fairly certain that all of the men who were still remaining in the courtyard had come inside or on Aimeric at least once already, and many had managed to gear themselves up for a second turn as well. Jord almost couldn't differentiate who had done what any better than Aimeric likely could with his blindfold. An ongoing nightmare, like Jord had thought. But not an endless one, for it was over now.

"It's sunrise," Jord called out when the sky started to lighten. If he didn't say it, then probably no one would. He worried that they would argue the point for a moment. The sun itself was probably still half an hour from peeking above the horizon, and while they wouldn't outright defy the Prince's orders to stop then, Jord would bet that at least a few of them would be willing to interpret 'sunrise' rather less conservatively than Jord was.

But although there were disgruntled noises, no one contradicted him, thankfully. Most of them were
probably actually keen for an excuse to slip off to bed for an hour or two of sleep at this stage, Jord thought.

"Pity," said Simon, who'd just finished with Aimeric before Jord had spoken up. He reached down and slapped Aimeric right on top of the still-red marks where someone – it had all blurred together somewhat for Jord in the end, so he couldn't even recall who – had laid into Aimeric's ass until his own palm had hurt too much to continue. Aimeric jerked from the renewed sting. "Look at what a mess you are. You're going to need to clean up now that it's over, aren't you? Let me help with that."

He scooped two fingers full of the come streaked on Aimeric's skin up and fed it to Aimeric, who took it without complaint.

"Hmm," Simon said. "No, that's going to take too long, isn't it? It's already sunrise, after all. So you're just going to have to settle for a quick hose down instead."

It took Jord a second to realise what was happening, and even longer for Aimeric to react. Aimeric's mouth fell open in evident shock when he realised that the warm wet sensation on his back wasn't come this time – couldn't be, not just because Simon had just come, but because there was far too much of it as well. Even then, he didn't move. Jord expected Aimeric to finally start rebelling again, rolling away from where the stream of piss was hitting his back and his ass, which must have made the abused skin there burn.

But he just stayed where he was kneeling, letting it happen. Too exhausted to move. Or just no longer able to care, even though this was one of the more humiliating things that had happened to him all night.

Jord went to Aimeric's side afterwards, after the others had dispersed. He waited while the servants the Prince had apparently organised to unlock Aimeric's chains saw to that. The Prince had only told Jord to stay there for the duration, Jord justified. He hadn't said – or even implied – anything about what Jord should do afterwards. Jord wouldn't be going against any orders by insisting that he should be the one to escort Aimeric back to his holding cell. And there was no rule saying that Jord couldn't take him to get properly cleaned off on the way, though he didn't think that anyone else would have done that.

But Aimeric didn't seem interested in Jord's special attention.

It took a while after Jord had gently slipped the blindfold from Aimeric's face for his eyes – which were just as red and swollen from crying as Jord had suspected they would be – had had enough time to adjust so that he could make out that it was Jord who was standing beside him, waiting to help him up.

"Fuck off," Aimeric said when Jord reached out a hand to help him stand. "We don't owe each other anything. We both got what we wanted from each other, and you even got one more suck for the road. Stop pretending it was anything more than that."

It was more, though. At least, it had been for Jord. Every word out of Aimeric's mouth, and even the way Aimeric had come far harder with other men's hands on him and not even wanting to enjoy it than he had ever had with Jord, made him wonder what it had really been to Aimeric. Had he even liked his time with Jord? At all?

Jord would probably never know for sure, he realised. Aimeric didn't seem likely to tell him.

Jord was summoned to the Prince's side later that day, after Aimeric had been returned – no longer smelling of a horrible mixture of bodily fluids – to his confinement and Jord himself had been able to
bathe. Not that that had made Jord feel any cleaner.

Jord had been hoping to avoid seeing the Prince for quite a while longer. He wasn't sure how to deal with him at the moment given everything: Jord's mistake in covering for Aimeric, Jord currently holding the secret of the slave's real identity, and now this new understanding of just how cruel the Prince was willing to be with his enemies when the circumstances pressed him towards it were all weighing heavily on Jord's mind. But the Prince apparently wasn't willing to let him off that easily.

"Is Aimeric going to be left alone now?" Jord asked.

"Yes," the Prince said simply.

Jord felt like he could breathe again.

The Prince didn't apologise for his decision, or what had come of it. Of course not; he was the Prince, and didn't beg forgiveness from common soldiers, especially soldiers who had reason to be begging for his forgiveness in turn. But Jord had to believe that the Prince felt some amount of regret even so, now that he seemed to have mostly recovered his normal composure and his temper was no longer vacillating between burning hot and ice cold.

"I'm reliably told that I'll have lost your confidence," remarked the Prince. Jord didn't need to ask by whom. Apparently the Prince actually had heard and taken into account Damianos's words of caution. They just hadn't made enough of a difference at the time. "If you are unwilling to continue as part of my Guard, you should say so now so that arrangements can be made."

Jord couldn't look at Prince Laurent precisely the same way as he had when the Prince had handed Jord the Captain's badge, or even back when he'd been fifteen and first proving his mettle and his cunning. But Jord had been following him whole-heartedly for what felt like so long that he couldn't imagine doing anything else. And what was the alternative to supporting him? The Regent? He had set Aimeric on this path in the first place and probably would have stayed to watch the men use him, laughing, where at least the Prince hadn't gotten any pleasure from it. The Prince might have deeper flaws than Jord had realised – or allowed himself to realise – before, but he was still the best option for Vere by far.

"You're my Prince," Jord said.

And if it fell a little short of a similar but still somehow vastly different pronouncement that Jord had not that long ago felt in his heart, the Prince didn't need to know that.

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