The Scarf

by MianMimi

Summary

Like any respectable alpha, Stephen placed a scarf on Karl’s neck to preserve the omega’s decency. He didn’t realize doing so would bring him thinly veiled death threats. Prompt fill for the Doctor Strange kinkmeme.

Notes

Original prompt from kinkmeme:

Alpha!Stephen tries to adapt to Kamar-Taj, Kathmandu, and all the cultural differences they bring. Except that Omega!Mordo is making it harder (literally) by offering his neck.

Basically, showing/offering the neck is the western omega equivalent of wearing only a thong in public (minus the fashion crime that is wearing a thong). Mordo doesn’t know that, thinks he’s just being friendly. Of course, Stephen then gifts him a scarf/collar/necklace, subtly trying to get Mordo to just cover his damn sexy neck/glands/scent. This, to Mordo, is a courting gift (“cover your neck, others can’t smell you, you’re mine”).

And now Stephen thinks that’s all solved and done, but Mordo thinks Stephen’s courting him. Cue TAO and Wong’s shovel talk and a very confused Stephen.
It was on a particularly chilly evening when it happened.

Stephen was sitting by himself in the courtyard nibbling on a small bowl of rice and vegetables. His appetite was poor, unused to eating more than a handful a day. With an irritated sigh he turned his attention to the latest book he snatched from the library, unsuccessfully distracting himself from the truth that no one wanted anything to do with him.

And that was completely fine, he reminded himself. He was beyond this petty high school mentality. He was here to learn for himself not to make any friends or find some clique to join. Yet their heavy stares and snickering whispers began to wear him down to the point where he avoided the dining hall altogether. This was alright by him, he was used to being alone, preferred it even. It gave him more peace and quiet to study as he pleased, and to contemplate on the series of unfortunate choices he made to end up here.

Adjusting to Kamar Taj was harder than melting iron with a matchstick. It seemed like no matter what he did he found himself offending someone or disrespecting some tradition. Walking barefoot in the halls? Sacrilege of course! Unless you were in the west wing of the compound where sandals were required. Morning meditations were held separately for alphas and omegas but afternoon sessions were mingled. When he asked why he was answered with a lecture about the importance of balancing the energies given off by the various dynamics that shifted through the day.

He was expected to know ten different exceptions to the rule with every rule he learned, both written and unspoken. It all felt like a gigantic mess that everyone could make sense of except him. The thought crossed his mind that this had to be some sort of trial, a hazing period to see if he would finally break from the absurdity of it all.

“May I join you Strange?”

Stephen looked up from his half eaten meal to see Master Mordo kindly smiling down at him. He wasn’t surprised at all by this. Karl seemed to develop a habit of joining Strange whenever he could, often accompanying him during meals in a strange mutual solitude.

What he didn’t expect was for the refined master’s neck to be bare, open, exposed for anyone to sniff and scent as they pleased. And it was mere inches away from him.

“May I join you?” Mordo asked again. His warm eyes showed no shame.

The student gulped and nodded, scooting over to give as much space between them as he could. Stephen found himself staring even as Mordo took a seat beside him and cheerfully spoke of the upcoming lessons, praising him for his efforts and encouraging him to keep going.

None of what the master said actually sank into his brain. It was thoroughly distracting to see an omega’s neck being displayed like that, and even more so that the prominent bondmark could be distinctly seen. Stephen’s alpha nature suppressed a growl at the sight, a sting of jealousy zipping by when he realized the master was already taken. The jealousy quickly gave way to confusion. No self-respecting omega, especially one so clearly bonded, would be caught dead with their scent glands exposed like that.

Growing up he was taught that omegas who wore their scent glands out out were “fixing to
“scratch an itching” or “hot for a knot” as the folks in his hometown would say. The sentiment didn’t change when he moved the New York either. Even the most flirtatious and notoriously insatiable omegas would sooner be caught with their legs spread in the throes of heat than have that precious, sacred, neck out for all to scent and see.

Yet here it was. Clean, clear, groomed, smooth, and ever so sweet. The way Mordo was turning as he spoke wasn’t helping matters at all, nor the deliciously fragrant smell of an omega lacking an alpha’s touch.

Stephen found that the most intriguing part. Karl was clearly bonded but went about with no alpha scent clinging to him. Stephen swallowed and various scenarios flooded his head. What was he supposed to do about this? Was this an open invitation? A test? What if he failed? Would they cast him out?

“I didn’t realize you were bonded,” Stephen mumbled, feeling stupid even as he said it.

“Does that bother you at all?” The smile fell from Mordo’s face. He sat up and took a bite of his meal, and still he made no effort to cover up his neck.

Stephen wasn’t sure how to respond to that. Of course it bothered him. Somewhere out there was an alpha who gave Mordo that bondmark, the same alpha that would surely rip Stephen’s head off for even looking at it.

“Because it doesn’t bother me,” Mordo continued. “I’ve long since broken my bond with my former alpha. But I can see how that would trouble you. It’s not commonly seen, even here in Kamar Taj.”

“You broke a bond?” Stephen looked at him with renewed fascination. “But how? Using what method? Attempts to do so have left people either killed or permanently maimed and you….you look great!”

Mordo laughed, his bright smile returning swiftly.

“Through magic of course. It was far from easy. It was one of the most painful experiences in my life but given the chance I would gladly do it again. The new found freedom was worth every ounce of pain.”

Mordo rubbed his neck with a sigh, looking wistful as he thought of what to say next. For Stephen the simple gesture was the equivalent of someone throwing their undergarments at him. His frustration mounted, torn between lust from the sickly sweet scent and pity for Karl’s pain.

His teacher placed his hands down, allowing the scent to pour out from his unveiled neck. Stephen could feel the blood rushing all over his face and down to other, more scandalous regions. The alpha was suddenly grateful for his thick beard that covered up the heavy blush spreading through his cheeks. He adjusted the book on his lap, thankful that it was already there to cover him. He hoped that the thin robes would be enough to hide his ever growing erection, dreading the possibility of having to stand and walk once their talk was over. The last thing he wanted was to explain why he had a sizable tent between his legs.

“We nearly married,” Karl said. “I’m eternally grateful it never went through.”

“Oh?” Stephen wasn’t even sure why Karl was bringing any of this personal stuff up. Was it just some common knowledge everyone but him knew and Karl just wanted him informed? Or was this now some heavy secret he’d have to hide?

“What happened?” Stephen asked. “You got cold feet?”
Mordo gave a smile that more sad than joyous. His eyes flickered with fresh pain. Stephen immediately knew he asked too much.

“No,” Karl said after the long pause between them expired. “I just finally saw him for what he was. And I finally chose myself over what he wanted me to be.”

Karl’s fingers swept along the bondmark again, seeping a fresh wave of that sweet, spicy scent into the air. Stephen’s heart fell to the floor when those scent coated fingers brushed against his shoulder.

“Stephen, here you can recreate yourself into whoever you wish to be. Let no one tell you otherwise.”

Mordo’s touch was going to get him evicted. He just knew it. He knew it was forbidden to have relationships between teachers and students in any culture. Yet here was Mordo, doing everything he could to seduce him.

“I learned that too many times to count and I hope that you’ll find a home here just as I have,” Mordo’s gentle voice continued. “I know you’re having a very hard time—”

“I bet you do,” Stephen chuckled awkwardly as sweat pooled at the base of his neck.

“Well it is rather evident,” Mordo’s eyes narrowed a bit in confusion. “Despite your progress you still struggle. And apart from that the other students haven’t been so welcoming. I apologize for that. They’re simply unaccustomed to you. I’ll do what I can to assure them.”

At long last Mordo pulled his hand away from Stephen’s shoulder.

“You better finish your meal,” Mordo said. He looked up at the clouds gathering above them. “Looks like we’ll be having some rain.”

“Does that mean classes are cancelled?” Stephen asked hopefully. He just wanted to run back to his little shack of a room, jerk himself off, and forget this interaction ever occurred.

“Classes are never cancelled here,” Mordo said. “Only adjusted. I believe your next one will take place in the library.”

Stephen’s breath hitched as Mordo’s hand squeezed his.

“Trust me Stephen, it’ll get better. The first few months are always the hardest,” Mordo leaned in with that beautiful, fragrant neck right there for the taking. “But I’ll be here to help see you through it. I have faith in—”

“Thank you Master Mordo!” Stephen stumbled out of his seat. He panicked like a man seeing death running towards him. “It was um...yeah...great talking to you about...things.”

Mordo’s lively eyes looked at him with amusement. Then those same eyes started to wander down. In a fit of desperate impulse to keep Mordo from noticing the tell tale bump forming just for him, Stephen snatched the scarf around his own neck and flung it over his teacher’s shoulders.

“God, it’s getting cold!” Stephen laughed nervously, his voice hitched higher than usual. He adjusted his tattered red scarf around Mordo, trying to cover up the deliciously offensive neck, “Getting chilly out here! Better stay warm.”

His shaking hands trembled so violently he gave up on making a secure knot and settled for
draping the fabric around Mordo’s neck. Their faces were close, both their scents hanging and mingling in the air between them. Stephen swore he heard what might have been a whimper. But that couldn’t be. Mordo would never-

“Oh my god! I….I did it. I fucking did it.”

Stephen spun around when he heard the loud gasp from across the courtyard. A student stood there with her jaw wide open, books slipping from her hands as she gawked at them. Her companion nearly jumped from his own skin with sheer joy, hollering like a mad man as he sprinted down the hall screaming.

“I did it! I won! Hand over your rupees. I won the god-damn bet! Where are my rupees?”

Mordo jumped up, his dark fingers gripping the scarf as students poured out from their lunch break. Several of them cursed, digging into their pockets to surrender their lost wagers. Others were giggling and nodding, whispering behind their hands. A few of them, alphas and betas, glared at Stephen as if he’d snapped their relics right in front of them.

“Stephen?”

The bewildered American turned back to look at his teacher. Mordo’s face softened, his doe eyes fixed on nothing else but Stephen.

“Are you sure?” Mordo’s fingers gently touched the rough fabric.

“Yeah, you should wear it.” Stephen said. “With all those alphas here now? You should definitely wear it.”

To Stephen’s shock his teacher’s eyes started to water and the crowds watching them grew ever louder.

“Master Mordo did I do something--”

“Karl!”

The crowd quickly dispersed as The Ancient One cut through the courtyard. Her golden robes billowed elegantly as she rushed towards them, standing between alpha and omega. She gave Stephen such a threatening glare that he stumbled back.

“Everyone back to your classes. This instant-”

“But Master Wong--”

“Give me that!” Wong snatched a list from one of the students who promptly took off. It contained the record of names, dates, and the amounts of money that they gambled on. In a second the list turned to ash in the librarian’s hands. “Everyone leave. Now! I won’t be saying it again.”

“What the hell is happening? Are we being attacked? Is it a monster?” Stephen’s eyes bloomed.

“Is it a...a demon?”

Wong growled in reply, the annoyance clear and cutting in his stare.

“Oh heavens Karl,” The Ancient One cupped Mordo’s face before taking the scarf in her hands. “Did you accept?”

Mordo nodded with hesitation, as if he were afraid of his own admission.
“Are you pregnant?” The Ancient One asked him. She cast a dark glance at Stephen for a brief moment.

“What? Heavens no,” Mordo said with a weak smile. “Sorry, but I fear your grandchildren will have to wait a little longer.”

“Karl when I said I wished for you to find happiness I meant for you to take your time,” The Ancient One said. “I didn’t expect you to find someone so….soon.”

“Can someone please explain to me what’s happening?” Stephen cut in. “Am I in trouble?”

The Ancient One took a deep breath and whispered something to Karl. The omega nodded and removed the scarf from his neck, handing it to her.

“Go get some rest,” The Ancient One said with a soft pat on Karl’s cheek. ‘I’ll sort this out. As for you, Mr. Strange-’

“Doctor,”

“I believe we must have a serious discussion,” The Ancient One said. “Master Wong? Care to join us?”

Before Stephen could protest the sorceress snapped her fingers. He felt his body melting into another plane, the air huffing right out of him as he was smacked full force into god knows what dimension. All he could do was shut his eyes and hope that when they opened he’d still be in one recognizable piece.

The first thing he was aware of was the smell of strawberries. The second was the warmth hitting his face and the cold sweat dripping down the back of his neck. He opened his eyes slowly, heart pounding so hard he felt the pulse on his feet. He found himself perched on a lovely antique divan, though the hard stares that greeted him made it feel more like an electric chair.

"What are your intentions?” Wong looked at him with cold dead eyes.

Stephen was utterly, thoroughly, confused, like a pampered pet chicken that suddenly found itself on the butcher's block.

"His intentions seem rather clear to me,” The Ancient One said. Her voice was ever calm and soft, deceptively so. Stephen had seen enough to know she could fling him into the middle of space on an impulse. "But where are my manners? Welcome to my garden. I’m rather proud of it. It took a few tries but I believe I achieved the look I wanted.”

“Was the look indecision? That what you were going for?” Stephen gulped and looked around them, his hands trembling faster than usual as he blurted out the unfiltered comeback. “Cause I honestly don’t understand the aesthetic…”

The entire thing, from the soil, water, and climate had to be held up by magic. There was no other way for it to exist otherwise. Roses, lilies, tulips, orchids, and bonsais littered the place in an explosion of colors, and on the far end of the garden a large evergreen brushed boughs with a coconut tree. There was a path by a little pond filled with koi that changed colors as they swirled, their scales glittering so brightly it looked like sunbeams piercing through the water. A pure white peacock pranced along the ferns, its regal crown bouncing against roses. A heavy flurry of monarch butterflies danced erratically above them, startling Stephen enough for him to duck. The sounds of coos and chirping songbirds chimed in a strangely cool breeze. Through it all the sweet
smell of unseen strawberries hung thick in the air.

Stephen could feel his anxiety overwhelming him, sparking through his nerves like an unwanted shock. He looked around, hoping for witnesses less these two decided to kill him, throw him out, or turn himself into some sort of monster as punishment for something he did wrong.

Not that any witnesses would help him anyway. He learned quickly that the librarian and the one they called Sorceress Supreme were not ones to question. If they actually did try to harm him the most likely reaction would be to pull up a chair and pass around snacks. A pot of tea was steaming before them, simple snacks set aside. It all remained untouched. Stephen wondered if any of it was enchanted or poisoned, making up his mind on the spot to not touch anything unless the other two did first.

"Oh stop it Strange," The Ancient One gave a soft sigh. Her thin, pale lips curved a little as she began to pour out some tea for him. "If we wanted to harm you it would have happened already. Besides, we don't attack unless threatened first."

"Then why do I feel like you two are up to something?"

"Us?" Wong kept his gaze steady even as he slid cookies onto Stephen's plate. "You're the one disrupting things Strange, and as you should have figured out by now we like to keep things in order."

The librarian pulled out a butter knife and spread strawberry preserves on a slab of warm biscuits. When the food actually appeared was lost to Stephen. A china set clanked in front of him when he blinked. He looked up at Wong, half expecting another thing to materialize from nothing.

“And the disruption you caused has greatly disturbed us.”

Stephen didn't know how he did it but Wong had a peculiar talent of making anything look lethal, whether it be a butter knife, a late fee, or a simple red scarf. Which, he figured, was the whole reason he was now the honored guest in the tensest tea party in the world. The dreaded scarf was hanging on an empty chair next to the Ancient One. It might as well have been dripping with blood by how Wong confronted him with it.

"I saw that scarf on Master Mordo's neck," Wong said, offering the biscuit to Stephen who promptly took it out of respect and in the next moment set it to the side out of paranoia. “As did a third of Kamar Taj.”

"A very serious thing indeed given how quickly this all transpired," The Ancient One said.

"He accepted it as soon as I gave it," Stephen said. "I don't blame him either. Omegas shouldn't be walking around with their necks exposed like that. It's dangerous."

The Ancient One stared at him, blinking as if trying to figure out if the words he spoke were real. Wong scoffed and rolled his eyes, muttering something about Westerners always thinking their decorum was universal. The sorceresses hid her laughter behind her pale, elegant hand. A blush blossomed through her face as she shook her head demurely at Stephen.

"You offered him your scarf, covered in your scent and you thought that was appropriate?" The Ancient One ended her laughter with a tired sigh. “Goodness I do forget how different things are now…”

"Well it was way more appropriate than letting him parade his neck like that," Stephen said. His irritation was quickly rising. "I was trying to protect him."
Wong let out something between a snort and a gag.

"Rest assured Strange, Master Mordo does not need your protection from any big bad alphas that would sweep him off," Wong said, looking at Strange as if he was the world's greatest idiot for even implying such a thing. "As you well know he defended both of you when you were getting yourself beaten by those ruffians in the streets."

"Ruffians?" Stephen's face scrunched. "They weren't just ruffians Wong they were a little more dangerous than that."

"Yes, a danger Karl disposed of in what was it...four moves?" Wong said.

"Three, I taught him that sequence myself," The Ancient One corrected. "He's used it several times. The dear thing has come such a long way. I'm very proud of him."

Stephen had half the mind to finally ask her what the hell her relationship was to Mordo, and Wong as well. One look and it was evident none of the three were related yet the way they spoke of Karl suggested something of a familial nature. He wrongly assumed that Wong was Karl's alpha at first. The two were often seen together, closed off in their little corners chatting quietly during meals and in between classes like old friends. Yet they did nothing to indicate intimacy beyond friendship, at least from what Stephen saw. He also noted that the two never retired to the same room at night, solidifying his guess that whoever left that bond mark on Karl's neck was not the overprotective librarian.

"I think I need some answers," Stephen said. "Like why am I being questioned like some kind of-
"

"Suitor?" Wong said, taking a heavy gulp of tea.

"Isn't that your intent? To court our Karl?"

"Our Karl?" Stephen cocked his head to the side, blue eyes narrowing as he tried to figure out where they got that idea from. "Umm...I admit I had a very wild time during school but I never fucked a teacher and I'm not starting now. Just...how did you two even come to that conclusion? I never so much as winked at him or said anything remotely flirtatious."

"You skipped all that catapulted yourself right into giving gifs. That scarf doesn't lie Strange," Wong said. "It was found around Mordo's neck."

"You're acting like I strangled him with it!"

"You might as well have," The Ancient One said. "He was trying so hard to hide his happiness from me. But if there’s one truth about Karl it’s that the poor child can never hide his joy. He wears his happiness right on his sleeve. Makes it easier for others to take and ruin. Yet you, for all you lack, you’ve impressed him somehow."

The Ancient One and Wong looked at each other, silently debating as they sipped on their tea. It drove Stephen mad, wondering what they could be saying about him when he was right there.

"Look, it was just a scarf. Where I'm from omegas can't just prance around with their necks exposed. They might as well be wearing nothing but um...undergarments...."

The word Stephen wanted to say was thong but figured it would be wise to spare the two that image.

"Heavens," The Ancient One held her head on the palm of her hand. "How could I have
forgotten? That's the common belief in the West isn't it?"

"In America at least," Wong said. "It's a bit ridiculous if you think about it. They always harp on omega equality and progressiveness but one little slip of that neck, one little sniff of a scent and it's a huge scandal that needs to be literally covered up."

"That exposed neck is just asking for attention," Stephen finished with a hard glare at Wong. "It's a very overt, aggressive way where I'm from for omegas to show that...you know...they got an itch they want scratched."

"Is that how they're saying it over there these days?" Wong sighed.

"Yes," Stephen said. "Yes it is. That's exactly what it means over there and the only way I know it to be. I didn't know by giving him a scarf it would cause all this. I thought I was being polite. It's like giving someone a shirt or fucking pants to cover themselves up."

"Maybe in America but here in Kamar Taj what you did was tantamount to getting on one knee and giving him a ring," The Ancient One said. "If that's still the fashionable way to propose that is."

Stephen stared at the Ancient One with his mouth gaping in shock.

"Wait, wait, wait! No," he held his trembling hands up. "That is definitely not what I was going for. I was just trying to be polite like any respectable alpha would."

He took a deep breath from sheer relief and laughed, his deep voice crackling into a nervous chuckle. So that's what got these two in a twist. It must have been comical to them then, and everyone who witnessed it. A new struggling newcomer in their sacred little magic cult proposing to his teacher. He felt foolish but incredibly relieved that the matter had been cleared up and settled. That was, until he wiped the relieved tears from his eyes to see Wong glaring at him with angrier than before.

"So you think courting Karl is a joke?"

Stephen's jaw dropped again but this time no words came out. It seemed like regardless of what he said or did he would always be at fault. He could give Wong a million dollars, half the world, and all the books mankind has ever known and he'd bet his soul that the librarian would still find a way to find insult in it.

"No, absolutely not. That's not what I meant," Stephen said. "Karl's everything an alpha could want in an omega. He's accomplished, strong, very independant, and really gorgeous-"

"Keep going, there's more to praise." The Ancient One leaned forward and took another sip of her tea. "I mean it Strange."

"Look, I'm not trying to disrupt the Master Mordo fan club over here. I just gave the scarf to be nice. For once," Stephen said. "And now I'm thinking maybe it would have been easier to just let him walk around like that."

"Karl was walking around like that for you," Wong’s butter knife landed in the strawberry jar sitting dangerously close to Stephen. "Here it's just a way to signify that you're welcomed and accepted. An omega showing their neck is a sign of vulnerability is it not? We can all agree on that."

"Yeah," Stephen nodded. "It's incredibly vulnerable for them."
"Karl exposing his neck with you around is a signal to the others here that you're harmless," Wong said. "A silent invitation for them to get to know you. He wasn't being some harlot bearing out his scent for all the world to sniff. He was merely vouching for you, showing everyone here that you literally won't bite."

Stephen felt the blood vanishing from his face, pooling into his heart so heavily it fell through the ground.

"Unfortunately whether you intended to or not giving him that scarf sent a signal to everyone here that you've claimed him as your own," The Ancient One said as she lifted the scarf up. "Putting this over his neck means that you don't wish for anyone else to see him like that."

"But there's tons of others wearing scarves, collars, and whatever else around their necks over here!"

"The damn difference is that you placed your alpha scented scarf over his neck in public. He wore your scent Strange, even if it was for a few moments," Wong said. "The alphas who have been pursuing him are very upset about it. They've been trying to court Karl since his last alpha left him. You come in here looking like you do-

"Hey!"

"Barely knowing anything about our world yet you manage to get a scarf on him with barely any effort at all," Wong continued. "They're crying foul."

"Well let them. It's not what I meant at all," Stephen said. "I'll have a talk with Karl. I have to sort this out I can't have him thinking that I...well that I see him like that."

"Don't you?" The Ancient One asked. "Even a little? Or have my old eyes deceived me?"

Stephen’s lips tightened. He wasn’t as good at concealing his feelings as he thought. Much like everything else in his life, even his ability to keep a crush secret was crumbling.

"I'm afraid that no matter what I say I'm gonna be in trouble."

"All I ask for is your honesty," The Sorceress said, "Knowing what you do now would you still have done it? Would you pursue a courtship with him?"

"I don't stand a chance with him," Stephen said. "It's way too early and I'm a student with nothing."

"Unfortunately, you must have something," Wong pointed at the scarf. "For Karl to accept this."

Stephen honestly didn’t know what it could be. Perhaps back when he was a wealthy, prestigious surgeon would have bragged about everything he could offer someone like Karl. With all of it stripped away he felt incredibly naked, his faults exposed and raw as any wound. The loss of his money, influence, and hands left him to face himself as he truly was. And it was with horror that when he looked at his reflection each day, he saw a man with very little to love.

How Karl saw anything there was a miracle. And it was a miracle that happened each time he laughed at Stephen’s poorly timed jokes. Or smiled at every feeble attempt to conjure basic spells. Even the way Karl would sigh softly as Stephen drew near was a wonder.

"Alright, I admit I admire him. But come on, who wouldn’t? He's exceptionally kind. It's really easy to like someone with that much compassion in them," Stephen answered.
"Opposites attract perhaps?" Wong muttered under his breath.

Stephen frowned and stared at him. He never truly got along with other alphas, his competitive nature made it impossible to. The way Wong was acting right now only ignited that edge, making him feel uneasy and challenged.

"We just wanted to clarify your intentions and for you to understand what you're getting into." The Ancient One said. She reached out and placed her hand over Stephen's. For a moment Stephen thought she would fling him right over the compound's walls never to be seen again.

"Yes Strange. It seems that Karl's been very taken with your accidental proposal. If you wish to pursue him then we shall not stop you. It's clear he approves."

Stephen gulped. There now laid a semi-blessing that sounded more like a veiled threat.

"But we also won't make it easy," Wong added. "If you think passing these classes are difficult you'll find that winning our approval will be harder."

"I don't think Karl needs your approval for anything," Stephen replied. "He can do whatever he wants. And if that involves wearing my scarf then so be it right?"

The Ancient One smiled and tucked her fingers under Stephen's chin.

"Excellent answer. Careful Strange, you're beginning to grow on me."

Stephen wasn't sure if that was a good or bad thing.

"Well I still don't like you," Wong said, crossing his arms. "But I must admit that since you arrived Karl has smiled again and I can't disregard that."

Wong appeared pained and annoyed by the admission. He sighed, shook his head, and appeared at war with himself. Stephen knew the look well. It was the look of a man trying to restrain himself.

"Best of luck Strange," The Ancient One said. "Treat Karl well in all the ways you can think of. I'll know if you don't."

She stood up to leave, looking down at him with her sharp, crystalline eyes.

"You wouldn't want to see me when someone harms that sweet boy," the sorceress smiled and flicked her fan out. "It becomes a very unpleasant sight. Things can get very violent very fast. Mangled, turned inside out, dismembered. It's such a dreadful chore to clean."

Stephen gulped, unsure if this was a joke or a true threat. He decided on the later and nodded solemnly.

"You gonna threaten me too?" Stephen eyed Wong, already knowing the answer.

"Naturally," came the expected reply. "You could say I have a very vested interest in Karl's happiness."

"I had a hunch," Stephen said. "But I'm not exactly sure what your relationship with him even is. You're not his alpha and seem content with that. You haven't snarled or tried to fight me."

"I'm Karl's oldest friend," Wong answered. "I helped integrate him into our community here when he first arrived, not so different from how he's trying to include you now. I've seen what he's gone
through all these years. Nearly twenty Strange. Two decades of friendship, broken hearts, a failed bond, and a sizable body count by his former alpha. I've seen him at his worst and I've helped him through it all. I didn't go through all that trouble just to see him be hurt all over again."

"I won't," Stephen said.

"Only because I'll ensure it," Wong said. "Good day Strange. Court him if you wish but know that I'll be watching and ready."

"Ready for what?"

"You'll know when it happens," Wong said. "Treat him well."

“And we will treat you in kind, for Karl’s sake,” The Ancient One said. “But harm him and you’ll be seeing the insides of your own skull.”

She waved her fan to the side, as she did the gentle little breeze turned into a swift wind that blew the ferns and flowers back to reveal a wooden door.

“I believe we’ve discussed enough for one day,” The Ancient One said. “Go on and speak with Karl. Remember our kind reminders. The door is enchanted and shall lead you right where you need to be.”

Stephen stood, wondering if the wooden door was actually just some trap he would fall into, sucked into a deep abyss never to be heard from again. His shaking fingers gathered the red scarf, lifting the fabric to his nose. It wasn’t just his anymore but also Karl’s, their scents mingling. It was the hint of greater things to come, a sample of their future should things turn in their favor. He closed his eyes, allowing himself to imagine it for a moment.

When he opened his eyes again he found himself staring at the wooden door. His throat felt so tight and dry. He turned around, wanting to ask the two sorcerers about Karl’s former alpha. Instead he found nothing but empty chairs and a clear table, with a songbird perching on a single teacup. He placed the scarf over his shoulders and gently pressed the door open with his arm.

The door opened with a slight creak into an unfamiliar room. The design of the windows and furniture indicated it was part of Kamar Taj, but definitely somewhere he’d never been to. Once both feet crossed the threshold he felt the door fading away, leaving him in dimly lit room. It was night out, a stark difference from the noon he was whisked away from. How long had he been trapped in that absurd garden?

A soft, tender voice hummed from behind another closed door. Candlelight peeked through the cracks, and the sound of splashing water accompanied the gentle singing.

Stephen took a deep breath as the door opened to reveal a freshly bathed Karl. Water still glistened off his dark skin as he tried to dry off with a towel, his eyes downcast. Stephen’s breath hitched as the naked body moved forward, drops of water rolling down to the cold wooden floor.

Their eyes met like fire striking ice. The air between them was tense, tight as the skin on their necks as their scents began to mingle on impulse. It was reaction beyond their control, and for that moment both were lost in the haze.

“Hey,” Stephen’s voice sounded foreign even to his own ears. It felt stretched and thinned out, strangled at the sight of the omega before him.

“Stephen,” Karl shivered in his place. His hands still gripped the towel, wrinkling the fabric roughly. For a second Stephen thought the omega would cover himself with it, or yell at him to
leave, or retreat back into the washroom.

Instead, the towel fell at Karl’s feet, leaving every part of him exposed.

Stephen’s breath caught like a bubble in his throat as Karl stepped closer to him, their eyes never leaving the other.

“Alpha,” Karl said. Their bodies were a kiss apart now. The hard earthy scent of an alpha melted with the sweet, velvet soft fragrance of an omega desperate to be held.

Stephen’s erratic heart danced madly, wild with want, and full of affection. Karl reached up and slipped the red scarf off Stephen. For the alpha he might as well have taken that frantically beating heart from his aching chest. The scarf, now saturated in Stephen’s scent, covered Karl’s shoulders. In a few moments the omega’s scent glands would catch the new scent and mingle them together, a temporary sign that he was taken.

The sight of Karl wearing nothing but that scarf, looking at him with eyes so full of trust and hope was sheer beauty. It was worth any trial this strange, dangerous place could ever put him through.

“What’s next?” Stephen whispered, suddenly realizing that he had no idea how to proceed with this whirlwind courtship. Or if Karl even wanted him to.

He was answered by warm lips meeting his.

Somethings were truly universal. A longing glance across a courtyard, a smile to a joke no one else thought funny, and the spark behind eyes that bloomed whenever it saw the one they loved. And above all, a tender kiss in the dim light.

Stephen pulled back, a smile crossing his weary face as he cupped Karl’s cheek, his shaking thumb brushing over the dimple.

“We’re moving too fast for courtship,” Stephen laughed softly. “Your pseudo mom and overprotective friend are gonna kill me-“

Karl kissed him again, and again, and again, deeper and more earnestly, his desire unmistakeable.

The omega pulled the scarf over Stephen’s shoulders so they both shared it. The alpha took a deep breath, his sense filled with nothing but Karl. His arms, trembling and feeble, wrapped around his omega, pulling their bodies together.

“They may very well try,” Karl whispered, kissing Stephen’s neck and jaw, his nose brushing against the comforting scent of their embrace. “But I promise you Stephen...I’ll be damn worth it.”

And as he was with nearly everything else, Karl Mordo was absolutely right.

The End

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