

Happy Anniversary

Chapter 3

After the young married couple had finished their mutual shower, they had both dressed themselves and headed off to do their respective things for the day. While the two of them were still looking for the jobs that would land them proper careers, they did still have full-time work. Jordan was an assistant manager at a nearby convenience store, and he was paid fairly well for it; Abigail was working at a youth hostel, as part of her intern training, and like her husband, she was paid well enough. Together, they were stable enough to support their current lifestyle, which, for now, was all they asked for.

Thankfully, today was a day off for Jordan, so he had decided to wake up early for exercise. Years ago, as part of his exercise with Abby, they had decided to join a small tae kwon do class, also as a means of self-defense in case they were involved in any fights. Sadly, Abigail's training prevented her from joining him a lot of the time, but she still managed to work in at least an hour of flexing and yoga in her morning routine before she had to leave for work.

Jordan packed up a bag to load his tae kwon do uniform into it. Dressing in a simple white shirt and knee-length pants, he grabbed his phone, wallet, keys and sunglasses, as well as several water bottles. Thankfully, the athletic centre where they trained was a short walk from where they lived, so he didn't need to catch transport or take the car. In any case, he appreciated the exercise, and in this heat, it would be nice to jog and feel the breeze against his fur.

Kissing his wife goodbye for the day, promising to come back in a few hours after his exercise, he exited the apartment, taking the stairs from the third floor down to the ground. Upon leaving the entrance/exit of the building, he donned his shades, protecting his sensitive eyes from the glare of the early morning sun. Even at such an early time of day, the glare was noticeably harsh; one of the downsides of the mid-Spring climate, he supposed.

Jordan took a moment to admire the location they had managed to find a home in: their apartment block was situated rather close to the lake with a great view from their apartment window. Opposite that side of the block was a beautiful park area, with a smaller lake nestled in the centre of it all. Whichever path you took, you'd have a grand time just walking, enjoying the scenery, an activity Jordan enjoyed immensely; and while he didn't particularly enjoy swimming, it never stopped him from being entranced by the sparkling body of water that lay before him as he gazed out the window most sunsets.

Today, the energetic fox had elected to take the park path to the centre; it was not a straight path to his destination, but he was in the mood for some pretty scenery, and the calming environment would give him time in which to think and reflect. He often used his exercise periods as times where he could simply let his mind wander and contemplate his life, and sometimes just random thoughts that he indulged in the privacy of his own time.

As he jogged, Jordan thought about what he and his wife had discussed the night prior. Their anniversary was only a mere seven days away from now, and as each day passed, he felt a small growing anxiety. He was unsure about whether or not he'd be able to provide a good celebration gift to Abigail. After all the different places they'd looked over, and subsequently passed over, was starting to grate against his patience, and Abigail's as well. Neither one of them was agitated enough to become violent,

thankfully, but whenever they talked about it, there was a sense that it would always end in disappointment.

He knew he shouldn't be over-worrying about this, but he couldn't help it. Their first year of marriage was coming to a finish, and he wanted it to be a good ending. He felt it would be symbolic, rounding off their first year together as best as possible; he didn't want to think what having a bad, or uneventful, anniversary would do to them. Abigail was the one woman he loved more than anything or anyone else, and he couldn't bear the thought of letting her down, no matter how understanding she could be about it. He *had* to find something for them to do together.

His musings had distracted him for so long that he almost ran head-first into the brick walls of the training centre. He caught himself at the last moment, snapped out of his reverie as he realised his location. Stepping into the air-conditioned, wide practice area helped to clear his mind, if only by a small amount. He removed his sunglasses, surveying the room: a handful of people were here just as early as he was, including...

"HEY! How's it hanging, Foxhole?!"

He turned to the source of shouting, ears flattening against his head slightly. The loud voice belonged to a large, blue-haired wolf male. He was wearing an enormous grin on his face, and he was already garbed in the class's traditional white uniform. He ran up to Jordan, throwing his arm around the fox's shoulder, giving him a hard pat on the back. Jordan let out a short sigh.

"Yes, hello, Danny", he replied wearily. He was still a little drained from the sunlight, and his extensive thinking prior. Danny was his old friend from his university days, a ruffian who seemed to have no real concept of subtlety or personal space. Truth be told, the only reason the two of them had become friends to begin with was due to Danny's insistence after Jordan had be co-assigned with him on a project for his classes. Since then, they had kept in contact, though lately it was mostly through tae kwon do lessons.

"It has been WAY too long since I've seen you, Foxhole!" Danny often used that nickname for Jordan; it wasn't a particularly terrible one, but it did make him feel a slight discomfort, as if it was a strange jab at his sexuality. Danny gave a faux gasp, feigning shock. "Don't tell me you've been neglecting me?? OH, HOW WILL I CONTINUE NOW??"

"I'm sure you'll live, Dan", Jordan replied in a deadpan fashion. He removed the wolf's arm from his shoulder, walking to the changing rooms to dress in his uniform. He heard Danny's voice from behind him, still in the same fake aghast tone. "Yes, BUT AT WHAT COST?! MY LIFE IS RUINED!" Jordan imagined his friend was on his knees at the moment.

It took a short time for Jordan to change into his white robes, tying his belt around his waist. He had been a black belt for the last 2 years now, so his training here was simply a way for him to keep up his outside activities, as well as a way to help train newer members, should they join up.

After beginning their warm-up stretching, the class was split in paired sparring. Jordan chose to partner up with Danny, since he was always a nice challenge; oftentimes the two had participated in some friendly match-ups, and each time, neither one had yielded until they had exhausted themselves. Apart from that, it would give Jordan a chance to try and talk to his friend about his dilemma. Though Danny wasn't an expert on love and marital issues, he needed to discuss this with someone other than his wife.

Once the free sparring was over, the class was granted a short break. Jordan took this chance to chat with Danny. He grabbed his water bottles from his backpack, grabbing one for Danny as well. He tossed it to the bright-haired wolf, slumping himself next to him, his back pressed against the wall.

It was Dan who spoke first. "So..." He paused to take a swig of water. "Ahhhhh, that's better...SO. You and the missus, I heard you're nearly a year gone hitched, eh?" Dan gave Jordan a playful punch on his arm. "Man, I don't get how you could manage that! You'd think after a while, you'd move on to someone else."

Jordan winced at the accusation. His friend, as he and many others had known, was not known for his commitment to relationships; his longest running "flings" had barely lasted a month, so it was unsurprising to see a new woman by his arm every other week. He let his friend's distasteful jab slide, however: He knew it was Danny's way of showing affection, and admiration, of how the two of them had stuck by each other for so long.

"Yes, well, unlike *some* carnivores I know, there's a much nicer joy in monogamy than there is in finding a new...what's the term you use, again? Ah, yes. A new 'sheila' every time you go out to strip clubs."

"Okay, first of all, matey, it's 'she-devil'; lord knows the biters are the best ones to shag. Second, it's not *just* strip clubs. Bars, gyms, beaches, weddings..." He ticked off each one on his fingers. "Any of these places are the best places to meet chicks. Believe me; I've done one from each, heh heh."

Jordan let out an amused sigh. He knew his friend was by no means a user of women; if anything, he was a pretty honest man. However, his good looks, charm, and, as hearsay had mentioned, "a cock that would put a horse to shame", had landed him dozens of partners in the time he and Jordan had been friends. Surprisingly, each new fling he came across, he treated with a fair amount of respect and attention, almost to the point where it would seem to be a long-term thing. Sadly, Danny often grew bored of each woman that he picked up after a few weeks, opting to find a new mate straight after.

Oddly enough, none of his ex-partners bore grudges towards him for it. Danny often picked women who understood his need for sexual release, but also shared his view that 'one is never enough'. Because of this, some of his previous partners had still kept in contact, if only usually as booty calls if he ever had the inkling to "release the tension".

"Yeah, weddings are a good place to find a partner...especially if you're marrying them", Jordan responded sarcastically.

"Rub it in, Foxhole, I'm enjoying my freedom."

Nervously, Jordan decided to broach the subject on his mind. As desperate as this might have seemed, he chose to ask Danny anyway. "Listen, Dan.....I need some advice....about Abby."

Danny turned to him, raising an eyebrow. "OH? The married man...The man who has *successfully* bagged a lady for life—"

"I get it, Dan..."

"—is asking ME, the womaniser, and the fuck-toy of dozens...for marital advice?" Danny let out a loud and hearty laugh, startling some of the other students.

Jordan sighed. "I don't need advice...I just need...Look. I'm worried about my anniversary. I want to make it *truly* special for Abby, and for both of us. But I've got no idea how to do that!" He lightly banged his head against the wall behind him.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned to see Danny, a slightly concerned look on his face. "Hey, hey, mate. Chill. You'll get nowhere pounding a fox-head-shaped hole in the wall. Now, from what I'm hearing, YOU...need a way to come together better, am...I...RIGHT?" He punctuated each of the last words with a tap of his finger on Jordan's nose.

Jordan shook his head, ruffling his snout. "In essence, yeah. This *is* a way for us to grow closer as a married couple, but..."

He was swiftly silenced as Danny's hand covered his mouth, surprising the fox. "Say no more, my friend. Your romance hero has arrived." Again, the same cocky grin appeared on Dan's face.

"I'm sorry...YOU? Dan, no offense, but...You're not exactly well-versed in marriage."

"Ah! But I AM well-versed in sex."

"Since when?"

"Since always, now pay attention. A few years back, this really hot bird...Glenda, or Brenda...might have been Stacy...Anyway! This hot bird I once dated, she was into all this touchy-feely crap, and a lot of weird stuff, too. Wasn't my concern, I figured, though; she could feel like she was on the moon so long as she was a good fuck."

"Danny", Jordan interrupted, exasperated. "Please tell me this is going somewhere; I don't think I want to hear another of your sexcapades."

"Just listen, I'll get to the good part. Anyway, this chick, she knew this great place, ritzy little hotel. I tell you, man. You want closeness? Those classy fuckers take it to a WHOLE new level I swear, that place...Ohhh, I haven't come so hard in a long while thanks to those—"

"THANK YOU DANNY. I think there was a point to this?"

"Point BEING, if you'd let me finish, is that this place? It'll solve your problems, SNAP, done. And...It's cheap."

This offer was sounding very tempting to Jordan as it was described to him. A hotel that promised a new level of intimacy, and cheap to boot? If he could find it, maybe he and Abigail wouldn't have to worry about their anniversary woes anymore. In a way, however, he was almost unnerved: Danny was something of a sex maniac, so his suggestion of a place like that was almost too good to be true. There must have been a catch of some sort.

"This hotel...sounds perfect for us to visit. What's wrong with it?" Jordan asked, scepticism lining his words.

"Well...Okay, don't freak or anything...But these guys?" Danny leaned in close to Jordan. "They've got some...pretty weird ideas about being close, man. Nothing dangerous, though, fuck, no! Just...If you're gonna go, be sure you and your missus are willing to get into it...I'm talking DEEP, man. But trust me, you'll enjoy it if you let yourself."

Jordan was about to ask what he meant by that, but the class was reconvening now. During the last of the exercises, he couldn't help but imagine what Danny had meant by it. Weird ideas? What exactly did that entail? He would have to ask later.

Unfortunately, by the time the lessons were over, Danny was nowhere to be seen. He must have slipped off early; he tended to be the first out in most things. As Jordan was changing back into his casual attire, he slapped himself. *Shit!* He thought. *I didn't ask the name of the place!* He cursed himself for his stupidity, and was about to phone Dan when he noticed something.

Sticking out of one of the pockets of his backpack was a small piece of paper. It hadn't been there when he had come in; someone must have slipped it in when he wasn't looking. He grabbed the slip, unfolding it slowly. The writing on the paper...It was Dan's, he'd recognise it anywhere. On it was written two words:

The Pantheon.