

The last bell of the day rang, heralding the start of the weekend. Everyone was talking about what they were going to be doing: going to the movies, work, Tim McCarthy's party, playing games, hanging out with friends, and other activities high school kids did. Aside from finishing the rest of the cabbages he had left to plant, there was not much more Alex had planned. He'd probably go see if the neighbors needed some yard work done; the Moores' lawn was looking a little overgrown and he knew the aging couple had trouble maintaining it. If he used a push-mower he could probably get a good workout out of it, but that could all wait until later because he needed to head to the gym right now.

The school's general-purpose gym was deserted save for the ancient, rickety machines that inhabited it. The sports teams had their own, updated facility for their exclusive use. So apart from certain gym classes, Alex often found himself the only inhabitant in the workout room after school. He figured he could get an hour's workout in before making the long walk home, which would be a great cool-down. He'd been coming here all week, trying to avoid encountering a certain husky, who he was sure wouldn't be found in the school's gym apart from required activities.

Alex took off his black jacket and changed into a pair of black shorts in the locker room before went into the weight room and approached the punching bag. He liked warming up with a few punches to get pumped up, plus, it doubled as a great stress relief to be able to pound something as hard as he could. He started out slow at first, a couple of light quick punches that only made the large sack of sand bounce a little. It wasn't long before he was getting into it and giving it everything he's got. The bag looked like it was filled with Mexican jumping beans as it hopped and swayed with each heavy punch it took. Loud thuds reverberated around the room as if someone was playing the drums, the punching bag's chain rattling from the force of the punches. Alex was working up a sweat now, the not-so-well ventilated room making it worse. The bull gave one last good punch which almost sent the bag parallel to the floor.

"I'm glad I'm not that thing right now."

The sudden voice shocked Alex as he turned to see who was talking to him. He caught sight of a black and white figure standing in the doorway before he was knocked down by the punching bag seeking its revenge. The bull was sitting on the floor in a slight daze, wondering what just happened, before he remembered someone was there with him, now at his side.

"Whoa, are you okay? I didn't mean to startle you."

"I'm fine."

"Do you need help getting up?"

"No."

David stepped back to give Alex room to get to his hooves. The bull was a little winded from the workout and being punched back by the bag. Alex took a moment to catch his breath while he wondered how David had managed to track him here.

"What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you. I didn't see you walk home."

"How did you find me?"

"Uh... well... a, um, friend said he saw someone that looked like you heading to the gym. He said it was a huge bull, and you're the only one that comes to mind."

Alex snorted at the response. "Do you usually have your friends spy on me?"

"What?! No, no. I just asked them to keep an eye out for you because, well, I... I wanted to talk to you."

"About?"

"Well, um... How about we go outside to get some fresh air and talk?"

"...Fine."

The pair went through an exit in the back of the gym and found themselves near the back of the school near a small parking lot. The cool, fresh air was a welcomed relief to the stuffiness of the gym; the light breeze helped cool Alex off, but his shirt was still damp with sweat and clinging to his body.

Alex leaned up against a wall while David situated himself in front of the bull. The husky didn't speak for a while, opting to fiddle with his tail held in his paws and avoided Alex's gaze. The situation was starting to become awkward and Alex was getting a little impatient. He wanted to get this done with and leave so there wouldn't be any more trouble. He let out a snort, which seemed to startle David into finally looking up at him.

"So I, uh, I haven't seen you that much this week."

"I've been busy."

"Oh, I see. Well, I was just wondering how you were doing and all."

"Fine."

"That's good."

David couldn't stop nervously fiddling with the tip of his tail, which had managed to stay curled all the way to the front of him without him having to hold it. He was trying to think of a way to approach the subject. Alex wasn't helping much with his short, one-sided answers making it hard to keep a conversation. There was only one way to get this over with quickly and he took a deep breath to calm himself.

"I've, uh, kind of gotten the feeling that... that you've been avoiding me. I'm sorry if I did something wrong," David apologized, his ears dropped and he dipped his head.

The site of the disheartened dog made Alex feel... guilt. He hadn't done anything to David to deserve an apology, so *why was the husky apologizing?* If anything Alex thought he should be saying sorry for

bringing trouble to the little canine, though it was sort of the dog's fault for hanging around a ruffian like him. Avoiding David seemed like the most logical solution he could think of to stop from hurting the husky even more; if he was the cause of the canids' big argument, what better way for them to stop fighting than to remove the cause. But now, David was here looking like a puppy that had been scolded, all because of what he did, or didn't do. Alex sighed and rubbed his forehead; this was getting way too complicated for him.

"It's not your fault. It's mine."

"But you didn't do anything wrong."

"You and your fox friend are fighting because of me."

"Oh, that... You weren't the cause of it, though. It was just a misunderstanding between us."

"Still, it was about me."

"Yeah, but we've talked things out and made up."

"That's good."

"I'm sorry if we made you feel like you were the cause of all of it. Is that why you were avoiding me?"

"I didn't want to cause any more trouble."

"Well, you don't have to worry about it anymore," David said with a small smile on his face. He hesitated before speaking again. He looked visibly worried as the smile faded, and he began fiddling with his tail again. "I was hoping that maybe, if you still want to, that maybe we could still be... friends?"

Fffrreh-end... that word was practically foreign to Alex. He'd heard of it, heard it tossed around before, but never used it himself or had anyone use about him. There might have been a point in the past when he had one or two *friends*. He remembered playing at some park with a horse and tiger when he was a kid, and then there was that bunny he'd play with in middle school when Alex's parents went to that blue house, that bunny moved though, just like that horse and tiger.

Now, there was just him. Who wants to be friends with an angry, short tempered, large, imposing bully of a bull? *"No one! That's who,"* Alex thought to himself. He was his only friend and he didn't really need anyone else; they would just be a bother. And yet, here was this chubby, wimpy-looking husky, who used to quiver just from looking at him, that wanted to be his *"friend"*.

The wait for a response felt like an eternity to David. He tried to prepare himself beforehand for the worst case scenario where Alex would say no and to leave him alone. David could hear his heart starting to beat faster as his ears began to droop and were on their way to pointing straight down. The silence from the bull made him think his worst case scenario was about to become reality.

"... Sure."

It took the husky a moment to register what the bull just said, but once it hit him, David's mood changed almost instantly. He couldn't stop the smile that spread across his muzzle or his tail from wagging up a storm. Alex even appeared to be relieved, the bull's tail was simply swaying back and forth instead of its usual whipping fashion.

David hoped that the stressful tension wouldn't return with what he was about to do next. He knew it had to be done if he wanted to keep both Tim and Alex as friends and not have any awkward tension between the three of them. David took a couple of steps towards the parking lot and signaled to a lone car parked to the side.

Alex watched as a fox got out of a BMW that he hadn't noticed was sitting in the corner of the lot. It had to be David's fox friend and he wondered why the vulpin was here. David went over to Tim, and they started talking a bit; but Alex couldn't pick up on what they were saying.

Tim looked over at the bull standing there in the shadow of the building and took a big gulp. He was nervous about approaching and talking to the large bovine, but if David could do it, he could too. David had told Tim that he and Alex had worked everything out and not to worry, which is the one thing Tim was doing right now. Alex didn't pummel David to a pulp while they were hashing it out. In fact, the bull hardly moved at all, but then again David wasn't apologizing for insulting the guy. Tim told himself that, if David was his friend, he would give Alex a chance also.

Tim took a couple of hesitant steps forward before he turned around and looked to David for reassurance and possibly safety. David simply motioned him to go on alone; he didn't want to stand in the middle of their conversation after all.

Meanwhile, Alex was watching the scared fox make his way closer as if he was walking the plank; all the while the husky in the background gestured for him to proceed, reassuring the doomed victim that everything would be okay.

"Hi Alex."

"Hi."

"I... I just wanted to come over and, well... just say that, I... I'm sorry."

Again, everyone was apologizing to him and Alex didn't know why.

"What for?"

"Well it's just, that... I wasn't very nice to you when I found out David was hanging out with you and said some bad things about you that I shouldn't have. I just wanted to apologize for that and hope that, maybe, we can start over." Tim extended his paw out, hoping that he wouldn't be left hanging.

Alex was still a little confused by what just happened and was trying to piece together what was going on. He looked past the fox to David with a confused look on his face. All he saw was the husky looking on, happily wagging his tail. Apparently, the fox was one of the many furs that jumped to conclusions

and talked behind his back about him; and now the fox was standing in front of him, hoping for an acceptance to his apology. Alex looked back at Tim and his extended black paw for a few seconds before deciding.

“Sure,” Alex said, engulfing Tim’s paw in his own.

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“Did you tell David where you saw Alex at?”

“Yes, but why are we still here? I’m getting hungry.”

“Just wait and get down; we don’t want to be seen.”

Stacy pulled on Justin’s tail to get him under cover. The pair of lions were staking out the exit by the school gym behind one of those “Danger – High Voltage – Keep Away” large, green utility boxes. It was awhile before they saw two furs walk out of the exit. Stacy told Justin to hush and keep quiet even though he wasn’t making a sound.

It was Alex and David, and they were talking. The crouching lions couldn’t hear what they were saying this far away but it had to be an awkward conversation from the looks of the two. They could tell David was nervous by the way he was fiddling with his tail, and Alex was looking somewhat impatient and disinterested.

“What did he say?”

“SSHHH! I can’t hear from here either.”

“David looks sad about something.”

“Just hold on a second. Give them time to talk.”

Sure enough, she was right. After a few more moments and a long pause in the conversation, they saw David was looking much happier. The dog’s tail was wagging, and Justin even thought he could make out a smile on David’s muzzle. David turned away from Alex, and the two lions quickly ducked out of sight, thinking they might have been caught. Instead, they heard the sound of a car door closing and poked their heads back out to see a familiar fox approaching David from a car parked on the other end of the concrete lot.

“What’s Tim doing there?”

“Let’s just wait and see.”

Justin obeyed and went back to his voyeurism of the now-threesome with his girlfriend by his side. Tim was approaching Alex hesitantly, occasionally glancing back at David as if doing so provided the fox with the courage to stand up to the large bull. Eventually, Tim made it within speaking distance of Alex and, seeing that he was not lying on the ground by now, started talking to the bovine. It was a one-sided

conversation, they saw, as Tim was doing all the talking and Alex didn't open his maw once. The two watched as Tim extended his black, gloved paw out towards Alex and waited there for the bull to decide what to do. They saw Alex just standing there, looking around as if the action was something foreign to him. For a moment, Justin thought Alex was going to walk away and not accept whatever Tim's offered paw meant, but he saw the opposite of that. Alex shook Tim's paw after some consideration, which must have been nerve wracking for Tim because his tail was stiff as a board until then.

"EEP!" A squeal of excitement escaped Stacy.

"Keep it down or they will find us."

"It looks like they all made up!"

"Why are you so happy? It's not like you planned this."

"I'll just let you go on believing that."

Justin looked over at the crouching lioness to his right, a toothy grin spread across her muzzle, as she happily flicked her ears. He wondered if his girlfriend was really devious enough to pull off such a feat.

Stacy was overjoyed at what she saw and had to cover her mouth to stifle her squeals.

"HEY! YOU CAN COME OUT! WE KNOW YOU'RE THERE!" a voice shouted in the distance.

Stacy looked at Justin and gestured for him to calm down and stay hidden, which was more directed at herself than him.

"WE CAN SEE YOUR TAIL!" the voice shouted again.

Stacy looked to her side. In all the excitement, she forgot to grab her tail; which was flicking about happily in the open. She looked over and Justin, who had his tongue sticking out at her.

"Guess the jig's up."

They both rose up from their hiding spot with paws in the air as they walked out. Justin had to jog to keep up with Stacy who was soon giddily bouncing over to the trio.

"Why am I not surprised to find you two here?" Tim said.

"It figures it would be you guys," David said.

"We just wanted to see what you three were up to and to meet your new friend," Stacy said through a smile.

"Oh, right. Alex, this is-

Before David could say anything else, Stacy jumped in and energetically introduced herself.

"Hello! I'm Stacy Henderson, and this here is Justin Matthews."

"Hi," Justin chimed in.

"Hey," Alex said as he gave a small wave.

This was enough of an opening for Stacy to quickly maneuver her way in for a hug. Alex was completely taken aback by this and stood in shock as the feline tried to wrap her arms around him.

Stacy: "It's so great to have you as our friend."

Justin: "Easy now, Stacy; you just met him."

David: "Hey, whoa, hold on."

Tim: "What the-"

Stacy: "Mmmhhh, he is as beefy as he looks."

Justin: "Hey! What about me?"

Tim: "I can give you a hug, too, if you want."

David: *LOL* "Knock it off you guys."

Stacy: "So what are we going to do tonight?"

Tim: "How about a movie?"

Justin: "Sounds good, what about food?"

Alex was still recovering from the sudden shock of being hugged by a stranger and was now staring dumbfounded at the group of furs chatting away. In a matter of minutes he had gone from having no friends to being David's friend and then gaining three others in the process. Now, they were talking about all the things they were going to do together. It was a bit overwhelming for the bull. Alex just stood there trying to soak it all in and thought to himself, *"What have I gotten myself into?"*

♦

End the Chapter Here

Is the rest really needed?

Post as a mini chapter?

Alex slapped the alarm with his paw to shut off the annoying sound the device was making. He groggily got out of bed, knowing that he couldn't spend a couple more minutes lying down or he would be late for school. The weekend was a blur to him as he tried to recover from the hectic past few days. He had never felt this tired before, not even after a workout or plowing the field. He was so exhausted last night that when he got home went straight to bed and as soon as his head hit the pillow, he was out cold. He wasn't use to this kind of activity. It was more mentally-exhausting than anything else, and he was kind of glad that it was Monday. Monday always slowed things down, and he was looking forward to the placid pace of the weekdays.

A yawn escaped his maw as he stretched his arms, rolling his shoulders to work out the stiffness. The clock read 5:00 A.M. He still had an hour before he had to leave for school. He liked to give himself plenty of time to get ready, because he knew he wasn't much of a morning fur even though he woke up before the crack of dawn most days.

The blue truck drove lazily towards the edge of the suburbs surrounding the school, the red LED numbers on the radio display read 5:53 as Alex and his mom made their way through town. His mom drops him off at the intersection she has to take to head to work and where the turn for the school is. It was a straight shot to the school for Alex, which was only about a few miles away from that point. He didn't mind the walk in the morning, and being dropped off at the edge of the neighborhood prevented others from seeing him being dropped off at school by his mom.

"So, I hardly saw you this weekend," Alex's mom said to break the silence and hopefully satisfy her curiosity.

Alex gave an ear flick towards his mom when he heard her speak. "Yeah, I was been busy," Alex said before pausing. He was debating if he should just get it over with and tell her because she was just going to keep up the questions anyway. "I was out hanging with David and his friends."

"Oh," she said, flicking her ears at that last part, "did you have fun?"

"Yeah."

She wanted to push for more details, but she knew her son could be quite stubborn; something he got from his father.

"We went out to watch a movie and catch a bite to eat."

She had to stop herself from turning her head and staring at her son after hearing him talk. Instead, she managed to just swivel her ears to better listen to him. "That's nice. What movie did you guys see?"

"It was that action movie about the president being a vampire slayer."

"I saw the previews for that. It looked... interesting. Did you like it?"

"It was okay."

She wondered if she should try her luck with more questions. "Where did you guys go out to eat afterwards?"

"That Asian noodle shop next to the theater."

"I've seen that place; driven by it a couple of times. It looks nice. You should invite them down to the diner next time though." She couldn't help but toss that in, just as a suggestion. Her answer came as a snort from her son and she decided not to push her luck anymore.

She pulled off to the side of the road as the truck came to a stop and Alex hopped out.

"Alright, have a good day at school. I'll be home late, but there should be some leftovers still in the fridge."

"Alright, have a nice day."

"Bye dear, I love you," she said as Alex waved goodbye, and she continued on her way to work.

The leaves on the trees were already beginning to change colors. Different shades of brown, orange, and yellow tainted the lively green landscape as summer succumbed to fall. There were already a couple of leaves on the ground that crackled and crunched under Alex's step as he made his way to school. Fall was settling in nicely; the air was cool and refreshing, though Alex still wore his black jacket just to be on the safe side.

Alex was surprised he got away with such little interrogation from his mom about the weekend. He really had been busy and hadn't even begun to tell her all that he did in the span of two days and three nights. He had indeed watched a movie and went out to eat with David and his friends, whom Alex still hesitated to call his also, but that was just on Friday night. He was still able to finish planting all of his crops on Saturday, and just in time too, before he was whisked away to go out shopping at the mall; a place he rarely visited and actively avoided. He didn't see the big draw in it and why furs spent hours in the crowded place, but that is exactly what he did Saturday and then again on Sunday but at a different mall. He found the whole experience exhausting, but that could also be because of the hard work he did planting the crops and mowing his and the neighbors' lawns beforehand. Usually, he was able to rest right after, but he didn't get to do that until they got done shopping.

The extra couple of hours of sleep from crashing in bed early last night did help him to recover, and he found the leisurely walk to school invigorating.

Alex shoved his way through the crowded entrance to get into the school. He never understood why furs liked to gather around the doorway, blocking it, and then give you dirty looks when you walk through them like you just rudely interrupted their personal space.

His first class today was biology, one of the few classes that he found interesting and was not failing in. The teacher was a lively goat that may be a little too enthusiastic, but she still managed to keep things interesting enough that Alex stayed awake during class, most of the time. They had just finished a lesson

of developmental biology and were going to start on biodiversity and finish up the semester with ecology. Alex always found the interaction and workings of life interesting and even thought of perusing a career as a scientist if he ever could get that far.

The bell for school to start rang, and all the furs waiting outside started to file in. Alex was rounding the corner to the hallway that lead to the science wing where his class was, when he saw some wolf guy harassing a bunny girl at her locker. Alex was pretty sure her outfit violated some school policy. She had on a pair of short-short jeans and a tight pink shirt that showed plenty of cleavage for anyone who just happened to glance her way. The attire contrasted brightly against her slightly fluffy snow white fur. Alex probably had more material in just his shirt than she had in her entire outfit and wondered how girls could wear something like that; the weather's nice but not that nice. Alex couldn't really judge others on their fashion though when his was nothing to talk about, but the popped collar of the wolf's green shirt and his gelled headfur made it easy to stereotype the guy as one of those preppy tools. The wolf must be failing English or something because he apparently didn't understand what the words 'no', 'stop it', and 'leave me alone' meant. He was continually insisting that she stop acting like that and go out with him to some friend's place after school. Alex normally wouldn't mess with another fur's personal life and love affairs, but he didn't like that the douchebag couldn't understand that the bunny didn't want to go out with him. So, as Alex was walking past the duo, he shifted his weight slightly and bumped the wolf with his shoulder. Wolf found himself on the floor after slamming against the locker, completely caught by surprise.

"Oh my god! Are you okay?" The bunny girl dropped down to the wolf, rubbing his shoulder. "Why would you do that, dick?" she yelled at Alex.

"Watch where you're going, asshole!" the wolf said from his seated position.

Alex balled his paw in anger and glared at the new, caring pair of love-birds below. They seemed to back down when they saw it was him. Alex just continued walking to class, making his way past spectators as they murmured things about him. It's like she completely forgot the guy was harassing her, and now she is on the floor crooning over him. If anything, the wolf guy should probably be thanking him now instead of insulting him. Alex wondered if there is a biology lesson that can explain the social interactions of high school students.

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Tim and David arrived at school and waited near the entrance where they meet their usual group of early morning friends. Stacy and one of the other cheerleaders, were talking about how someone messed up on one of the routines last game while the badger couple were commenting on all the historical inaccuracies of the fictional movie about the president moonlighting as a vampire slayer. The conversation ended up turning into a debate about who was the hottest vampire when Stacy and her jaguar friend decided to toss their two cents into the conversation. David didn't think any of the vampires in the movie looked that good; he was just happy they didn't sparkle in the sunlight.

Jennie came walking over from another crowd of friends, sure to bring us the latest news that had been buzzing around the school. "Hey gals... and Mark." David gave her an inquisitive stare, complete with the raised brow on one side. "And David." He wagged his curly tail and put on a smile just to tease her.

"So what's up Jennie?" Tim asked.

"Well... the word on online is that you guys were spotted at the mall this weekend" Jennie said pointing out the culprits she was talking about.

"So were we, but spotting a group of high schoolers at the mall is hardly anything to post about," the badger girl commented wondering where Jennie was going at.

The raccoon always liked to draw things out and add drama whenever possible.

"Yes, but they weren't with just anyone," Jennie stopped at that, waiting for them to guess.

"Who? Was it someone famous?" the other badger asked looking at Stacy, Tim, and David.

"Nope," Jennie cut Tim off before he could get a word out.

"Alright, just tell us already," the jaguar said, wanting to put an end to the guessing game early.

But Jennie wasn't done and had them right in her paws, "It was Alex."

David's ears flung up at the mention of the name.

"That doesn't really help much," the jaguar noted, knowing the masked fur was trying to add some dramatic flair.

This time it was Stacy who cut someone off. "Alex Wyatt, you know that big bull. He went to watch the movie and came to the mall with us." Stacy couldn't help but crack a small smile as she knew she took away the best part from Jennie.

The raccoon didn't hide the glare she gave the lioness for ruining her fun. Though, that didn't spoil her mood for too long because she saw she had caught the attention of the other party whose ears were now at the raccoon's attention.

David didn't think who he went to the mall with would generate any type of gossip and didn't see the big deal in it. If they just got to know Alex, they'd see he isn't a bad guy. Apparently, Tim thought so too as he told Jennie that he sees her all the time at the mall with her friends. That made David's tail wag for real that time.

"Yeah, but I don't go with Alex Wyatt. You've heard what that big bull has done. I'd be too scared to be anywhere near him," she said with a fake touch of worry and concern.

"Well if you treated me like that, I'd be a cold, mean bitch to you too," David stepped into the conversation.

Just then, the bell rang, granting them access to the school and leaving David with the last word. They waved goodbye to each other as they went to their first period. David saw Jennie quickly move to another group of furs, probably to spread more gossip to anyone who would listen.