

Chapter Three

Blue's Clues

Hunter stared at the page of figures in front of him, one of many in the two inch thick textbook laid open at the study table. The fennec had been attempting to read the same paragraph for the past several minutes, but for some reason was unable to process the meaning of the words.

At least, he consoled himself, he was actually trying. To his left, Jack was smirking at the screen of his laptop as he browsed through YouTube, the sound of the videos just barely audible in the earbuds lodged in his ears over the noise of the buzzing overhead light. Malissa was on her phone, the text document on her own laptop untended as she browsed through whatever media app she had opened.

Hard at work, or hardly working?

This mantra repeated itself a few times in Hunter's head, further stymying his attempts at regaining concentration. Their exam was in two days, and only Hunter appeared worried about it. Malissa had already expressed her desire to get a B in the class and nothing more, while Jack, Hunter was sure, was banking on his elevated homework score to keep him adrift. An elevated homework score, that was the result of copious copying of Hunter's own work.

The fennec was sure that the professor was well aware of this not-so-ethical exchange, but did not care enough to address it. After all, cheating on the exams was by near impossible and was the proper demonstration of who really grasped the content.

But that was not what was keeping Hunter's mind off task.

The previous evening, during his own meanderings on internet video entertainment, he had stumbled upon a review of children's shows that struck his interest. Most notably, his favorite show as a child had been Blue's Clues, and seeing

the friendly face of the blue canine had tickled something in his brain that caused him to click on the video.

One video was all that it took, and before he knew it he had spent several hours watching clips and even a few full episodes of the show and feeling downright giddy. Although he was not aware of it until he had finally decided to go to bed, his eyelids drooping telling him that it was very much time to call it, he had been completely worry free in those hours. No thoughts of assignments, classes, social obligations, club meetings, nothing. The sense of freedom and elation that came with such a leaving of his own life had been blissful, and had caused him to feel a little strange.

He had not been able to fully parse what that experience had been, although it certainly helped him sleep better without having intrusive thoughts to badger him before his dreams. Even though, as he stared at the textbook page with his friends around him, apparently unstressed by the looming exam date, he found his thoughts returning to the plots of the cartoon episodes from the previous evening.

“Hmmm hmmm... Hmmm hmm... Hmmm hmm...”

“Found a blue paw print now, did we?”

“Huh?”

Hunter looked up, his eyes wide and innocent as he looked from Jack to Malissa. It was Jack that had spoken, his tone wry and lips curled in amusement as he stared quizzically at Hunter. A slew of emotions ran through the fennec fox’s brain, first and foremost embarrassment.

“Uhh...”

He responded intelligently, scrambling for an explanation before realizing that saying the truth would probably be easiest.

After all... He told himself. I'm certainly not the only college student who watches cartoons for nostalgic purposes...

"I might have stayed up last night watching Blues Clues on Youtube..."

He admitted sheepishly, glancing from Malissa to Jack with a growing smile on his muzzle.

"Hey, I used to watch that as a kid too."

Malissa responded, her eyes sparkling even as her whiskers twitched. Jack's response was less enthusiastic.

"I'm hangin' out with a bunch of babies."

In perfect synchrony, Hunter and Malissa rounded on Jack indignantly and both began to speak at the same time.

"Really? You've never revisited a kid's show you used to watch as a kid?"

"How can you disrespect Blue like that man?"

The weasel held up his paws in defeat, smiling nervously as he saw the ferocity with which both of his friends were speaking to him.

"Whoa, whoa guys take it easy. I'm just kidding, I watched my fair share of Blues Clues back in the day. I guess I'd just find it kind of boring now is all."

Malissa turned to Hunter, reaching her paw over to place it on top of his own as she spoke in a condescending tone.

"I don't think Jack found any of Blue's Clues when he was a pup, Hunter."

It was the weasel's turn to be indignant, much to the shared amusement of Malissa and Hunter as he responded.

“Oh come on, they were bright blue and obvious.”

“Which makes it only more embarrassing for you for not being able to spot them.”

Malissa replied dryly, clearly enjoying the edge Hunter and she had over Jack in this situation Hunter held back his own reply, contenting himself to stand by as witness to Jack and Malissa’s friendly bantering. As he pretended to resume reading through the text in front of him, his mind wandered back his feelings the previous evening.

He had not quite remembered the show being as good as it was, though he barely remembered any of it at all from when he had been a kit. It had been uncanny, the blank state his mind had been in and even the occasional childish giggle that had escaped his muzzle at one of Steve’s quips.

A frown formed itself on his brow as he thought further on it, hoping that he appeared as though he were concentrating on the education material as opposed to why he was enjoying kit media so much. A second later, he had made his decision, without looking up from his textbook he spoke in a flat, clear tone.

“My apartment, Blues Clues marathon, now.”

He looked up, meeting Jack’s and Malissa’s steady gaze. Malissa nodded slowly, after which Jack’s eyes widened and he nodded as well. The three of them were getting absolutely nothing productive done in the library, so why not actually do something mindless for a bit was what Hunter was suggesting. The sound of chairs scraping against hardwood was heard amongst a chorus of backpack zippers being opened and closed. A minute later, Hunter’s tail was the last thing out the door of the library study room as the group made their way toward his flat.

After stopping by a convenience store along the way to load up on snacks, the gang had made their way up the three flights of stairs up to Hunter's place. Having had guests before, he enjoyed the excited expressions on his friend's muzzle as they saw his large collection of beanbag chairs.

"Yo you've got *the* set up."

Jack whistled, turning around and allowing his light body to flop down onto one of the large cushions.

"I'll say."

Malissa added, settling herself down and reaching for the remote sitting on the coffee table. Hunter was about to follow suit, when he noticed Jack's eyes wandering over to the ornate box his aunt had left him. He met the weasel's inquisitive look, shrugging as he answered his friend's question before he could voice it.

"Inheritance, heirloom, from Egypt, and I'm forbidden to sell it."

Jack motioned expectantly with a paw.

"Well, open it."

"Thanks for asking so nicely."

Hunter replied sarcastically, but he moved over to retrieve the container. After all, this was about as much use as this trinket was going to get. Heaving it off of the floor with a grunt, he set it on the coffee table as both Jack and Malissa sidled over next to him. Reaching for the lid, he tried to open it but found that it refused to budge.

"What..."

He tried again, but found that the lid remained stubbornly closed.

“Nice dude.”

Jack said, snorting to himself as Hunter gave him a look.

“It did open, you know, there’s like a brooch or something inside. Opals and gold and stuff. I might need to get insurance on it...”

Hunter said, after which Malissa added.

“And find someone with a crowbar, pity to break the box though.”

Hunter rolled his eyes and heaved the box down underneath the coffee table once more.

“Probably needs oil for the hinges or something. The ice cream’s gonna melt, get the show going.”

Their interest having dissipated, the three college students eagerly turned their attention to the entertainment and sweet snacks at hand as they looked forward to a wholly unproductive weekday afternoon.