

Chapter Four

Exam Day

Hunter bolted straight upright in his bed, his chest heaving as he panted to catch his breath. He could feel the back of his pajama shirt was slick from his sweat, not unusual for him after having a stressful night's dream.

Even as the vestiges of the dream seeped out of his paws like so much running water, several stark details remained in his mind's eye that caused him a sense of simple confusion.

He remembered colors, primary and in abundance in the rooms and items around him that had appeared stark in contrast and dazzlingly present. It was as if he were seeing them for the first time, bright and almost overwhelming in their brilliance that had been predominantly present in the environment around him.

That, and the incredible sensation of being much smaller than he normally was. Fennec foxes were normally a bit diminutive when compared to the majority of other anthropomorphic species, even other fox species. He was not, however, his normal XS t-shirt size in this dream. He recalled seeing a teddy bear plushie, almost as big as him sitting in the corner of his...

He thought for a moment, trying but not too hard to recall where exactly he had been in the dream.

A crib... I was... In a crib...?

Another detail came back to him, the one that caused his stomach to churn and a strange, almost pleasant sensation of self-consciousness coming over him as he thought about it.

He had been wearing a diaper.

Hunter remembered pulling back the soft, velvet blanket that had been covering him and looking down at the brightly colored, plastic undergarment he was snugly garbed in. The fennec recalled how comfortable it had felt, swaddling his midsection and giving him a sense of security that he had found oddly comforting. Not only that, but he recalled an almost euphoric sense of relief when he had inadvertently found himself piddling inside of it.

Having no other place to go, as the confines of the crib were as equally confusing to navigate as they were to escape, he had ultimately arrived at the conclusion that he had no choice other than to use the article of clothing for its intended purpose.

Hunter felt a cold prick of sweat at the back of his neck as a sudden panic came over him. Even as he had in the dream, the fennec ripped off the blanket covering him and looked down between his legs dreading the worse.

The back of the little fox's shirt was not the only thing that was wet. To his horror, he saw a distinct wet mark darkening the front of his pajama pants, some of which had dribbled down to discolor his mattress cover as well.

What!?

Hunter stared, his muzzle agape at the sight as his mind raced to figure out an explanation. The most obvious of which had been that while he was peeing himself in his dream, his real self must have mirrored that action causing him to wet the bed.

Hoping to get a grip, Hunter glanced over at the alarm clock on his bedside to see what time it was.

6:32 A.M.

Hunter took in a long breath, and then released it just as slowly. Normally, he was not much of an early riser. Given the flexibility in his college class schedule he was able to sleep in much later than he had had the opportunity to back in high school. Still, this was early even by that standard. Blearily, he glanced around his room to find his

phone intending to check his calendar. Before he even unlocked its screen, it dawned on him what day it was.

Right... The test is today...

Hunter returned his attention to his sodden bed sheets, his mind turning to the fact that he would likely have to make a visit to the laundry room of his apartment complex that morning before both his clothes and bed started to smell like fox pee.

As if I did not have enough to worry about today...

He thought glumly to himself, deciding that it would be for the best to put this worry aside for the time being and focus his schedule on giving himself a sense of preparation for the upcoming exam, which would surmise a whopping 25% of his final grade in the class.

As the wet contents of his pajama pants were just starting to feel clammy on the fur between his legs, Hunter got out of bed and promptly stripped himself naked until he was just standing in his fur. Gathering up the bedsheet and blanket off of his bed, he stuffed them unceremoniously into his laundry basket before heading towards his kitchen to prepare himself breakfast.

He cracked eggs into a pan, he tried his best to shift his thoughts of the strange dream and unwelcome awakening to the facts and figures he would be manipulating for the upcoming exam. It took him a moment to realize that he wanted to pass the exam as much for his own GPA as to please his professors' confidence in him as a student of mathematics.

Hunter allowed himself a small smile of bemusement as he thought to himself while adding pepper to his scrambled eggs.

Huh... I guess that polar bear's heart isn't as icy as his external disposition...

The classroom was as quiet as it had ever been, with only the sound of pencils scratching against paper and the occasional heavy breath that followed the turning of a page to reveal a new Calculus conundrum. Hunter could sense the tangible atmosphere of stress in the air, which felt doubly as pungent around Jack next to him who Hunter could sense was not having a very good time.

The exam only consisted of eight problems, distributed one on each page of the exam. Hunter knew the professor had carefully chosen to be as fair and as challenging as the amount of content they had learned that semester so far would allow. The first half of the exam had felt trivial to him, and with that came a confidence that caused him to feel a little less stressed about the ordeal than his fellow peers around him.

As he worked, doing his best to keep his penmanship as neat and orderly as possible knowing that that would earn the meticulous professor's brownie points, his mind could not help but wander back to that morning's events. It troubled him, but not in the way that he would have expected it to trouble him. Something about the helpless, vulnerable nature of being comfortably positioned in a crib, surrounded by friendly, plush stuffed animals, and wearing little else than a t-shirt and a diaper made him feel a little strange.

There was an allure to it, he realized, boxing in his answer to the problem as he moved on to the next puzzle. Something in the back of his mind told him that such a comfort, though clearly unattainable due to his age, was a reality that part of him wanted to be in. Lost in his thoughts, Hunter could not help but dwell on the strange sensation of having a diaper swaddled around his waist. He recalled the tail tape, well positioned and snugly attached above his tail holding the diaper up so that it hugged his bottom properly.

Hunter stared at the page in front of him, coming to a sudden realization that he had been daydreaming in the middle of an exam. Momentarily panicked, he glanced up at the clock and felt his stomach twist. Five minutes had elapsed during which he had done nothing except stare uncomprehending at the figures in front of him.

He caught the eye of his professor, who raised an inquisitive eyebrow at him telling him he had noticed the fox's lapse in concentration.

Hunter turned his attention back to the paper in front of him, trying his best to shrug off the fantasies that he had been entertaining as he returned himself to the task at hand.

Still though, as he went from focused to reflexively writing down his steps for problem solving, he never really truly abandoned the fantasy he had been entertaining. Several times, he had to redo parts of his problem solving, wearing the eraser down on his pencil as he did so. To his dismay, he had erased so hard at one point that he tore a bit of the exam paper.

Sloppy.

He chastised himself, this time redoubling his efforts as he turned the packet to its last page. The fennec stared at the problem in front of him, his lapses in concentration compounding as he realized that he was at a loss for how to solve it. Something told him that the material covered that would have allowed him to solve it had been covered recently, and with the latest distractions that had been coming more prevalent in his daily schedule he was unsure of how to proceed.

Hunter bit his lip, hoping to rely on his problem-solving skills to suss out how exactly to approach it. He glanced up at the clock, noting that less than ten minutes were left. Several of the other students were getting up to hand in their paper, some appearing more confident than others as they delivered straight into the polar bears large, black soled paws.

The fennec felt himself beginning to panic a little bit, distracted by the sound of shuffling paws across the linoleum floor and the rising chatter happening outside of the constantly opening and closing classroom doors.

Come on... You can do this...

Hunter glanced at the nib of his pencil, and stopped what he was doing. He blinked, unable to at first comprehend what he was seeing.

Instead of his mechanical pencil, Hunter was holding a blue crayon.

The fennec's mind raced, trying to figure out how on earth he had come from holding a mechanical pencil to a child's artistic instrument. Forgetting about the time constraint, he flipped a page back to see his previous work and stopped breathing for a second.

It was all written in the vague scrawl of a blue crayon.

Unwilling to glance around him, as such movements would appear suspicious given his visible struggle with the last problem, he wondered if anybody else had noticed. It was too late to rifle through his pencil case for a different writing utensil, and as the professor announced that five minutes remained he realized that he had to turn his attention to the last problem.

Dang it... I don't even have time to check my work...

With one minute remaining, Hunter arrived at a conclusion that he hoped would be approximate enough to the actual answer. He knew he would lose points on that problem, doing the math quickly in his head and realizing that he could potentially lose up to 12% on that problem alone.

That, and the fact that the exam had been answered in blue crayon was something he had no idea how the professor would react to.

Sighing, he got up to turn his exam in. As he handed it over, the polar bear stared at the test uncomprehending as he noticed the penmanship.

"Creative, but we don't give extra points for that unless you've pioneered a new mathematical proof."

He quipped, glancing up to gaze at the fennec with a bemused expression on his muzzle.

“Lost my pencil.”

Was all that Hunter could think of to answer with. As he returned to his seat to grab his book bag and coat, he thought to himself.

Well, at least he didn't say he'd dock me for it...



Malissa and Jack were waiting for him outside of the classroom, with varying degrees of happiness plastered on their faces. Malissa looked a little anxious, but Jack looked as if he had swallowed a bee.

“How'd it go?”

Malissa asked, a note of forced optimism in her voice as she looked kindly to Hunter.

“I wrote my exam in blue crayon by accident.”

Hunter said flatly, which caused an immediate surge of change in emotion in Jack's expression.

“You what!?”

He exclaimed, amusement mixed with what Hunter noted looked like a degree of awe in his expression and voice.

“Yeah... I, uh, lost my pencil.”

Hunter repeated his lame excuse once more, deciding that attempting to explain the apparent shift in reality would be too difficult to attempt.

“Bull.”

Jack responded immediately, his initial feelings of dismay appearing to disappear as he focused on the potential amusing consequences of Hunter’s actions.

“Dude, the professor is going to eat you alive. Are you *trying* to mess with him?”

Clearly entertained, which Hunter presumed was the weasel’s method of coping, the fennec decided to play it cool. After all, that day had started out in the least cool way he could have imagined.

“Figured I’d play the exam on hard mode, I guess. I needed a challenge.”

Malissa interjected, her voice filled with a mixture of disapproval and amusement.

“Don’t tell me that last question didn’t tear you a new one too.”

“Oh, it did.”

Hunter responded, sighing and shaking his head as the three made their way over to the pizza place they had agreed on nursing their grade point’s wounds at.