

Chapter Five

Fall Break

Hunter stared at the paper in front of him, the corner of his lip turned downwards in an expression of abject chagrin as he perused through the various corrections and comments on the exam in front of him.

On either side of him, his friends were behaving similarly as they poured through the mistakes they had made on the calculus test. Jack appeared utterly stricken, the paper held loosely in his paws as he gingerly turned over page after page. Out of the corner of the fennec's eye, the fox could see that there appeared to be more red pen marks than actual penciled in answers at which he had to suppress a wry smile.

Malissa appeared less disappointed, nodding slowly as she read through the final page in the packet before sighing and sliding it into her bookbag with a shake of her head.

"Nothing I didn't expect really."

She stated, glancing sideways at Hunter before her eyes wandered to his own exam paper with curiosity.

Hunter shrugged his shoulders, handing the paper over to her to examine as he added.

"Well, he didn't dock for the unorthodox writing utensil at least. Still I totally butchered the last page."

Malissa raised her eyebrows at him, pointing with her chin at the number scrawled on the top of the page. Her voice had a note of disbelief in it.

"An eighty-eight percent? And you're disappointed? I got a seventy-two. I just barely passed."

“Don’t talk to me about passing...”

Jack chimed in, his voice sounding so dejected that the two other furs could not help but chuckle in response. Hunter turned, his eyes searching Jack’s face before he dared posed the question he knew both he and Malissa were thinking about.

“Okay, how bad?”

Jack took a moment to ceremoniously fold his exam in half before he crammed it into a pocket of his bookbag.

“Thirty...”

Malissa prompted.

“Thirty what?”

“Just... Thirty...”

The otter took in a breath, sucking in her cheeks as she did so before she shook her head. Fumbling around in her bag, she brought out her purse and stood up.

“I think you need some ice cream, champ.”

Hunter stood up as well, clasping a paw on one of Jack’s slumped shoulders as he got up to follow Malissa over to the concessions table that was being hosted by one of the campus sororities. When she glanced at him, Hunter nodded back and spoke.

“I’ll cover half of it, I also think Jack needs to eat his feelings right about now.”

Malissa laughed, his shoulders shaking as the tension of the post-exam review seemed to ease out of her.

"I'll say. To be honest I fully expected to do much worse myself, he really didn't pull any punches on that one. And it's the first exam of the semester!"

Hunter nodded, sidling into the queue that was forming behind the cheerful face of a pink labradoodle that was handling the exchange. As they waited, Hunter spoke up once more.

"Right? I did some math and I'm going to have to pull a ninety-eight on every consecutive exam if I still want to be in the A range."

Malissa rolled her eyes at him, the corner of her lip twitching in accompaniment to her swishing tale. Something told Hunter that she was planning on eating some of her own post-exam depression feelings as well.

"Nerd."

"Uh-huh, miss history buff. I got a C on my first History of Rome 102 paper last week you know."

"Oh please, like Roman history makes any money in the real world."

Hunter shrugged, and they lapsed into silence as they waited for their turn. The concession stands were pulling some serious attention, as they saw a burly looking ox buy three entire buckets of Neopolitan. Hunter could sense that something was on Malissa's mind, and he turned to face her the moment her eyes met his.

"Okay, spill it."

She said, her eyes squinting at him in mock suspicion.

"Crayon?"

Hunter sighed, running a paw over the back of his right shoulder as he stretched his left arm, attempting to diffuse some of the anxiety welling up inside of him.

“Uhhh...”

He said intelligently, mulling over whether or not he should make a joke out of it or tell her the truth. The fennec decided on something somewhere between the two options.

“I’ve been distracted lately, I legit did not notice it. I swear.”

Well, that’s honestly completely true.

He thought to himself, looking to see whether Malissa believed him. She looked at him for a moment longer, her gaze slightly unnerving as she scrutinized him. He had never been good at lying, and keeping the entire truth out of his statement was difficult enough.

She appeared to take him at his word, however, as they were finally the next to be served.

Malissa insisted on treating the lot of them, buying three pints of rocky road.

Hunter was not the least surprised when both Malissa and Jack finished their pint in one sitting. It seemed to do the trick, however, as walking out of the student hall Jack appeared to be in much higher spirits as the sugar coursed through his bloodstream.

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Hunter was standing idly an aisle over from Malissa where she was checking out at the cash register. Having decided that the three needed a little break, as tomorrow would be the first day of their Fall Break. None of the three were going home that weekend, so they decided that the best use of their time procrastinating on assignments due the very next week would be to pig out and binge on their favorite movies.

They had already been to the drug store a half hour earlier, but Malissa had insisted that coming back to movie popcorn was worth it as it was the only item they had miraculously forgotten to pick up.

Hunter was zoning out. Free of worrying about his classes for a few days, his mind wandered once more to the crayon incident. He had pushed it to the side of his mind afterwards, having more pressing academic obligations to attend to but now it was the only thing he could think about.

Something had happened, something unnatural because he would have sworn on anything given to him that he had been using a mechanical pencil the entire time. The fact that he remembered scribbling on previous pages of the exam in the dull graphite and then having witnessed them suddenly become the smudged texture of a child's drawing utensil was something he could not set aside.

For some reason, he felt like it had something to do with the recent fascination with Blue's Clues. He had no idea how the two could be linked, but the sudden shift in his mind's wanderings were beginning to become strange indeed.

"Think of a new choice of wardrobe there, foxxo?"

Hunter blinked, his mind suddenly turning blank as he looked uncomprehending over at Jack next to him. The weasel wore an amused expression, upon seeing that Hunter was not getting it he nodded towards the range of products that the fennec had been staring at.

Hunter followed his gaze, and then felt his cheeks burn in embarrassment. In front of him were several packages filled with diapers intended for toddlers. Patterns of contemporary kid's cartoons covered both the boxes and as the display advertised the diapers themselves. He did not even know what show the characters were from, but several of them appeared to be wearing diapers themselves.

"Dah... Uhh..."

The fennec was suddenly at a loss for words, as the possibility of wearing such an undergarment entered his mind. His internal reaction to it was not something he expected.

He felt exposed, a degree of self-consciousness washing over him that he had never experienced before. Hunter felt suddenly as if he were standing stark naked in front of his friend.

As if that was not enough, Hunter realized that the mixed feelings he was experiencing were due to some part of him *wanting* to wear the diapers, as suggested by Jack. Of course he knew the weasel's humor, he did not actually mean what he was saying and had simply been looking for a cheap joke to pass the time by.

But still, Hunter had actually blushed. Normally Jack's comments hardly phased him nowadays as the fennec had grown used to his humor.

Hunter realized that he had been silent for too long, and Jack was beginning to smirk even more. His eyebrows furrowed however, telling Hunter that the weasel was not sure what to make of the fox's reaction. Malissa finished up just in time for Hunter to not have an excuse to formulate a response.

"Okay let's bounce, I've been on my feet since six today. We're starting with that 'chick flick' by the way."

She gave Jack a pointed look. This prompted the weasel to make a sound of disgust so guttural, that Hunter was still wiping tears from his eyes as they walked up the stairway to the first floor of his apartment building.

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Hunter was laying on his back, the lights in his room were turned off as he had already snuggled himself up into bed for the night. His internet browser was open, and with some degree of thrilled embarrassment, he was browsing through a selection of

toddler incontinence products in an attempt to find the brand he had been staring at earlier that day.

It was not difficult to find them, despite him not recalling their name.

“Put a little waddle in their step!”

Hunter read the brand catch phrase over and over, his fixation on the design of the diaper adamant as he zoomed in on an infographic.

He told himself that he was only interested because he was bored and did not want to fall asleep just yet, but he knew that was not the real reason.

Something about the idea of wearing them tickled his fancy, stirred something inside of him he had no idea had previously been there. As excited as he was at the prospect of wearing underwear designed for a kid an eighth of his age, he could not set aside the uneasiness that accompanied such desires.

Is this what burnout feels like?

He wandered, thinking back to how tired and stressed he had been at the end of second semester of college. No matter how he justified it, Hunter was beginning to wonder at his mental health.

Rewatching an old kid’s show was one thing, but now fantasizing about wearing diapers? Pants intended for the smallest of puppies and kittens?

Hunter locked his phone, casting his previously illuminated muzzle into darkness as his eyes slowly adjusted to the drastic shift in luminance.

Maybe I just need to sleep on it...

Even as he tried to clear his mind of thoughts in preparation of the night’s sleep to come, his mind continued to wander. He imagined how it would feel to have the soft,

absorbent material straddling the space between his legs, comfortably hugging his jewels and comfortably cupping his backside.

Hunter's eyelids grew heavy, his mind awash with fantasies on how freeing it would feel to not have to worry about a thing; not even the need to relieve himself in the comfort of his own bed.