

Chapter Twenty-Six

Syllabus Week

The ghost paws had made this decision to place Hunter in his regular, babyfur-themed diapers for the rest of the week. The fox had little trouble hiding them due to the weather, as wearing several layers including flannel pants had made it relatively easy for him to hide his choice of crinkly underwear. Having no publicly embarrassing moments visiting the convenience, school supply, and bookstore leading up to the first day of class, he had mentally prepared himself for a surprise when he woke up wet a few hours before his organic chemistry class.

The paws had lovingly unfolded a fluffed one of the hieroglyphic diapers that morning, specifically the one that had the three cygnets on the front. He had been nervous, unknown magic would be a part of his day that he would likely have to deal with. That was why when three ghostly Egyptians were looking up at him next to his changing table, he knew that his unexpected interruption to his life had arrived. The fox had stared back at them, unsure of how to react at the sudden appearance of the ethereal creatures. One of them strode over to the backpack he had prepared that morning, looping its long bill through one of the straps to pick it up before waddling over to him expectantly.

The fox sighed, taking it from the bird and looping it around his shoulders before putting on a bare pair of insulative pants. From the look of it, he would have three companions accompanying him throughout the rest of the day. The ibises appeared to have minds of their own, pecking at random bits of trash as he had walked down the street from his apartment, invisible to all except him. It was only when he walked into his organic chemistry class was he surprised to not only find Jack waving at him cheerfully from the bench, but to see the weasel tilt his head questioningly at the birds that were waddling after him as he took a seat next to his friend.

“Dude, what *are* those things?”

Hunter shook his head, taking out his grotesquely thick textbook and letting it thump down on the table in front of him.

“What do you think, they’re my back-up dancers.”

The fox had quipped, no hint of humor in his voice as he turned to face the front of the classroom, trying to ignore as one of the ibises fluttered up to the book and began to peck at the cover of his textbook. He raised a paw to shoo it away, to which it squawked indignantly before flying off the desk once more. Jack had given him a weak smile, eyeing them with suspicion as he looked around to gauge whether anyone else was reacting. It appeared that the apparitions were visible only to him and Hunter, as the fox did his best to ignore their curious venturings to various corners of the classroom.

“Are they like here to stay, or...”

Jack trailed off, and Hunter told him what he figured was the most accurate answer he could come up with.

“They came with my... Uhh... ‘morning change.’”

Flexing his fingers to create air quotes, he opened the front of his textbook and began perusing the notes on the first chapter. After reading a few equations, feeling relieved to find some familiarity with the topic of hydrocarbon rings it was discussing, he turned his head without taking his eyes off the page as he asked his friend.

“So, what are you doing in Orgo?”

He raised an eyebrow at the weasel, just as one of the ibises hopped up on the desk once more and tilted its head inquisitively at Jack. Jack eyed it suspiciously, before turning to respond sheepishly to Jack.

“Uh... You know, learning.”

Hunter looked at him, smirking slightly as he assessed the weasel's apparent discomfort. As any college student knows, this particular branch of chemistry was renowned for being particularly unforgiving for students with bad study habits. The fact that Jack had had the grades last semester to even make it into this class was an achievement in and of itself. The fennec continued staring at him, until at last the weasel gave in to the scrutinizing stare. Sighing, he opened his textbook disdainfully and began to imitate Hunter's perusing as he responded

"If I manage to pass this class, they'll double the credit value for it and mark off a D on my chemistry course last semester. I had to practically beg them for this deal, and I think they found it amusing when they finally agreed to it. My counselor looked pretty entertained."

"I'll say, you know this is a weed out class right?"

Jack swallowed, looking up nervously to stare at an ibis at the far end of the room who was busying itself by dumpster diving into a recycling bin. He responded, his voice unsure.

"Yeah... I'm going to need to study... And maybe look at your notes again, if that's alright."

Hunter shook his head in mock disapproval, the corner of his muzzle turning upwards as he gave the weasel and assessing look. Jack caved until his gaze, placing his paws out in a silent plea as he continued.

"Come on man, if I don't pass I'll lose my scholarship and might even be held back a semester. This is serious."

"You have a scholarship!?"

Hunter said, his ears pinning to his head in surprise as he stared at the weasel. His friend's discomfort did not lesson, as he continued to monitor the ibis that was currently engaging him in a staring match.

“Yes, I do. Anyway, so what are these guys all about anyway?”

Hunter shrugged, reaching forward to touch one on the bill experimentally. The bird looked back at him in what could only be described as an offended expression, hopping away from him and shuffling its feather agitatedly.

“I don’t know, maybe it’s kind of like a fluke spell or something. Or maybe it’s just outdated, like it might have been relevant way back when or whatever. They don’t really seem to do much other than be kind of annoying. They came from the hieroglyph on my... Yeah...”

Jack nodded, reaching into his bag and taking out a granola bar. Unwrapping it, he broke off a piece before crumbling it in his paw. He glanced around briefly to see whether anybody else was looking at him before dropping a few crumbs onto the ground. One of the ibises caught wind of this offering, waddling forward and leaning down to tilt its head and inspect the goods. Clicking its beak once, it turned away disdainfully before inserting its long, curved beak into Jack’s bookbag.

“They’re ghosts dude.”

Jack looked a little annoyed, responding back sarcastically.

“Wow, real scientist over here.”

A second later, the front door to the classroom opened to reveal a tigress walking through. A thin pair of half-moon spectacles rested on the bridge of her nose, her auburn fur quite the sight as the classroom quieted down as she entered. Placing her briefcase on the table at the front of the class, she picked up a piece of chalk and began to write. After writing her name and the university from which she got her PhD: “Yurvik University” she turned to address the class.

“Hello everyone, I’m Dr. Zadora. Three times a week, we shall be meeting in this room and discussing worksheets, lab assignments, and exam prep. There will be six

exams, each of which comprising 15% of your final grade. They will be cumulative. The remaining 10% of your grade will be homework and lab results.”

Jack kneaded his paws in his lap, surprising a groan as he heard the stringency of the grading rubric for this class. With 90% of the grade being test-based, performing on each consecutive exam would be paramount for a good final grade. Hunter thought of it as relatively generous, given the fact that each exam’s content would stack on top of each other.

In the front of the room, one of the invisible ibises hopped up and looked curiously at the professor’s briefcase. Hunter and Jack held their breath, watching as the bird opened its beak and began to tamper with the front buckle holding it closed. The tigress appeared not to take notice, as she turned her back to the class and began sketching out with the chalk once more drawing out several carbon chains.

The two friends watched with bated breath, seeing that the ibis’s determination to open the briefcase did not lessen. With a click, it opened, flopping open and spilling its contents across the floor with the sound of fluttering paper. As if in slow motion, the tigress turned, staring confusedly at the pile of strewn notebooks and manilla folders. The class was quiet, watching to see how she would react. She smirked, stepping forward to pick up the office supply detritus, packing it back into the suitcase before returning to what she was drawing.

The ibis chattered irritably, waddling and weaving between the tigress’s footpaws as it left to retreat into the back of the classroom to join the others. Hunter exchanged a look with Jack, the two wondering the same thing. If these paranormal activities persisted throughout the entire hour, how would a class filled with scientifically minded individuals explain it? Thankfully, however, the ibises appeared to have become tired from their mischief. Hunter a few minutes later they had huddled together next to his bag, preening the feathers on each other’s backs.

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“Oh would you just *look* at these cuties!”

Malissa exclaimed, reaching down to pet one of the ibis's on the head. It hopped away from her, looking at her outreached paw distrustfully as it shuffled its wings. The three were at the cafeteria, laptops and textbooks out as they waited out the afternoon until their next class. Jack was looking over his Orgo notes, demonstrating a significantly more studious attitude than Hunter could ever remember him showing before.

The moment the otter had seen the ibises, she had clearly fallen in love with them. The birds seemed to care less for her affections, embarrassing Hunter twice as they pecked inquisitively at the front of his pants, gently squishing the front of his soaked diaper as they did so.

"So they really don't do anything?"

Malissa asked, and Hunter shrugged once more as he popped a french fry into his muzzle, chewing before responding.

"Other than getting into trouble, no not really. Nobody else can see them except us, and they seem more interested in random trash and bookbags than anyone."

"They did totally spill everything out of Dr. Zadira's bag though."

Jack added, grinning as he took a bite out of his PB&J. Malissa looked thoughtfully over him, before zeroing in on the sandwich he was eating and looking at it disapprovingly.

"Someone really needs to teach you how to cook."

She remarked, taking out a tuna fish salad sandwich she had packed for the day and opening the plastic bag it was contained in. Jack shrugged, placing a peanut butter covered thumb into his muzzle and smacking on it obnoxiously. Chewing, he opened his muzzle and rattled out excitedly.

"I think I might have some information on the relic thingy though."

Malissa and Hunter turned their attention to him, just as one of the ibises knocked over a stack of plastic cups over at the utensils bar in the cafeteria, plastic forks and spoons following shortly afterward.

"What?"

Malissa prompted, looking intently at the weasel while holding her sandwich halfway through her muzzle. The weasel grinned devilishly, pleased at having captured both of their attention so easily. With great deliverance, he spoke in as serious a tone as he could muster.

"It's from Egypt."

The two stared at him in shocked silence for a moment, before Malissa picked up a grape from her tupperware and flicked it at the weasel's head. It hit him squarely in the forehead, after which he clapped both paws on his head and exclaimed exaggeratedly.

"Ow! That hurt!"

"Good."

Malissa remarked, turning away in disgust as she addressed Hunter who was still staring, unamused, at the weasel.

"Any actual breakthroughs on the other hieroglyphs?"

Hunter shook his head, setting down the french fry he was holding on his plate as he spoke.

"No, this is the first time I was put in the ibis summoning one. I still don't know what the other two do, or even if there are going to be anymore. I wish I could pick

them out, if I only got to wear the panther ones I think I'd be set until we get more info on the curse."

Malissa nodded empathetically, her attention drawing back towards one of the ibises that was currently tailing a rabbit, hunched forward and ruffling its wings behind it as it stalked the oblivious student.

"Well, they're cute even if they are harmless. I'm going to hazard a guess to say that they're supposed to be like, little bodyguards of some sort?"

Hunter shrugged, willing to accept the explanation as he returned to his snacking.

"Yeah, possibly. They're kind of distracting to be honest."

Malissa turned her attention to Jack, a gleam in her eye as her whiskers quivered as she posed.

"So... Orgo?"

"You too? You guys are awful."

Malissa raised her paws up in mock innocence, responding in a high-pitched defensive tone.

"I'm just asking!"

Jack sighed, closing his notebook and taking another PB&J out of his backpack. This was his forth, causing Hunter to grimace incredulously as he watched the weasel unwrap it and take a bite. Talking with his mouth full, Jack responded sincerely as he chewed.

"Look, this is a 'last chance' kind of deal. I'm gonna be cutting back on the weed too."

“Wow!”

Malissa exclaimed, appearing genuinely taken aback as she looked at him. There was a note of respect on her muzzle, and Hunter decided that it would probably be best not to bully his friend too much. He offered.

“I’ll give you my notes, but you should probably come over and study with me a few times a week. Wanna swing by my place on nights after class? If we did a review and tested each other we could be in pretty good shape.”

“Totally!”

Jack exclaimed, grinning and appearing genuinely pleased. Malissa nodded approvingly, closing her laptop as she made to head off for her next class.

“Don’t have too much without me boys, we’re still on for Saturday bar crawls right?”

“Totally.”

Hunter echoed, giving her a wave as she walked off to her next class, her rudder tail waving casually behind her