

A Date With a View

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The feminine grey fox set his jaw, gazing up the rocky mountainside as he bounced in place like a boxer about to square their far larger opponent up. "You can do this, Alessi," he said in his usually convincing and encouraging tone, this time only half-succeeding in his persuasion of one of the hardest targets of all: himself. "You've been training for months now. You've gotten stronger...nimbler....sexier. And that third one is *certainly* an accomplishment, darling, given the level you already were at."

Despite the daunting task of scaling a sheer cliff, Alessi had not abandoned his colorful style. Purple sleeves, red top, dark red pants, sashes of green and teal...and every piece had a stylish cut that suggested a fashion beyond the usual adventurer's practicality. The only two things that showed the new influence in Alessi's life were the white wraps of climbing tape around his hands and feet and a new highlight of red streaking through his otherwise pristinely cared-for locks of brown hair. Those, and the fact Alessi was considering climbing a sheer cliff of his own free will.

It was hard to hide the eager-yet-intimidated swish of his tail, but there wasn't very many people around. As well-traveled as this island was for vacationers and explorers alike, the most strenuous locales to reach still rarely saw traffic. "Nekot sure knows how to choose them..." he huffed as he stepped forward, hips swaying in that instinctually flirtatious walk despite the rising anxiety. He'd stretched, he'd prepared, and now...there wasn't much more he could do to delay. Not without potentially keeping someone waiting.

The feeling of his fingers pressing against naturally worn-down stone, grip locking to allow those graceful dancer's legs to lift and anchor paws against more solid juts, was an increasingly familiar one. Scaling buildings, leaping cargo boxes, pouncing over roofs, racing through jungle... Where once his hands and feet were delicate and soft, now Alessi's hands and feet were...still soft, but only due to some concerted effort and moderately more expensive oils. "Greca could really use a spa," Alessi grunted, eyes alternately focused on the next hand-holds up above and the foot-holds he lined his steps up with.

While they weren't the tallest trees in the isles, that fact didn't make the sight of those leafy tops growing ever more distant below him any less disquieting. Three stories worth of height separated him and the more level ground, and soon it was four, then five. A small outcrop made for a brief break, allowing the fox to sprawl out amongst the alpine grass and dirt. "Hoooooof...hah...this...definitely works...something different...than dancing...does," he panted to himself, brushing back his hair and looking up. The outlook Nekot had spoken of was still at least three stories up, and, exposed to the wind, the texture of the above rock had been worn down to a smoother face.

Alessi glanced to the sky. Even though the clouds obscured it, he could tell the hot midday sun was finally beginning to arc downwards. "C'mon, darling...not much time left. Do it for him," he mumbled. With determination, he pushed himself upright. He put his hands atop his head and breathed in deep. *In through the nose, out through the mouth...* He stepped up to the rising mountainside and reached out, digging his fingers into the cracks, and began to hoist himself upwards.

His knuckles began to ache as he ascended, and his toes were forced to bend uncomfortably to press into many of the nooks and subtler ridges. Alessi gritted his teeth, gaze increasingly focused on the landing above. *This'll be worth it*, he promised himself, grateful for the tape that helped cushion the worst potential scratches, scuffs, and bruising. The burn of exertion began to fill his muscles, but his green eyes remained focused. One story...just a few more feet.

Gasping with relief, Alessi slammed his forearm atop the grassy rim. He lifted himself up and over, scrambling at the edge before he finally swung his legs over the side, winded from the hardest climb he'd undertaken by far. "Hah...haha! Haha! I have overcome your challenge, Nekot dear, and I shall take my prize!" he cheered breathlessly, arms flung up towards the heavens as if anticipating an embrace.

Gradually, his eyes slid away from the cloudy afternoon sky and to the landing. There, standing nearby a luncheon table set for two, stunned into silence, was a raccoon with dyed-green hair. His dress was unlike what Alessi expected, so the realization of who it was came just the slightest bit slower. Nekot was wearing a tailored suit, complete with tie, in perfectly clean condition. "...challenge? Alessi, did you really climb up the mountain to get here?"

"...yes, Nekot, I did. Did you not?" Alessi confusedly, boggling at how Nekot managed to remain so pristine.

Nekot gestured over his shoulder, prompting Alessi to push himself to his feet and look. Behind Nekot stretched a long, gradual path downwards and around the mountain, a gentle grade clearly carved out for the least athletic visitor to reach the sweeping view of the isle and the ocean that stretched beyond. "I...took the trail. I thought...you might want a fancier outing for once," the raccoon replied, trying to keep his voice steady. But the building mirth at Alessi's befuddled and incredulous expression was hard to hide, even if he hid his growing smirk of bemusement behind a hand.

Alessi stared at the path, then at the table with its small plates of finger-sandwiches and bottles of fruit juice. He looked over Nekot's fancy attire, then at the chairs. Dramatically, he threw himself over the nearest open chair and groaned. "Nekot, dear...you are truly the cruelest lover I have ever taken," the fox moaned melodramatically, tail swaying in such a way that did not hide the dancer's ability to find the humor in the situation from his boyfriend.

"If it helps, I genuinely am impressed," the raccoon said, walking over to gently pat and rub the sprawling Alessi. "That's like...seven buildings' worth of rock climbing. That has to be one of the best climbs you've made...and with decent time too!"

"I am wounded. You have wounded me, darling. I may never recover!"

Nekot glanced away from the sore fox and to the platter, also taking the moment to stifle a snicker and a widening grin. "Do you...want one of those tiny sandwiches?"

Alessi rolled over, draping his head over the chair's back. "Yes, garçon, I want one of those tiny sandwiches," he said matter-of-factly, "and I would very much like it to be fed to me by my boyfriend who has rendered me invalid."

"You have other boyfriends?" came the raccoon's quiet reply, tinged with sadness.

"Oh, darl-" the fox gasped, snapping upright to comfort and clarify his statement. He was stopped by the bright ear-to-ear grin upon Nekot's face. "...Nekot, dear, you are digging yourself deeper," Alessi warned as his boyfriend began to openly laugh.

Still, Nekot pulled the other chair around, sitting down next to the exhausted fox and gently picking up one of the small triangle-cut sandwiches. "Sorry, sorry...couldn't help myself. But yeah, I'd be glad to feed you," he said, lifting the food to his lover's mouth.

Alessi opened, allowing Nekot to place the sandwich upon his tongue, chewed, and swallowed. Seeing Nekot dressed fancifully, the handsome raccoon framed by a beautiful vista, and tasting what the roguish adventurer thought to be extravagant food, Alessi couldn't help but forgive him...at least a little bit. "Thank you, dear...and when you carry me back down, I will consider us even."

"Carry you?"

The fox smiled. "Of course! I am wounded, after all...and you've yet to get *your* exercise in today."

"But...I..."

Alessi put a finger up to the stammering raccoon's lips. "Don't worry, darling. If you get too sweaty from doing so, I *suppose* I could help you get out of those soaked clothes in my quarters. I ought to, as ship supercargo, catalog these smuggled goods you so improperly hid from me anyhow. And I'll have to make sure you're not smuggling anything else, of course."

The gears turned in Nekot's head before the smile returned with an added blush.
"I...guess that's fair. But for now...?" he prompted.

"For now," Alessi continued with a smile, tail swaying happily behind, "I would like more tiny sandwiches. And a kiss a champion climber such as myself deserves."

"Of course," Nekot replied, planting a quick smooch upon Alessi's lips. "It's your prize to claim."