

Chapter 13 - Nerve-wracked

Blake looked himself in the mirror, adjusting the collar on his button-up shirt and doing the last bit of adjustments before he went out for dinner. It wasn't a date, but rather a meeting with Erik's literature teacher, Koray Demir. The two had been discussing the progress of Blake's son Erik ever since the two first met. Both sides cared very much about the younger reindeer, thus it always made the two men talk about him amongst other things.

A brief spritz of cologne, one final adjustment and Blake stepped out of the bathroom. Erik was getting ready to head out as well as he stood in the kitchen, helping himself to a glass of milk. His guitar and amp were packed and ready to be taken to Troy's place.

"(So... why exactly is my prof asking you to join him for dinner?)" Erik asked curiously before he took a drink. Blake simply shrugged. "(My guess is he just wants to have dinner with a friend. And you know how much we've been talking, well, mostly about you.)"

That didn't make Erik feel better as he let out an annoyed groan. Blake looked to his son and huffed. "(Look, Erik, I know it sounds incredibly awkward that your dad is going out with your teacher, but rest assured, nothing serious is going to happen. We're just having a casual dinner and then I'll be home watching the playoffs.)"

The younger reindeer finished his drink and put the glass away. With a sigh he went on to grab his guitar and amp to head out. "(I'm going to Troy's place. See ya whenever I get back.)" Erik huffed as he opened the door and made his way to the bus stop.

Blake tried to reach out to him, but Erik was already out. The older reindeer sighed as he collected his thoughts. "(Teenagers...)" he chuckled a little and finished buttoning up. A brief check up to see if the oven and coffee machine were turned off, then he made his way to the backyard to take the car.

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Koray had managed to gain control of his nerves after the drawn-out pep-talk he'd given himself the entire time he'd dressed and travelled to the restaurant he'd selected for this particular meeting. It hadn't been terribly uncommon for he and Blake to meet over coffee to discuss Erik's progress in the class, but the fox had decided to try something different.

So he'd boldly selected a little mom-and-pop Scandinavian restaurant he'd stumbled across during his time there; he was sure Blake would be unhappy if it wasn't authentic, but he was hopeful that his choice pleased the older reindeer.

Koray arrived a little early and settled at an empty table, just ordering a glass of water when the waitress came around, informing her that he was waiting for a friend to join him before he ordered, so she politely left him alone after bringing him his water. The fox fiddled with his outfit, fixing cuffs that were already perfect, brushing invisible lint from his sweater vest.

He was nervous.

Was he really going to go through with this?

But he couldn't ponder it anymore because he heard the door to the small restaurant open and looked up to find Blake walking in, looking as handsome as ever in his dress shirt and slacks. It was a casual look, but the reindeer pulled it off perfectly. Getting to his feet he smiled, holding out his hand in greeting.

"So glad you could join me Blake. There's some things I'd like to discuss with you. And with school over, I figured why not meet over dinner, yes?" The fox said with a bright smile, his ears perked atop his head in a happy expression.

"Oh absolutely." Blake shook Koray's hand then took the seat across from him. "The basketball season is almost over so I have quite some time on my hands now. I figured it would be rude of me not to take your invitation." the reindeer smiled and looked around the restaurant. "Quite a nice place this is."

"It is nice, isn't it?" Koray felt slightly hypnotized by Blake. His firm structure was filling his shirt quite nicely, showing off all the right angles for the foxy professor. He sighed for a moment and adjusted his glasses, though the reindeer read something from the fox.

"Are you okay?" Blake asked, looking quizzically to Koray. "Y-yeah, I'm fine." Koray nodded. "I just... had a few rough days lately, that is all."

Blake nodded. "Yes, I can relate. I'm just glad this season is ending, so I can look forward to spending more time with Erik." the reindeer remained content as he looked through the menu. Koray just leaned over the table, his heart racing.

"And how is Erik? He seems to have coped well in my class; his final mark looks promising at this time. Mind, I'm not quite done tabulating everything, but nonetheless. His marks have been better than I had expected. He's learning quickly."

"Oh, Erik is alright. He's at a friend's place to play music." Blake replied. "But he's also preparing for the European Under-20 tournament that's happening in July. So we'll be heading to Europe for some time."

"I must say, I'm a little jealous! I've never had the pleasure of getting to explore Europe yet, but I so dream of it. Though I'm sure you two are more excited about the sport than the scenery, hm?" Koray teased with a smile on his features

"Oh, well, a little bit. The tournament will be in Germany this year, but we haven't seen all that much of Germany yet, so we will be sure to do a bit of everything when we're there. Of course, I will go back to Finland to check on my mother." Blake nodded as the cat waitress came over to the two and the orders were placed. Blake ordered something more to his traditions.

Koray ordered something lighter on the menu, finding this Scandinavian cuisine heavy with carbs and overly filling, albeit delicious. But he also knew he was far too nervous under the surface to eat much of anything at this point; he was dying to ask, terrified to ask, so he didn't dare disrupt a peaceful meal with a friend due to his own desires.

"I'm sure she'll be happy to see you two. Do you have other family that is still living in Finland as well?" Koray asked, sipping from his water; he was getting exhausted, hiding his nerves was more work than he had expected it to be. But he also hadn't expected Blake to look so charming, his looks softened by the lack

of suit and the velvety growth of his new antlers. The fox found himself wondering how soft that velvet really was.

It looked very soft.

“Yes, there’s still a lot of family of mine back there.” Blake blinked and smiled a little. “My brother, my sister, their families. My aunts and uncles, who have moved south to Helsinki. I plan to at least visit a few of them. It will be very nice to see them again.” the reindeer added on, then taking a drink from his water. He felt this conversation was going well, but he also felt there was something on Koray’s mind, but it was far from what the fox actually felt. He had been a little bit nervous every time they talked. Maybe it was just the way he was, so the reindeer simply shrugged it off.

“Sounds like Erik and yourself will be having a busy summer. But I imagine it’s nice to spend time with family, especially after so long apart, hm?” Koray’s ears folded back momentarily, reminded of his own family situation briefly before he returned to his normal self, ears forward and intently focusing on his dinner companion.

“Of course it’s nice. I remember when I was still playing in the EFBL. After every season, I always came back to Finland to spend the summer there. I always like to go home and relax and that’s what I’m gonna try to do after Erik’s tournament is done. But rest assured, we’ll be back in time for when classes start.” Blake chuckled lowly.

Koray laughed gently at Blake, shaking his head a little as he settled back in his seat a little more and looked around the restaurant for a brief moment, pushing his glasses up his muzzle in the process.

“I should hope you make it back in time. If I don’t see Erik sitting in my class on day one I’ll be very disappointed in you.” The fox said, playfully wagging his finger at Blake in a joking threat of reprimand.

“Oh you teachers are very keen on having your students all in your classroom when the time comes around. I don’t blame you. I’m eager to come back to work when the new season rolls around. So I think we can relate on that level.” Blake smiled and the waitress came around with their meals. With a quick ‘Enjoy your meal!’ she departed again. The reindeer looked to the fried fish and potatoes and vegetables on his plate. The smell was quite convincing already, as he dug in to sate his hunger.

Koray wasn’t bothered by the quiet that settled as they ate their respective meals. The fox rather enjoyed his meal of pork and duck sausage with a side dish of mushrooms and onions. It was still a heavier dish than he had hoped for, but it was very delicious, and he savoured every bite that his nerves allowed him to swallow. He tried not to pick at his food and just eat like a normal person, and he felt like he was succeeding when he realized he’d finished most of the plate before he started to feel full.

The two had a relatively quiet meal together, as Blake contently ate his dish, finding it good, but not as authentic as back in Finland. He finished his hearty meal and pushed the plate aside, then proceeded to break the silence. “Well... that actually wasn’t bad at all.” the reindeer chuckled.

The sound of Blake starting to speak startled Koray a little, making him look up to the reindeer promptly before he chuckled a little himself, running a hand through his hair absently. “It was good. But I certainly couldn’t eat like this every day. I’d weigh a ton!” The fox exclaimed with a snicker, pulling off his glasses momentarily to clean them with a handkerchief he’d pulled from his pocket.

“Us Scandinavians do like to eat hearty.” the reindeer chuckled contently, leaning back against his seat with a full stomach.

Dinner was almost over. If Koray was going to ask, he had to ask soon. The thought made his heart race, his tail twitching nervously behind him as he calmly slid his glasses back on and looked back to Blake with a smile.

“Thank you for the invitation, Koray. That was really nice of you.” Blake smiled, forearms leaned on the table top.

It was now or never. The fox nodded.

“It was my pleasure Blake. Though I confess...I may’ve had...ulterior motives...behind my inviting you...” Koray started a little hesitantly, his ears folding back a bit in a clear motion of concern and discomfort as he fought to keep his nerves at bay, to not lose his resolve to finally ask the question that had been plaguing him.

“I... don’t really understand, Koray...” Blake’s smile faded, looking on as Koray seemed more and more nervous now.

The fox hesitated a moment, taking in Blake’s expression, pausing to momentarily meet warm brown eyes that were currently filled with utter confusion. Sighing, he ruffled his own hair again, psyching himself up for what he was about to do.

“Blake...I...I wanted to...” Ugh. He was acting like a bumbling teenager! Koray felt himself utterly foolish for acting this way, but he knew that Blake had previously been married, and as far he could tell, the reindeer was still straight as an arrow. He inhaled deeply, exhaling slowly, before offering Blake a soft, hopeful smile, his ears perking up.

“Blake, I wanted to ask...if you’d go out with me? ...On a date?”

The reindeer’s eyes widened immensely, his jaw dropping slightly. Utter shock crossed his mind. He couldn’t believe what he just heard. It wasn’t hurtful, just gentle inviting words, but what could Blake do? He wasn’t into the same gender. All this time, he has been with a girlfriend or wife. And now, a kind, smart and genuine fox was asking him out because he couldn’t hold in his true feelings any longer.

Without a word, Blake stood up, darting to the door, thoughts racing in his mind. He didn’t want to believe it. He wanted to say no, but he couldn’t hurt Koray like that. Was he in denial? He didn’t know, but what he knew was this: he needed advice. As soon as possible.

Koray’s expression of hope faded as Blake didn’t react beyond a look of shock, his ears laying back and his eyes growing big as he felt emotions of sorrow and upset replace his previous nerves. He opened his mouth, wanting to say more, wanting to try and play off his question as a joke or something, pretend like it’d never happened, but before he could say anything the reindeer had rose to his feet and dashed out of the restaurant. Koray got to his feet as well, scurrying to the door. “Blake!” He tried to call out, to stop the reindeer’s retreat, but it didn’t work.

He sighed, head lowering and ears drooping as he apologized to the waitress and paid for their meals. That done, he headed for home, settling in his favourite chair with a book in hand, but he couldn't focus on reading. All he could think about was Blake and the expression on the man's face. And the one question that now rang in his mind.

Would he ever hear from Blake again?