

“DOES MY HAIR LOOK BETTER UP, OR DOWN?”

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“Thought of anything for Forest’s birthday?”

Trina looked up from her computer and blinked at her mate. “Hmm? Oh, no, I haven’t. Chakats are so *difficult* to shop for; there’s not a lot that you can give a herm that isn’t meant for either male or female.”

“Yeah, you’ve got that right.” Kris walked in and sat down on a corner of Trina’s desk, leaning forward to give her a kiss on the muzzle. “We’d better hurry up – it’s only five days to go, and I’m sure shi’ll be disappointed if we don’t get hir something so spectacular that shi won’t expect a gift next year.”

“Huh.” Trina leaned back, tapping her fingers on the desk. “What did we get hir last year?”

Kris was silent for a few seconds while he thought. “A pair of halter tops, I think. Those blue ones with the white stars on the breasts. Maybe another top? Or maybe we should cater more for hir male side?”

The arctic fox vixen chuckled. “I think you’d find that a bit of a mission. Shi’s not your typical male, interested in cooking on the barbie, fishing, hunting, drinking mates under the table...though shi’d probably be capable of that if shi tried. They can process alcohol more efficiently, you know.”

“True.” The red fox morph shook his head and shrugged. “Well, the halter tops were well received last time. Say...what about something for hir field studies?”

“Hmm...didn’t shi say that hir camera’s getting a bit dodgy? Pixels dropping out randomly?” Trina glanced at her screen briefly as it went into stand-by mode, then looked back to Kris. “What say we pool our resources and get hir a new one? And maybe something for himself.”

Kris nodded. “That sounds good to me.” He suddenly grinned as a thought occurred to him. “I’ll take care of it.” At Trina’s raised eyebrow he shook his head. “I insist. I think shi’ll like it...as will a few other people.” With that cryptic comment Kris got up and left the room, leaving Trina to wonder what her mate was going to get up to.

The next day saw Kris and Trina heading into Melbourne to do a spot of shopping. Trina pulled into a parking space in the central parking building and got out, locking the doors after Kris had exited. “Right, let’s say...meet back here in about half an hour, and we’ll go for lunch.” She looked askance at him. “Are you *sure* that you won’t tell me what you’re thinking of buying for hir?”

“Not on your life,” the red foxmorph replied. “I want you to be just as surprised as hir when shi sees it,” he said, putting on a little smirk. “And with that, I bid you adieu.” He turned and sauntered towards the stairs down to the street level.

Trina sighed. “Men!” she muttered, before moving herself to follow him.

The photography shop was only a couple of blocks away, so it didn’t take Trina long to walk there. As she walked in, she surveyed the bewildering range of cameras on offer, any one of which could be suitable for Forest’s needs. “Oh, boy,” she murmured, standing in the middle of the store and looking around.

“May I help you?” A young tod fox seemed to appear next to her, his tail wagging happily behind him in his anticipation of a sale.

“Well...I guess you could. I’m looking for a new camera for my mate. Shi spends a lot of time out in the bush, working on hir field studies. Truth is, I don’t know much about cameras, other than ‘point and press the button, so...’” She trailed off and just shrugged helplessly.

The fox, named Haydn, according to his nametag, nodded. “Then you’ve come to the right place. We like to make sure that our customers know what we’re talking about.” He smiled and gently guided Trina over to a glass display case. “I think one of these might be what you’re looking for. This particular model,” and he opened the case and pulled out a smart little metallic grey

camera with black trim, “is used by journalists for *National Geographic*. However, it’s not too great on capturing quick movements. I believe that’s what your mate requires?” At the answering nod he hummed to himself and removed another, much larger camera, putting the first one back. “Possibly this one, then. Can capture a speeding cheetah with ease. However, it’s rather more pricey than the other one,” he added, replacing the camera in the case.

“I don’t know,” murmured Trina, scratching an ear. “Is there any way I can buy one, and trade it for another if it’s not the right type? I don’t have that much money right now, but I want to get hir exactly what shi needs first time.”

“Ah, I see. Hmm.” Haydn thought for a few seconds. “Perhaps, if you bring hir old camera in, or give me the model number, I can sell you a camera of equivalent ability within your price range if I can. Would that suit?”

Trina nodded. “Yes, that would be great, thank you. Uh...I can bring it in this afternoon, if that’s okay?”

Haydn nodded. “Certainly. We’re open until 7, so you’ll have plenty of time to come in. Now, may I help you with anything else?”

“No, thank you. You’ve been ample help to me.” Trina smiled at the young fox. “Maybe I’ll see you later then.” She turned and quietly headed out the door, chuckling at the fox’s enthusiasm. “Salesmen – anything for a sale,” she said under her breath.

Kris, on the other hand, was having a rather more interesting time in another shop a few blocks away. “Excuse me. May I assist you?” said a young soft-spoken woman. She had long blonde hair with auburn streaks reaching down her back, and clear green eyes. An amused smile creased her lips at seeing a very out-of-place male in her shop.

“Uh...yes, I think you can,” he said, clearing his throat. The insides of his ears were distinctly red. “I’m looking for a birthday present for my mate. Something sexy, but not too...obvious, if you know what I mean.”

“Hmm. I think I do. You want her to look sensual, but not sluttish, excuse my terminology. I think we have just the thing over here.” She started walking toward the back of the shop, followed closely by Kris. “Any item in particular you were looking for?”

“I was thinking a halter top, but maybe you could suggest something better? I’d like it to be a gift for my other mate as well.”

The assistant turned and raised an eyebrow. “Oh, really? I guess you must be mated to a chakat then,” she said, stopping at the back wall. “Now, here we have a wide selection of halter tops, ranging from A all the way to sizes you probably couldn’t imagine on a female. What’s hir size?”

Kris didn’t waste time in replying. “42DD. And very nice they are too!”

“I’m sure they are,” mused the woman with a smile. She looked up and down the racks until she found the appropriate section. “Here we are. One of these might suit your mate. Does shi like lacy stuff, or more...masculine looks? Leather is surprisingly popular.”

“Er...I’m not sure. Something leather would look nice, I think. Something that bares the essential femininity, but not too much.”

The woman reached up to about head height and took down a black leather top that was more of a large bra than a halter top. A small hole was cut out of each breast, assumedly for the nipples to poke through, and was lightly trimmed with silver, as was the rest of it. “What about this? It comes with a matching tail ring, necklace and leg covers, as well as a body cover, which I can show you if you wish.”

Kris frowned, trying to imagine Forest wearing such an outfit. “Hmm...I’m not sure. I think shi’d be a bit overdressed in all that. Is there any way I could take just part of the outfit? Say, the top, necklace and ring?”

“Ah, not really, though I can offer you a similar set that has only those components. I’m pretty sure we have a catalogue entry,” the assistant murmured as she went over to a table in the corner which held dozens of lingerie catalogues. She rummaged through and selected a book, flicking through it quickly. “Ah, here it is,” she said, coming over and showing Kris what she’d found.

“It’s available in several colours, so you can pick whichever one you think best goes with hir fur colour.”

Looking at the outfit being modelled, Kris began to feel a tightening in his pants as he imagined Forest posing in it. It was as he wanted, but it was of a simpler style, done in dark grey leather and silver trim. The top exposed more of the breasts than the other, but that was fine by him. The necklace was a braided leather rope from which depended a five-carat synthesised diamond. The tail ring was a two-inch wide piece of leather upon which was embroidered an intricate design in silver thread. Then he looked at the price, and his arousal deflated like a bicycle tire. “You’re asking *how* much for this?” he choked out.

“Oops...I forgot to change the price. This batch of catalogues was riddled with price errors until we got it sorted out. This is one of the old ones. Let me just get a newer one....” She trailed off as she bustled off through a door, returning a few moments later with a sligher bigger book. “This is the correct price, sir,” she said, finding the page and pointing it out.

Kris breathed a sigh of relief. “Oh, thank heavens. I thought I was going to have to mortgage the house to pay for this. Yes, I’ll take this one.”

“I’m sure shi’ll be very happy with it,” assured the woman. “I’ll just go pack it up.” She went out the back again, and Kris wandered up to the front of the shop to the counter, pulling out his wallet to pay for his purchase. He couldn’t wait to see Forest’s expression when shi opened his gift. Shi didn’t really have anything proper for an intimate occasion (not that he was aware of, and he certainly wasn’t going to go through hir wardrobe to find out), so he thought it was the perfect gift.

A few minutes later the woman returned with a large box wrapped up in blue wrapping paper, complete with ostentatious bow on top. “Here we go.” She put it on the counter and took the credit card Kris offered her. The transaction was swiftly completed and Kris happily walked out the door with the box. “Thank you!” he called over his shoulder as the door closed behind him. “Trina’s going to go spare trying to guess what’s in here,” he mused to himself.

“What the...?” Trina thought when she saw Kris, mostly hidden behind a huge box, walking toward her. “Kris, I hope you didn’t buy the shop out!” she said as he drew near.

“Not quite,” the foxmorph replied as he set the box down on top of the car. He opened the back door, previously unlocked by Trina when she got back, and placed the box inside on the back seat. “Right, let’s go to lunch!” he said cheerfully, ignoring the intense look of curiosity on Trina’s face. “Give it up; you’ll find out when Forest opens it.”

“Spoilsport,” muttered Trina good-naturedly. “Come on; I’ll treat you to a hot lunch.”

Finally it was time to reveal the gifts. Forest’s new camera was in a small box wrapped in Christmas paper kept over from last year (Trina had found the old camera’s manual and taken it in to the camera store, as Forest had been using the camera), and was dwarfed by Kris’ gift.

After some effort, the energetic cubs had been put to bed, and now the living room was quiet, save for the movements of Kris, Trina and Forest. Forest’s curiosity was reaching peak levels, matched only by Trina’s, at the sight of the boxes placed before hir. “I’ll open the small one first,” shi said, reaching for Trina’s gift.

The arctic foxmorph settled himself down on the rug next to Forest, putting her arms around the chakat and snuggling up. “Hope you like it.”

The chakat ripped apart the paper, revealing the grey box within. ‘Oooh, what’s this?’ shi murmured, slitting the securing tape with an extended claw and lifting the lid. Shi was positively vibrating with anticipation; hir tailtip was twitching furiously. “Oh, a new camera!” Forest almost dropped the thing as shi snugged Trina hard and kissed her full on the muzzle. “Thank you so much! How did you know this was what I most wanted?”

“Well, you kept complaining about the bad photos your old one kept taking, and I figured that it couldn’t be too much longer before it gave up totally, so me and Kris decided to get you a replacement. It’s even loaded with two gigs of memory.”

“Wow,” Forest breathed, examining the camera closely. Shi held it up and squinted through the viewfinder. “Excellent! I’ll go out tomorrow and test it out! Thanks!” shi said again. “Now, let’s open this big one. I’m dying to know what this is.”

“You’re not the only one,” said Trina, shooting a glance at Kris. He merely smiled back and took a seat on the sofa, leaning forward and resting his elbows on his knees.

The bow was removed and set aside, then the paper was torn off with equal fervour. The box beneath was plain, giving no clue as to its contents. Trina leaned closer, tail swishing madly with curiosity.

There was absolute silence for a few seconds once the box’s lid was removed. Both Forest and Trina stared at the contents, before Forest reached in and pulled out the leather top, opening it out to get a better look. “I’ll bet you got the right size too,” shi murmured with amusement, setting it aside to pull the other items out.

Trina’s eyebrows rose higher when she saw them. “And I’ll bet you had a good time in that lingerie store, didn’t you?” shi accused Kris, trying to hide a grin.

“Go on, Forest. Go put them on and show us how you look,” urged Kris.

“I guess I’ll have to, won’t I?” mused the chakat, putting the ensemble back in the box and getting up. “Back in a moment, folks,” shi said, taking himself off to his bedroom to don the outfit. Shi batted his eyelids coquettishly before shi disappeared.

Trina went over to Kris and swatted him on the head. “Trust a male to buy a gift like that!” she laughed, putting an arm around him and planting a little kiss on his cheek. “I should have known.”

Kris tried to look properly modest. “Yes, you should have. I think all males think in the same way, from the lowliest cave dweller to the highest royalty.”

“Well, that does have its advantages sometimes,” murmured Trina, snuggling up close to her mate and mrring softly.

A few minutes later a voice spoke from the doorway behind them. “Does my hair look better up, or down?” Forest had struck a pose, raising his arms to gather his long black hair up and pushing his bosom out. His nipples, and the surrounding two inches of flesh, were displayed proudly through the holes in the leather. The diamond on the necklace sparkled brilliantly in the room’s light as shi turned his head to look at his mates. His tail curled around his feet, showing off the ring at its base. Shi then lowered his arms, letting his hair fall naturally down his back, a few strands framing his face.

“Mmm, down definitely,” murmured Kris, shifting position slightly as he felt the stirrings of arousal again. “Come over here so we can get a better look at you.”

Forest’s movements were deliberate, emphasising the sensuality of the outfit. Shi stopped in front of them, leaning forward to pull Kris’ head toward his in a slow kiss. “Thank you, Kris. This is *certainly* the most...interesting present I’ve ever been given. A pity that Goldfur isn’t here to see me now.” Shi chuckled, then added, “We can send him a photo taken by my new camera!”

“We can do that tomorrow. In the meantime...does that outfit inspire you in anyway?” asked Kris, lightly tracing Forest’s jawline.

“Perhaps,” shi said, pretending to think about it. “Why don’t we all go to my room and find out?” shi suggested, the tip of his tail flicking to and fro quickly. “I’ll give you a performance you won’t forget in a hurry.”

Both mates raised themselves off the couch and put arms around Forest’s waist. “Sounds like an excellent idea,” said Trina, Kris nodding in agreement. “Mmm, this leather feels wonderful...”

Together they padded toward Forest’s bedroom, stopping briefly for Forest to check on the sleeping cubs. “They should be fine,” shi whispered, before leading the way into his room, closing the door behind Kris and Trina as they entered. “Now, let the show begin....”