

“You Look Really Sad”

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The tension crackles in the air. It's so real it might as well be tangible.

Kei stares into Remy's eyes. The other fox's green irises look like they've had bits of gold leaf laced into them somehow. Like by magic.

Like by whatever magic brought the two of them together in this moment.

The tension is breaking. It's happening in an instant but it's such a distinct sensation that it feels to Kei like time has slowed to a crawl, like the time when he was thirteen and he fell off his bike and could see the ground coming up to meet him for what felt like forever.

This is the good kind of forever. Kei doesn't know it yet, but five, ten, fifteen years from now, he'll be able to think back to this exact moment and it will always, always feel the same.

The tension breaks. Remy's gorgeous green-and-gold eyes flicker in the dim light as they widen, and then the two foxes have their muzzles pressed together. Kei lets out a whine that's full of so much strain and emotion and his bushy tail cannot stop wagging.

“You look really sad,” Remy had said seconds before. Sad, because Kei had given up hope. Sad, because Kei was trying to cope with weeks—no, months of misinterpreting mixed signals and holding onto so much wasted hope. Sad, because Kei thought this was never going to happen, and now here it is. It's happening now and sad is the last thing Kei can possibly be.

Remy's tongue plays with Kei's and Kei's tongue plays with Remy's. It's just for a few seconds, and it doesn't feel like quite the eternity that the perfect moment of tension breaking felt like, but it feels like a lot longer than a few seconds.

The two foxes pull their muzzles apart from one another. Both of them are blushing. Both of them have their ears tipped partway back. Both of them are smiling.

In the aftermath of the kiss that Kei has been daydreaming about for weeks—no, months—the short fox is finally aware of his surroundings again. But the little party here in the dorm lounge is still going on as it was a few seconds ago. Some of the people are a little drunk, but nobody's drinking here, not where the RA might see. One of the girls from down the hall, Angela, the ring-tailed lemur that was in Kei's Astronomy class last semester, is looking at the two foxes, but her expression of surprise soon changes to a smile and her tail curls about in amusement.

The following Monday at breakfast she'll tell Kei, “I'd always kind of wondered.”

She'll also say, “I think it's kind of cool.”

Remy reaches out, takes one of Kei's chocolate-brown paws in his own, and squeezes it before letting go. “I've been wanting to do that for a long time,” he says, quietly, so that not even Angela can hear.

“Me too,” Kei replies. There's a lot he's wanted to do for a long time, but it's that kiss just now that he's wanted more than anything. Now that it's happened, his mind is spinning out of control.

Remy asks, “Wanna head back to Tyler and Jay's room and grab another drink?” Kei thinks *“I'd rather go back to your room and do some more kissing,”* but he doesn't say it, doesn't dare say it, but

figures that, now that the tension has broken maybe more kissing is inevitable.

So instead Kei says, “Yeah,” but he knows he shouldn't have more than one more. Not because he's worried he'll take things too far if he's drunk. Just because he's a small fox and he'll regret it in the morning if he's hungover, and he doesn't want to regret anything about this night.

In five, ten, fifteen years, he'll look back on this night, and no, he won't regret anything.

Tyler is a coyote and Jay is a mouse, but Tyler and Jay's room smells more like coyote. Coyote and alcohol, at the moment. There's not as many people in here as there are in the lounge, but the energy is just as high, in part due to the drinking and in part because of the music coming from Jay's computer.

Kei swirls his tongue around inside his muzzle and still can't believe he just kissed Remy a few minutes ago. If he couldn't taste the other fox in his mouth still, he might think he'd made it all up in his head, but no, he only had one raspberry cider earlier and there's no way he's that far gone. Part of him wants to swish his tail over to touch Remy's to see if Remy touches back, but he's too nervous (giddily nervous, but nervous) while waiting for Matt, the black wolf who was Kei's roommate last year, to mix his drink in a red plastic cup that he just stands there and fidgets his paws together.

Remy had squeezed his paw after the kiss, too, hadn't he? God, this was all real, wasn't it?

The drink tastes more like sugar than alcohol. Kei had told Matt to put more peach schnapps in than vodka, and Matt had stopped when Kei had said, “That's enough!” after only pouring the vodka for like half a second.

He'll be able to nurse this. He takes a few gulps, first, because he's still trying to steel his nerves, but he slows down after that. Remy joins him with a full cup of his own. Matt probably poured more vodka into that one.

The next few hours are a weird blur, and five, ten, fifteen years from now, Kei won't really be able to remember anything that happened between the kiss and leaving the party. He'll remember going back to the lounge, remember Remy being close but not too close, remember nobody remarking on the fact that they'd seen the two foxes kissing. He'll remember wanting to touch Remy's tail while Matt made him a drink and then chickening out, but not much more than that.

More than anything, he'll remember Remy saying, “You look really sad,” and then looking into Remy's beautiful perfect magic green-and-gold eyes and realizing that he hadn't been misreading the other fox's signals at all and just kissing him right then and there in the dorm lounge.

After leaving the party (and this will be where Kei's memory picks back up), Remy walks with Kei back to Kei's dorm, which is down the hill a ways. The paved path between the trees is lit just enough to see by. It'd be really romantic to stop here and kiss again, Kei thinks, but he's too anxious to stop and do it and besides, he thinks maybe Remy will give him a kiss goodnight in a few minutes anyway. Maybe more, but he's not sure about that.

They stop outside the door to Kei's dorm room. There isn't a hall party that spans multiple rooms like there is up at Tyler and Jay's dorm, and while the sound of music and merrymaking comes from behind some of the closed doors the two foxes passed on their way in, the hallway is empty.

“Thanks,” Kei says, feeling awkward but hopeful as he looks up at Remy. “That really cheered me up.”

It's been an hour or two and neither fox has mentioned it since, but of course Remy knows Kei is talking about the kiss. “I'm glad,” he says to the smaller fox. “You're really cute and you're cuter when you're smiling.”

Kei looks at his door and then back at Remy. “Do you, uh, want to come inside? Just to like, sit and

talk.”

Remy says, “Yeah, okay,” and so Kei fishes out his key and opens the door. The lights are all off, which means that Kei's roommate Matt (a different Matt; this one is a jackal) really did go back home to his parents' place for the weekend after all. Kei considers pointing that out to Remy, but doesn't.

The two foxes sit down on the edge of Kei's bed. Kei doesn't look at Remy and instead looks at his own black-furred paw against the hunter green sheet as he runs his fingers along it. He starts to say something about how he wasn't sure if he was barking up the wrong tree, but he only gets partway through his thought before Remy takes his fingers and puts them on Kei's muzzle to gently turn the little fox's gaze away from the hunter green bed sheet and back to those green-and-gold eyes, and he says, “Hey, look, don't worry about it; it's all been sorted,” and then he leans in and the two foxes are kissing again.

“It's all been sorted.” Five, ten, fifteen years from now, Kei will still remember those exact words and reflect on how accurate they really were.

The foxes kiss while sitting up for a while, and then after a break so that Kei can catch his breath, they kiss while lying down, on their sides, face to face. Kei whimpers because he's still a little scared but Remy's touch is reassuring.

Paws wander, but they don't wander anywhere untoward. The most adventurous they get is brushing along Remy's hip or the small of Kei's back with a brief detour to stroke his tail. There's a lot more tail-stroking after that, because it's nice and intimate without being too serious or scary.

Kei is really worked up, and he thinks he can smell that Remy is, too, but doesn't comment on it and makes a point of not looking to check. It's really late now, and though Kei isn't tired or sleepy he knows he needs to go to bed eventually, and if he stays up too much longer things might go further than he's necessarily ready for, even if his body is ready for it just fine. He asks if Remy would like to stay the night, and then he finally says, “Matt's gone home for the weekend.”

Remy asks, “Are you sure?”

Kei replies, “I mean, just to sleep and spend the night.” He hopes that gets the point across.

A minute later, the two foxes are under the covers together. Their shirts are off, but their shorts are still on.

They cuddle in close.

Remy gives Kei one last kiss, then whispers, “Goodnight, fox,” into one of Kei's big ears.

They fall asleep like that, but when Kei wakes up, he's rolled over and Remy is kinda-sorta tucked up behind him. Kei takes a breath in through his nose and just enjoys how the air smells like fox, but not only himself.

It's another five or ten or fifteen minutes later, Kei thinks, that Remy finally wakes up. There's more kissing then, but nothing too heated. “We should probably shower, huh?” Kei finally says. He's a little nervous about whether he's got really bad morning breath.

Kei and Remy go and shower (not together), then get breakfast at the dining hall. They spend the afternoon together, and that night a bunch of their friends get together and they go the movies. They manage to sit next to each other, but it's not really a date.

They won't get the chance to go on many dates because it's close to the end of the semester and neither of them really wants to rush anything with summer coming up. And that's fine, because the few times they do get to be together, it's still really nice.

Things will eventually move beyond kissing, but not that much further.

Come summer, Kei will head back home two hours to the east and Remy will go home five hours south.

Over the summer, Kei and Remy will stay in touch, and it'll be a little romantic. To his surprise, Kei will hit it off with someone online who only lives an hour away, an otter who five, ten, fifteen years down the road, Kei won't remember whether his name was Jimmy or Jamie. It'll just be a summer fling, and he'll tell Remy about it, and it'll be weird for a while.

Later in the fall semester, while studying for midterms, Angela the ring-tailed lemur will ask Kei how come he and Remy never dated, and Kei will explain that they kind of did for a while, but that school has them both really busy and that they're still good friends.

Five, ten, fifteen years later, Kei and Remy will still be good friends, but they'll only kiss one more time, three years after they've both graduated when they're both at wolf-Matt's wedding.

They'll both be a little tipsy, but not drunk, and after it happens, Remy will ask, "What was that for?"

And Kei will look into those green eyes, with the gold leaf effect that's faded in the intervening years, but only a little, and just say, "You looked really sad."