

It was late into the afternoon when Noemi, Caedim, and Mata arrived at Mata's house with the supplies they'd purchased. Mother's Day was coming up later in the week, and Noemi had planned a special surprise for Emily as a special "thank you" for everything the woman had done. However, where Emily lived above the jewelry store she owned, Noemi would not have been able to craft the gift without being discovered so she had to rely on her mate and Mata to help her out. Once they'd set foot inside the house, the three set the supplies down in the living room and followed Mata into her studio. The "gift" was simple; Noemi wanted to craft Emily a special, one-of-a-kind piece of jewelry using her fire magic, and Mata had agreed to take some photographs of her as an add-on. There would be another photoshoot on Mother's Day to commemorate the event, but for today, it would just be Noemi and Caedim getting their photos taken. Though Emily had invited Caedim to come and live with her and Noemi after he and Noemi became mates, the apartment Emily lived in barely held her and Noemi comfortably, let alone a third party, so he opted to stay in his apothecary. The apothecary was also unaccommodating for more than one person, making it difficult for Noemi to move in with her mate.

"Alright, would the happy couple prefer to get the photo session over with? Or should we all catch a break first?" Mata put a playful emphasis on 'happy couple,' watching the other two Scarfoxes fidget shyly.

"I'd like a drink first, if you don't mind," Caedim answered quickly, wanting to delay the photoshoot as long as possible.

Though he'd come a long way in gaining trust in others, Caedim still had his insecurities and getting his photo taken happened to be one of them. Noemi had given him the choice when Mata proposed the idea, and he'd almost said no, but where Emily had accepted him as a son-in-law, he felt it would have been improper if he backed out. He was, as they say, "part of the family" now, after all, so he should be in the family portraits. Those words made his face flush with mist, coloring his cheeks with an orange and green tint. Emily was a sweet woman, he couldn't deny that. She made him feel welcome any time he did stop by her place, and something about her was very comforting. Like Noemi, he felt like he could open up to her about anything without fear of judgement or scorn, and he liked that.

Noemi nodded in agreement with her mate's suggestion, settling the debate. Mata beckoned the pair to follow her, and they made their way to the kitchen. While the begemmed fox grabbed the glasses and poured drinks for everyone, Noemi and Caedim rummaged in the fridge to find something to snack on and prepared three

individual plates. Everyone grabbed a drink and a plate and sat down around the table to discuss the plans for how to time everything.

They'd given themselves a week to prepare, Noemi and Mata were confident enough in their skills that they felt a week was too long, but Caedim convinced them both to pace themselves in the event that anything might go wrong. Noemi was easily persuaded and agreed to stretch things out, so as not to overwork herself and her magic, but Mata was stubborn. Not unlike Will in times past, Caedim had been gifted with the misfortune of questioning Mata's skills as a photographer and gotten an earful, and he sternly reminded himself to never make that mistake again. Still, even Mata eventually agreed that a sentimental gift like this was better prepared with time and love, and in the end she too agreed to space things out by opting for traditionally developed photographs rather than digital.

Today, Mata decided, would be the indoor photoshoot in her studio due to the time of day and the cloudy sky. She left Noemi and Caedim to rest and relax while she prepared some backdrops and props, and once she was ready, she returned to the kitchen to announce that everything was ready in the other room, all they needed to do was double check that they looked presentable. Both had dressed up for the occasion today; Noemi was wearing a semi-sheer, sleeveless ruffled blouse paired with a black ruffled skirt, accessorized with some of the jewelry she'd saved up to buy from Emily's shop. Caedim was in his more formal attire consisting of a white dress shirt, pinstripe vest, and a necktie that was loose and improperly tied. Smoothing out his clothes for him, Noemi chuckled at Caedim and re-tied his necktie properly.

"There," she said softly and smiled at him. "Very handsome."

Caedim flushed again and looked away, his ears twitching in embarrassment. One day, he'd get used to the compliments. Today, however, was not that day.

Mata watched the scene from the doorway, grinning, and then called out to the two of them. "The studio awaits."

The three Scarfoxes entered the photo studio and Mata promptly went into business mode, deciding who to photograph first. Knowing that Caedim was camera shy, she grinned slyly and ushered him over to the backdrop and props she'd set up prior. He sat stiffly on the stool, looking uncomfortable and awkward, until Mata called out to him.

"Take a minute to relax, hun. There's no rush." She crossed her arms on top of her tripod and leaned against it. "Let yourself get used to the camera's presence."

Caedim looked at her with uncertainty, and then looked at the camera pointed at him. His ears pulled back and he looked around before casting his gaze over to his mate. Noemi smiled softly and gestured to him to take some deep breaths, and he obeyed. Noemi coached him through a breathing exercise until he visibly relaxed, and then he looked back towards Mata. "Okay, I'm ready. I think."

Mata smiled. "I'll let you know now that I prefer more 'natural' looking subjects, so instead of focusing on me or my camera, I'd like you to look around and just act natural."

The split colored fox tilted his head curiously, but understood. It took him a minute or two to get comfortable, but soon enough the photoshoot was underway. With Noemi's help and guidance, and a little bit of conversation, Caedim let go of his tension and Mata was able to get a number of photos of him laughing, smiling, excited when he started talking about his potion making, etc. When Mata announced that Caedim's time was up, he looked back at her in surprise. "Wait, already?"

Mata chuckled. "Yep! See, that wasn't so bad was it?"

Noemi swapped places with her mate, and Caedim watched, entranced, as Noemi breezed through the photoshoot with ease. Not that it surprised him, Noemi was often a model for Mata's photography when she was willing to participate. The candle fox glanced Caedim's way to see the starstruck look on his face, and she giggled shyly.

Mata looked over at him too, and grinned. "I hope, someday, I find a mate who looks at me the way he looks at you, girl."

Noemi immediately blushed a bright orange, hiding her face in her hands as she stammered out a weak reply.

It was time then for the two to pair up for the couples photoshoot. Mata called for a brief intermission while she changed up the backdrop and props, and then ushered the two lovebirds back in front of the camera. Where she was relatively hands-off with the individual photoshoots, Mata was a little more commanding with this set of photos so that she could get the best angles and most meaningful moments

between the two Scarfoxes. When the photoshoot ended, Noemi and Caedim were just about to walk out of the studio room when Mata stopped them.

"Hold up, you two. That was the business side of things, now comes the *fun* side of things."

Caedim and Noemi exchanged curious glances, but before either of them could ask, they found themselves bombarded with costume parts and accessories. Caedim let out a muffled "oof" as a trenchcoat blanketed his face and slid down to the floor, and Noemi was holding a feather boa in her hands.

"Mata, is this-

"Serious photos are nice and all, but we gotta give Emily some fun, silly photos too. Suit up, you two. I'm gonna go get more film."

As she exited the studio, Noemi and Caedim set to searching the trunks at the back of the room, rummaging through various articles of clothing and some other items. Noemi pulled out an elaborate black hat with a sheer veil hanging down from it, adorned with red roses and beads. Looking at it thoughtfully, she put it on her head and wrapped the feather boa around her shoulders. She spun around playfully as Caedim slipped into the trench coat, finding a matching hat hanging on a hatrack to his right. Shoving his hands in the coat pockets, he put on a serious face, mimicking a detective from an old film he'd watched some time back. Noemi laughed and playfully slapped the end of her feather boa at him.

"Hey, save that energy for the camera, you two," Mata cooed as she entered the studio once again, a film roll in her hand. "Though, since you two look like that, I could take some fun Film Noir style photos if you want, for something dramatic."

The three Scarfoxes had fun with the shoot, taking lots of silly and dramatic photos until the film roll was used up. With that, it was time for Noemi to start working on the necklace she wanted to make for Emily. There would be no more indoor photo sessions for the next week, so Mata put away her backdrops and props and cleaned off one of the tables in the studio to ensure the candle fox had ample space to spread out her materials.

"You two can go ahead, I'm gonna get a head start on developing these film rolls."

Caedim and Noemi nodded and left the studio, returning to the living room to gather up the supplies they'd bought. Spreading them out on the studio table, the two arranged everything in neat piles. Though Caedim knew that Noemi had been given her own jewelry line in Emily's shop, he'd never actually seen her work on a piece so he was greatly intrigued to see how she worked. He was disappointed, however, when it turned out Noemi wasn't going to start the actual crafting process that day, and instead was drafting up the design she planned to make. By the time she was almost finished, it was getting late and Mata wanted her and Caedim to get some rest in case the weather happened to be pleasant the next day. Saying their goodbyes, Caedim walked Noemi home to the jewelry store and then headed back to his apothecary to sleep away the night.

Both awoke the next morning to find the skies a dark grey, a heavy rain soaking the streets and sidewalks. There would be no photoshoot today, but Noemi and Caedim still met up and headed back to Mata's so that Noemi could work on the necklace. Since the draft was almost finished the previous night, Noemi put the finishing details on the blueprint and immediately set to preparing the materials. First, she needed to transform the glass pieces into the desired shapes, then she would have to imbue the shapes with her fire magic. Once that was done, she would need to put everything together. It wouldn't all be done in a single day, but she wanted to at least get as much of it done as she could.

Taking a small piece of plain glass into her hand, she closed her eyes and focused her attention on its weight and texture. Caedim observed her with interest, watching as her palms began to glow a soft orange color which then spread into the glass itself. Small sparks of flame began to ignite around the glass before tongues of flame began to dance and coil through the air around it, lifting it out of Noemi's flattened palm into the air. Awed, Caedim leaned in for a closer look until the intense heat of the flames became too much to bear and he shrunk back defensively. As Noemi opened her eyes, her pale orange irises were now glowing with an intense light, the glass beginning to melt and liquify in the heat from her magic. Intently, she gazed at it, her mere will beginning to shape the simple glass cube into something more ornate, giving it an entirely new form and hollowing it out. When it was half formed, she ignited a small flame inside of the glass before wrapping it in her magic and then sealed the shape up. Setting it down on the table, she exhaled and sat back.

"One down..."

Caedim's ears pointed forward. "How much energy does that take?"

"For more complex shapes, a lot. For smaller shapes, not so much," Noemi answered, picking up a smaller piece of glass from the pile. "This one will be done quickly since it's an accent piece, not one of the main points."

She repeated the process multiple times, crafting out the smaller glass accents before moving onto another cube of glass similar to the first one. When she'd crafted one third of the required components, she slumped back in her chair and said she needed a break. Caedim looked concerned, but she assured him that she was fine and that she'd taken on bigger challenges than this while crafting some of the more expensive pieces from her designer catalog. As if sensing the need for a break, Mata came in carrying a tray of drinks and some small snacks, joining the other two at the table and looking over Noemi's handiwork. The three of them took a rest and chatted idly while they ate and drank, Mata confirming the photos had developed perfectly and that, pending the weather, she would be ready for the outdoor photoshoot.

When they were done, Noemi went back to transforming the glass pieces that remained, and this time Mata stayed to watch since her photos were developed and just needed to dry. Her and Caedim were both enamored with the fire magic that Noemi possessed, and Mata picked up one of the flame-imbued pieces to look at it.

"It's warm," she mused to herself, "and it feels comforting."

"Yes, that is what my magic creates," Noemi set down the piece she'd just finished shaping. "I aim to make pieces that are both visually appealing but also comforting to those who own them. Comfort is something we all need, from time to time, and a piece of comfort that you can carry with you everywhere goes a long way to help someone in need."

"Huh," Mata hummed thoughtfully. "Don't suppose I could bribe you for one of these someday? How much do these even cost, anyway?"

Noemi laughed. "Emily sets the price depending on the complexity and materials used, they do get a little bit expensive." She fell silent. "I don't need a bribe to make one for a friend, Mata. We can worry about the details later, but I'd be more than happy to make you something." She turned over one of the pieces, inspecting it. "It doesn't even have to be jewelry," Noemi added. "I can make decorative pieces too!"

Mata's ears perked up. "Well hey, I'd love that. I'll come see you the next time you're free and we can discuss it."

The rest of the day proceeded with the three Scarfoxes idly chatting while Noemi worked on the necklace, and once she couldn't take anymore, Noemi decided it was time to go home and rest. Donning their umbrellas, the two Scarfoxes departed Mata's house to return home for the rest of the day. Emily was out when Noemi returned home, so she headed to her room to rest. Caedim decided to return to his apothecary and grab a small energy mixture, which he brought to Noemi later in the day to help her restore some of her magic and strength.

The following day was sunny, so Mata decided to take advantage of it and rallied up the other two for the outdoor photoshoot. This time, to match the weather, Noemi was wearing a breezy and loose fitting dress, accompanied by a sun hat adorned with a ribbon. Caedim was dressed in a slightly less formal shirt paired with an open vest, but still maintained a somewhat fancy appearance. Not wanting to waste the day, Mata spaced out the photoshoot with a picnic, enjoying the time with her two friends on the grass. In a similar fashion to the prior photoshoot, she took pictures of Caedim and Noemi individually first, utilizing the natural beauty of their surroundings, and then focused on the two of them as a couple. With that, the only photos left would be the ones taken on Mother's Day with Emily, but for now, Mata had enough to start putting the album together.

Since the day was nice, and Noemi still felt a little bit fatigued, she decided not to work on the necklace that day, taking it off after the picnic to rest and recuperate a little more. Mata left early to go home and develop the photos, leaving Noemi and Caedim in the park to enjoy the day. By night, they returned to their homes. The rest of the week leading up to Mother's Day went smoothly, and Noemi completed the necklace one day earlier than anticipated. The three Scarfoxes gathered together on the final night to make their preparations for the next morning, combing through the album and getting everything nicely wrapped up for Emily. Wanting to surprise the woman, Noemi and Caedim stayed over at Mata's that night so that the three of them could arrive at Emily's apartment bright and early in the morning to unfold the rest of their plans.

When the sun rose, it was time. Mata gathered up her photo supplies while Noemi and Caedim grabbed the wrapped gifts, and the three departed Mata's house. Emily was still asleep when they arrived, so Noemi and Mata set to work making breakfast while Caedim tidied the place up a bit. Once the food was ready, Noemi set everything onto a tray and crept into Emily's room, calling out to her softly. "Mama, it's Mother's Day."

Emily stirred in her sleep and then slowly opened her eyes. Seeing Noemi standing by her bed with a tray of food, she sat up in surprise.

"What's this?"

"Breakfast in bed," Noemi chuckled.

Emily looked stunned for a moment but then smiled and beckoned the candle fox to join her on the bed. Noemi obliged and handed Emily the tray, taking a seat on the edge of the bed beside her. Then, Mata and Caedim joined her as well, each one holding one of the wrapped gifts. The human looked at the gifts and then at the two Scarfoxes holding them.

"And what do we have here?" She laughed.

"Gifts, for mama," Noemi reached out and took the gift from Caedim first, the necklace that she made by hand. She handed it to the woman and waited for her to open it, wringing her hands together nervously.

Emily gasped when she unwrapped it, holding it up to admire it. In the light of the morning sun, the transformed glass sparkled beautifully on the ornate gold chains woven together. "Noemi, darling, it's wonderful!" She set it down gently and opened her arms for a hug. The pale Scarfox leaned in, hugging the human tightly.

"Thanks, I'm glad you like it."

"I love it, dear."

Mata was next, and she approached the woman with the album of photos. Emily graciously accepted it, looking at the cover. It was a small black leather album with a photo frame in the center. Staring up at her was a black and white photograph of Noemi and Caedim, smiling and in good spirits, from the day of the picnic. She smiled back and opened the cover, looking delightedly at the contents. "My dear, these are gorgeous photos."

Mata flushed slightly, fidgeting with the hem of her hoodie. "It's nothing, really..."

Noemi and Caedim chuckled in unison.



As Emily continued to flip through the photo, she reached the back portion of the album which contained empty photo sleeves. She closed the book and started to comment on how lovely it was, but Mata stopped her.

"It's not done, yet."

The human tilted her head. "What do you mean?"

Mata grinned. "It has all of the photos you could want of your daughter, and your son-in-law, but it's missing one thing..." Mata waited to see if the human would catch on. When Emily still looked confused, Mata continued. "The final photoshoot is today. With you."

Emily's eyes widened. She opened her mouth to protest, but Noemi intervened.

"Please," she pleaded quietly, "we've been planning this for weeks. We have the whole day planned out as a treat for you."

The woman thought about it as Noemi took her hands and held them. "This is your day, and it's going to be a nice afternoon. The shop can go for one day without opening, can't it? And besides, it's been a long time since you've had a vacation."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," Emily agreed. "I'll need some time to get ready, I hope you don't mind waiting."

Noemi smiled excitedly and hugged the human once again. "It's fine mama, take as long as you need."

When she was ready, Emily entered the living room of the small apartment to find the three Scarfoxes sitting on the sofa. They stood up immediately, with Noemi accompanying Emily out of the apartment, Caedim following close behind. Mata was last to leave as she rallied up her photo equipment. Once all four of them had piled out into the hallway, Emily locked the apartment door and the quartet headed out into the sunshine. The day was an eventful one; a photoshoot in the park and a lunchtime picnic, and then the three Scarfoxes treated Emily to a movie followed by dinner later into the evening. Once the day's events had concluded, Mata went her own way, returning home to develop the new photographs for the album. Noemi and Emily returned home together, and Caedim returned home to his apothecary.

All in all, it had been a success, and Emily had enjoyed herself immensely in the company of the three Scarfoxes. As she brushed Noemi's hair after the Scarfox had bathed, she hugged the Scarfox tightly. "Thank you, Noemi. I really enjoyed myself today. A wonderful day, with a wonderful daughter and her friends!"

Noemi smiled happily, her cheeks tinting orange, and tilted her head back to look up at the woman she called her mother.

"You're very welcome."