

Chapter 6

It was close to six pm when they returned to the room with several paper grocery bags with the Price Slasher™ logo on them (PRICE over SLASHER with a sword cutting into SLASHER diagonally). After the sticker-shock of their late lunch in the hotel restaurant, they decided to make a trip to the nearest town and buy groceries. They might still eat a meal or two in one of the restaurants, but now they had less expensive options.

Rick pulled a crockpot out from one of the kitchenette cabinets. “I knew I saw one when I poked around when we first got here.” He proceeded to wash it as a precaution and set it out to dry. “Chili tomorrow evening.”

Liz and George unloaded groceries into the fridge and into one of the cabinets. Jim folded the empty bags and stared at the two dozen cans of assorted beans and tomatoes. “So, just how much chili do you plan to make, Rick?”

“At least a full pot, preferably two.” He paused a moment. “I probably should have asked this at the store. I’m hoping to kill two birds with one stone if you three don’t mind.” He pulled a knife and cutting board out of a drawer, washed them, and started chopping peppers and a sweet onion. “I had to cut a deal with my boss to get today through Monday off. At some point over the weekend, I have to host an impromptu WMSU alumni event. As I mentioned on the drive up, I have served for years as the advisor to the university’s furry student club. I’d like to offer an open invitation to WMSU students and alumni for chili tomorrow evening. We’ll limit how many are in here at once. I know its last minute. I’m not too worried about running out of chili. I’m sure there will be those with questions about the suit. You’ll have a semi-captive audience without taking-up room in the con space.”

Jim looked about the dining area. “We’ll need to move your stuff into the bedroom, Liz, if we do this. I don’t think we should have more than 10 to 12 in here at a time. Your thoughts?” Both simply gave him a thumbs up. Jim nodded to Rick.

“Thank you. Obviously, if you’ve got any friends here, don’t hesitate to invite them.” Rick chuckled. “As the scent of that wafts in the hallway tomorrow as it cooks all day, and as people get over the shock of the restaurant’s prices, we might have friends we didn’t know we had.” He chuckled again. “Before you ask, if I prep this tonight, I can also rewash the board and knife right off and come morning, just dump everything in the crockpot and forget it.” He pulled out a frying pan, inspected it, and washed it prior to setting it on the stove. He turned the temp to medium, scraped what he had chopped so far into the frying pan. He added a little oil and then turned back to the cutting board and continued to chop. “Go relax, I’ve got this covered and we’ve still got a couple hours before registration check-in.”

“You mean less than an hour,” Jim corrected.

“Only if you want to stand in line for an hour or so,” Liz chimed in. “At most furry cons I’ve been to of this size, registration check-in seems pretty slow the first hour ‘cause everyone is

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

trying to get their badges all at once. Also, this is a new con, so there could be glitches that'll slow things down. Wait an hour or so, and you don't stand in line as long."

"Provided everyone else doesn't think of the same thing," George piped in. "So, if you want, Jim, you and I can go wander down to registration in an hour and scout it out. If there's no line, we can text Liz and Rick to come down. If there's a long line, there's nothing that says we have to get in it."

An hour later, Jim and George scouted things out and quickly returned. "There must be 150 in that line," Jim reported.

"It's moving smoothly," George added, "but nope, as you predicted, Liz, it'll be a while before it's worth getting in line."

They waited until 8:30 and the line was fairly short. As they reached the head of registration, one of the staff jumped up, ran around the table, and embraced Rick in a bear hug.

"Stash! I didn't expect to see you here!"

"Janet, I didn't know if I'd be attending until a few weeks ago." Rick paused a moment. "Nor did I know you were serving on staff. It's been what? Three or four years since we last saw each other?"

"Yep, not since I graduated. So, who are your pals here?"

Rick introduced Sheila/Liz, Cantaloupe/George, and Jim to Janet and vice versa. "Flof, Raccoon, Normie meet Janet. Her fursona is a black bear."

Janet quickly focused on Jim as she got back behind the registration table. "I'll need photo ID. Thank you." She examined it. "And how did these furries drag you to this event?"

"Work. You'll find we paid dealer fees though we don't have a booth, nor requested one."

Janet tapped away at a laptop. "I see that now. I appreciate that you waited for the crowd to die down. I need to call our director in regard to this as I'm not sure how you were able to register as dealers after the deadline to do so." She swiped her finger on her phone screen, punched a number into it and waited for the other party to answer. "That special case you wanted me to alert you about? They're here at registration." She turned to Jim and handed him his driver's license back. "He'll be right down. Thanks for your patience."

Others checked the ID's of Rick, Liz and George. In all three cases their registration were flagged like Jim's and they all needed to wait. Soon after, a tall snow leopard with fur in shades of light green and white walked into the room. He went straight over to Janet and pulled his suit head off along with his hand paws. He set them on a table behind the registration area and then went over to the four.

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

He offered his hand. "Sublime Green, Con Director." All shook and introduced themselves.

"So, you're the four representing Second Fur?"

"Yes," Jim answered for the four of them.

"You do realize, you don't have a table in the dealer's den and as such, you can't sell anything."

"Just as it was explained by our boss, we don't plan to. We do plan to promote our new products, which are still in the beta test phase. The boss asked to register our group as dealers anyway so no one would think we were doing this underhanded."

Sublime nodded. "What sort of beta testing?"

"High tech robotics-enhanced fursuit," Jim responded and pointed to Rick, "which Pistachio will be wearing."

For the first time, Sublime closely looked at Rick. "Wait a minute. I know I've seen you somewhere recently and not at a fur meet. But...I can't place where I've seen you."

Rick nodded as he handed Sublime his WMSU business card and offered his hand. "Yes, we have met. Rick Michaud, White Mountain State University, Department of Conferences & Meetings. And, before you ask, no, I'm not stupid enough to try and sabotage an event that my employer didn't win the bid on. For one thing, we knew we had little chance of winning 'cause our facility isn't geared to fan cons. Hopefully, the proposal I made helped you get a better deal at this facility. I'm here because I just happen to 'win' the lottery, so to speak, with getting this gig with Second Fur to show-off their suit. After a few con appearances for them, the suit becomes mine in payment."

Sublime briefly glanced at the card and closed his eyes a moment in thought. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He then opened his eyes. "I want to see this suit before I make a final decision."

"Give me ten minutes," Rick stated.

"It'll take longer than that just waiting for an elevator," Jim responded.

"It's only 3 flights up. I'll take the stairs."

"I'm coming up with you," Sublime interjected. "I would like to screen this privately."

"Suit yourself," Jim replied. He turned to Liz and George. "Hang here if you want. Hopefully, this won't take long."

The three of them returned 20 minutes later. Sublime went straight over to Janet. "Print their name badges as dealers." He turned back to them. "I'm really impressed. However, remember,

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

as stated in the Code of Conduct, any trouble and we'll revoke your badges. You may promote, but no sales."

"As I said, we're only at the testing stage. We'll behave," Jim stated and offered his hand again in another handshake. "And thank you."

After the four of them left registration, Sublime retrieved his fursuit head and hand paws and shook his head. "Wait until you see that suit, Janet," he quipped as he put his snep head on. "They might steal the show from Letisha Possum, our Guest of Honor."

"May I ask why you're allowing them dealer badges when they won't really be dealing, boss?"

Sublime shrugged. "I had discussed Second Fur's request with the rest of the board in advance and it was left to me to make the final decision. As you know, dealers are charged an extra \$40 per table. Second Fur just 'donated' an extra \$160 towards con expenses without needing any tables in our already full dealers den, nor wanting or needing any of the extra perks we give to those who purchase a supporter membership at the same fee level. The con budget is pretty tight. That helps a bit."