

Chapter 7

“So how did you convince him?” Liz asked back in their suite.

“We showed him the suit and explained about the goggles and that the robotics in the tail are computer controlled using the goggles,” Rick replied. “I then put it on and gave him a quick performance.”

“He did the face washing routine again and then scampered into the kitchen and back,” Jim added. “I watched the director as he watched Rick. Sublime Green was sold on the spot.”

Rick nodded. “Watching and imitating all those squirrel nature videos on the Nature Documentary Channel website has paid off. Now then, time to get the street clothes off again, and the suit on. Then, go have some fun for an hour or so in the public spaces.”

Liz and George were all for it and were quickly in their suits as Sheila and Cantaloupe. The Sheila Floc suit was blue furred with a white belly. Her head could pass for just about any canine. Her tail was wolfish shaped but with fox coloration-blue for most of it with a white tip. Cantaloupe’s suit fur was beige and orange with a standard black raccoon mask around the eyes. This time, they did wait for and take the elevator down due to Sheila’s and Cantaloupe’s reduced vision.

“We might need more spotters,” Sheila stated as they descended.

“Nonsense,” Mal replied. “You’ve got me with my extra wide squirrel vision and Jim.” He triggered a gigglechitter. “We should be fine at least for this evening.

“We’ll see,” Cantaloupe replied.

As soon as they got off the elevator, Rick switched to feral mode. While there weren’t a lot of people in the common space, they quickly drew the attention of those who were there. Many complements and pictures occurred. Sheila quickly became Mal’s nemesis, stalking him throughout the lobby. Cantaloupe simply stayed out of Sheila’s way. Jim stood back, but kept an eye on the crowd, answering questions when asked and handing out business cards.

An hour quickly passed. Registration closed, and Janet stepped out of the registration room, noticed the crowd and walked over. She was amazed at Mal’s antics. “Stash, is that you?”

Mal turned towards Janet and nodded while his tail flicked up and down a couple times. He scampered over to her, crouched-up and accepted a hug. “What do you think?” His tail wigwagged sideways. He slowly spun around for her. He then spotted Sheila getting close. “Chitter, I can’t stay. That folf,” he pointed towards Sheila, “is out to get me. Scree!” He scampered past Janet towards the other end of the lobby. The crowd laughed.

Sheila came up to her and echoed Mal’s question, “What do you think?”

Janet shook her head. "I can't believe that's the same Pistachio I knew at WMSU. He was our group advisor. If someone wanted to try their hand at making a suit, he always had contacts we could turn to for assistance, especially in the theater department. Yet, he never put on a suit, even when a student offered to let him try theirs. He used the excuse that it wouldn't be proper for an advisor to do that. Yet, there he is acting like he's always done it." She shook her head again. "He had confessed to us students that he chose a squirrel as his fursona for he felt it was his kindred spirit. He dreamed being one many times. Maybe he's just letting that inner spirit take over."

Mal returned.

"So, snack, you're surrendering?" Sheila asked. "I promise to make it quick and painless."

Mal reached into his pocket, amazing onlookers with comments like, "He's like a toon. I didn't see the pockets before." Pulling out his phone, he successfully swiped through his passcode on the first try and called-up the Code of Conduct and held it up to Sheila.

"You can chase me all you want, folf. But it says right here, Rule number forty-seven, 'No eating or voring others in public con spaces.'" Mal's tail wigwagged sideways.

Some of the onlookers cheered.

"Let me see that!" Sheila snatched the phone. She held it up to look at without really being able to see it clearly, sagged her shoulders, and handed the phone back. (sigh) "You're right, squirrel snack. Though you do look awful tasty. Truce?" She opened her arms inviting a hug.

Mal's tail wigwagged up and down a couple times. "This isn't a trick is it?"

Sheila shook her head in the negative.

"Don't do it!" Some in by-standers cried out.

Mal's tail wigwagged up and down a couple times again as he thought about it. He then stood-up in a semi-crouch and they hugged to cheering.

"Truce for now," Sheila stated loud enough for the crowd to here. "But I know where you sleep, squirrel snack, and it's not a public space."

"Eeep!" Mal jumped back. "Now, that's not fair!"

Sheila shrugged.

"What's your name?" Several asked him.

Mal switched the suit to anthro mode and semi-stood, drooping his tail. He motioned to Sheila and then towards Cantaloupe and Jim nearby. "While this suiter normally goes by Pistachio,

that's not this character. This is the debut of this brand-new suit. My companions and I haven't settled on a name for this Malabar giant squirrel character. Sheila suggests Mal, and Cantaloupe suggests Maize. What do you think I should be called?"

There was some quick shouting back and forth in the crowd. Suddenly, they fell silent as Janet stepped forward and got their attention as they recognized her from registration. "Any other suggestions beyond the two proposed?" There was silence. "Then, let's make this short and simple. Cheer for Mal." There was loud cheering. She nodded and waved for silence again. "Alright, now cheer if you prefer Maize." There was loud cheering again, but not quite as loud. She turned to Mal. "Close, but it looks like you're going with Mal if you'll take a crowd vote."

Mal nodded. "Mal it is." He noticed a hand signal from Jim and then made like he was yawning. His tail quivered. "Unfortunately, it's well past bedtime for this squirrel. We are diurnal creatures, after all. Goodnight everyone. I'm sure I'll see many of you tomorrow. Giggleschitter."

Several selfie requests later, Mal and company finally made it towards the elevators. Janet was with them, also waiting. Mal turned to her. "Are all the rooms here suites?"

"I don't know, but staff got assigned two-room suites with kitchenettes."

"We got one of those too. Ours has a crockpot. Does yours have one you don't plan to use tomorrow?" Mal's tail wigwagged sideways.

Janet laughed. "That suit tail is incredible. I'll check as soon as I'm up there. I'll text you. What's your number and what are you up to?" She paused a moment. "Wait, are you planning your famous chili?" Her eyes lit up a bit at the thought.

Mal giggleschittered. "Of course." He turned to the others. "And you're invited. It will be easier with two crockpots."

Once back in their suite, Rick went through the steps to remove his suit head and pulled it off. He sighed. He really enjoyed playing as a squirrel.

"That went better than I expected," Jim quipped as he tapped away at his tablet computer. "You're an instant hit."

Rick started to wiggle the suit off as his pocket vibrated. He pulled out his phone. "Oh, good, Janet can loan us her room's crockpot. I'll respond to her in a moment." He set the phone on his cot and pulled the suit the rest of the way off.

Rick texted back to Janet with their room number. "I am a little worried."

"About what?" Liz asked as she brushed the fur on her suit body before carefully laying it in its tote. "That you might actually wind-up a folf-snack?" She giggled. "It was fun stalking you tonight."

“Isn’t it obvious?” George replied. “Look at the crowd he attracted tonight. There weren’t many at first, but I saw several take photos and send them off on their phone. Soon just about anyone about came down to the lobby to see him. He’s fearing he’ll be labeled a popufur due to the suit.” He looked at Rick. “That’s it, isn’t it?”

Rick bowed his head. “Yes, and in the negative sense of that term. That’s my worry. While it’s fun playing Mal, I just hope it doesn’t backfire. That could hurt your company’s sales. After producing the suit of my dreams, I want to see you succeed.” He slipped his street clothes on over the union suit. “And before you ask, I don’t plan to be up much longer. It’s easier to just throw my clothes over this briefly than to strip completely down twice.” Someone knocked on the door before he could continue. “That must be Janet.”

Rick let her in. Janet handed him the crockpot and waved to the others. “I can’t stay long. I’ve got to get some rest. I’ve got the morning shift tomorrow.”

“Thanks, Janet. If you know of others attending who are WMSU alumni or students, pass the word on. Chili, here.” He paused a moment glancing through the con schedule on his phone. “What is the best time you think that won’t clash with other events so it doesn’t look like our ‘room party’ is trying to steal someone’s thunder?”

“Five-thirty pm, it’s the closed rehearsal for the Saturday dance competition. Nothing else is scheduled until seven, so people can grab a bite to eat.”

Rick turned to his roommates. Does five-thirty sound good for you?” They nodded. He turned back to Janet. “Then five-thirty it shall be. You pass the word on that Pistachio’s got chili, both pred and prey varieties, and I’ll post it to the alumni page on social media.”

She nodded and left.

“Pred and prey varieties?” Jim asked.

Liz chuckled. “Meat and vegetarian.”

“Yup.” Rick chimed in. “I’d like to get a quick shower in. Are the rest of you all set for 10 minutes?” As none of them made a move towards the restroom, Rick took that as permission.