

Chapter 9

“Mommy! I’m scared!” the young boy cried out from near the center of the lobby as he clung to his mother. There were fur suiters everywhere.

“Seth, there’s nothing to be afraid of,” Seth’s mother tried to reassure her four-year-old son as she looked about. Seth whimpered.

Mal was close behind Seth’s mother, while Seth clung to her by the leg, peaking out behind her staring at the giant squirrel. Mal chittered quietly and his tail wigwagged sideways as he looked nearly eye-to-eye at the scared young boy. (chitter) “What’s wrong, Master Seth?”

Seth buried his face into his mother’s leg and hip. Mal moved around where Seth’s mother could see him.

He bowed his head briefly and then looked back up at her. “I’m sorry we’re scaring your son.”

“What is all of this? It looks like a sports mascot convention.”

“It’s something like that. Look-up ‘furry fandom’ when you have a moment. I’m guessing our group didn’t book the entire hotel.”

Seth squirmed. “Make the monsters go away.”

Mal chittered and made like he was crying, tucking his head into his forepaws. His tail drooped behind him. “I’m not a monster. I’m just a large squirrel.” He looked back up. “Do you go trick-or-treating at Halloween, Master Seth?”

Seth peaked at Mal and nodded.

“What do you dress-up as?”

“A pirate! Arrghh!”

Mal cowered back a little laying his ears flat and swirling his tail over his back. “I bet you make a very scary pirate.” Mal gestured around the lobby perking his ears back up. “This is something like that. Not all adults ‘grow up’ and do only adult things. Some of us still like to play dress-up. We like to get into costumes and pretend we’re something else for a while. Adults are busy, but some of us don’t forget how to have fun at make believe.”

“You’re not a giant squirrel?”

Mal gigglechittered. “I’m only pretending. This costume has a computer in it that allows me to make squirrel sounds and lets me make the ears and tail move,” he wigwagged his tail up and down and then made it whirl in a circle. That got Seth to giggle a little. Mal looked at Seth’s mother. “If your mother will let me, I’ll come a little closer and prove I’m not really a squirrel.”

Seth's mom nodded. Mal got up close.

"I need to be up close when I do this, Master Seth, because some of those here don't like to see people in costume take it off in a public space. But I'm going to do it to prove to you I'm really a human like you and not a squirrel under this. And I'd like you to help me." Mal reached up to the right side of his head and brushed back the fur to show Seth. "Do you see that button?" Seth nodded. "I'm going to let you press it for me. It turns off the computer and then I can remove this squirrel head. Go ahead."

Seth hesitated, but then reached out and pushed the button. The suit unsealed, startling him a little. Mal pulled his squirrel head off. He turned it over to show the inside to the young boy.

"There, see."

Seth showed a big grin. A fox with a slightly curled husky tail came over. *Swift* was listed on his name badge. He knelt down and took his head off. Soon several other suiters came over, crouched down, and also removed their heads.

Mal waved around. "See. This is what we do for fun. But it isn't fun if we scare someone. Are you still afraid?"

Seth shook his head negatively.

"Will it bother you if I put my head back on now?"

Again, the boy shook his head negatively. Mal put his head back on, pressed the button and wigwagged his tail again.

"High five?"

Seth high fived all the suiters who offered. When he turned back the giant squirrel was lost in the crowd.