

Chapter 14

“We raised \$5,123.37 for the North Kingdom Humane Society, which runs no-kill shelters throughout northeastern Vermont!” There was loud cheering. “Our attendance figure for CatamountCon was 527 with 120 fursuiters in the parade. This puts us in the top thirty-five or so in attendance for a first-time con.” The crowd cheered loudly again. “We’ll be back in this same facility next year the third weekend in June.” There was more cheering. “Be sure to watch our website for the theme. We plan to review your suggestions for the theme and plan to announce it by late July.” Sublime paused a moment reviewing his notes.

“Be sure to tune into Burlington Public Radio tomorrow evening as they will air a news article about our con. If you’re not within range of BPR, you’ll be able to listen to it on their website. I’ve received an advanced screening this afternoon and it is all positive.” More loud cheering. “Finally, we need to thank our staff. I’m not about to try and name them all as I’ll miss someone. Please take a bow.” Staff members ran up and bowed to loud cheering. “And our guest of honor, Letisha Possum.” Letisha waved and bowed to loud cheering. “And finally, I need to thank four special attendees. These four represent a company hoping to break into the fursuit industry. They went above and beyond what is expected of attendees helping to deescalate an incident Friday morning, hosted a chili dinner for our staff and alumni of White Mountain State University,” Sublime had to pause as WMSU students and alumni cheered, “and from how I’ve seen many of you react, entertained all of you with their squirrely antics. “Let’s hear it for the staff of Second Fur Mascot Costumes.” Mal and company, shocked and surprised, stood-up to the loud cheering. The cheering wouldn’t stop until they made their way to the stage. Mal in suit waved to all. The crowd quieted.

“We can’t take a lot of credit.” Mal spoke with his voice speaker cranked to full volume enabling the crowd to hear him without the need of a microphone. “I did nothing different than any other suiter would have done. I just happened to be the closest to the situation at the time. As for this,” he gestured to his suit. “All the credit goes to these three and the dozens of staff at Second Fur Mascot Costumes who couldn’t attend. Without them, Mal would never have been brought to life. Thank you.” Mal bowed to Jim, Sheila and Canteloupe as the crowd cheered. The cheering grew louder as they group hugged.

“With that,” Sublime stated, “it is my sad duty to proclaim CatamountCon closed for this year.”

Rick sat and powered down the suit and sighed as he removed the head. The weekend had flown by.

“Yes, I’m sure you get tired after wearing the suit for that long,” Jim stated, again misinterpreting Rick’s sigh. “But that went very well,” he tapped an icon on his tablet. “Traffic to the website has jumped throughout the weekend. There are a lot of inquiries about what we can make. There are also a lot of inquiries here specifically about Mal.”

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

“Really?” Liz asked as she came out of the bathroom after removing her folf suit and getting street clothes on. She sat down next to George. The two held hands and stole a quick peck of the lips.

“Like it or not, Mal has quickly become very popular it seems. There are multiple inquiries for his social media presence.”

“Then, I guess Mal will need at least a Chatter and a Telegraph account.” Rick stated as he wiggled out of the suit. Inside, he was saddened the event was over. He really enjoyed playing as the squirrel. “It’ll need to be totally in-character, of course, as Second Fur’s official/unofficial mascot.”

“We’ll need to clear that with Nate.”

“Of course, but we’ll also need to point out to him that if we don’t create one, some imposter will. It would be better if we controlled said account. You may even want to set-up that account now so as to ensure we have it when it’s cleared with Nate.” Rick grabbed his street clothes and slipped into the bathroom to change.

“That sounds like a good idea,” Jim called after Rick just before he closed the door. He then turned to Liz and George. “What’s your assessment? How did things go this weekend?”

“Obviously, it went better than planned,” George started as he held up his hand holding Liz’s hand showing off the engagement ring. “As for Mal’s debut, we couldn’t have asked for a better performer. Nate needs to get him on the payroll somehow.”

“I agree with George,” Liz added. “He’s a natural. We couldn’t ask for anyone better to help sell our product line. Even if Sheila and Cantaloupe were redone by Second Fur, I don’t think either of us could pull it off the way Rick does with Mal.”

Jim nodded. “I’ll discuss that with Nate when I report to him on Tuesday. We may need to discuss this further on the drive home after we drop Rick off.” He nodded towards the bathroom as the doorknob turned.

Rick rejoined them and laid the Mal suit out and plugged it in to charge. He looked at the other three. “Are you ready?”

“For what?”

“You didn’t hear Sublime at the end of closing when he stepped over to us briefly to thank us again? He invited us to the post-con staff/guest of honor dinner. In some ways, I’m tempted to show-up as Mal, but this is a ‘normies-only’ event.”

“Why would we be invited? We weren’t on staff.” George asked.

Rick shrugged. “Who knows? However, I don’t think we should stand him up after the invite.”

The dinner was a buffet set-up in the room used for gaming during the con. Sublime Green quickly greeted them and introduced them around. There was a lot of small talk. There was also beer and wine for those who chose to partake.

At some point, the crowd grew quiet as Sublime stood up. He thanked the staff for their hard work in putting on the successful event. He again thanked the guest of honor for her work. He then turned to Rick, Jim, Liz, and George.

“And I invited the representatives of Second Fur Mascot Costumes to attend as they also deserve thanks. I will admit I was very hesitant to grant them membership. Whoever heard of a vendor requesting a dealer membership despite there being no space left in the dealer’s den? But my real hesitation was due to ‘Mal’ here,” he pointed to Rick. “Their suit performer also works for the Department of Conferences and Meetings at White Mountain State University.”

Staff members looked back and forth at each other. “Didn’t they bid on this con?”

“Yes, we did, though we knew we had no chance to compete against a resort,” Rick replied.

“As a result of their bid, Snow Mountain adjusted their own bid, enabling this to be a more affordable event to put on,” Sublime jumped back in. “And despite not winning the bid, he attended our event anyway and supported it far and beyond what one would expect of any attendee. I don’t need to repeat what he and Second Fur did this weekend in support of our event. And ‘Mal’ the squirrel was a huge hit among attendees. I can’t thank them enough. I hope you’ll join me in doing so.”

The staff applauded. Eventually, things quieted down. Sublime sat briefly with the four of them. “Look, I’m serious about what I said up there. And after a brief discussion with the other staff members, we would like to have ‘Mal’ as our fursuiter guest of honor next year. You don’t need to decide now. But please think about it.” He turned to George and Liz. “Congratulations to the two of you.” He moved onto the next table to personally thank each staff member.

Rick sat in stunned silence through the rest of the meal. He remained silent all the way back to their suite.

Liz and George were bubbling with excitement over what had occurred. Meanwhile Jim had a frown on his face as he tapped away at his tablet.

“Some of his staff aren’t very tight lipped. It’s already on social media. The account I created for Mal on Chatter already has dozens of congratulatory messages on it. We haven’t cleared it with Nate yet, but ‘Mal’ already has over 400 followers in the past couple of hours.”

Rick shook his head in disbelief. “This isn’t what I signed-up for when I applied to be your suit tester.” He paused a moment. “If I was in suit, my tail would be whirling fearfully over my back and head.” He got up and paced a bit. “Shit!” (sigh) “Excuse my language. I’m not ready for this. Mal has become popular overnight and that’s not the kind of person I am. How the hell am I to

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

handle this? If I wanted to be some sort of movie star I'd live in Hollywood, not podunk Groton deep in the White Mountains of New Hampshire."

George and Liz were quickly by his side. "We'll help you get through this," Liz assured him. "We'll do our best to keep 'Mal' the squirrel character separate from Rick the fursuit performer."

Rick nodded in reassurance. "Thank you. Now then, we can't disappoint our fans, I guess. Any of you up to attend the Dead Critter Dance?"