

Chapter 21

Pistachio slowly opened his eyes. He hurt all over, but not as bad as before.

The orange and beige raccoon was immediately at his side. “Still with us, huh?” Cantaloupe asked. “That’s good. Sheila will be happy. I’ve got some blueberries and pine nuts for you.” Cantaloupe carefully slipped them one at a time into Pistachio’s mouth. Pistachio squished the blueberries against the roof of his mouth with his tongue and swallowed. The pine nuts were just as soft and easy to eat. Cantaloupe followed this with a gourd of water, which he carefully trickled for Pistachio to lap.

“Thank you,” Pistachio replied weakly.

“Hush, you need to rest and heal.”

“What he said,” Sheila stated as the blue and white folf came into the den. “I’m glad to see you’re awake.”

“Why?”

Sheila sniffed him and started to gently lick him. “That’s what friends are for,” she replied between licks. She turned to Cantaloupe. “We’ll need to give him another paste treatment. Would you mind preparing it?”

Cantaloupe nodded and ducked out. Sheila continued to give Pistachio a tongue bath. He nervously tolerated it as he was in no condition to flee which is what his instincts were screaming at him to do. She could smell his fear, but there was nothing she could do further to try and calm the squirrel down as he needed to be cleaned. When she was finished, she lapped a little water out of the gourd and spat it out.

“Your burns are healing nicely, Pistachio. Your fur should start to grow back in soon, but it’ll be a while before you have a full coat again. We’ll probably have to take turns keeping you warm this winter.”

“You didn’t answer my question,” he replied glaring up at her. His near furless tail wigwagged weakly.

“Why didn’t I kill and eat you when you asked?” Sheila replied. She sat down and stared at him silently a moment. “I don’t eat friends. One wouldn’t have friends for long if they ate them, Pistachio.” She sighed a moment. “While you may fear calling me a friend, I consider you one, even before you welcomed my future mate into your home after his was destroyed. You have been his friend a long time. That’s good enough in my book.” She was silent again for a moment. “To put it another way, while your burned and injured body would nourish me for a day, our friendship nourishes each other’s souls for a lifetime.” She affectionately licked him on the cheek and wagged her tail briefly. “Now try to get more rest. Your body needs it to heal.”