

## **Chapter 24**

Thirty minutes later, Pistachio paused briefly at a small brook to drink. He lapped quickly at the water, paused, and panted heavily, and then lapped some more. He was also hungry, but there was no time to forage for food in this strange forest. Like the humans, all the trees were too small. He had to flee along the ground as none of the trees were large enough along the branches to support him. It was so strange. He had snagged a few acorns from the base of the oak he had used to escape the human place and they were micro-tiny! It would take him a full day to try and gather enough to satisfy his hunger. And there was no time for that. He needed to flee further into the woods as far away from the humans as he could get before nightfall. He knew they would come looking for him. Why else would they have kept him in that room? There were only a few hours of light left. He needed to make the most of it.

Several times, he stopped short as he would break from under the trees and find more of the human-killed ground, which his mind named a 'road.' It was a good thing he paused the first time as a human-made killing machine rolled by at a high rate of speed along it right when he would have crossed if he hadn't paused. This strange dreamworld seemed to be overrun with humans.

Near sundown, he found a large white pine tree. Well larger than most of the trees he'd seen so far. He scaled it. There was no hollow to nestle into. He prayed to the Spirit that the predators in this strange place were small like the humans as he curled up on a largish branch part-way up the tree, quickly falling asleep.

In the middle of the night, Pistachio rolled over and snapped awake to fresh pain as something bit into his shoulder. He lashed out in panic and nearly lost his grip on the branch. His lashing out sent the attacker flying against the trunk of the tree with an audible crunch. It cried out in pain as it tumbled to the ground below. He looked down as he ignored his instincts which cried for him to climb and flee. Curiosity seemed to win out. By the faint moonlight, he saw the smallest marten he had ever set eyes on. It must have been half his size, instead of double. If he hadn't rolled over when he did, the small predator might have gotten his throat instead of his shoulder. Then it would have been able to feast on him for days. Pistachio licked at his minor wound and then ventured down part way for a better look in the dim moonlight. The marten hissed at him and then let out a cry of pain as it tried to move. Only its front end moved. Its back appeared to be broken.

"Serves you right," Pistachio snapped at it. "Bit off more than you can chew, huh?" Pistachio hiss-chattered at it as the adrenaline rush ebbed out of him as quickly as it had flooded into him.

The marten mewed in pain again as it tried to drag itself away by just its forelimbs. Pistachio's stomach growled. Before he consciously realized what he was doing, Pistachio leapt down, driving the weight of his body against the neck of the small predator, putting the marten out of its misery. Guilt washed over Pistachio briefly before he picked-up his kill in his mouth and carried it back up the tree. It seemed strange that he had turned the tables on the predator. He only hesitated a moment before ripping into his meal as hunger won over guilt and confusion. It wasn't easy ripping into the marten with just his incisors as he didn't have the canines of a

predator. However, hunger and a craving for protein drove him on. The small predator-turned-prey satisfied that craving. When he had finished eating all of that he wished from his kill, he let the remains drop to the forest floor below. Pistachio then curled back-up and quickly fell back to sleep with his full stomach.

Nothing else attempted to bother him that night. He awoke just before sunrise, found another brook, washed the blood out of his fur, and slaked his thirst. He moved away from the brook into the undergrowth and felt the urge to urinate. He paused a moment as something didn't seem right. He looked down and didn't see his genitals. He chittered in concern for he could feel they were there. He poked around and found a slit that blended in with his fur revealing a cavity within. His mind called it a 'pocket' or 'pouch.' He felt very confused as he poked in it and pulled out what he was looking for to relieve himself. He wasn't sure why his male plumbing was tucked into a 'pouch'. He didn't remember having one before in the real world. This was one very long and very strange dream. Once done what he needed to do, he tucked it back into the pouch. As soon as he pulled his forepaws away, the slit was again concealed.

He shook his head again questioning why this was and then brushed it aside as he needed to continue to put distance between himself and the humans. He turned towards the northeast and then paused. Something in his head said to go east instead. So, he turned in that direction and fled deeper into the forest and up a winding hill.