

Chapter 25

Abigail was escorted into a meeting room. She glared at the hospital staff members within.
“Where’s my husband!”

“He gone. When he awoke this afternoon, he panicked. He acted as a squirrel would. And said his name was Pistachio. We tried to calm him down, but he darted past us into the hallway. He fled to the north end of the hallway and ripped through the screen in the window. He escaped the building by leaping to a tree and dropping to the ground. He fled towards the northeast into the woods.”

Abigail glared at the medical staff trying to fight down the anger within over their failure.

Another staff member came into the room and handed a note to Dr. Zebronski. She read it briefly. “If this is correct, your husband was spotted 30 minutes ago crossing Grafton Turnpike a few miles south of Lyme. That’s about 10 miles from here.”

Another staff member pulled out a New Hampshire map and laid it on the table, marking the hospital and the approximate place Rick had been spotted and drew a line.

“So, at the moment, he’s travelling northeast. If he sticks in the same direction and stops for the night and remains along that same course in the morning, he’ll cross Route 25A just west of Wentworth by 9am, give or take an hour considering the hills he’ll be passing through.”

“That’s provided he doesn’t turn east.”

All looked at Abigail.

“Why east?” Dr. Zebronski asked.

“That’s the direction to Groton and home.”

“Very well, we’ll send-out two groups. One will patrol along this stretch of 25A in Wentworth. The second will set-up just west of Groton along Tenny Mountain Road.”

“And when you find him.”

“We’ll try to reason with him and then tranquilizer dart him only as a last resort.”

Abigail sighed. “I’ll go with the Groton group. I have a feeling he’s fleeing towards home.”

Pistachio climbed yet another hill. He’d lost count between yesterday evening and this morning as to how many he had climbed. At the top of this hill, he scaled the ‘largest’ tree he could find.

He briefly admired the fall foliage as he looked about. Unfortunately, that meant he'd need to establish a territory soon and start gathering food for the winter if he wanted to survive. There was no telling what winter was like in this strange place. He hoped he'd find larger trees soon. To the east was yet another tree-covered hill and a human settlement in the valley beyond. That wasn't good. He should avoid it. But something drew him towards it. Why? He fought against it. He needed to get away from the humans, not run towards them. He looked to the south and north. In both directions were more hills and forests, but the hills were taller to the north, so he turned north hoping taller hills also meant taller trees.

As the sun reached half-way to its zenith, Pistachio paused at the edge of the forest. He could see he had a long clearing of tall grass to dart across. His mind placed it as a quarter mile (400m). He wasn't sure where the term came from, but for some reason, he understood the length. He could see there was a human-made road near the center of the clearing and a stream just past it and another nearly equally long clearing beyond the stream before the next tree line. He had no choice unless he wanted to back track. He didn't want to do that though part of his mind kept trying to urge him to turn back and head for the human settlement he had seen earlier that morning. The road was busy with many killing machines ('cars' and 'trucks' his mind named them) rolling at great speed back and forth.

Pistachio shook his head and darted forward. He paused at the edge of the roadway due to all the vehicles. Several slowed down and the humans within stared at him. Some of them then stopped and pointed at him. Pistachio didn't waste time and darted across quickly. He waded across the shallow stream, continued through the clearing on the other side and back into the forest, running as fast as he could.

"He was just spotted crossing Route 25 just east of Rumney heading north."

Abigail looked to the others in her group. "Come on! We got to get to Stinson Lake ahead of him. It's the last road for many miles north of Rumney."

Ever since Pistachio reentered the forest, he found himself climbing uphill, yet again. Why did this dream world have so many hills and when would he finally wake-up back home? And, he was getting hungry again. Fortunately, he came across an old apple tree gone wild. They must have been crabapples, 'cause they were so undersized. A normal apple would be between a third and half his body length. These easily fit in one forepaw. He ate several quickly after peeling the skins off with his incisors. They were a bit tart, but juicy. When finished, he continued heading north.

The sun was close to its zenith when he reached the top of the latest hill. It had a treeless summit. He looked about and could see a few human settlements to the south. To the north, more forest

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

and mountains. Between him and the mountains was another valley with a lake. He could see there were human places scattered around it. He would have to skirt it.

As he turned to proceed north, he froze in place a moment as he detected movement to his right. Two humans emerged from the tree line. Both appeared as small as the others he had seen so far. They also froze and pointed at him. Pistachio bolted as quickly as he could while he heard them exclaimed to each other behind him.

“Did you see that!?”

“Holy, shit! I’ve never seen...”