

Chapter 29

After they left. Pistachio gently chittered in a soothing tone as he rocked back and forth with Abigail in his paws as she continued to cry into his fur covered shoulder as all the stress from the past eleven days flooded out of her.

“It was horrible watching you change. Bones cracking, you twitching in obvious pain from it, and all I could do was talk to you with encouraging words and hold your hand, staring in horror as it slowly changed into a paw.” She sobbed. “As I watched I had made up my mind. If they hadn’t been able to stop you from becoming a normal squirrel, I’d have settle our estate and demand they do the same thing to me so we could remain together.”

Pistachio blinked. “You’d sacrifice your career and everything else because of this?” He narrowed his eyes. “From what I can grasp in his memories, Rick wouldn’t be happy if you did that. He’d expect you to go on with your life, just as you’d expect him to do likewise if he outlived you. We have a deal. I’ll try to fit in within your human world as a giant squirrel and do my best to try and find Rick up here,” he pointed at his head again with his tail. “And from what I see in his memories, that’s not going to be easy. Your species is so xenophobic.” He shuddered briefly. “Xenophobic to the point of fear hating other humans with different shaped eyes or skin color. But I’ll try for your and his sakes. If he doesn’t turn-up by late spring, I want my body to reflect my mind.”

“I understand. But you’d best understand in return that if you do that, I’m planning to follow you. Rick or Pistachio, you’re still my husband. If you think I’ll let fur, a bushy tail, and size separate us, you’re mistaken, and it won’t be a ‘one-night stand’ thing either.”

“Yes, you can be stubborn as I can see in Rick’s memories. We’ll see what comes.”

Abigail finally pulled back. “Yes, the new you will take some getting used to.”

Pistachio briefly closed his eyes a moment and sighchittered. He then looked straight at Abigail as best he could despite his eyes being on the side of his head instead of in front. “You’re still talking like I’m Rick. Remember, I’m not Rick. I’m Pistachio. I’m Rick’s made-up squirrel character now brought to life. Did you know that he is/was so loyal to you that he never gave me a mate in the world he made-up for me?” His eyes drifted off a moment. “As you never got into the furry fandom thing like him, he didn’t feel comfortable creating a furry-version of you for me. He felt it would have been like cheating on you. He is/was that dedicated to you. If you had joined the furry fandom, regardless of what species combination, he would have then added you in.” He paused a moment. “In some ways, I’m glad you aren’t in the fandom. I’d have been even more confused if when I awoke, I found my ‘mate’ was now human instead of the raccoon, skunk, otter, or whatever species you chose for your ‘fursona’ as it’s called in the fandom.”

“Rick or Pistachio or whatever you wish to call yourself, you are my husband. Our vows included...”

“Rich or poor, health or sickness,” Pistachio stated calling up the memory. The vows weren’t much different from the pledge Cantaloupe and Sheila had made to each other in the dream world. “I get it. You view me as a very sick Rick suffering from a delusion of squirrelhood. Please forgive me if I find it strange to suddenly have a mate when I never had one in the other world.” He blinked again. “I’m not Rick. Rick loves you deeply as you do him. I understand that. I don’t want to hurt your feelings, Abbie, but I need to be honest with you.” Pistachio paused a moment, blinked, and took a deep breath. “I can’t say I currently have the same deep feelings for you as he does. At least not yet. I’m going to need time to learn, to understand, to cherish, and hopefully to embrace the deep relationship you have with him in his place should he not return. Spirit, I don’t want to screw this up and drive you away. If Rick then surfaced, he’d never forgive me and I owe my very existence to him.” Pistachio wigwagged his tail repeatedly. “Please, Abbie, this isn’t normal for a squirrel. I need time to learn and understand all this. And hope to receive a lot of forgiveness and patience from you as I try to learn.”

Abigail held onto Pistachio’s left paw. She slipped Rick’s wedding band onto his clawed wedding finger briefly and noted how loose it was before drawing it back off. “I guess we’ll need to get the ring resized. As I said, we’ll get through this hon. Rick or Pistachio, you’re my husband. My mate if that is what you prefer to use. I will not abandon you.”

Pistachio sighed deeply. “Thank you for understanding. So, being mates would include sharing a nest, um, bed, I mean.” He paused another moment as Rick’s memories popped up in his mind. “Please forgive me as I try to understand the ways of this human world. My world was so much simpler. After all, it was his escape from the stresses of this world.”

“Of course, we share a bed. We’ll be snuggled-up together, especially on cold winter nights.” Abbie paused a moment. “Though it’ll take some getting used to with the fur. I hope you don’t constantly shed like the cats.”

Pistachio’s eyes widened. “Spirit! You and Rick have two pet predators!” He paused and gigglechittered. “Yes, it’ll be interesting to see how Mindy and Ebony react to one of their ‘staff’ now being a giant squirrel. I’m going to need my own fur brush. While I wouldn’t mind sharing theirs, I’m not sure how they will react to that.” He shook his head again as he tried to wrap his squirrel mind around Rick’s human memories to comprehend all this.

Abigail laughed a moment before sobering up. “So, what do we do about what they did to you? I’ve already contacted our lawyer. He’s ready to go to work. We just need to give him the word.”

Pistachio sighed again. “Abbie, please remember, I’m Pistachio. While Rick might have been ready to,” he paused a moment trying to find the term and understand it. He blinked and continued, “sue, why would I? This,” he gestured at his body, “is the me I know, a squirrel. A very, very big version of that squirrel, mind you, but none the less, a squirrel.” He whirled his tail around proudly. “It may be a misfortunate accident, but it could be much worse. I could have awoken as who I am, but in Rick’s severely burned human body.” Pistachio shuddered. “At least the nanobot thingies healed Rick’s/my body. You need to take that into account, though I have no interest in this sue idea/thing.”

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Abigail nodded as an idea blossomed in her mind on Pistachio's last statement. "May I take the lead in this?"

"Of course. This is your world. I'm still trying to sort through Rick's memories to better understand it. And I need to if I am to survive and thrive in this very, very complicated world. Just having a mate so dedicated to me, though I'm just a simple squirrel, is mind blowing enough right now." His ears twitched. "Alas, our private time is over for the moment as we're about to have company." There was a knock on the door.

"How did you know?"

Pistachio twitched his tasseled ears again and smirked at Abigail.