

Chapter 32

Pistachio gazed at Abigail through glazed eyes. “The concept of having such a loyal mate is still foreign to me, Abbie,” Pistachio slurred as he tried to fight the urge to sleep brought on by the vaccines. Abigail held his forepaw in one hand and stroked the back of his neck with her other hand. She knew it was just a standard reaction to the vaccine cocktail he had been injected with at the recommendation of the wildlife veterinarian, Dr. Canatori. It was a combination of rabies, distemper, Lyme, and flu all in one dose at the dosage he had estimated a squirrel of roughly fifty-two pounds would need. Mindy & Ebony always reacted in the same way to their distemper and rabies shots. It still bothered her to see him suffer after all he’d been through in the past two weeks.

Pistachio yawned again and curled up on the bed. He brushed Abigail’s arm with his tail affectionately. “So tired. Dr. Zebronski said you can take me home soon. Maybe as early as tomo..” He drifted off to sleep. Abigail stayed by his side. Even though he was only a small part of her Rick, she would stick with him. She continued to stroke him on the back of the neck and silently shed tears.

Pistachio awoke in a pile of pine needles and leaves. He could tell from the smell that this was Sheila and Cantaloupe’s den. He looked about in the near darkness and listened. It didn’t seem that either of them was around.

“Chitter, chit, scree! Sheila?! Cantaloupe?! Hello?” He stretched and lapped water out of the gourde Cantaloupe used to bring water into the den. He made his way to the entrance and looked out. It was either dusk or early dawn, he wasn’t sure which. Instinctively, he simply knew it wasn’t safe for him to venture out alone at this time of day. “Chitter, chit, scree! Sheila?! Cantaloupe?!” he called out again.

A breeze stirred dead leaves into the air. They scuttled around the squirrel. Otherwise, there was no sound and no reply to his calls. There weren’t even bird calls, bats, or insect noises. Pistachio shivered as he wigwagged his tail nervously. This didn’t feel right.

Where could they be? Pistachio thought to himself as he crept back into the den and safety. He snuffled about and found a pile of nuts they must have gathered for him. He snacked on a few and lapped more water. He curled up and tried to nap but couldn’t sleep. Then again, sleep wasn’t a good idea. He might wake up back in that other world again and not find his way back here. He knew he needed to stay here as long as he could. Hours seemed to drag by as it grew pitch black in the den. So, he must have observed dusk when he looked out earlier, proving it was a good decision to stay put and not venture out.

Eventually, it began to grow lighter outside. As the sun rose lighting the den entrance, the blue folf and tan and orange raccoon returned to their den. They were making small talk but stopped in mid-conversation when they saw Pistachio. Both stared at him in disbelief.

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

“Long time, no see,” he greeted them, whirling his tail.

Sheila stepped forward looking hard at Pistachio. He stood his ground. “Go on, sniff me over, Sheila. I know you won’t try and eat me.” She did so while he nervously wigwagged his tail. “Lick me too if need be,” he added.

She hesitated a moment and then gave the back of his neck a tentative lick. Her eyes grew wide. “It is you! But how is that possible? You don’t show any signs of the burns.”

“You’re not going to believe the tale I have to tell.” He summarized his experience in the human world. Both stared at him before giving each other a knowing glance. He observed this. “No, lying. You know that other world is real, don’t you?”

Both lowered their eyes. Then they looked up at him. “Yes,” they answered in unison. “And you need to go back now.”

The world started to fade. Pistachio fought against it. “No! I need to find Rick! Sheila, Cantaloupe!” He cried-out. “We need to find Rick! Please!”

Pistachio startled awake in the hospital room, chittering in alarm, his paw pads soaked with sweat. Abigail stroked the back of his neck trying to sooth him.

“It’s alright, hon. You’re safe.”

It took him a moment to focus on and recognize her. “How long did I sleep?”

“A full day.”

Pistachio nodded while he tried to gather his thoughts and recall the details of the dream. “For the first time since the aftermath of the accident, I was back in the dream world Rick made-up for me. Except it wasn’t good this time.” He told her what happened as best he could. “They said I had to go back, and the world faded quickly after that and I awoke. If Rick is still around, he, apparently, isn’t interested in returning right now.”