

Chapter 36

“President Krasten? Please, come in.”

“Theo, please,” White Mountain State University’s president responded, “provided I can call you Abigail rather than Dr. Michaud here in your home. I heard they discharged your husband after only a little over two weeks. If I had been aware sooner that he was home recovering from his injuries, I’d have dropped by sooner. Is he well enough to accept visitors?”

“Of course.” Abbie lead Theo into the living room. “Make yourself comfortable. I’ll go let him know you’re here.”

Theo looked about the living room at the various squirrel knickknacks and figurines. There were a few squirrel paintings on the wall along with family photos. She found it interesting. She knew he was the advisor to the student furry group through his employee file but wasn’t aware how extensively he was into that fandom.

Abbie returned in just a couple of minutes. “He’ll be down shortly. He needs to put a shirt on. Are you aware of what happened?”

Theo nodded. “He was severely burned. I was surprised to learn he was home from the hospital so soon based on the news.”

“Well, about that,” Abbie responded as she glanced through the doorway and up the stairwell. “He healed rapidly thanks to an unauthorized medical experiment, but there was a serious side effect to it.”

Theo could make-out the sound of someone coming down the stairs, but it didn’t sound like an adult. It was too light a sound. “Side effect?” She gasped and nearly jumped back as a giant tasseled eared reddish-gray squirrel bound into the room. Wearing a maroon polo shirt with the WMSU logo in gold over the breast pocket and modified shorts, it sat-up and bowed to her. It then offered its forepaw to her.

“President Krasten, thank you for dropping by.”

Theo slowly reached for and took the offered paw in her hand while trying to not stare. She was briefly perplexed as he sniffed her hand while grasping it firmly, but gently.

“Richard Michaud?” she finally asked.

“Yes and no. While Richard Michaud remains my legal human name, I’m Pistachio, Richard’s squirrel character,” the squirrel replied while pointing to various paintings on the wall with his tail. He released his paw from her hand. Theo Krasten immediately sat down heavily in a chair.

“Would you like something to drink, Theo?” Abbie asked. “Water, juice, something stronger? Perhaps a glass of wine?”

“Part of me is screaming for wine, Abigail, as I’m sure this is going to be an interesting tale. However, that’s probably not a good idea, especially, as I need to go back to the office afterward. A glass of water will do.”

“Make that two, please, Abbie.” Pistachio responded. He hopped up on the couch near Theo’s chair and turned his full attention to her. “This is what happened the best I can explain it in brief...”

Theo listened to Pistachio’s tale. She accepted the glass of water when Abbie returned with it from the kitchen. Abbie sat on the couch next to Pistachio. When he finished, Theo simply sat there a moment in a combination of thought and shock.

“I put this on quick,” Pistachio pointed to his shirt with his tail, “for you so as to maybe lessen the shock a bit. I have a medical waiver to enable me to skip the clothes. Truthfully, I find them a bit itchy and irritating to my fur.”

Theo slowly nodded and took a sip of water. “And there is no way to reverse it?”

The squirrel shook his head in the negative and wigwagged his tail sideways. “As far as they can tell, no, not unless I want to be a midget. I lost over a hundred pounds (45 kg) in the process. Besides, I’m Pistachio, not Rick. I’m fine being a squirrel. And things could have been worse.”

“How?”

“Well, as you may know, Rick is the advisor to the student furry club. I am his furry character, a Eurasian red squirrel.” He gestured again at the paintings on the wall some showing a red squirrel, others looking more like he currently looked with reddish fur on the head blending to gray on the body and reddish again along the tail and then at himself. “At least our body was transformed into his character, though a Eurasian red squirrel is normally a little smaller than my foot,” he briefly lifted one of his foot paws for emphasis, “and not nearly three feet tall. Now, what if that saboteur had been aiming for a skunk? Would you be as calm as you are, if I had prance-hopped in here waving,” he wigwagged his tail a few times, “a huge, black tail with white stripes, speaking with a heavy Franglais accent?” He did his best imitation of that. “Ah, Mademoiselle Krasten, how nice it eese pour vous to drop by, non?”

Theo stared at Pistachio.

Pistachio sighed and chittered at the same time. “That was meant to be a joke. I practiced that a lot for this meeting, which I anticipated would happen at some point.”

“I’m having a hard time picturing this as a laughing matter Richard..er..Pistachio.”

Pistachio drooped his tail. “No, it isn’t a laughing matter. But Rick has always tried to use humor to lighten things a bit. And, I also understand this is a huge change in his/my life. By human standards, I’m now disabled. I need all four paws to move around.” He lifted up his glass of

water, using both his forepaws to position it correctly against his lips and carefully sipped. He pointed to it as he set it down. "It has taken me a lot of practice over the past several days to do that without dribbling it. It's a lot easier to lap it." He proceeded to lap some. "But lifting it up and sipping shows others I'm not some dumb animal." He lifted the cup to his lips and sipped some more. "I've got the dexterity to lift it with one hand, but I still need practice doing that without spilling any."

"More seriously, prior to being discharged, my supervisor, Wynona York, visited. I explained and demonstrated what I can and can't do. She's working with HR to try and find something I can do as I can no longer carry out many of my duties in Conferencing. Even though I have the strength to do a pull-up with two clawed fingers, which I can demonstrate to you too if you want." He paused looking at her.

"No, that's alright."

Pistachio nodded. "That's fine. Despite my strength, I can't carry this drinking glass across the room or from the sink to wherever I'd like to enjoy it if there's liquid in it as I need all four paws to move about." His tail drooped.

Theo sat there a moment in thought, swirling the remaining water in her glass. "Maybe I should have gotten wine after all," she whispered under her breath.

"It's not too late, if you want Abbie to get you some," Pistachio responded startling her. He twitched his ears. "My hearing is much sharper now, Theo, with these scoop-like ears. She's got well, I'm not sure what she's got in the kitchen, but I know she's always got a few bottles on paw...er...hand."

Theo nodded slowly. "I really can't as much as I may need it now. I'll work with HR. For now, I'll make sure that they continue to list you out on disability leave while we try and see what we can do. That medical waiver on clothes is now in your file and your resume on file is up-to-date, correct?"

Pistachio wigwagged his tail up and down once. "Yes, both are, along with my updated vaccinations as I just had my flu, rabies, Lyme, and distemper shots."

Theo stop herself from dropping her jaw at the statement as she got up. Pistachio offered his forepaw again, which she took and shook.

"One more thing, Theo. If Public Relations hasn't alerted you yet, I'm having a pre-screening tomorrow afternoon at 3pm, here. You are very welcome to join the small group that will be here to watch it with me. Jeremy in Public Relations, Wynona York, the student officers of the Student Furry Club, and one or two others will be here."

"A pre-screening of what?" She pulled out her phone and opened her schedule. She found it had already been blocked off for the event. Her very helpful office assistant must have done it for her.

“Right after my discharge from the hospital, I had an extensive interview over what happened with Melissa Sagenthrope with Burlington Public Radio. She teamed-up with New Hampshire Public Television to get ‘the exclusive’ on my story. I figured it was best to get it out there all at once and maybe cut down on possible rumors before they occur. Ms. Sagenthrope was kind enough to send me a link that will be live at 3pm tomorrow so I can see what did and did not make the planned show to help me prepare for after it being aired. It will air tomorrow evening on both New Hampshire and Vermont Public Television after their evening national news program. I’m hoping it’ll make it easier for me to go back out in public afterward. Also, any inquires to our Public Relations can then be deflected to BPR and NHPTV.”

Pistachio paused for a moment. “Be forewarned as I warned the others. I plan to be comfortable for that screening. No clothes,” he scuffed a paw and looked down briefly. “As I explained in how this happened, while they couldn’t stop the metamorphosis, they were able to make a few alterations. Thanks to that my ‘naughty bits’ are hidden, thus the no clothes medical waiver as nothing offensive shows.”