

Chapter 37

Mid-afternoon the day after the interview aired, Pistachio returned home. Mindy and Ebony fled from him as he entered. The cats still hadn't adjusted yet to the large squirrel invading their territory.

"Is that you, hon?"

"Yes, Abbie, I'm home," Pistachio called back from the mud room. He removed the fanny pack that had been buckled to his waist and proceeded to remove the tie, shirt, and shorts. He immediately started grooming his fur where it was rumpled. It was such a relief to get the clothing off. It only took a couple minutes to get his fur back in the proper place. He sighed in content as he finished.

"So, how did things go?" She called back to him.

He scampered into the kitchen. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out his phone and a new thin wallet Abbie had gotten him to replace the bulky, burnt leather one. He slipped the phone back in his pocket. From the wallet, he produced his temp driver's license and showed it to Abigail. "Success, but it wasn't smooth. The DMV put me through another driving exam. Thank you for taking the time with me to practice up. It paid off. The exam officer tried to get me to violate several laws. He was trying to find any excuse to fail me. I don't think he was very happy with me for refusing to do so, especially after pointing out the," Pistachio paused a moment, "well, Rick called them the 'Big Brother' cameras installed in the car to meet the insurance company's requirements for the discounted rate we receive. Then waiting in line at the DMV for the new license wasn't exactly smooth either. But I should get the new photo license in about a week."

Abbie set a glass of water on the kitchen table for him. He immediately leapt up on a chair, carefully grasped the glass in both forepaws, and drank deeply. She treated him so well he thought again as he had many times recently.

"Thank you, Abbie. As I was saying things weren't exactly smooth at the DMV. After the new road test, I went through a new eye test to prove what the medical records show, that I'm no longer near-sighted as Rick had been. Then they tried to test my peripheral vision with this goggle-box thing you're supposed to stick your face in. Of course, it's designed for a human's head, not a giant squirrel. I couldn't fit my head in it properly, much to the tester's consternation. Finally, while looking straight ahead at him I said, 'Look where my eyes are. Do you really think I'll have a periphery problem? The man waiting 6 chairs behind me to my slight left is reading the *Union Leader* newspaper. The woman front row, 7 chairs to my right is trying to keep her young daughter entertained, though the girl wants to run-up to me and pet me. Yes, with these ears I can make that out from here over the white noise.' He accepted that after glancing in each direction to confirm what I said."

Abbie couldn't help but chuckle. "Did she get to pet you?"

“Who? The little girl?” Pistachio took another sip before answering. “She did break free of her mother and ran up to me as I waited my turn to get photographed. It was tough to not flee because of how she charged at me. She asked me, ‘Mr. Squirrel, Mr. Squirrel! Can I please pet you?’ Her mother was immediately there using the daughter’s full name and scolding her. I assured her mother it was alright. I then bent down slightly and thanked her for asking first. I then explained it wouldn’t be polite to pet someone in public. I explained how her hair was like my fur and asked her how she would feel if a stranger came up to her and asked to tussle her hair. She pouted but agreed that would be really weird. I then offered her a hug instead, which she accepted. As she did so, I whispered to her to go ahead and give me a small scritch, which she did on the back of my neck that I don’t think her mother saw. She whispered about how soft my fur was before she thanked me loud enough for her mother to hear before darting back to her and letting her mother lead her back to their seats.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad.”

Rick drooped his tail. “Well, there were other quiet comments I did my best to ignore as it was obvious the commenters didn’t think I could hear them, some of which occurred while I was talking to that young girl. Things like ‘Freak should go back to the forest,’ and other less polite comments, none of which, sadly, don’t surprise me based on Rick’s memories.” Pistachio took another sip of water.

Abbie sighed. “I’m sorry, hon.”

“I’m sure it’ll get worse before it’s all said and done. Rick has seen it happen to some of the students as I’m sure you have as an instructor, too. Though the university has a no tolerance policy against discrimination, it still occurs from time to time as you’re aware. As I said in the interview with Ms. Sagenthrope, the human race is xenophobic. Look at all the laws on the books against discrimination, but it still occurs. I’m simply thankful no one tried to pick a fight in order to make themselves feel superior.” He finished the glass of water. He had been thirstier than he realized. “It wasn’t all bad. I took so long because several people flagged me down in the parking lot. They all wanted selfies after expressing their sympathies for what I’m going through. Some of them were town folks, some of them were students.”

Abbie retrieved the glass. “Well, at least not all your experiences today were bad, hon. Oh, while you were out, we received an invitation to dinner. If you would rather stay home, I can cancel.”

“An invitation? From whom?” Pistachio’s tail twitched.

“Several students who identified themselves as members of the university’s furry club. They only used their furry nicknames. I didn’t recognize any of them as students of my classes. And none of them were here for the preview yesterday. They wanted to know if we would be joining them tonight.”

Pistachio stared blankly a moment. “Oh, wait, right. It’s the first Thursday of the month. The student furry club usually gets together for a meal. Of course, I’ll go. Maybe the two who performed CPR on Rick/me will be there. I hope so as they couldn’t make the screening last

night. I want to thank them for what they did.” Pistachio paused a moment in thought. “I wonder why they didn’t remind/invite us last night after the screening.” He shrugged very human like a moment. “Wouldn’t that have made more sense? Oh, well, doesn’t matter. Do you mind carry a change of clothes for me, Abbie?”

“Your waiver is on file with the university, you’re exempt.”

“I know, but if it bothers some of the students, I’ll cover up. I’d rather sacrifice a little of my own comfort then make them feel uncomfortable. Are they gathering at the normal time of 6pm in the social room in the Union building?”

“Yes.”

Pistachio nodded. “Good. Then, I’ve got just over an hour to go workout out back before I need to tidy up.”

“You be careful scaling that silver maple tree.”

“Of course, I will, Abbie.”