

Chapter 41

Pistachio stirred in his drey. The drey swayed. Pistachio snapped awake as the drey swayed again in the gentle breeze. He heard other leaves stirring in that breeze. He poked his head out of the drey's opening and blinked in surprise as he was high up in a huge red oak tree. The sun was rising over the lake in the distance. He was back! He quickly scrambled out of the drey and leapt from tree to tree making his way to his friends' den. He wasn't sure how much time he'd have and needed to make the most of it.

"Chitter, chit, scree! Sheila, Cantaloupe! Are you home? Hello?!"

Cantaloupe came out to the entrance and blinked a few times in the bright light. He stared at the Eurasian red squirrel.

"Pistachio?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes!" Pistachio replied excitedly and startled the tan and orange raccoon as the small squirrel embraced him in a hug. "We need to talk." His tail wigwagged with urgency.

Cantaloupe yawned again trying to shake away the sleep that was calling to him.

"What's all the commotion about, hon?" Sheila asked as she poked her muzzle out of the den. She stared at Pistachio. "Pistachio? What are you doing here?" Her voice turned cold as she finished the question.

Pistachio gestured to the forest around them. "Like you, I live here, or at least I'm supposed to live here."

Sheila shook her head negatively. "No, you belong out there, not here. You need to be 'home' when our body awakens."

Pistachio drooped his tail. "So, why me? Isn't that Rick's job? It's his body we're sharing. He just made us up, right? We're just a small part of him. And it's not completely working out. I'm trying," he drooped his tail. "But it's Rick's world, not mine. We need Rick to go back wherever he is."

"When lightning struck, we found you in the debris." The folf put her forepaws on the squirrel's shoulders and stared down at him. "You are Rick."

Pistachio felt almost like he'd been struck by lightning again. "What?"

"Here in this world, you pretend to be Pistachio the squirrel, but you ***are*** Rick. You can't stay here, Rick."

Pistachio pulled away from Sheila. "No! He may take control of me when he comes here, but I am not Rick. I'm Pistachio. I'm his squirrel side. I am ***not*** his human side."

“You need to go back, Rick.”

The world started to fade around him. Pistachio fought against it and somehow pulled himself back into the dream world. “***NO!***” He stomped a hind paw in defiance glaring up at the folf who towered over him.

The folf put her paws on his shoulders again and glared at the squirrel. “Rick, you need to go back! It’s time for you to wake-up!” Nothing happened as the squirrel continued to glare up at the folf who towered over him.

(CHATTERGROWL!) “No, Sheila!” He yelled as he yanked himself out from under her forepaws. “You, who I assume represents our survival instinct, have put me in charge of our body. As such, I can control this to a point now that I realize that. I’m only going back to the human world on my terms unless you wish to ‘kill me.’ That usually forces a person to snap awake from a dream, doesn’t it? What if I’m right and I’m not Rick and you kill me? Will I simply vanish? What happens then if Rick doesn’t wake up? And in the past, you said you don’t kill and eat friends. So, I doubt you’re going to leap at me to try and kill me now. As such, I’m staying right here. At least until I have a promise from you two. I am ***NOT*** all of Rick any more than either of you are. I am Pistachio. I represent that part of him that identifies as his squirrel side he uses when he needs an escape from the reality of the human world. I need your help to look for Rick’s human side. You want me to wake-up back in the human world? You need to promise you’ll search for Rick’s human side, and when you find him, you will let me know. Do that and I’ll go back.”

Cantaloupe pulled Sheila aside and whispered to her, glancing at Pistachio. Pistachio couldn’t quite make out what he was saying, but Cantaloupe seemed to convince his mate.

Sheila sighed. “Very well. We’ll look for Rick’s human side. In the meantime, you will go back.”

Pistachio held out his forepaw and shook Sheila’s paw to seal the deal. The world soon after faded and he awoke with a start in the drey he had constructed at the science center. His heart raced a moment while he got his bearings. Once he realized where he was, he calmed down. He could tell it was the middle of the night. As he knew he was safe and warm where he was, he simply rolled over. He curled up on his other side and drifted back to dreamless sleep the rest of the night.