

Chapter 52

When they returned to Estelle's house, she sat in a kitchen chair heavily, sighing deeply.

"I'm so sorry, Richard. I think I overdid it going to the diner. I'm exhausted."

"That's alright, Mémère, you sit there. If I can borrow your walker, you tell me what to bring to the table and I'll bring it over." He glanced at Blanche, "Or Ma Tante can help bring what you need over. Then you direct me how much of what to mix together and I can make the cookie dough. We can then sit and talk some more while it chills in the fridge for.."

"An hour."

"Right, then I'll roll it out until it's the proper thickness. Dig out the cutters, and so on. You'll hardly need to lift a finger."

His grandmother didn't have the energy to argue and agreed. It took just over 30 minutes to mix the heavy cookie dough. Once she was satisfied with what he had done, he covered it and placed it in the fridge to chill.

Blanche set-out more tea and they chatted. Rick called-up the video the science center had made of him constructing a drey. He explained how it was now on display for children visitors to look in. When the hour was up, Rick brought the dough to the table. He cut-off a more manageable size chunk, laid her pie mat on the table and proceeded to carefully roll the dough out as directed. Blanche set the oven at the proper temp and pulled the cookie sheets from the drawer beneath the oven for them. Estelle cut some of the cookies and then let Rick take over.

Into the oven the first batch went. The process repeated with the second batch. Wire racks were laid on one end of the counter for the first batch to cool on. Half-way through the time for the second batch to bake, the first batch was transferred to wax paper and the empty trays brought to the table with one soft gingerbread man the three of them split for 'quality control.' The process continued for the next hour until the last batch was placed in the oven. Rick removed the last batch of cookies from the oven and set the tray on a rack to cool. The ginger scent permeated the entire house. He moved over to the sink and started to fill it to do dishes.

"Now, Richard, you don't need to do that."

"Of course, I do, Mémère. I'm not going to run off without cleaning-up first. You taught me to always clean-up after myself."

She pulled herself up with the walker, came over to the sink, and made him move over. They did the dishes together. As they finished, his phone buzzed. He wiped down his wet forepaws the best he could, pulled it out, and was surprised by the time. How did it get to be after 4pm already? He glanced at the message that had caused the phone to buzz and drooped his tail.

"I can tell something is wrong, Richard. Your tail is so expressive."

“The time, Mémère. I can’t get back to Groton before dark now. The sun will set in less than an hour. I’ve got the instincts of a squirrel overlaid on my human mind. I could nod off on the road if I head home now. I’ll need to get a room for the night. That was Abbie checking on my whereabouts. I hadn’t realized how much time we spent making cookies.”

“You’re welcome to spend the night here. I could move to the couch.”

Rick’s tail wigwagged in annoyance. “I’m not going to kick you out of your own bed, Mémère. I take up less room now. If I pull the two cushions off the couch and lay them on the floor to form a square, I’ll have plenty of room to curl-up and be comfortable, just like I use to do when I was little, pretending to be what I am now. If I stay, you’re not giving up your bed for me.” His phone buzzed again he glanced at it hiding his reaction from his grandmother.

“I don’t know how I feel about that. I’m not sure how others would react if they learned I let you sleep on the floor like an animal.”

Rick hugged his grandmother. “Well, I am a squirrel now, Mémère,” he chattered. “A giant, intelligent one, mind you, but a squirrel none-the-less. Besides, I slept on the ground a lot back when I was a summer camp counselor. This will be more comfortable than that. I’ll be fine.”

“Well...alright.”

“Thank you, Mémère.” He hugged her again before returning both his wife’s text and the other text.