

Mariel smiled all the more. “Now, there’s a title I haven’t heard since I was a child. My aunt insisted on being called that. I guess it was tradition in her neighborhood. She grew up in Penacook, which use to have cotton mills when she was growing up.”

Rick sat-up a little and replied slowly, “It’s intended as a title of respect for women who are not your mother/grandmother among those of Quebecois descent, Ma Tante.”

“Please, just call me Mariel. Liz said she knew you, but I thought she was joking.”

Rick blinked a couple times. “We met in June. She and George had worked on the high tech fursuit I was testing out for their company.” Rick paused, shaking his head trying to think clearly. “If you’re not sure what that is…”

“I’m aware of the furry community. Liz and I talk a lot.”

“Good,” Rick responded and continued slowly like he had to think about every word. “That makes it a bit easier to explain, Mariel.” He paused again, closing his eyes briefly. “Mal the Malibar squirrel suit debuted at a small furry con in Vermont in June. Liz and George were part of, um, I guess you could say they were part of my support team as they helped to design the suit. I witnessed the proposal.”

“In fursuit no less, I think she called me about it before letting her folks know.”

Rick nodded. “So, I’ve only known them about 5 months or so, but they have been such a big help to me prior to the accident. Not just in designing that squirrel fursuit but by helping me handle my sudden social media stardom as a result of that suit.” He carefully raised his water glass, took a sip and only dribbled it a little. He gnawed on another cracker.

Mariel waved her arm gesturing around the room. “And I know a lot of this was planned by you prior to your accident.”

Rick nodded. “I work for the Department of Conferences & Meetings at White Mountain State University. Wedding planning falls within my scope of work. It was my little gift to them.”

They continued to chit chat until their table was called-up for the buffet. Without asking her, Abigail went-up and got food for both of them. It gave Rick a couple of minutes to just sit and rest before she returned with a plate for him and herself.

When the others returned, he turned to them as they looked at him. “As you’ve probably noticed as I’ve nibbled on crackers, a squirrel’s mouth is different from a human’s. I can’t chew with my mouth completely closed. I’m sorry if it bothers you.” He had forgotten he had already apologized about not being able to close his mouth to chew. He dug in without waiting for a response. Food on his stomach and lots of water seemed to help.

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

“If you’ve been married less than five years, it’s time for you to go sit down.” Several couples left the dance floor. The emcee paused a moment. “Ten years.” A few more went to sit down. “If you’ve been married less than fifteen years...”

Rick sighed in relief as he disengaged from Abbie and escorted her back to their table. “It’s not easy standing up like that on just my hind paws for any length of time, Abbie.”

The couples dance continued until George’s great uncle and great aunt were the last left on the floor having been together nearly 60 years. Those in attendance cheered them on as they gave advice for a long, happy marriage to the newlyweds.

The emcee came on again reading from a piece of paper. “We’re now going to take a 15-minute music break. This is to give those of you who brought a,” he paused a moment looking at the paper with a puzzled look on his face, “fursuit. Fursuit?,” he shrugged. “Anyway, those with a fursuit, this is your time to slip into the room next door and change-up.”

Nearly two dozen or so attendees including the bride & groom headed next door. When they returned, some of the remaining attendees looked on in confusion while others cheered, especially when Sheila emerged in a wedding dress similar to Liz’s, but larger to fit the fursuit. Cantaloupe was in a tux with cane and a top hat with slits for his ears.

“This next dance is for fursuiters only,” the emcee announced.

Sheila and Cantaloupe signaled him to pause on starting the tune. They went over to Rick’s table. “Come join us on the dance floor, Pistachio.”

“I haven’t got a fursuit anymore.”

They both laughed at him. “Silly squirrel, yours is built in as you pointed out to us a few weeks ago. Come’on, already!” They each gently grabbed one of his arms and tugged him off his chair. They then let go and led him to the dance floor as others cheered and a techno dance tune started up. He bounced about as best he could with his tail wigwagging to the heavy beat. It took a little bit for him to relax. He hadn’t realized how tensed-up he had been. By the end of the tune he was really getting into it.

As the tune ended, the emcee came on again. “The floor is now open for any and all to dance.” Pistachio stayed on the dance floor with the other suiters, each doing their own thing to the beat. His wife joined him. He quickly lost track of time. What seemed like just fifteen or twenty minutes was several hours later as the reception began to break-up.