

Chapter 60

“Hello again, Jeanne and Josie.”

“Thank you for agreeing to meet on such short notice, Mr. Michaud,” Jeanne replied. The three of them sat down at a table in the student union building. Rick put his back to a wall. “Especially after last time. I want to apologize for that.”

“Apology accepted. And you may call me Pistachio or Stash if you prefer. So, what did Ms. Sagenthrope say to you?”

Jeanne looked at him strangely with a puzzled look. “She said you prefer hazelnuts over pistachios.”

Rick nodded. “Very good. You’ve passed.”

“Passed what?”

“She approves of you and gave you the code phrase I chose with her. She’s granted you permission to properly interview me. It means she’s also released her right to exclusive in-depth interviews with me as Pistachio had previously arranged with her. Did she say anything else?”

“She wants me to send her a copy of the resulting news article.”

Rick nodded again. “Did she mention anything about a possible summer internship?” His tail wigwagged left to right in amusement as he watched her.

Jeanne stared at the giant squirrel a moment with her mouth half-opened. It took her a moment to gather herself. “N..nnoo.”

Rick raised one eyebrow, which looked a little strange on a squirrel. “Interesting. Maybe she didn’t plan to discuss it until after seeing your work. My apologies for jumping the gun. Anyway, the reason you wished to meet?”

“As I said, to apologize for my previous devious behavior.”

“And I’ve already said, apology accepted,” Rick replied.

“And to request to conduct a proper interview, especially now that you’ve been hired as the university’s new goodwill ambassador and substitute mascot.” She paused a moment. “Wait. Internship?”

“Like I said, I may have jumped the gun, but she did ask me to keep an eye out for a student journalist to point her way for Burlington Public Radio’s summer student internship program. Though she’s tried reaching out to the University of Vermont, she’s hasn’t been able to get any local interest in the internship. I suspect after she reviews the resulting article, she might ask you

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

to apply.” Rick grasped his white gardening gloved forepaws together, which Jeanne finally noticed. “Yes, I remember how my claws bothered you last time and wanted to put that issue aside right off.” He turned to Josie. “And the reason you tagged along today?” He raised his tail briefly in a question mark shape.

Josie couldn’t help but giggle. “I can’t get over how expressive your tail is, Stash. I’m here to make sure she behaves.”

Rick nodded again. “Have you talked to Counselor Shim?”

“She has been very insightful. We’ll be meeting again soon.”

“Wonderful!” Rick exclaimed. He turned back to Jeanne. “Where do you want to start? I assume you wanted to meet right off as the publish deadline for the last issue of the paper for the semester is 6pm this evening.”

“How did you know that?”

Rick shrugged. “I keep tabs on a lot of things on this campus. I needed to as part of my job with the Department of Conferences and Meetings. I’ll need to do so even more now in my new role.”

That Thursday’s *White Mountain State Avalanche* student paper had the interview as the top story covering nearly 3 pages of the edition. The questions answered by Rick/Pistachio ranged from his family background to his past involvement with White Mountain State University including his time as the Furry Club advisor. It also covered such mundane things as his favorite take-out restaurant in Groton and his favorite local brewpub. The latter he reminded readers to be of legal age and enjoy responsibly. Readers also learned that 100% of all profits from any merchandise sold in the bookstore with his name/likeness would go into the university’s general scholarship fund. Yes, he and his wife still shared the same bed despite his physical change. He wears custom-made silicon caps on his claws in bed to protect both her and the bedsheets. They chose early on in their relationship that they would not have children.

Early in the spring semester, Jeanne chased Rick down at the student center to thank him for giving her a second chance and let him know that Burlington Public had offered her an internship for the summer.