

Chapter 74

Dr. Canatori stepped through the doorway from his exam room.

“How is she, Doc?” Rick asked

“Tired, scared, a little on the thin side, but healthy. She nipped me lightly at one point in her panic and then started sobbing. She grabbed onto the finger she had nipped and started licking the wound while trying to apologize for what she had done. If it weren’t for that app you showed me, I wouldn’t have understood a thing she said.”

“Are you alright?”

“Sure. I’m usually good at reading animal body language. I had pulled my finger back as she tried to bite me, so she only nicked the skin, no bleeding. I’ve been bitten much worse before. She started to panic again as I pointed her towards a cage. It wasn’t until I showed her how to unlatch both doors including the one that leads outside that she agreed to be placed in it. I explained it was as much for her safety as for ours. I still need to give her a vaccine cocktail, but otherwise, she’s fine.” He paused a moment. “Though, she might still be suffering some shock from her transformation.” Dr. Canatori shook his head in disbelief. “I hope this doesn’t become a regular thing around here. I’m used to rehabbing wildlife, not former humans.”

“She’s the one who created the process, Doc. Second Limb is researching the medical aspects of the process, not the transformation aspect. Speaking of vaccines, I was supposed to see you on Thursday for my annual rabies booster. If you think it would help, I’m willing to receive it now with her watching to show it’s safe.”

“Well, as you are here now, sure. It may help.”

Lieutenant Campton spoke up. “You don’t seem as surprised as I’d expect, Dr. Canatori, over the idea of dealing with a human who has changed into a wild animal.”

Dr. Canatori shrugged. “Rick, here, gave me a bunch of practice over the past year.”

Rick shrugged. “It was fun arguing with my insurance company when I requested to make Dr. Canatori, a state licensed wildlife veterinarian, my primary care physician. You should have seen the look on the insurance adjuster’s face when we met in person. That put an end to the argument in my favor.”

“Is it possible for me to try and question her?”

“My patient needs some time to rest and to adjust to her new surroundings, Lieutenant. Come back in a few days.”

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

Rick peaked in on Rose. “How do you like your temporary home?”

“It’s alright, but human smell is strong.” Her reply was echoed by a nearby speaker.

“Yes, but Dr. Canatori will take good care of you through the winter. He is both a veterinarian and wildlife rehabber. He should be able to help you find a territory to claim as your own come spring.”

“Are you leaving?” Rose drooped her tail.

“Not yet. I actually came to escort you to a different room. He needs to give you a vaccination against rabies, distemper, and I think Lyme. It’ll make you sleepy for a bit.”

Rose wigwagged her tail nervously. “No! I don’t want to die!” She chatterscreed loudly.

“No, not that kind of sleep, Rose. I’m due for my rabies booster. He’ll inject me first so you can see it’s safe.”

“Really?”

Rick nodded. “If Doc wanted to hurt you, he had plenty of time to do so while examining you. If he wanted to cause you harm, he wouldn’t have shown you how to unlatch the cage on your own, would he?”

Rose leapt onto the cage door, reached through the bars with one paw, and popped the latch open. “No, I guess not.”

“Ride on my back?” Rose agreed by jumping onto the larger squirrel and holding on.

Rick scampered through a few corridors and into the closed exhibition area. “This space is usually open to the public, but not this time of day and the center is closed tomorrow.” He pulled his phone out of his pocket and started the app again.

“What’s that?” Rose exclaimed leaping off his shoulder and checking out the Rick-size drey on display.

“I, well Pistachio, built it last fall so human children can see what a drey looks like. I made some repairs to it this past spring. It looks like it’s held-up well since then.”

“But how?”

Rick gently tapped her head while also tapping his own head. “You have the instinctual knowledge up here, just as I do. Doc got Pistachio to start it and then he just knew what to do next. He did the same thing for me this past spring when it needed repair. He’s that good, Rose. You’ll be in good hands here.” He glanced over as a door opened and closed behind him. “There he is now.”

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

Dr. Canatori carried a small stainless-steel tray with alcohol swabs and two syringes on it, one large, one small. He set it on the railing near the drey display.

Rose nervously twitched her tail. “He’s going to do it in here?”

“Of course. Like I said, after a little bit it’s going to make us feel sleepy. What better place to sleep it off than in the drey I built?” Rick crawled into it briefly. “See, there will be enough room for you too. You’ll be snug, safe, and warm for the night. Tomorrow, I’ll have to go home.” Rick crawled back out.

“You’re first, Rick.”

“Where do you need to stick me, Doc, so Rose will know what to expect.”

“I got to put it into the muscle in your lower leg, Rick. Whichever you want.”

“Let’s go with the left so Rose can easily watch.”

“Very well.” Dr. Canatori gave Rick his rabies booster. He scratched him on the back of the neck, eliciting a chitterpur from the large squirrel.

“I still can’t get over how soft your fur is, Rick.”

“See, Rose, nothing to it. Thanks, Doc.”

“You’re not sleeping.”

“It takes a little while, but trust me, once you start feeling sleepy, you’ll want to curl up someplace quickly and sleep it off. You’re turn.”

Rose tensed for a moment but didn’t try to flee or nip Dr. Canatori as he vaccinated her.

“There that wasn’t so bad.” Dr. Canatori consoled her, gently brushing his fingers on the back of her neck. She quivered in delight from his gentle touch.

Rick yawned and without consciously thinking about it, covered his mouth with his tail.

“Remember what I said, Rose?” Rick crawled into the drey and curled up.

Rose hesitated a moment and then joined him. It was cozy. Rick gently licked her. “Good night, little sister.”

“Huh?”

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

Rick's voice was slightly slurred. "I assume you used the same DNA copy on yourself as you first infected me with. So, that makes us sort-of-siblings, right?" he slipped off into sleep before she could respond.

Rose smiled. She never had a brother before this. She snuggled up to her big brother and was soon fast asleep.