

Part 4: Moving Up is Hard To Do

(Due to strong personal convictions, the writer of this story wishes to state ahead of time that the roommates presented within are not meant to be iconic or representative of any real life person, culture, religious affiliation, or nationality.)

The prospective roommate who was supposed to ride to the apartment with us rescheduled, so it was just Xavier and I cramming into the rusty old blue truck Xavier insisted on driving, even after the incident with the engine not starting for a full week. I'd tried so hard to convince him to trade up, but he had to bring up finances. Life is a lot less glamorous when that pesky reality comes into play.

"You still haven't told me what Samson came here for." Xavier flipped the turn signal on before shifting one lane to the right.

"We were just talking!" I blurted out, wanting to kick myself. Normally I'm not that awkward, but the whole Samson affair had thrown me off. I was still trying to figure out how I felt about that squirrel. Seeing Samson had stirred up a lot of feelings I was still sorting out. Not to mention what we did...

I thought that I had meant what I said when I told Samson we weren't getting back together. But after thinking about it for a little while... Ugh, my feelings kept going in circles.

"I wasn't wondering what you two were DOING. I was wondering why he came here." Thankfully, my embarrassment went over the skunk's head. "He deliberately came to see an ex, and I can't wrap my head around that. Why make the effort? Did he apologize or something?"

I let out a long, pronounced sigh while looking away. "Let's talk about something interesting." I pointed ahead at the building we were parking in front of. Our new apartment complex, just a few blocks away from campus. "Like who's going to be sharing that roof once it's over our heads. Did you let slip earlier that a certain muscular husky was in the running?" I frowned, the sentence calling Kristoph to mind. He was the one who got away: a gorgeous white-furred canine with pale blue eyes, a sculpted body and a keen mind. I'd almost started dating Kristoph, and then... well, I'd fucked things up and hurt him. We hadn't seen each other since. I hadn't made the effort.

"Yeaaaah. I wasn't really gonna mention that until he got there, but yeah." Xavier rolled his eyes, looking away from me as he shifted the car into park. "I mentioned we were moving out, and he asked if we had a third room. Seemed like a decent fit, he's a pretty stable guy, right?"

"Him being stable isn't the issue!" I blurted out. "You know I wouldn't be comfortable with it after how bad I treated him. I'm a lit flame too close to a leaky gas line, and I don't want to burn him again, Tuxedo." My ears drooped. Even using the nickname I gave Xavier didn't cheer me up.

Xavier folded his arms and turned to glare at me. "So because you messed up with him as a romantic prospect, you can't co-exist with him?" He frowned. "We aren't scoping out potential boyfriends for you, we're looking for roomies. And we don't have a LOT of other options, Teri. If he seems fine with living with you after everything you did, why are you freaking out about it?"

I was freaking out because just thinking about Kristoph made me feel guilty. He'd seen me at my lowest, and I remembered the look of disgust he gave me when he hit me. I wasn't afraid he was gonna do it again; when I'm not drunk off my ass I'm not an easy target for fists. But more importantly... Kristoph was kind. Even when he had no reason to help me, he'd come back and tried to look after me. My ears drooped. "Look, let's just be polite, but say no. I can deal with any other roommate, but not him." I sighed. I wasn't sure I could look Kristoph in the eyes without being reminded of my own failures. I whimpered, crossing my legs and staring out the window, watching life pass us by. "So who else do we got?"

Xavier clicked his tongue as his arms worked, spinning the wheel as we turned right. "Let's see... a llama who is studying philosophy, a zebra guy here on a basketball scholarship, a cougar here to study economics, and a racoon looking for a place to stay while he works on his graduate work in linguistics.

"Any of them hot?" I allowed myself a moment of fantasizing about my prospective roommates, all shirtless.

My tediously dull actual roommate scoffed. "You WOULD ask that." Xavier barked back at me, but I could see a faint smile on his face. "Anyways, I'm not so sure I'd be a good judge." He pulled into the parking lot. I'd opened my mouth to reply, but he beat me to the punch. "Anyways, you'll have a chance to tell for yourself, soon enough." He gripped the stick of his car and pushed it into park. "We're here and our first interview happens in thirty minutes. Grab some things and follow me up."

Our new apartment complex loomed over us, the shadow it cast stretching all over the parking lot where we had parked. Sedate tan walls, studded with glass windows, all arranged in a rectangular fashion. The North Hills apartments were the only off-campus student housing on the south side of the city, and although the building was rather drab by my tastes, they were also the most modern off-campus apartments we could afford. Back during winter when we'd discussed moving out, Xavier had made a huge stink about wanting to go with something cheaper. He hadn't wanted a third roommate, and some of the older housing was cheap enough that the two of us could afford it by ourselves. He'd argued we didn't need to pay for the luxury of North Hills, with individual private showers and air conditioning. And he'd asserted it'd be less of a fight, since they gave out rooms on a lottery system and we'd have to compete with other students to get it. At the time I hadn't protested. I'd just smiled and nodded, complimenting him on his thick, lustrous black fur that helped keep him warm in the wind and snow. But I entered us into the lottery anyway, behind his back. Once spring came around, that same lustrous black

fur resulted in a lot of sweating, panting, and overheating. Even once his summer coat had grown in, he wasn't safe. When he'd expressed his frustration over the temperatures we were dealing with, I at last brought the subject up again. He'd quickly conceded the point. The memory made me smile. It'd been a simple victory for luxury over cost, and all I'd had to do was give him time.

"So our apartment's on the sixth floor, right?" I asked, shading my eyes from the sun with my left paw, as I looked up.

"Yup." Xavier walked around to the back of the truck, undoing the hatch on the carrier cover. His tail curled up as he let the hatch drop open with a loud thud.

"So we'll be moving UP as well as moving IN, huh?" I swallowed. "This place has elevators, right? Please tell me they've got elevators."

"Come on." Xavier chuckled and poked my side. "Climbing a few flights of stairs back and forth will do you good. Grab a box and let's get going."

I let my tail thrash. "Ugh, manual labor." I looked at the back of the truck, loaded with offensive boxes.

"Oh, I'm sorry, princess." Xavier grinned at me, as he got out of the car. "I forgot you used to have people for this sort of thing."

I stuck my tongue out at him and got out on the passenger's side. "You're never going to let me live what I told you down, are you?"

"No." he said, stating a simple fact. "But if it gets you working any harder, all the lifting and climbing will likely get us both hot and sweaty."

I felt my cock twitch as I thought about how my roommate would look after a fair bit of exertion. Xavier was a metaphorical white whale: a tantalizing goal that too impossible to attain. Sadly, he persisted in maintaining he was straight. "Well, what do you know? I'm suddenly motivated." I purred, as we opened the trunk of the truck and reached for a few boxes.

After a whole school year making do in a tiny dorm room, our new three bedroom apartment seemed like a mansion. On one side, we had a kitchenette that even came with its own shining steel oven. Along the other side there was a white carpeted expanse, begging to be furnished and used as a proper living room. Lastly, we had a hallway going out with two doors on either side, offering three bedrooms and one bathroom. In spite of how heavy our boxes felt, we had nowhere near enough stuff to fill all the added room. I felt myself grinning as I scanned each bedroom, trying to decide which one to lay claim to. The sole bedroom on the right had the cutest purple walls, but it was right next to the bathroom, which I worried might be noisy when-

“Hey Teri! The first guy we’re interviewing arrived!” Xavier called out from out in the kitchennette, calling me away from my fun. With a soft sigh, I pulled away from the bedrooms to saunter back out into the entryway. Our ratty green couch had been one of the first things we hauled up from Xavier’s truck. After all, we had to have something to quietly judge each applicant from, didn’t we?

“This is Lou, the llama that was going to ride over with us.” Xavier waved a hand at our guest as I took a seat to his right on the couch.

Our guest had bright blue eyes that went well with his sandy brown fur. He had a slight, warm smile as he waved in front of us. “Hey.” He stood in front of both of us. “How’re yah doing?” The tan jacket he was wearing rustled as he shifted his weight.

I gave him a smile back. “Not bad at all.” My tail curled behind me. He seemed like a sweetheart. I already liked him. Xavier had already spoke with him, so I decided to take the reins. “Alright, handsome. I want to ask, what year are you, what are some of your hobbies and interests, and how do you feel about living with a gay guy?”

“Whose also a relentless stereotype.” Xavier said, earning a playful swat from me.

Lou chuckled. “Well, I’m a sophomore, which I understand is the same as both of you. I’m like studying other languages, and I’m a bit of a reader. I read a lot, and I’m pretty quiet. I won’t keep anyone up at night with loud music, and in what time I have left, I occasionally play some video games.” He put his hands in his pockets. “I have nothing against gay people, by the way. Being bi myself, that’d be sorta hypocritical, right?”

My ears perked up. “You go both ways, huh?” I found myself licking my lips. Now, I’d had a moment with Samson, and I still was working out how I felt about that. And Kristoph was showing up sooner or later, and I still wasn’t sure how I was going to bear seeing him again. So while I wasn’t really in any hurry to date anyone new. But a cute guy who seemed sane and temperate? I’ll admit he was a tempting little morsel. Especially because he was really cute! “So next question, which I need to know for, uh, roommate purposes. Are you seeing anyone?”

My comment provoked a chuckle, as those pretty azure eyes of his shimmered. “Uh, no? I mean, I’m single right now, but you never know what might happen during the year, right?” He leaned forward, looking me straight in the eyes. “Maybe Mr. or Mrs. Right is literally just someone a door away.” I felt my heart racing, just a little bit.

I turned to Xavier. “Oh, I like him, Tuxedo.” I whispered, just loud enough for both of them to hear. This provoked an eyeroll and a scoff from the skunk.

“Regardless of my roommate’s overly amorous demeanor-” I stuck my tongue out at Xavier as he spoke. “-I’m inclined to agree. You seem like you’d be a perfect fit for living with us for the semester.”

“Great!” Lou said, turning to look out the window. “I’d really like that. I think we could get along well together.” And then, without missing a beat, he continued. “By the way, can you guys handle rent for a few months? I really need to save my money. See, my brother Alphonso has this plan, see, and-”

We couldn’t shoo Lou out of our apartment fast enough. As charming and friendly as he’d been, we weren’t a charity.

“So have either of you bros heard the Good News?” said Zebulon, the zebra who was next on our list of potential roommates. Several of the stripes around his neck and arms were dyed a pale yellow, which I kept wondering about. It would have taken a lot of bleaching and dying to turn black to sandy yellow, yet he’d done it for just a few stripes, without even any discernable pattern to it. There were probably more under his leather pants, which clung around his thighs with an almost supernatural fit. Staring at those thighs, however, was a bit distracting. He was a very attractive ungulate!

“Er, I’m sorry. what was the question?” I’d been staring at his thighs so much I’d tuned him out. In my defense, he had to be used to a few stares.

He stared at me, tilting his head ever so slightly towards his left shoulder. “The Gate has opened! He is the Gate and He has come! Let me tell you bros about Yogg Sothoth!”

My ears fell flat against my head and I raised an eyebrow. He was going to our school on a basketball scholarship, so I hadn’t really expected the conversation to go outside of sports. I blinked a few times as I tried to make sense of what I was hearing. “Er, ok. Who is he? Some kind of basketball star or-mmmph!”

Xavier had put a paw over my face. He gave our prospective roommate a plastic smile. “I’m sorry, but the room has been filled.”

“Before we begin, are either of you virgins? I am seeking to live with virgin in this housing arrangement.” The zebra’s eyes widened, a bloodshot expression on his face. “The master, you see bros, is a congeries of iridescent globes, yet-”

Xavier had sprung up and was shoving him to the door. “THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!” he shouted, as he pushed with all his might against the hooved, stripey man in the black basketball hoodie

“Bro! Bro! I understand your hesitation, but it’s misplaced.” Zebulon pushed back against my skunk of a roommate. “If you would just take a moment to hear the singing of the elder ones as-” Xavier grit his teeth and renewed his efforts, pushing the zebra as he broke down into gibbering. The skunk slammed the door behind him, locking and bolting it.

I folded my arms and gave a slight huff. “That was a bit extreme, don’t you think?”

Xavier lay against the door, holding it shut, as if locking it wasn’t enough. “Nope.”

I sighed. “He looked hot in leather, and he actually seemed interesting. A bit manic, sure, but he had an air of danger that seemed enticing.” There was loud cackling from just outside our door.

“Nope. No danger.” The skunk’s tail was bristling. “No peril, no weirdness, and nothing that involves two g’s in its name.” He walked away from the door after the cackling died down.

I curled my lower lip. “Aw, maybe just a bit of peril?”

“Nope. No peril. Too perilous.” Xavier walked over to the refrigerator, looking through it.

“I always listen to swedish death metal blaring on my speakers while I’m doing economic homework.” The cougar said. “I HAVE to. It’s a habit.” For an economics major, he’d been entirely unlike what I’d expected: Tall, with burly shoulders and a shaggy blonde dyejob that covered both his eyes and bounced whenever he so much as moved his head. He wore black leather pants and a matching vest, on top of black fur, and had ridden here on a motorcycle. “That isn’t going to be a problem, is it?” As he paced about in front of the couch, some of the silver jewelry he had just clipped to his jacket jingled. I ground my teeth at the sound.

I was trying not to growl at him. “That... would violate a few noise rules they have here.” My striped, monochrome partner responded. “But get some headphones and we should be fine. So you can pay in advance, right Carl?”

“Yeah.” The cougar nodded. “But actually, it’s Nyx, not Carl. That’s just the name I put on my tax forms.” He frowned. “So anymore questions?”

I bit my tongue. I really really needed one of these people to work out. Otherwise, Kristoph was our best bet. Even if this guy was such a... I shook my head and grit my teeth.

“Yeah, I have one.” Xavier nodded. “Source of income. How are you going to be paying rent every month?”

“Nyx” chuckled. “Well, I work in an old record store, but I’m really just filling time there. I’m in this band, you see, and we’re gonna be big. Still, record store pays most of the bills right now.” I rolled my eyes. And he was in a band, too. Of *course* he was..

“A band?” Xavier raised an eyebrow. “Huh. What kind of music do you play?”

The cougar stared at his claws, smirking. “Oh, it’s really novel stuff... I dunno if you’d be into it, it’s kinda experimental.” I felt my paw clenching into a fist.

“Uh... ok?” Xavier turned to face me. “How about you, Teri? You’ve been pretty silent the whole time. What do you think of Nyx?”

And that did it. I couldn’t keep silent. I stood up. “Yeah, I’ve got a question. Why the heck do you insist on wearing mismatching silver things with black leather?” I scowled, standing up. “I mean, I could see like, maybe the ankh or the star of david or the pentagon, if you had some sort of affiliation with some religious group, but are you just wearing random silver stuff to seem hardcore? And why silver jewelry on obviously black dyed fur, anyway? With that blonde hair of yours, gold would have made you look less like a walking fashion disaster.”

“Oh EXCUSE me, flea bait?” He growled back at me, baring his fangs. “You have a problem, pretty boy?”

“Teri-” Xavier started, as I spun around and glared at him.

I narrowed my eyes, putting my hands on my hips. “Uh, yeah. The mismatched accessories, the hipster band attitude, the eclectic taste in music... you are such a pretentious little-”

The interview went about as to be expected from there. After Carl (I refuse to call him Nyx!) left, Xavier sighed as he looked up at me, while I scowled at him, my hands on my hips. “Teri, you want to tell me why you couldn’t tolerate that guy? I’ve seen you hand out makeovers like some people hand out religious pamphlets.”

I looked away. “The just wasn’t room for both of us here, Xavier. That’s all there is to it.”

Xavier covered his face with his paw. “Oh gods, this is a cat thing, isn’t it.”

I turned around and hissed at him. “It is NOT a cat thing! Geeze, don’t be speciesist!” It had been a cat thing.

“Sprechen sie deutsche?” Our last prospective roommate stood before us, his fur pattern a mix of grays and blacks. The squat racoon, a black mask of fur plastered over his face, put his

hands into the pockets of his leather jacket, and tilted his head, pale hazel eyes looking towards Xavier. He waited a few moments, tail twitching behind him, before repeating that line for the fourth time since we'd let him in.

There was a pause of silence. I'd just gotten done asking him if he used any product for the pompadour he walked around wearing. "Yeah, this isn't going to work." I said, shifting my body over to stare in Xavier's direction as well. "I thought you said you had a conversation with all the guys we were interviewing today?"

Xavier shrugged. "I did! He seemed fine over the phone, if a bit slow to talk. I don't get it. Maybe he used a phrase book?" He looked back towards the man standing before us. "Richter, are you able to understand us?"

Richter Racoon's response was to take a few steps forward, now just a few inches away from the legs of Xavier and I. "Sprechen sie deutsche?" He said again, looking between Xavier and I.

"Um..." I bit my lip. "Non. Je ne parle pas?" I gave him a wide grin, hoping he got the message. "

"What is that? Isn't that French?" Xavier raised an eyebrow at me.

I folded my arms, letting out a light huff as I narrowed my eyes. "I don't speak german, Xavier!" I growled at him.

"That doesn't answer the question." Xavier continued. "*Why* would you respond to someone speaking German with French?"

The continued staring put me on the defensive. "He's studying Linguistics, and I just thought that-" Xavier continued giving me a stare with those dead fish eyes of his. I threw my paws out in front of me. "Look, conventional communication has failed us, ok?!? This isn't going to work. Even if he is a cute foreign man, I need a roommate I can have conversations with!"

"Sprechen sie deutsche?" Our would-be housing partner suddenly leaned in between us, gazing at me with a flat, confused expression.

I leaned away from him, ears flat against my forehead. "Uh... Ok, I usually like to know what the hell is going on in someone's mind before I get this close to them." I scooted all the way over to the far side of the couch. "U-um, Xavier, our german friend doesn't seem to respect the idea of people's personal space... or maybe there's just something kinda off about him."

Xavier had scooted all the way over to the other side of the couch. "Look, just give him a chance, alright? Maybe he's just being, um, friendly or something. I mean, he clearly doesn't speak English, in spite of our conversation over the phone. We have to be culturally sensitive, ri-

As Xavier was finishing that sentence, Richter Raccoon began to climb onto the couch, crawling towards me. "Sprechen sie deutsche?" He said, licking his lips and giving me a hungry gaze as he moved a paw up towards my thigh.

In any other context I might have been into it, but at the moment, I slapped his hand away. "Um, X-Xavier, I'm all for being culturally sensitive but I don't think this is how anyone from Germany would act when meeting someone new." I felt my face getting hot. As I started to stand up, Richter reached over again and grabbed the tip of my tail. An unwelcome shudder ran up my spine. "Ireallythinthere'sjustsomethingoffaboutthisguylet'sgetridofhimplease." My voice had dropped down to a frantic squeak. It was one of the only times I could remember when I wasn't happily excited about being touched by a guy. Our german applicant was staring the tip of my tail as it squirmed in his front paw, jerking as I tried to free it.

"Y-yeah." Xavier stood up on the other side of the couch, watching as the raccoon as he let go of my tail, getting up on all fours on the couch. "Come on, Mr. Raccoon. I think we need to just, um, go our separate ways for now. Don't call us, we'll, uh, call you. Possibly." He reached out to grip at Richter's shoulder, but never actually managed to touch him.

Because the raccoon had pounced, launching himself at me from a position of being on all fours on the couch. I felt him knock me to the ground, as he looked into my eyes from on top of me. I cried out in shock. Glazed, vacant irises met my upwards stare, as he gave me a large, toothy grin. He opened his mouth, and his words were madness singing into my very soul.

"Sprechen sie deutsche?"

I walked out of the showers, rubbing a brown towel against my hair. Properly drying off and brushing my fur after bathing would take a half hour that we didn't have, so I had just dried off what I could and slid on a pair of loose blue jeans (I'd prefer not to wear long pants, but if it was a choice between them and showing someone ungroomed fur, it was a necessary evil), as well as the green sweater I'd been so eager to throw away just hours before. I didn't like walking around with wet fur, but after our last roommate interview, I had needed a shower.

Xavier was looking over a housing agreement as I joined him on the couch. With a decided pout on my face, I sat down next to him, folding my arms and thrashing my tail along the floor.

His eyes flicked over to stare at me for a moment, before going back to what he was reading.
"So-"

"We're never talking about what just happened again." I said in a quiet, angry tone, folding my arms. "I don't even want to think about Richter." Just mentioning his name sent a shudder up my spine.

Xavier nodded. "Sure. I'm fine with that." He folded over the front sheet of the roommate agreement, with a flourish of paper. One of the things I'd come to rely on with Xavier was his willingness to let things drop. He'd seen what had happened, he wasn't going to tease me about it. "Feeling better?"

I nodded, running a brush through my long brown curls of hair. "A little." I sniffled, looking away from him. "These apartments aren't inexpensive. I thought we'd get some better applicants."

Xavier shrugged. "I dunno what to tell you. We didn't get to advertising until a lot later than most people do. We got what we got, and we're lucky we got this many, when we only started advertising a few weeks ago. Plus, these places are pricy. Not many college students can afford to live here, even with the rent split three ways."

There was a knocking on the door. Xavier and I both turned up to look at it. "Hey Teri, go grab that, will you?" Xavier turned his head back down to the paperwork.

My ears drooped flat against my head. "Aw, come on! It's gonna be him, we both know it." I whimpered. "I... I need a moment!"

Xavier shook his head. "Look, I'm busy here. Go get the door for our last interview, Teri. Don't make me ask again."

"Ugh, fine." I threw my head against the back cushion of the couch, letting tangled tassels of brown hair whip against the backside of our cushy support. With a long, pronounced, melodramatic siiiiigh I stood up and walked over towards the door. I didn't want to do it, but Xavier was right. We had one last interview to give, and right now we needed this individual to be the one who we picked. It was especially important now because we really didn't want to call back any of the guys we'd just rejected. I knew that, and yet my hand was shaking as I gripped the knob of our new front door.

"Hey, Teri."

Just as I'd predicted, he stood before me. Whitish-gray tufted around the neckline of his long-sleeve carmine shirt. His abs tightened beneath that shirt. It was clinging so tight I could see them through it. He was looking at the black claws along his left paw as I'd opened the door, only to look at me. For a moment, cool, sky blue eyes gazed into my green ones. I averted my gaze as fast as I could. A moment of silence passed between us, as he reached down to pull up one side of his navy jeans. I swallowed, feeling my heart race as his scent hit my nostrils. Even though I knew it would be him, I couldn't keep my hands from trembling, or my eyes from

widening. I had such a hang up about him, it wasn't even funny. After all, the last time Kristoph had seen me, I had been drunk off my ass, wanting to die. I'd said horrible things about his family to try and drive him away. And yet he didn't leave. Kristoph was kind. He was genuine. He was a good person, better than I'd ever be. And he'd seen me at my absolute worst. I couldn't even look him in the eyes. Heck, I'd spent the last few months deliberately avoiding him, after the way I'd acted.

I felt panic creep up into my mind. I'd been hoping to avoid this encounter. I gave him a plastic smile and moved to one side of the door. "H-hi! Come on in." I waved him in. "I, um, have to go use the restroom. Xavier will get us all started, and I'll just jump in once I'm done, ok?"

Kristoph's kissable lips curled into a frown for a moment. "You sure, Teri? I think-"

"Oh yes!" I said, backing away. "I really have to go, and no one wants to see that, so I'll just go, and you guys go ahead, and I'll go back to the couch once I'm done. Going." With that, I darted into the bathroom and locked the door.

I took a seat on the toilet, pressing my chin up against my front paws. I stayed silent until I heard the muffled sounds of the two of them talking. I couldn't make out their words, but it probably wasn't anything too important. I needed a moment to get my head back on straight. I closed my eyes and calmed my mind, taking in deep breathes. "This isn't you, Teri." I said, to no one in particular. "You don't melt into a babbling puddle of goo just because you see someone you wronged. That's not how you act. That's not how you were raised." Thoughts of the person who raised me popped into my head. *He* wouldn't have ran into a bathroom to hide. He'd have seen that as a sign of weakness. The expression on my face curled into a snarl. My claws pushed out, purely on instinct. The one good lesson I learned from growing up under his thumb was to never show weakness. I took another deep breath, then stood up to gaze into the mirror.

"You aren't a scared little kitten." I said, mostly to my expression. "You aren't a weak willed coward to be pushed around. Not even by your own feelings. You're better than that." I lifted my tail. "You are a tiger. So act like it. You are bold. Fierce. Daring." I looked at the mirror and made a fierce face. "Rawr, right? You control the situations you enter." I watched as my reflection clenched a fist in front of its chest. "So go out there and handle the situation."

Opening the bathroom door, I strolled out, walking into a conversation already in progress.

"-and I can pay first and last month's rent right now if you want." Kristoph was standing in front of the couch, arms folded just above his crotch. "I'm pretty quiet, and I already know you and I have a bit in common, Xavier. Really, I think the only concern is if Teri-"

"Teri can take care of himself." I said, sauntering over to the couch and taking a seat.

Xavier looked over towards me. "Feeling better?"

I didn't look back. I kept staring up at Kristoph, sizing him up. At six foot five, he was a little taller than me while standing. But when I was seated, he was literally towering over me. I didn't squirm. "I am. Now then, applicant. I have just three questions for you."

"Applicant?" Kristoph raised an eyebrow.

"First question: Are you willing to agree with the standard rules of the roommate's agreement? No loud music after ten pm, no large parties without RA approval, keeping our shared space clean, and so on?"

The husky nodded. "Of course, but I think-

I nodded back. "SECOND, do you have any preexisting medical conditions we need to be aware of? Asthma, allergies, or anything we need to take into account as your roommates?"

"No." Kristoph shook his head. "Nothing like that at all. But you and I-

Without a hint of hesitation, I pushed on. "And you already told Xavier you could pay the first and last month's rent. But my third and final question is this: Are you going to be able to meet the financial obligations every month?"

"I got a job as a pizza delivery guy, which is covering most of it. Loans'll get the rest." Kristoph said, putting his paws in his pockets. "So can we talk now, Teri?"

"After this is done." I folded my arms. "What... you and I... need to talk about is personal. Just between the two of us." I narrowed my eyes. "But this is business, and we get that out of the way first. Xavier and I need a roommate. Regardless of how our discussion goes, my personal feelings shouldn't matter about you living here." I turned to look at Xavier. "Do you have any objections or concerns?"

"What? No. I was worried you would." Xavier shook his head.

I turned back to Kristoph. "Then welcome to the apartment, Mr. Kristoph." I gave him a plastic smile. "My assistant here-

"I'm NOT your assistant!" Xavier scowled at me.

This provoked a dismissive wave of my paw. "We'll talk later, Xavier." My legs ached a bit as I stood up. They were still sore from all the heavy boxes I'd lugged up here. "-my associate will get you the paperwork to sign. But, with the formalities out of the way..."

Taking Kristoph's right paw, I started tugging him towards the bedroom I'd claimed. "NOW we talk." He followed, his eyes wide as dinner plates, as I led him into the room. "We're going to resolve this like sensible, rational, adults. Because that's what we are."

Xavier groaned, then cupped a paw around his mouth. "DON'T FORGET TO WEAR CONDOMS, YOU KIDS!"

I scowled at him, hissing silently, before I shut, and locked, the door behind us. It was time to work things out with Kristoph once and for all.