

Home Alone in Pure Heart Valley

Chapter 11: Day 4 – Snowfest Eve

The next morning was just like yesterday's.

Adorabat was in the bathroom, standing on the sink counter in front of the mirror freshening up. She had a catchy jazzy Snowfest song playing, which she was silently lip-syncing the words of while using the various grooming products available to her. She combed her fur, occasionally holding the comb she used as though it were a microphone. She took a can of fragrant solution and sprayed a few whiffs on herself. Then, she took the bottle of aftershave and sprinkled a few drops on a wing. She rubbed her wings together to spread the liquid solution and placed them on her cheeks for a rub.

The sensation was instantaneous. The burning feeling was strong enough to make her scream, long and loud enough to drive Lucky's pet spider out of hiding and make it leave the bathroom.

Back in town in an average grocery store, Adorabat carefully examined every shelf of the aisle she was navigating. She had to take her time, as she needed to flap her wings harder than she usually did to pull the shopping cart behind her with the various goodies she already placed in it. Looking in one direction, she went and grabbed a carton of milk to add to the cart.

After she finished grabbing all the items she needed, she pulled the cart towards one of the checkout counters. She could already see the cashier working at that counter give her a funny look, as though the cashier were expecting someone taller and older behind the shopping cart. Adorabat tried to pay no mind to that insinuation, stopping herself right next to the counter and taking out her grocery items to place on the countertop for scanning.

Adorabat watched as the cashier began scanning all the items. She decided to occupy her time by reading one of the nearby magazines from the rack next to the counter. After a bit of browsing and skimming, she got curious about the boxes of TV dinner that were being scanned. "Are those microwaveable dinners any good?"

"I dunno," the cashier answered.

"I'll give 'em a shot," Adorabat remarked, giving a little smile for self-assurance. She noticed the cashier scanning and then taking a longer-than-usual look at a sealed bag of toy soldiers and military vehicles, holding the bag up for her to see. It was as though she were being asked what that was doing among the rest of the pile of essentials. "For the kids," was her explanation for it. When she spotted the cashier scanning a juice carton, she knew that was the last item. "Hold on," she interjected, "I got a coupon for that." She took out a printed coupon in which its edges made it look like it had been cut with scissors. "It was in the paper this morning."

The cashier took the coupon Adorabat handed over and scanned it on the cash registering machine, pressing more buttons to calculate the total cost. "\$19.83," the cashier told the bat.

"Okay," Adorabat affirmed, taking out the required amount of money asked of her. She handed them over to the cashier.

It was at that point, after the transaction was done and over with, that the cashier decided to get curious. "Are you here all by yourself?"

"Really?" Adorabat responded to the question like it was a joke. "I'm 5 years old. You really think I'd be here? Alone? I don't think so."

"Where's your mom?" the cashier began probing.

"I don't have a mom." Adorabat answered.

"What about your dad?" the cashier went further.

"He's waiting outside." Adorabat said.

"Brothers and sisters?"

"I'm an only child."

"Where do you live?"

Adorabat was a little uneasier in answering that question. "I...can't tell you that."

"Why not?" the cashier asked a little bit more insistently.

Adorabat narrowed her eyes, almost like she was leering at the cashier. "Because," she told the other person in a low gravelly whisper that made her sound ominous, "you're a stranger."

That statement alone was enough to make the cashier stop talking and back off. With no other means to get answers from the bat, the cashier turned to begin packing up Adorabat's groceries in bags.

Adorabat took the bagged up groceries, which were exactly two bags. She had one bag held with both of her feet and the other between her teeth. She had to fly back to HQ with her own two wings, holding on to everything the best she could. She was nearly home when she decided to land to take a rest.

However, right as she was going to do that, she felt the bags splitting open from the bottom, spilling out all the groceries that were once contained tightly inside them. Adorabat growled in frustration, knowing she was going to need to find some other way to collect them.

She soon did, though, and she made it back home quickly enough.

Later in the day, in an aerotruck that sat in the woods meters away from HQ, Rufus and Reggie were looking out and at the building, waiting and thinking about their next action.

"I don't understand," Rufus muttered without taking his eyes off the building, his chin resting on his hand with an elbow on the window frame. "I mean, it looks like no one is home right now, but it was bustling last night with the sheriffs being present. Something is amiss..." He turned to Reggie. "Go check it out."

Reggie waited around in the truck, feeling himself in agreement with Rufus's immediate plan. Rufus, after all, was the idea man. He got a little uncomfortable when the silence dragged on longer than he felt it should, not to mention how he noticed Rufus's increasingly drilling gaze boring into him at several

intervals, as though he was trying to clue the raccoon in. At the very least, Reggie was able to tell something was up with Rufus. "Now?" he said like it was a suggestion.

"No, I meant tomorrow – YES, I mean NOW!" Rufus loudly and sarcastically clarified in his quick moment of frustration. The forcefulness of his voice was enough to get Reggie opening his door and scrambling out of the truck to start walking through the snow towards HQ. Rufus shook his head as he watched Reggie, displeasingly reminded of his raccoon partner's periodic but typical penchant for dimwitted behavior.

Reggie checked every available corner of the house, going from the edge which led to the dojo and then the other where the waterwheel stood. It was at that side that Adorabat was busy putting some dry goods away on a nearby shelf. When she just put away another item, her eyes widened at noticing a blurred shadow through the curtained window of the nearby door. Even more, she saw the trespasser put his foot through the little flappy door. The purple foot, along with the short round proportions of the leg attached to it, made her realize it belonged to someone she recognized all too well: Reggie. Thinking quickly as Reggie pulled his foot back out, she zipped over to the TV in the living room and turned it on, playing *"Angels with Impure Hearts"* again like yesterday.

"– get out of here." – "Alright Timmy, but what about my money?" Reggie froze when he heard the voices. **"What money?"** Reggie leaned in closer to the door for a better listen. **"Rudy said you had some dough for me." – "That a fact? How much do I owe you?"**

As the movie continued to play, Adorabat carefully made her way to another corner of the kitchen, doing the best she could to not make a sound.

The TV continued to play. **"Rudy said 10%." – "Too bad Rudy ain't in charge no more."**

Going up to one of the high-hanging hooks, she grabbed a little pot, the kind that had a long handle, and placed it gently in front of the door that Reggie listened from the other side of.

"What do you mean?" – "He's upstairs taking a bath. He'll call you when he gets out..."

Then, Adorabat went and opened a drawer. In it, she took out the firecrackers she took from Badgerclops garage supply days earlier, and then searched for a flame source, in which she settled for a lighter.

"...Ey, I'll tell you what I'm gonna give you, Scales."

Adorabat got right next to the pot in front of the door, holding the firecrackers just above the pot with the lighter pointed close to it at the ready, carefully listening to the movie dialogue. **"I'm gonna give you to the count of 10 to get your ugly, yellow, no-good keister off my property before I pump your fluff full'a laser beams."**

The sound of those words made Reggie widen his eyes in looking fright, his breathing deepening and quickening as he immediately heard the countdown. As if on cue, Adorabat held the flame right on the firecrackers and waited until they started to sparkle. Once they did, Adorabat let them fall into the pot, raced to the opposite corner of the kitchen, covered her ears, and waited for the inevitable to begin.

"One, two, TEN!"

The crackling spark reached the firecrackers, which instantly exploded with sizzling fire. They were generating deafening pops which were only compounded further thanks to the metal pot they were in, amplifying the explosions with the reverberating metal.

The firecrackers going off in the pot coupled with the movie gunshots on max volume was loud and convincing enough to send Reggie running away in the opposite direction. With every rapid gunshot he heard, he was yelling in fright and tripping over his own feet, even trying in baton to tunnel under the snow to get further away. All the while, the shooter on the TV was maniacally laughing nonstop, with Adorabat soundlessly imitating it, as evident by her similar facial expression while her wings remained pressed over her ears. Once she was sure Reggie was long gone after the movie's shooting sequence ended, she lip-synced the scene's final line in all her grim smugness:

"Keep the change, ya' filthy animal."

Rufus was surprised to find Reggie scrambling in a dash for the aerotruck, yanking the door on his side open and throwing himself onto the seat beside the fox and pulling the door closed just as hard.

"Reg, what's the matter? Why are you scared and out of breath?" Rufus asked, though he sounded more weirded out than concerned.

Reggie didn't look at Rufus, but continued to stare wide-eyed into space. "I dunno what went on in there, but someone just got blown away!"

That got Rufus curious. "What?"

"There were other guys in there! They beat us to the job! I think there were two of them! There was arguing and then one of them blew the other guy away!"

"Who were they?"

"I dunno, but one of those voices, I swear I heard before. One of those guys was called 'Scales', I think."

"Scales?" Rufus raised an eyebrow and then turned away to ponder on his own recognition of that name. "*Scales...Scales...* I don't know who that is."

Reggie was too shaken up to help clarify any further when he was sure he and Rufus were still in a dangerous situation. "Let's get out of here."

Rufus got ready to start up the vehicle, but stopped short of turning the key, thinking of something.

"What?" Reggie noticed the fox's hesitation. "Why aren't we going?"

Rufus raised a finger to shush Reggie. "Just wait a moment," he contemplated. "Let's wait and see who comes out, see who it is."

Reggie blanched. "What!? Why!?"

Rufus shushed him again. "Don't you see? We're working in this area too, the whole valley in fact. If by any chance, we're caught and we need a negotiation ticket to get off the hook, we'll offer them

knowledge on a murder in the area. Don't you think it would be useful to know a face to go along with their questions?"

Reggie thought about Rufus's words for a few seconds. "That's a good idea."

"Of course it's a good idea," Rufus rolled his eyes. As he looked back at the house, he pondered some more. "*Scales...*"

"Yeah," Reggie nodded. "He didn't sound like a piano..."