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## *XXIII - Constructing a tale*

Gabrielle was sitting in the kitchen when Jean came out. "You know...you're the one who's got to attend classes early, and I'm always the one who gets out of bed first," she said and sipped her coffee.

"I know," the vixen said and yawned. "I just like to snooze until the last moment."

"So, do you have any classes today?" the bronco asked.

Jean shook her head. "No, I have an appointment with my therapist."

"That was quick. You usually go a month in between sessions. You feeling up to it?"

"I'll be fine. Actually, the reason I scheduled another session so soon is because I'd like for him to see the change. I know he has been wary of advancing my treatment further because I was always so depressed," the vixen replied and sat down.

Gabrielle nodded. That was reasonable enough, she figured. "Anyway, what're you doing tonight? It's Friday, after all."

Jean blinked. "I don't know. I've got nothing planned for tonight. I was thinking I'd do some work on the rewrite today, after the session but I don't think I've got anything else to do. Why?"

"Well, I found this really nice little place. I was thinking of dragging you there. Kicking and screaming if I have to," Gabrielle said after another mouthful of coffee. She wasn't sure if the vixen would want to go. Going to a party with a small circle of furs was one thing but going out was a big test.

Jean thought about it for a while. "What kind of place is it?"

"It's called 'Spirit of New Orleans'. It's a jazz-hall, actually. They had a really good band on the stage last time I was there. Jamming, you know. It had a lot of atmosphere."

"I know the place, believe it or not. I've...visited it a few times. When I've gone out to think on my own, or when I needed to relax with a drink somewhere," Jean said and poured herself a cup of coffee. She looked at the black liquid. "Ewww...I thought this would be tea," she said and went to the sink to pour it out.

"Sorry, I didn't know when you'd get up. So, are you game?"

"We can't afford it until we get your first paycheck, Gabby. We're hard enough pressed as it is," Jean said and put the kettle over to make herself some tea.

"I know," Gabrielle said and waved an envelope around. "But this has your name on it and the return address is ZZ Studios. So my guess is this is *your* first paycheck."

"Huh? Oh, you'd like that wouldn't you," the vixen grinned. "Taking me out, and it'll be my treat."

Gabrielle grinned widely. "Got it in one. Hey, we have a joint economy anyway. I haven't seen how much it's for though. Perhaps it won't be enough to actually go anyway. Open it and see."

Jean nodded and sat down, waiting for the water to boil. She scratched above her plaster cast and grumbled. "This thing is itching like you wouldn't believe it. Why don't any of us *knit*. We'd have knitting pins in the house and I could scratch back!"

"Because last time I tried picking up a pair of knitting pins the national guard went into full combat readiness, Jean. I'm lethal with those things. Anyway, when can you get that thing off?" Gabrielle asked.

"Another three godawful weeks of itching," the vixen sighed and pinned the envelope down with her broken arm, using a claw on her left paw to shred the back of it.

Gabrielle wrinkled her muzzle. She sympathized with her roommate's plight but it couldn't be helped. "We'll get some knitting pins today so you can scratch back. How much can they cost, after all?"

Jean was staring at the check that had been inside the envelope.

The bronco sipped her coffee again and raised an eyebrow. "Is something wrong?"

"Erhm...do you think we can buy gold plated knitting pins in Columbus, Gabby? Holy mother of..." Jean began and put the check down. "Zig Zag pays her proofreaders and scriptwriters pretty well. I'd expected...I dunno...peanuts?"

Gabrielle picked it up and looked at it. "HEY...no fair, you're making more than I do!"

"Yeah, but yours is a steady income, Gabby. I may only get this one and one more for scriptwriting. At least this answers one thing."

"What's that?"

"We can definitely afford going to that jazzhall tonight," Jean said and scratched her neck.

"I'd *say* we can. Anyway...does that mean you'll come?" Gabrielle asked and poured herself another half cup of coffee.

"I'll come on one condition," Jean said and got up. The water kettle was starting to rumble like it was almost done.

"What's your condition then?" Gabrielle asked, looking over her shoulder at the Vixen.

"I get to pick what I wear tonight, and I get to invite Esteban."

"That's two conditions, dear." Gabrielle teased.

"Sue me! We've got something to celebrate."

"Are you sure you want another date that quickly after the first one? I mean, come on...you were still glowing when I came home and found you the next day," the bronco said. It was true too. Jean had more or less floated on a little pink cloud.

The vixen poured the water over the tea-leaves and shrugged after putting the kettle back down. She was smiling. "If I didn't think it'd wear out the novelty a little fast, I'd go out with him every night, Gabby."

Gabrielle put her face into serious folds and sighed heavily. "Oh dear oh dear...this is very bad."

Jean turned around and blinked, looking confused. "What do you mean?"

"I'm living with someone who's suffering from a clear case of *Lovus Severicus*, better known as the condition 'terminally smitten' in plain English. Should I call doc Lupin? I'm sure he can find some kind of medication for it," Gabrielle said, absolutely deadpan.

She didn't see the towel until it hit her in the neck with a snap.

"Careful, horsy, or I might start with the 'My Little Pony' quips again," Jean giggled.

Gabrielle rubbed her neck with a grin. "You wouldn't do that. I'd have to tickle you."

"Hah, I *laugh* in the face of tickles," Jean said, overly theatrically. "Anyway...I'm in love, Gabrielle. I don't think I can remember the last time it's happened to me. Not like this, at least."

Gabrielle smirked. It was too good to pass up on. "Oh and here I was, thinking you were hopelessly in love with *me*. I'm hurt."

Jean suddenly looked very serious and sat down again, bringing the tea and a small pitcher of milk. "All right. I suppose that had to come up sooner or later," she said, sighing. "Listen...Gabby...I said some really stupid things that night. I'm sorry. I think in all honesty I was just...envious. It wasn't love...it was just plain envy."

Gabrielle reached over and ruffled Jean's hair a little. "You know what? I've thought the same thing. And I can hardly blame you for it. I *am* completely enviable," she said in an amused tone of voice.

Jean narrowed her eyes and smiled mischievously. "I know you, Gabby. You're going to make some really silly comment now."

"Whatever do you mean, my dear? Just because I'm ludicrously beautiful, I have the world's best roomie, and I'm blessed with the most wonderfully insane father who can't cope with the fact that I work at an adult entertainment studio..." the bronco said, exaggerating her accent on purpose.

Jean snickered, "Well, three out of four ain't bad," she said. "But ludicrously beautiful? Now you're just bragging."

Gabrielle snorted. "I'm deeply offended," she said, but couldn't keep her voice steady. She could feel a major fit of giggles coming on.

"Why? I didn't say you weren't beautiful. I just don't see anything ludicrous about you. You're just about the best looking femme I've ever known, Gabrielle. You walk down the street and males turn around, tongue lolling and tails wagging. Even the non-canids react that way. You don't see it because you've already passed them by but *I* do. You've got a face like a Helen, the body of an Athena and the attitude of a Xanthippe. You're God's gift to males. There's nothing ludicrous about that," Jean said, pouring herself a cup of tea and sipping it.

The giggles dissipated. Gabrielle found herself staring at her roomie with wide open eyes. "Apart from not knowing who Xanthippe was...I think that's probably the most aweinspiring compliment I've ever received," she muttered.

"Xanthippe? She was the wife of Socrates. Provided he ever existed, of course. Most furs aren't sure if he's just an invention of Plato. But Xanthippe was a real fury. Socrates allegedly wrote several texts complaining about what a terror she was to live with. He loved her deeply but he never got a word in sideways, and this *was* in ancient, misogynistic Greece."

"I think I'd have liked her," Gabrielle said and smiled. "Thank you though. That was very nice of you to say."

"Don't mention it," Jean said and smiled. "Anyway...I'd better get some breakfast and a bath before going to that session, hm?"

"Definitely. Go get'em, vixen!" Gabrielle chuckled.

Jean winked and sipped her tea again.

###

"Theodore Bigglesworth-Farthington von Salzburg the Third?" the officer asked.

Darlington looked at the policefur in front of him and stood up straight. "I am Darlington. Mr. Bigglesworth-Farthington von Salzburg the Third's furservant and butler, sir. How may I assist you?" he said, in an aloof tone of voice.

"Mr. Darlington then. If you would be so kind as to get your employer."

"Noone *gets* Mr. Bigglesworth-Farthington von Salzburg the Third. You can schedule an appointment like everyone else has to, sir. Provided you have a good reason," the raccoon said, overly patiently.

"Well, he'd better damned well get out here. I have a warrant for his arrest."

"I said Mr. Biggleswo--", Darlington began when a voice behind him spoke up.

"I will take over from here, Darlington. Go and tend to the servicefurs in the conference room," the voice of Roxanne said.

Darlington nodded and stepped back with a bow. "As Milady wishes." he said, obediently, and went back inside.

The policefur looked up at an impressive bronco femme. In her prime she had no doubt been extraordinarily beautiful. Even at her age, she'd shame most younger femmes. She dressed with style. Right down to the silver-plated horseshoes with platinum nails. She was holding a long, thin cigarette-holder in one paw.

"What is your name, officer?" she asked, politely.

"I'm Sergeant Minimus!" the officer said and straightened up.

"You're a chipmunk, correct?" Roxanne asked and held out a paw, palm up. "Let me see the warrant for my husband's arrest, please."

Sergeant Minimus nodded. "I am, Ma'am. And don't bother tearing it up. There are copies," he said suspiciously and gave Roxanne the paper.

Roxanne chuckled. "Oh, I see no reason to tear it up," she said, quietly, skimming it. "Yes, this all seems to be in good order. Would you wait just one moment, Sergeant Minimus?"

"Of course, Ma'am."

"How very courteous. Good to see that there is still well behaved officers on the force," Roxanne said in a slightly patronizing voice, and took out her cell-phone from her inner jacket. She dialed a number and waited, impatiently for the line to connect.

"Ah, yes. Governor Hamson. This is Roxanne Bigglesworth-Farthington von Salzburg. I called to thank you for attending our soiree recently. It was a pleasure to have such a *distinguished* porcine amongst our guests," she chimed.

Sergeant Minimus swallowed. He didn't like where this was going.

"I do so hope you will be able to attend our Christmas ball as well, Governor. I know it's still many months away but I know how many offers you must get...such an influential fur as you. Anyway, it will be the talk of all Denver, I assure you. It will be *the* place to be seen, and of course, we could easily arrange a little fundraising scheme for your next campaign if you were to join us? You will? Splendid! Excellent. I am sure my husband will be thrilled to hear that. Oh, and speaking of my husband. I have a young chipmunk in a police uniform here with me. He's got a warrant for my husband's arrest. I'm *sure* there's been some misunderstanding somewhere. My husband is a pillar of the community. He donated generously for your campaign if you recall," Roxanne said. The smile on her face was waxen and her eyes had a downright cruel look to them as she looked at the sergeant in front of her.

Sergeant Minimus mostly felt like running away.

"Sergeant, the governor would like a word with you..." the bronco said and gave the phone to the shivering chipmunk.

He took it and held it to his ear, bracing himself.

Apparently, he didn't brace hard enough, Roxanne noted. He went rigid as the explosion on the other end of the line came through, loud and clear.

"Yessir, I'll be on my way right away. Nosir, I'm not the one responsible for the investigation, Captain Cavia is. Yessir, I will tell him where he can stick it, sir. Yessir. Explicitly sir. Right away, sir. Nosir, it won't happen again sir. I promise sir. Yessir. Thank you sir."

Roxanne smiled as the deeply shaken chipmunk gave her back the phone. "Now...you were saying something about not tearing up the warrant, Sergeant?" she asked.

Sergeant Minimus reached out and took the paper back, tore it into a lot of very small pieces and swallowed. "I don't remember, Ma'am," he said.

"Very good, Sergeant. You know, looking at you, I'd swear you were in line for a promotion soon," she said and went back inside, closing the door.

She mused inwardly at the look on the chipmunk's face and headed down the hallway towards her husband's office. At this time of day, he'd certainly be there. She smiled. Theodore might not want her involvement in his business, but deep down she knew he'd be unable to manage without her. And she knew that *he* knew. It was a good working arrangement. She had no financial trouble because of him. She lived luxuriously and she was the envy of every socialite in Denver. It was of no concern that they were a couple for reasons of convenience.

She knocked lightly on the door to the office.

"Enter," her husband's voice sounded.

She opened the door and stepped inside. "Good morning, Theodore. I hope you slept satisfactorily," she said. It was more a statement than a question.

Theodore nodded, putting down his pen and leaning back in his seat. "Adequately well. How may I help you, Roxanne?"

"Actually, I am here to let you know that your investment in Governor Hamson has just paid off."

Theodore made a face of disgust. "That pig is unsavory. He smells like a latrine and he has less wits about him than your average professional pugilist."

"Perhaps so, but he just got the police off your back. Someone sent a single policefur here with a warrant for your arrest," Roxanne said and lit a fresh cigarette, placing it in her holder and leaning against her husband's desk.

"ONE policefur? What were they trying to do? Kill him? If Mr. Hammond had been around, the situation would've gotten out of control."

Roxanne smiled overbearingly. "Well, in that case we should be grateful he wasn't here. I don't know *why* you keep that uncultured bulldog on your staff in the first place."

"Because he's good at what he does and because he works for a lot less than most furs would. He's loyal, and that's more than most can say. Now, what was this about Governor Hamson?"

"I called him, and explained the situation, after inviting him to the Christmas ball. I said we'd arrange a little fundraising-scheme while we were at it, for his next campaign. He asked to talk to the policefur in question and afterwards...well...let's just say the situation solved itself."

"Jolly good," Theodore said with a grin. "You are a jewel, Roxanne. I have to admit, you're the most valuable fur in my entire organization."

"I know. Oh, you know, I saw this enchanting diamond ring yesterday..." she said, practically purring.

Theodore chuckled. "Very well, you earned a reward. What did it cost?"

"It was almost a steal. I swear, so much ring for just sixty five thousand?"

Theodore's face went blank. "Just be sure you *stay* the best fur in my organization," he said, sourly, and wrote out a check.

"Always, Theodore. You know you can count on me," Roxanne said and blew a ring of smoke, accepting the check before getting up and leaving the room.

###

Jean looked at the building in front of her. Every time she had looked at it so far, it seemed threatening and looming. But now, it was just another building. She smiled with satisfaction as she pushed the door open and went inside.

"Hello Marla. Is the doctor ready?" she asked the receptionist.

"Sure, go right in. He's waiting for you," the receptionist answered.

Jean nodded and opened the door to her therapists office. A thin red fox turned around and nodded to her. "Good morning, Jean. Ready to continue?" he asked.

"Certainly, doctor. I'm more ready than I've ever been," the vixen answered and sat down.

"That sounds good. What's gotten you so cheerful?" the fox asked and sat down opposite of her, crossing his legs.

"Well, let's just say my life has taken a turn for the better since I was here last time," Jean answered.

"You don't say? And that's why you walk with a limp and your arm is in a plaster cast?" the doctor asked.

Jean shook her head. "No, that was an unfortunate and very unpleasant incident, but I'm not going to let it get to me."

The fox blinked. "I see. That's a new tune from you, Jean. You've been scared of your own shadow for as long as I've known you. How long has it been anyway?"

"Three years in two months, doctor. But I'm glad to say I finally started to get better. I've got a long way to go, I know, but any improvement is good."

"I think you're right there. I've been close to terminating your sessions because of your nerves, you know. So, let's start from the top. What started it all?"

"Actually, it started at a party where I met this really stunning maned wolf. But it was more the next day when I went home to confront my parents that the big improvement started," Jean said.

The fox blinked again and looked over his wire-rimmed glasses. "I see. How did that go?"

"It started really badly. My mother got nasty again. My father seemed to want to talk, though," Jean answered.

"Very well? Did you leave then?"

"That wouldn't have made for much of a story, would it, doctor?"

"Not really. Go on," the doctor said and smiled slightly.

"I snapped back at my mother. Told her off. I told her how I felt. How angry I was. I didn't pull punches, either. Verbally of course," Jean said.

"That's good. I'm glad you finally confronted her with it. How about your father?" the fox asked.

"He cried and apologized for having hurt me. He looked miserable. I did forgive him. I gave him a hug too. Gabrielle told me he wants to meet with you to get some answers. Is that doable?"

"Oh it certainly is. I do need to talk to one of your family members at some point if it is at all workable," the doctor said "So I take it he's finally started coming to his senses?"

"You have no idea. It's like I've gotten my father back with a vengeance. And I've started speaking up in class as well. Been telling off some of the more annoying lecturers and I kicked up such a storm there that the faculty decided to make a policy against harassment of minorities."

The fox took off his glasses, chuckling. "Hello, my name is Fox Jones, I'm a psychiatrist. Who are you and what did you done to my patient, Jean LeBrun?" he asked.

Jean beamed proudly. "That's not all though."

"By *all* means, go on?" Doctor Jones said with a smile. "I'm intrigued. It seems that suddenly the world decided to deal you a winning paw? It's certainly taken its dear sweet time about it."

"Oh, you're wrong doc...you're wrong. No one dealt these cards to me. I *took* them," Jean said and snatched her left paw into a fist in the air to illustrate her point. "Anyway, the wolf I said I'd meet at a party..."

"Sure? What about him?" doctor Jones said, listening with a smile on his face.

"Well...we've had our first date and if he wants to go, we'll be going to a place called 'Spirit of New Orleans' tonight. Do you know it?"

"Actually I do. It's a quite nice little place. You could go to much worse places, for certain. So, you had a date with him? Is he aware of your situation?" the fox asked, curiously.

Jean sighed wearily. "Do you think I'd keep something like that hidden? Actually, he knew in advance. Gabrielle had told him about me."

"That was a bit careless of her. I'm glad it worked out all right."

"Actually, he's a colleague of hers. She's gotten a new job."

"Do tell?" the fox asked.

"Ahem...well...she's gotten a job at ZZ Studios, doc," Jean said. She figured she might as well come straight out with it.

Doctor Jones went blank faced. "You're dating a porn-star, Jean?" he asked, carefully keeping his voice neutral.

"I know how that sounds, doctor. But he hasn't laid his paws on me like that. I *swear*. That's why it's so nice. He is so tired of always being treated like a prize or like he's just sex on legs. And I'm not interested in sex at *all* until I'm done with this. He's just...incredibly nice to me. He's a really sweet fur, doctor. Please, don't judge him on what he does for a living."

Fox Jones sighed and leaned back. He didn't really know what to make of this. He liked Jean, and he felt sorry for her. She was one of the most obvious cases of transsexuality he'd seen or heard about. He hadn't treated many cases himself, but he'd read the necessary literature, and he'd consulted colleagues on Jean's case. There were few things he'd rather do for the vixen than recommend her for surgery but she wasn't ready yet. And while she'd obviously made some leaps and bounds since her last visit a few weeks earlier, it was too early to say if it'd last. And this romantic interest of hers concerned him deeply. He didn't doubt her word on the lack of sex, but he felt unsure if this was just some desperate move on her part.

He leaned forward again and folded his paws in his lap. "Jean..." he began "...are you sure about this? I don't want you to set yourself up for a fall."

"I'm not setting myself up for a fall, doc. I can guess what you're thinking. But this isn't about hoping against hope. I haven't felt this way about a male before. He makes me feel *safe*. Like I'm really okay. When he's kissing me..." she said and smiled, softly, blushing a little.

"I see," the doctor said, with a smile of his own. "Well then, I wish you the very best with him. Keep me up to date, though, okay? Now...shall we get started on today's regular program? I was thinking we could do your IQ test today."

Jean nodded. "If you think that's a good idea, then certainly. Oh...by the way. I started taking hormones after visiting you last time. Yesterday, I felt a nub for the first time."

"That's good. Be prepared for some sore nights though. Oh, and Jean?"

"Yes doctor?"

"I'm happy for you."

Jean smiled and blushed again. Somehow, she didn't think the sessions would be as bad anymore.

###

Gabrielle parked her car and got out. She brushed down her skirt and pondered looking over her shoulder for a moment to see if Jean had been entirely truthful that morning. She thought better of it and went inside the building.

It was a nice apartment complex. The stairs were clean and smelled of soap, she noticed as she ascended them.

"Third floor, to the right," she reminded herself. She knocked on the door and smiled. She had very little idea of what to expect. Zig Zag hadn't given her much information about the scriptwriter she was being sent out to talk to.

The door opened, and Gabrielle found herself face to face with an elderly beaver wearing an apron and a big smile.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I must've gotten the wrong door, ma'am," the bronco said with an apologetic look on her face.

"Nonsense! Zig Zag said you'd be coming over. I'm just preparing my lunch. Come on in, deary, come on in," the old-timer said.

Gabrielle blinked. "You're the scriptwriter Zig Zag sent me to meet?"

"The one and only. Best one in the business. Don't let my exterior fool ya. I may look old but inside, I'm probably younger'n you, Miss."

Gabrielle smiled and shrugged. "Well, in that case...I'm Gabrielle Ryder, pleased to meet you...?"

"Anna. Now, come in...all the heat is seeping out," the beaver said with another smile.

The bronco nodded and stepped inside. Anna closed the door. "Do you like flapjacks, Gabrielle? I've got plenty for two of us. I wasn't sure what you'd like but I figure, most furs like flapjacks."

"I do, very much in fact. Unfortunately I can't eat them very often anymore. They tend to land heavily on my ribs and stick there," Gabrielle chuckled.

"Ahhh...you young femmes today. You know, when *I* was your age, there was *nothing* wrong with a femme having a bit of curves," the beaver said and looked up and down the bronco "Although I must say you're not half bad."

Gabrielle felt a blush coming on, despite herself. "Thanks. Anyway...how long have you been writing scripts for Zig Zag?"

"Ohhh...since she started, more or less. I'm pretty good at this, y'know," Anna said and went over to the stove, quickly flipping over two flapjacks on the frying pan. "Please, have a seat."

"Thank you," Gabrielle said and sat down. "So, how do we go about this? I've never had to help write a script before. I'm still very new at the studio."

"Don't worry. Zig Zag told me to go easy on you. I think she likes you, you know."

"Why is that? I mean, Zig Zag likes all her employees," Gabrielle said.

"Oh, she certainly does. She's a very kind femme. Even if she doesn't always think so herself. But I'm an old fur...and I can see it. And I think she likes you. She told me you had a real attitude," Anna grinned.

"And that's a good thing?"

"You didn't know Zig Zag when she was younger. Oh you should've seen her when she was your age. She's thirty or so now...but four or five years ago? I'm telling you, she was a real hothead."

Gabrielle chuckled. "Believe me, she still is."

"I know. But it was even more pronounced back then. Now...let's eat and talk about what this movie should be like and then I'll start taking some notes afterwards, okay?" Anna said and brought the flapjacks and some maple syrup.

"My cholesterol count is aching from just looking at that and I *so* don't care," Gabrielle grinned.

"Good filly. First eat, then fun," Anna said with a warm smile and sat down.