

“You’ll do it?! Really! Wow I thought this would be a hard sell! Okay see you there.” The blue bird Amelia said, excited beyond belief to the point she seemed in a hurry to end the conversation.

Noir blinked in surprise, the bunny still held onto the phone, stunned for a moment before putting it down. Amelia had told her the basics, that there was a parade due and that someone had fallen ill and had to drop out so they wouldn’t spread it to everyone else. Amelia had clearly been fishing for Noir to step in and fill the seat, especially with how she highlighted it would be easy, simply saying she’d just have to follow step with the others.

All she knew was that it had a festive theme, she’d be part of a parade with a Santa-like figure, celebrating the time and generosity of the year. She’d agreed, willing to help a friend rather than have the event be cancelled.

Amelia had given her the directions which she checked now the chat was over. It seemed more remote than expected, still well within the town proper but hardly adjacent to any main thoroughfares. She sighed and shook her head wondering if it was a smaller scale than she’d built up in her imagination. “Well. I guess we’ll just have to see...”

As she drew closer to the building she felt a weight in the air, a tingle of excitement crackled from the signs and decidedly adult bills posted on the walls. She saw the place, a prop sleigh was already out, laden with decorative gift boxes, with a few people in mundane clothing putting the last pieces in play, covering up the machinery and motors of the float so that it would blend in. It was smaller than she expected too, when she heard that ‘their twelfth’ had dropped out she expected a daunting display.

Some of the staff saw her drawing close and looked up but they were stopped as Amelia ran out, the blue bird was practically bouncing, a fluffy ruffed coat protecting her from the dark and chill of the winter air though her steps clacked loudly, what was she wearing down there? “There you are!” She yelled excitedly, pulling Noir with her. “Now you’ll need to sign the form and then we can all get you ready and able. I hope you’re as excited as I am. I can’t wait to see you dressed up!”

“S-steady on Ames, I’ve just got here. What exactly are we meant to be doing?”

“I didn’t say? We’ll be helping to pull the cart!” She said, bouncing excitedly.

Noir blinked stunned for a moment. “Uh... I mean, if you need my help I’m not gonna flake out but- just wasn’t expecting you to be that excited over manual labour.”

“Oh silly me, we’ll only look like we’re pulling it. The motors will do the rest. But it’ll make sense once you see!”

“And if I sign this form am I uh... bound to whatever the plan is?”

“No no, you can stop if you don't want to, it's just agreements are needed especially given the different kind of work and pay.”

“What have I gotten myself talked into...?” Noir grumbled defeatedly as her friend tugged her.

“Fun!”

The form was just vague enough to hint at what 'Fun' was without giving away what waited for her, though guesses were starting to brew. It was only when she stepped into the warmed back rooms with Amelia throwing off her coat and hanging it in a locker that she realised what parts of her assumptions had been right and which were so very, very wrong.

Amelia was dressed in a snug fit suit, smoothed out over an insulating layer below it. Her bright plumage was buried below the neck in a sleek and shining skin of brown and tan-reindeer colours. The warm gloves she'd been wearing came off, showing her hands were on display still but the suit hugged the rest of her form, down to clapping clacking hoof-tipped boots that definitely spoke of the theme more than the shiny layer did.

“O-oh. Is... is that the uniform?” Noir asked, blushing and flushed. Her mind telling her she should run, she could run- true but there was still a stronger part of her that was intrigued.

“Oh? No no no, this is for the front of house. My performance uniform is waiting like the rest of yours...” She pointed to the side, to the others, who were in various stages of dress up. Noir's eyes went to the two furthest along, at first thinking they might be props until they moved.

Lightly puffed up rubber reindeer suits adorned them, with a short festive cape around the shoulders of one of them. The other turned their back as she glanced, letting her see the cape's purpose- to hide the latching zipper, easy to access and thus very easy to see.

Her jaw dropped, staying open as she looked across the room, seeing another performer in the same insulating layer Amelia wore under her shiny suit being helped into the costume, seeing that it was all one piece. The rest were taking off their usual attire, putting that first layer on.

With a gentle push Amelia prodded Noir to her own locker. “Here you are. I'll leave you to it, yeah?”

She stumbled a step, opened the locker with a tentative grip and then saw the waiting full body suit hanging there. “Amelia- I’m-” But as with the phone call her friend had run off before she’d been able to speak further, slipping through the doorway. “Ohh.”

Noir took her time gathering up that suit. She must have been standing there longer than she realised because a gentle voice coming from a speckle coated cat spoke to her side. “Hey, Noir right? I’m Sandy. We appreciate you standing in for us. The show could still go on with only eleven deer but- well, it is super great of you to have stepped in.”

“Oh thanks, I sort of owe Amelia... I didn’t- I mean I wasn’t aware of what this was. Will- will many people see us?”

“You’ll be quite anonymous if that is a concern but also don’t worry, the sleigh is outdoors but it’s a private stage show more than a parade. And so long as you just move with the machine you’ll be in the right spot. The two over there will be hogging the spotlight.” Sandy said pointing to the near fully costumed pair. “Anyway I wanted to say hi for one, also since you seemed to be a bit caught off guard, I can help if you need a hand. The curtained off area will let you get into the suit without anyone seeing. It also might be cool at first but it gets comfortably warm fast enough.”

“Oh! I- Thanks, I’d appreciate that too.” Noir replied. Sandy gave a soft nod.

“I’ll be here when you want me.”

The conversation was the push she needed, taking the dark insulating layer to the changing area. She undressed quickly, trying to not keep anyone waiting, pushing herself into the suit. It did fit quite snugly, yet without pinching too much, proving one other thing Amelia had said; she was the closest match in build to their quitting performer. She gasped at the sensation, brushing over herself lightly, revelling in the feeling of the texture on her skin. The strange almost cold feeling despite the growing warmth made her tingle.

Her regrets were ebbing away, though she made sure to stand and exit the room before anyone asked what was taking her so long, pulling up the cowl of the suit to cradle her head, aside from her flopping ears which managed to fit through a pair of holes quite comfortably.

A short trip to the locker got her hands on the main attraction, the squeaking thick rubber reindeer which looked like a flattened out toy. Like the undersuit she was in it was also a single piece, the opening going up behind the shoulders. At first she was concerned at the lack of visible fingers on the end of the arms, before she realised the hoof tips were hollow bottomless covers, allowing fingers to move and grip underneath.

She struggled with the heavy thing, the privacy curtained area meant more for the undersuit and thus the new layer bumped the walls. It was a struggle to get most of her lower

half in, stuffed into legs that seemed to resist until she got past the bends and joints, grinding her foot on the floor until it felt truly in place.

She reached a point of being mostly covered, below the waist, the zipper pushing against her lower back, though the suit was far from the most flexible item, compressing her own range of motion. “Uh... I might need help here, Sandy!” She called, joined within seconds by the feline.

“What’s the- ah! Got it.” Sandy said, throwing the curtain down her back to give them more space while remaining mostly private. Between the two of them the arms were helped over her shoulders, then with constant checks all the way the reindeer mask slipped over her head, spacious on the inside, held by the neck and jaw rather than a full press.

“Trust me, it’s way easier to get out of than into. All ready for it to close?” Sandy asked.

“Think so.” Noir mumbled, already feeling conscious of growing heat around her head, not just from the trapped air.

The suit tightened up, squeezing as the zipper was pulled all the way, with Sandy hitching it in place, tucking it until it was mostly hidden. “How’s that feeling?” Sandy asked, fiddling around with a few parts.

“It feels alright, a bit of a drag, is it meant to be saggy?” Noir asked, growing concern of a different kind blooming inside her.

“Ah! It needs a bit of air pumped in, not much, it’s just our way of getting the costumes to look just right! You good for me to do that?” Sandy proffered, Noir nodded.

“Will it uh, trap the thing shut?” She asked unsure if it was out of concern or curiosity.

“No, no, the shoulder and ruff already look right and that’s the part we’d remove when we get you out. Okay here goes!” She said, using a tank and valve to add just a little air. “Oh wow, not even an extra crease! Awesome!” She said in excitement.

“Really? Th-that’s good.” Noir replied, trying not to think of how flustering it all was, especially now it was squeezing on her hard.

“Alright, if you’re all good, I need to go help another performer.”

“I think I’ll manage, uh, when I know where to go.” Noir said, breath pluming the air as she let out a large unconsciously held lungful.

“Amelia’s gonna be next to you! When she gets back I’m sure she’ll show you where to go.”

Noir had been left alone then, too overwhelmed to strike up a fresh conversation, not least because soon none of the other performers were even obviously identifiable except from unique ornaments added to each costume, like the garland around her shoulders that helped to obscure her long ears. Amelia had picked her out easily, then took her to the sleigh, leading her to where she'd stand, fortunately near the back.

“One last question, cosmetic or actual leashing? Technically the first one is safest, but there is excitement from being harnessed until the show's over, trust me on that!” Amelia chirped happily.

Noir stammered for a moment, grateful that the suit hid her immediate reaction.

“Plus being properly harnessed takes care of ninety percent of the role! You just need to lift your legs up high in time to the rhythm! I know most of us are- Barring the two trained for emergency first aid.”

“A-alright, let's um. Let's try it properly.” Noir conceded slightly bashfully.

“You won't regret it!” Amelia insisted, taking up her place on the other side of the wooden crossbeam. All the more blushing and concern rose into Noir's cheeks as stage hands patrolled, harnessing the majority, effectively binding them to their positions. Amelia in particular wiggled in delight, making a show of tugging and being quite rooted to her post. When the helping staff left she leant in close to her friend. “We won't be allowed to gossip when the lights go on so if there's anything else, now's the time.”

“When does it end?” Noir asked, quickly adding. “Not that I need to be out or anything, just wondering.”

“Well the parade ends when we reach the fourth bend, honestly you've probably worn the suit longer than the walk will take! Then when we're done it's up to you! Sandy and some of the others have a busy day tomorrow so they'll want to desuit and desert us immediately. Then our two prima donna's meanwhile have arranged dates for themselves- still in full costume. So... do whatever you might want to do. Especially if you have any ideas.” Though Amelia's face was fully shrouded, Noir could hear the wiggle of her brows and fully understood the implications.

She knew she'd likely be tired by the time they came to a halt but the idea of seeing what else the costume could do... she opened her mouth to ask. Before she could the music kicked up and the frame started to lurch into motion.

Ahead, eyes turned, glinting from the shade cast by the light on the performers. Questions would wait and the time spent would either chase away the unimportant ones or let her refine the good ones. Either way, as the outfit squeaked in response to each high legged step, she had zero regrets...