

Writer's Guild

by Charles Matthias

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Michael was having a difficult time adjusting to his new surroundings. They were rather unique as was the situation. To see an animal, some quite fierce in appearance, others almost cute, walking on two legs and speaking in a human tongue was quite a shock. The fact that he would become like them in time was probalby more of a shock, but like all things, it numbed with the passing days. However, the sights that came to him each day both refreshed and befuddled. So that morning he decided to wander down a new pasasge of the Keep; there would certainly be something extraordinary to dazzle his imagination and his senses.

Aside from the array of fantastical creatures that appeared before him, many of whom he had already met and talked with, there was one sight that brought a look of amusement to his face. A fellow, no taller than four feet who looked quite like a simple brown rat with a hairless tail that was at least half his height in length, wearing a simple tunic — most likely for modesty's sake — was attempting to push a dresser that was much larger than him through a portal only five feet high.

The rat turned back, obviously a bit exhausted from the effort, and saw Michael staring at him. His whiskers twitched agitatedly, "You look like a strong fellow, could you possibly help me with this thing?"

Michael stepped over to the dresser, saw that it barely came up to his chest, but then again so did the rat, and nodded, "I guess so. Where do you want it?"

The rat stepped into the small aperture, "Just push it on through my door, and I'll tell you what to do with it."

Michael gave it a firm push and noticed that it moved quite easily with his strength. The rat motioned for him to continue pushing as he carefully stepped out of the way on his short legs. Michael had to duck his head when he reached the door, but the ceiling in the room was high enough for him to stand erect. The rat pointed to a faded portion of masonry, and Michael easily slid the

dresser adjacent to the wall. He looked at the rat. "How's that?"

The rat had picked up a piece of wood which was literally covered with bite marks and began absently chewing between his words, "That looks great, thank you very much. It would have taken me another hour to get that in place."

"Why wasn't anybody else helping you?" Michael asked, hoping that he wasn't being impertinent.

"Well, they are either too big to fit in here, or they are at the Writer's Guild meeting which I am missing." the rat replied, gnawing obsessively. Michael couldn't help but stare at the man-rat chewing on his stick; it seemed somehow odd to think of such a habit, but then again, he had seen many other people who had obviously once been human doing other strange things. He wondered just what he would end up doing himself when his metamorphosis completed. It was not a thought that he liked to dwell on.

"Writer's Guild?" he asked, though considering the occupation of many of the inhabitants of the Keep, this should not have surprised him.

"Oh, I am being a terrible host, do sit down. My name is Charles Matthias. And who might you be?" Charles indicated a cushion on the floor next to the miniscule desk with oil lamp and quill pen sitting atop it. Matthias slid into a backless chair, his tail wrapping around the base while his feet dangled, barely touching the floor. Michael took a good look at the figure, noting the elongated feet with tiny claws at the end, the greyish tail with only a few straggly hairs on its surface, the sinuous shape of his upper torso, his small black eyes that darted about, and his large incisors which were gnawing away at the chunk of wood when he wasn't speaking.

"I'm Michael, I'm kind of new here."

"I could tell." Matthias cocked his head to one side. Michael wasn't sure whether he was smiling or whether he was picking a piece of wood out of his teeth.

"You look familiar and I know I've heard your name before. I think I saw you when I first got here," Michael pointed out.

"Ah, Copernicus's good old whirlwind tour." Matthias smiled. "I remember when he gave me mine, took me weeks to sort everything out. Have you figured out what you're becoming yet?"

"Ah, no. I've got this hair on my back, but other than that, nothing yet. I've only been here a week or so. How long did it take you to become...well...that." Michael pointed at Matthias's chest.

"A rat? Oh, it took about two weeks. I must admit it's not the form I would have chosen. I started over five feet tall, and in two weeks I shrunk to this size. It was a miserable two weeks let me tell you. I gave up a lot of fluid as I lost mass and size. Most of the animal people gain in size when they change, but not all. After I stopped changing, I had to move into new quarters as everything in my old room was too large for me."

"So they stuck you here?"

"Actually, I asked to be placed here. I kind of like it, my little hole in the wall. That's what I call this place, 'My little hole in the wall'. I think it is highly

appropriate.” Matthias chewed on his stick some more, looking quite proud of himself.

“So you don’t mind being a rat?” Michael asked a bit sensitively, hoping that he wasn’t treading on Charles’s toes.

“Oh no, in fact, I love being a rat. Sure there a few inconveniences, but overall, I can’t think of anything now that I’d rather be.”

“I guess it sort of grows on you.”

“Pretty much. I guarentee whatever you become, you’ll get used to it.” Matthias then leaned in closer to Michael with a mischevious glint in your eye, “As far as I’m concerned, as long as your not a cat, I’ll be happy.”

“Have you actually been chased?” Michael asked, the suggestion striking him as rather brutal.

Matthias nodded, “Chased and pounced. At least none of them have tried to eat me. It’s all in good fun though, so I’m not really worried about it.” Matthias gnawed on his stick thoughtfully for a moment, and then smiled again, “One is wondering just what you would like to become.”

“Who me?” Michael asked, a bit taken aback by the question. Matthias nodded slowly, his whiskers twitching. “I don’t really know, I haven’t thought about it really.” Michael then remebered something that Charles had mentioned before. “You said something about a Writer’s Guild earlier. Just what is it?”

“The Writer’s Guild is an organization that was started when it was seen that there were many people who wanted to write, but it became increasingly inefficient to keep naming everybody court writers. So the situation was rearranged, and only a certain few were named to the position of court writer. I happen to be one of those fellows. Actually there are quite a lot of us, but there are many more who still write, but are not officially writing for the court. The Guild was set up at my suggestion, and is run by three headmasters, Channing, Phil, and myself. Membership is simple, ask one of us three, and we’ll give you a challenge: you have to write a story that meets our specifications which we will give you, and do it in less than a day. If it meets our standards, you are an apprentice member. So far, we have rejected only a few applicants.”

“What do you do there?”

“Well, we assist the less experienced writers, giving them pointers and helping them out with their ideas. Eventually, when we think one of the guild members is ready, we will submit his name to His Majesty, and he will decide whether to invest the person as a full fledged court writer. They are still a member of the guild, but they now have the added responsibility of helping the uninvested members out with their work.”

“It sounds intense.”

Matthias chuckled, “Not really, it’s a pretty laid back group, once you get used to everybody’s little quirks.”

“Such as eating wood?” Michael ventured, feeling much more comfortable in Charles’s presence.

Matthias smiled, “I don’t actually eat wood, I just chew on it. It is one of my quirks though, that and the fact that I am shorter then some of the age regressed fellows here.”

Michael had been wondering about something, "Did they make all this furniture for you after you finished changing?"

"Yes, it took some time, but the carpenter is very competent, though he could use more apprentices himself."

"Did he just finish your dresser?"

"Actually, no, he was repairing it."

"What happened to it?"

"It was damaged by accident. I'd rather not talk about it."

Michael looked abashed, "Sorry about that."

"That's all right, you didn't know," Matthias quickly forgave him.

Michael nodded, then another thought struck him, "I thought you said that you had a meeting to go to? Now that your dresser is in place, can't you catch the last of it?"

Matthias perked up, "Oh, thank you for reminding me, I got so distracted." Matthias reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a ream of parchments. Charles stuffed his stick under one arm, and the parchments he slid into his tunic. "I must be going, they will certainly be pleased to see me."

Michael ducked his head as he stepped out the low door of Matthias's little hole in the wall. Matthias followed and closed the door behind him. Matthias then tapped him on the arm, "Could you do me a favor, tell Copernicus if you see him that I want a rematch."

Michael smiled at the little rat, "I will. It was a pleasure meeting you, Charles."

"And you too, Michael. I hope to be seeing more of you soon." Charles waved as he walked on down the hall. Micheal waved back, looking at his still human hand. How much longer before it was a paw, or a hoof or something else altogether? He put his hands behind him, and continued his march down the corridor, still marveling at how much his life had changed within the space of a week. He began to wonder, perhaps he could tell his adventures one day, maybe joining the guild wouldn't be such a bad idea.

For later of course, he had to get things straightened out first himself before he started making plans. He was going to be in this fort the rest of his life, he might as well plan properly.