

FALL-SEASON FINDINGS

PART ONE: THE COSTUME

“Wake up! Wake up! We’ll miss the contest window!” Mittens (gently) shook Shell’s shoulders back in forth happily to wake them up. Shell awoke slowly, lifting their heavy eyelids to meet Mitten’s wide-eyed, enthused expression. She was sitting right on top of them with their light covers between them. It was quite a sleepy morning - *and they slept in* - the chilly air somehow pouring in through their windows. But this was exactly Mittens’ favorite time to shine: autumn!

Shell then said, with a different groggy and husky voice, “... good morning to you too,” rubbing their sleepy eyes, “What are you on about?”

“Today. Is. The. Day!” She threw her hands up. “Today is the day! They’re going to grade the couple costumes in just a moment, I feel. Just a moment.”

Shell chuckled in response, nudging Mittens to the side a bit playfully, “I get you’re so excited, but we haven’t even decided on the theme yet.”

She then froze in her tracks, realizing in awe. *How could I forget the most important part? We don’t have a costume theme!* Of course, Mittens is known for her rather last-minute additions to happenings; that’s never been new. But an entire costume by sundown might be her best trick yet.

“Oh and, I don’t feel that well today.” Shell said softly, clearing their throat, “I’m not sure how much I could contribute, but I’ll try of course!”

Mittens frowned “Oh dear. Oh, my dear...” she mourned the idea of missing the costume contest three entire years in a row. Shell was excited, you see, but they don’t want to show any sadness

Yes, that’s right, three entire years in a row. The first time, Mittens shied away to the roundabout group right before the grading. The next year, Mittens turned up sick, and just last year? Well... how are you going to walk with a rolled ankle? Nevertheless, Mittens had to make it up somehow; Shell has tried so hard to get them there but they’ve always fell short because of her.

Mittens tried her best not to show any disappointment, “That’s alright, you rest yourself up, okay?” but really, she was determined to show she can make things right.

Shell nodded a simple thank you and she gave them some room to stretch their legs, the morning sun pouring into their cozy bedroom like *simple* twilight. That made Shell feel a little better maybe, but at this point it was a lost cause. Mittens was already ready to admit defeat, like a deer caught in headlights, going through a laundry list of ideas they've... maybe mentioned last week?

"What about, and you'll have to bear with me," She started, waving the air around with her claws, "I be the weather, you be the sweater. That way you can just wear something cozy, and I can make the costume."

Shell just about lit up at that idea, a smile returning to their face, "But of course I don't want you working alone... That sounds so cute."

"Nonsense! My wife isn't feeling well, my costume is in my own hands." Mittens moved the blanket up to Shell's neck, tucking them in, "I'll just run about to the shops, come back, and we'll be dandy. You rest up!"

"Alright..." Shell shyly said, a soft blush taking their cheeks over, "Just don't hurt yourself, okay?"

"Promise, my ocean! I'll be back by sundown!"

~ ☁ . . . Later

Time was just ticking away... Mittens had hit 3 unique stores, 5 different tellers, and 3 separate neighbors and somehow, she still couldn't find exactly what she was looking for. But what was she looking for anyway? She had the picture in her head, but putting it to paper, far from it...

Nothing has what I want: inspiration. She thought, her hooves clacking on the cobblestone path of the marketplace, *I don't want to look like a ball of fur walking around; I want to be as pretty as **Shell**...*

Lost in a sea of thoughts, Mittens bumped directly into a Willow accidentally, looking up to see the damage. It was Dip, a strange face to see indeed with their dark-colored mask and tall figure, who barely even flinched.

"H-hey!" They started, "Are you okay!"

A little intimidated, Mittens stuttered, "Oh my L-Leaf... No, so sorry! U-Uhm! Y-You're...?"

"Z... Dip..." They held their bags close to them, "Daw... Who are you heddin' to? I'm sure you've heard of me..."

“I uhm... Hi, Dip... Y-Yes, I have... I’m... Mittens... You’re judging the contest, aren’t you?”

“Well, nice to meet ya Mittens... Yes... I am...” They seemed awkward themselves, but noticeably frowned at her being so worried, “Are you okay? Do you need help?”

Mittens was a bit surprised, completely frozen in place but muttered, “Yes... I’m okay,” then returned her hands to her sides in defeat, figuring she has nothing to lose, “If you’re willing to listen I haven’t but the slightest bit of a clue on what to do exactly for the contest. Shell, my paramour, is at home running a cold, and they already have their idea for their costume, but I need mine.”

“Oh?” with intrigue, “What are you goin’ as? Are you two matchin’?”

“Y-yes... we’re matching. They’ll be the sweater; I’ll be the weather. It was my idea.” She braced herself for a chuckle, laughter, something. But Dip just smiled,

“Oh, neva heard of that idea...” They gave it a bit, “Howsabout we come hit up my shop quickly before going out. I might have something for you...”

Mittens was skeptical, lifting an eyebrow, but since this was her last hope, she caved, “Goodness... Would you? Thank you, Dip. That’d mean everything. I don’t want to let Shell down...”

~ ☁ ... Later

Masquerade's Magical Cosmetics' candles were dimmed, only wheezing some light by the time they walked in. Dip introduced Mittens to the shop briefly, joyous to show her a mysterious experimental corner covered by a tarp... Dip pulled away and:

Ta-da! A lone, slightly tattered barber chair was sitting there on a slight squeaky swivel. There was a half-finished sign taped on the wall... that... seemed to be drawn by Dip... but the signature just had a bolt through it. Mittens narrowed her eyes in speculation – or pure disbelief possibly.

Dip had Mittens sit down into the chair, facing a Willow-length mirror right in front of them. They pulled out some supplies out of their bag, which made Mittens' heart shallow, but she trusted the process.

“You do hair?” she asked, genuinely interested.

“Yeah, I want to... I was thinkin’, auh... we could make your hair all puffy like a snow cloud. I love snow clouds...”

Mittens gave that a long think. Honestly, she loved that idea, and she thought Shell would too, “Why not, okay!”

The transformation took a solid 30 minutes, a puff of safe glitter here, hair clips there, and of course some holding gel right around here. The final product was wild, in a good way of course, that made her look exactly like the picture in her head: controlled chaos in the form of a fantastic, puffy fro that went just with her white hair!

Mittens was in awe, lightly touching her hairdo with her claws. She felt pretty and very pretty at that!

“You think Shell will like this?” She asked innocently to Dip.

They smiled then in response, through the mirror, “Do you like it?”

“... I do, thank you. What do I owe you?”

“Howsabout I just see you at the contest?”

~ ☁ ... Later

Mittens had scooped up Shell for the occasion, wrapped up in their sweater. They were absolutely amazed by her flashy appearance, and thought it went just well with the sweater and weather theme! After all, she was their weather...

The contest went exactly as they expected: they all lined up prim and proper in a circle as Dip, Ginger, and Chestnut walked about grading their final products. There were a lot of wonderful and creative costumes, some made with their own claws and some obviously taken from the shops, but the gentle smile of loving couples gave everyone warmth this chilly evening.

Once the grading was over, Ginger in a cardboard box slipped pieces of paper to the winners, proud and true.

“Congratulations! You’re on the podium. Thanks for heading out here this evening.”

Low and behold, Mittens and Shell had gotten one! Mittens turned to Shell and Shell turned to Mittens, wide smiles on their faces. ‘Look, we did it!’ smiles. Mittens took the piece of paper and opened the slip with one eye open, quite nervous to see the results:

2nd place, but “only ‘cause you got a lil’ xtra help”