



Rex in Reeboks

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Retold Fairy Tales

Abigail stared distastefully at the mutt sitting across the room from her. Why? Why did she get the dog? Her sister Anne got the house, totally unfair. Her other sister, Ashely, got the car. She'd never appreciate it. And she got Rex, all seventy-five smelly and foul tempered pounds of him.

She had loved her father, and watching him finally pass was difficult. She didn't want the dog, but Abigail felt she owed it to her dad to care for him.

She didn't know how she was going to afford to take care of him. Her low-rent south Chicago apartment really wasn't "dog friendly" but she resolved to make the best of it.

"Let's go buddy," she sighed as she took his leash from the hook by the door.

"Nope."

Abigail staggered back, terrified. She stumbled over a chair desperately looking for something heavy to grab as a weapon. She scanned the room looking for the intruder. All she saw was Rex, looking at her with a cocked head as if she'd been huffing paint.

Regaining some composure, Abigail stood up again and picked up the leash from the floor.

"I'm not going out there."

Once again, her heart raced, but this time she could have sworn the voice came from the dog.

"I'm hearing things," she said out loud, hoping the sound of her own voice would reassure her somehow.

"You're not hearing things, and I'm not going outside. It's like 20 degrees out there. Do you have any idea how cold my feet get?"

Abigail rubbed her face with her hands. She'd been under a lot of stress with her father's passing, she must be having some kind of mental break she thought.

"You're not going crazy, I really am talking, so let's get past that ok?"

She peered at the dog through her separated fingers

"How... I ... how?" she stammered.

"First things first. My name isn't Rex. I don't know why your father insisted on calling me that. My name is Alexander. Not Alex. Not Zander. Alexander. I'm proud of the name, so use it the way it was intended."

Abigail nodded, still unable to speak coherently.

"Second, if we're going to live together, there's a few things I'm going to need, starting with some shoes. I'm sick of these god forsaken Chicago winters, and if I'm going to go outside at all, my feet are going to be covered, got it?"

The shock of seeing the dog speaking was starting to wear off and Abigail was beginning to realize just what rude personality this canine had.

"Did my dad know you could talk?" Abigail finally mustered.

"No. I never really felt the need. But I figure we're starting fresh here, and 'this' place," Alexander craned his head around Abigail's meager home, "is a bit of a downgrade from what I've been accustomed to."

Abigail frowned. She worked as a waitress at an all-night diner, and a part-time at a dry cleaner's where she mended clothes to make ends meet. It wasn't much of an apartment, but it was warm, clean and all hers. No one gave her a thing, she'd earned her independence and she wasn't going to be talked down to by anyone, least of all this dog.

“Alright Alexander, what exactly is in it for me?”

“Beg pardon?” Alexander was visibly taken back.

“What’s to keep me from just hauling you off to the humane society or calling animal control?”

“Hey, hey, hey sister. Let’s just settle down here. Maybe I come on a bit strong, but I really don’t talk to too many people. I’m as upset about losing my last home as you are losing your dad. Look, you get me the shoes, and I promise, I’ll make it worth your while,” he finished by inclining his snout a bit and looking up with sad eyes.

Abigail could tell this was not going to be an easy situation, and that sad eyes look was obviously well practiced. She reasoned if the dog was smart enough to talk, he might be smart enough to earn his keep. She grabbed her coat and purse and started for the door.

“And bring me back some burgers, do you have any idea how terrible that dry dog food is?” Alexander called as the door closed behind her.

Abigail first brought back an assortment of little booties from a nearby pet store, but Alexander was having none of it. He complained about them being either too tight, not warm enough, or itchy. There seemed to be no pleasing him. Finally, she relented and went the ‘human’ route, picking up two pair of baby Reebok sneakers that set her back near \$140.

Alexander tried them on and complimented her on the choice, but alas, his paws were constantly slipping out of them. She put her sewing skills to work and with a series of strategically placed straps and some foam on the inside, the shoes finally fit like a, well, they fit like shoes.

“These are great,” the dog said admiringly, “and thanks for the burgers,” he belched.

“Ok pooch, what’s the quid-pro-quo here?” Abigail replied.

“Right, you go to work tomorrow and leave me to it. Leave the door open so I can get back in, ok?”

Abigail was dubious, but what did she have to lose at this point. He’d already set her back some cash that she

didn't have and this dog was going to cost her a fortune to feed. "If he doesn't come through, then perhaps animal control will pick him up on the street," she thought to herself.

Work came and went uneventfully. Abigail returned home, exhausted as usual, and collapsed onto her sofa. Before she could even pick up the remote to switch on the television, Alexander trotted over, his mouth stuffed with magazines. He deposited the soggy mess in front of her.

"What the hell?" she exclaimed, curling a lip in disgust.

"Read 'em, they're research," the dog replied as he lopped away. He turned back, "Dinner?"

"Leftovers from the diner," Abigail pointed a tired finger towards a bag on the kitchen table as she carefully picked up the slobbery magazines. They were a collection of several different publications on camping, hiking and whitewater rafting. Strange as it was, Abigail had never really left Chicago, but had always dreamed about hiking amongst the redwoods of the Pacific northwest.

"Hey, what gives, what's this research for?" she called to Alexander, but the dog was happily wolfing down the meatloaf he'd torn out of the brown bag.

The days passed as Abigail went to work, came home, delivered diner scraps or fast food to Alexander, and thumbed through the ever growing pile of magazines and books on outdoor life. She didn't feel like there was much progress being made but she was too exhausted from working double shifts to complain much.

She was nearly drifting off on the sofa, when a cold nose poked her on the cheek, "Alexander! What the..."

She opened her eyes to find his snout inches from her face, the leash between his jaws, "Come on, we're going for a walk in the park," he said through clenched teeth.

Abigail groaned as she sat up, but followed the dog. It was just past 7:00 am, and the morning was crisp and cold. It hadn't snowed in a few days, but the piles left by constant street plowing flanked the sidewalks.

By the time they reached the park, the sun was coming up over the lake. All variety of joggers, walkers and other recreationalists were out, many also walking dogs. Abigail breathed in the frigid air and looked around

anxiously.

“There he is,” Alexander muttered, keeping his voice low.

“There who is?” Abigail not taking the hint and speaking in a normal voice, a passerby looking at her quizzically.

“Your 2 o’clock. Blue jogging pants, black shirt, with the yellow lab,” he indicated towards a man stretching against a bench, a dutiful blonde dog tethered to his arm.

“What about him?” Abigail replied.

“Get close to him, then I want you to swoon,” the dog said.

“Swoon? What, are we in the 1800s here? And why would I do that anyway?” she responded, confused.

“Because, he’s a doctor, he’ll help you,” Alexander seemed to be getting annoyed. “He also enjoys hiking and frequently visits Seattle. So, once you ‘regain consciousness’ strike up a conversation about Mt. Rainier, it’s one of his favorites.”

“What? How do you know all this?” Abigail exclaimed, her voice raising an octave.

“I’ve been watching him...and talking to Sandy.” Alexander replied simply.

“Sandy?”

“His dog.”

“You can talk to other dogs?” she questioned, now interested.

“Well of course I can,” the dog replied, taken back, “It’s my native language. It took me a long time to learn yours, let me tell you.”

“So, what’s the deal? You’ve been running around this whole time in your overpriced baby shoes playing matchmaker for me?” Abigail didn’t know whether to be embarrassed or outraged.

“Look, this guy is perfect for you. He’s handsome, smart, funny, and he doesn’t live in an apartment over a tattoo parlor.”

Abigail had to admit, he was attractive and if the rest of the details Alexander provided were true, this guy might be worth checking out further.

“Can’t I just go and talk to him? I mean, do I really have to faint to get this guy to notice me?”

“Look, you’re going to have to trust me, I’ve done my research here. If you really want to make an impact, you’re going to need a hook, and this is it,” he replied, circling around behind her and nudging the backs of her knees with his head.

Abigail lurched forward, then Alexander took off, half dragging this girl with him. As they closed on the man, he barked, “Now!”

Abigail collapsed on cue and half skidded on the snow covered grass towards their target. The man turned, looked around, then rushed to her side. Kneeling down next to her, he gently gathered her head in his hands.

“Miss? Miss? Are you alright? You took a nasty spill there.”

“Uhhh. I felt dizzy. I was just walking my dog and started to get light headed,” Abigail said, now staring into the deepest blue eyes she could ever remember seeing.

“It’s okay now, I’m a doctor,” he said, now staring back in her eyes, but she couldn’t tell if he was interested or just checking the response of her pupils. “When’s the last time you had anything to eat?”

“Oh, it’s been hours. I just got off work and wanted to take Alexander out for a walk,” she replied still transfixed with his eyes.

“Well, let’s get you up,” he said, gently helping her onto the nearby bench, “I’m Jason by the way.”

“Abigail,” she smiled shyly.

“Look, I know we just met, but how would you like to get a cup of coffee, maybe get some breakfast and get your blood sugar up? If your still not feeling well after, we can take you over to county general” he said returning her smile.

“I, um,” she stuttered, then looked over at Alexander, the dog was panting and vigorously shaking his head up and down. “Sure, I’d love to,” she finally replied.

The pair walked away from the park, Jason’s arm around Abigail’s shoulder, presumably to keep her steady, and the pair of dogs at either side of them.

“Abigail, do you mind if I ask you a question?” Jason said as they walked.

“Of course,” she replied.

“Why is your dog wearing shoes?”

She didn’t reply.

Several months later, Abigail laced up her hiking boots and looked out over the view from her Seattle bedroom window. The beautiful silhouette of Mt. Rainier was framed in the distance.

She walked out into the back yard. A pair of dogs lounged in the sunlight on the stone patio.

“We’re going out,” she called to Alexander and Sandy, need anything while we’re gone?”

“A juicy steak would be nice,” Alexander replied, “Sandy wants some of that organic tofu if the market has it. The vegetarian diet seems to be working for her.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Abigail said with a raised eyebrow, “Anything else?”

“Well, I supposed I could use some new shoes,” he said slyly.

Abigail looked at him and started to laugh, but it was completely apparent that he was very serious.

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