

“He does look somewhat like a wild cousin, Aouphril. He’s the right size and his paw-like hands.”

“Trust me, when he wakes up, you’ll be able to tell he’s not wild, Orlan. Oh, and thank you for coming by.”

“You perked my curiosity, Aouphril. I had to drop by. But if he’s not wild, we should take him to the clinic to be looked over and to make sure he doesn’t have any other injuries.” Orlan looked over at the hammock and the small, strange squirrel sleeping in it. “How did you meet him?”

“You won’t believe me.”

“Try me.”

Aouphril scuffed a foot and drooped her tail almost child-like. Orlan loved her tail expressions and had encouraged her to do them soon after they first met. He never understood why her mother forbade it as Aouphril had explained it to her.

“I was walking home from work. I was almost home, when there was a bright flash of light like lightning and a loud bang like a clap of thunder about 12 mits up in the tree over me. It startled me as I leaped backwards. I wasn’t expecting it as it’s a bright, sunny day. It’s a good thing I had leapt back. He fell from that spot and landed at my feet right where I had been standing before I moved back. I heard his arm break as he landed.” She paused. “You’re staring at me. I could show you the spot. There’s a small bit of smooth rock imbedded in the ground in the spot where he landed. So, it’s a real good thing I got scared and leapt back. You can see all the damaged tree branches above it. It’s not natural what happened out there, Orlan.”

Orlan paused a moment. “Yes, it’s hard to believe you. You’ll have to show me later, I think your patient is waking up. What did he say his name was?”

“All-dun.”

Orlan nodded as Aldin slowly awakened. It was their conversation that had stirred him back to consciousness. He blinked a few times and carefully sat-up in the hammock. He looked first to Aouphril and then to the new squirrel. His pelt was similar to Aldin’s, a peppery-gray with an off-white chest and a little brown along the edges and mixed into his muzzle. He was a little larger than Aouphril.

(greetingsflick) “All-dun I Orlan,” Orlan said in (chitter)speak swishing his tail in a friendly manner.

Aldin nodded as he tried to suppress a yawn, covering his muzzle with his bandage tail tip. He chattered, “Orlan Aouphril friend?” Orlan nodded. “Good (chitter)?” Aldin asked excitedly raising his tail briefly in a question mark. (curiousflick)

“Will try.”

Aldin turned to Aouphril. “Aldin go fast Ohfril forgive?” He asked her slowly.

Aouphril nodded.

50 ceklicks passed as Aouphril patiently waited while Orlan and the strange squirrel chattered back and forth. Aldin did his best to explain himself in (chitter)speak and tail emotes, increasing the pace as he saw that Orlan understood and could keep up, but also repeating himself as necessary. Orlan’s eyes widened as he replied back the best he could to try and clarify. He then repeated back to Aldin to make sure he understood. Aldin nodded back as it was close enough. Orlan then turned back to Aouphril.

“As you probably know, Aouphril, (chitter)speak is rather limited. Some of this is a best guess based on our conversation. And part of the challenge was the accent.”

“Accent?”

“Yes, like when you first moved here and people looked at you funny because of how you pronounced some words. His name is Aldin, not All-dun. He was just trying to pronounce it slowly for you as soon as he realized we and he don’t speak the same language. Anyway, his version of (chitter) and what I learned growing up have different accents. His natural language is something called Ing-wish...”

“English,” Aldin piped in slowly as he recognized the word.

Orlan glanced at Aldin, “Yes. Ing-lish, whatever that is. I’ve never heard of it. I didn’t even know there were other higher level languages still spoken.” Orlan shrugged. “He is not a wild cousin. He understands the concept because where he is from, there are wild cousins. They usually keep clear of his kind, except for the occasional accidental encounter. His kind doesn’t smell right to them—like they’re disease carriers and should be avoided, if I understood him correctly. He used the term, sickness fear.

“He is thankful you’ve bandaged his injured tail and broken arm. He’s agreed to go to the clinic. That last part was tricky to discuss in (chitter)speak. There shouldn’t be a word for clinic. He came up with a way to describe it before I could think of it. ‘Remove sickness home’ was the literal translation.

“Chitter.”

“He’s also thirsty and hungry.”

“I can prep us a little food before taking him to the clinic,” Aouphril replied. “Is it possible through (chitter)speak to find out where he’s from?”

Orlan turned to Aldin and asked. Aldin paused. “I tell you no believe,” he chattered slowly enough for Aouphril to understand. “Bright light thunder fall land hard pain darkness here.” Both stared at him. “See. No believe,” he said after a moment.

Both shook their heads and Orlan explained what Aouphril had told him before was what he just said, so they did believe.

“Thanks,” Aldin replied slowly in (chitter)speak and then switched to more rapid (chitter)speak. He repeated himself when Orlan didn’t respond. Orlan repeated back again to make sure he understood before turning to Aouphril.

“He doesn’t know where home is,” Orlan explained to Aouphril. “Definitely not here, wherever here is. Lost.”

Again, Aldin spoke in (chitter)speak slowly so Aouphril could follow along. “You big. No big squirrel my home.”

They both looked at him.