

On screen, Dr. Hanter relaxed a little. “Good. I’m sorry to say you both and All-dun are now under quarantine.”

“What?” they exclaimed in unison.

The rabbit drooped his ears a bit. “All three of you are under quarantine for at least 30 days. So am I and the two orderlies who tended to him here at the clinic. Government orders.”

“Why are we under quarantine?”

“His blood tests came back showing he might be a carrier. Of what, the lab couldn’t tell. The tests didn’t come back until an hour after you left because they ran them a few times trying to figure it out. We then sent them off to the main hospital in Claton City. They were also puzzled. They couldn’t match it up with anything on file. The closest thing was some sort of wild cousin squirrel virus, but even then it didn’t match-up. They’ve forward it onto a research hospital. So, as a safety precaution, we’re all under quarantine.”

“Is that why you called me on the big panel, Doctor?”

“Yes. I had to use a secure connection. We don’t want to cause a panic if there is no reason to do so. A government flitter will be by in the morning. They’ll take you to your place, Orlan, to gather what you need. Please stay at Aouphril’s overnight.”

A light shown briefly in the windows.

“A law enforcement officer will be outside at a distance to make sure you stay put. I and the two orderlies are being treated the same. Please don’t ask any more questions. I want to get some rest. I suggest you two do likewise. We’ll be keeping each other company for a while. We’ll have plenty of time to talk to one another then. Maybe you can explain that long story you mentioned about All-dun then. ” He sighed whistling a little between his buckteeth. “I said I needed a vacation, but this isn’t what I planned on.”

“Just one question, please, Dr. Hanter,” Orlan pleaded.

Dr. Hanter paused from killing the call. “Go ahead.”

“If you’re under quarantine also, why were you the one required to tell us. Shouldn’t it have been a government official?”

“Representative Mara is listening in. I’m not going to put words in her mouth. I offered to make the initial call as the doctor who had been on duty. I’m going to sign-off and turn it over to her.”

The rabbit's image was replaced by a vixen. She was looking at a smaller flat panel, scrolling through something. "Orlan, is it?"

Orlan nodded.

"I see you tried contacting me yesterday. I'm sorry I couldn't get back to you sooner. Does it have to do with this," she paused at the name, "All-dun."

"Aldin."

"Aldin, a talking wild cousin squirrel."

"He only looks like one. We'll explain as best we can, but it may take as much as a klick, your honor."

Mara sighed. "Mara is fine. I had only two weeks left in parliament before the next representative chosen by lottery was to take over. I was looking forward to going back to my research full-time. Now, because this quarantine is in my district, I must remain in parliament until this is resolved. So, yes, take whatever time you need."

When they were done, Mara cursed under her breath, not loud enough for the microphone to pick-up. She apologized anyway. "Sorry. I guess I may be stuck in this position for a while. May I talk to this, Aldin?"

"I'll wake him," Aouphril offered. She went over to the far corner where Aldin had placed the sitting cushion to sleep on. She touched him lightly on the shoulder. When he didn't stir, she nudged him gently until he stirred a little and looked up at her.

"Not morning," he said groggily in (chitter)speak.

She tried to remember the word he had used per Orlan's translation. "Elder call. She wants to talk to you."

He blinked a couple times, yawned, stretched and followed her back to where he could see the panel and the panel sensors could see him.

"Aldin, this is Representative Mara," Aouphril said. "She serves in parliament. Like your Elders thing."

Mara looked long and hard at him as he stared back with his beady eyes.

“Hell-oh, Rah-pree-sent-ah-tive Mah-rah,” he said, breaking the silence while flicking his tail a bit tentatively. He reminded himself, what looked like a fox on the screen wasn’t in the same room as him. As such, there was nothing to fear.

“Mara is fine or we’ll be here all night.” Aldin nodded. “I agree you look like a wild cousin squirrel, but it’s obviously this is no joke. You can talk.”

“Slow-ly, pleaz. I still learn you words. Need more time learn bet,” he paused.

“Better?” Orlan suggested.

“Yes. Better. Only here one day and little chitchat.”

“So far,” Orlan translated.

Mara raised an eyebrow at that. “They told me what you told them, Aldin. Is it true? You are not from our world?”

“Yes, iz true I think.”

“You think?”

“Stars here not same. Day one klick longer. Year fiveteen?,” he paused shrugging, “one-five days less. Most species my world like wild cousins here. No talking,” he switched to English, “fox,” and back to the local language, “my world.” He chittered to Orlan to translate the word.

“The word he used in his language, focks, is for a wild cousin fox.”

Mara again cussed under her breath and apologized for the outburst. “Do you know what you are really saying, Aldin?”

Aldin replied in English and then repeated it in the local language. Once he learned the word, he’d probably call the local language, Common. “Yes. You are not alone.”

Mara sat back holding a hand to her head and shook it slowly sideways back and forth. “Looks like I won’t be getting done in parliament anytime soon. Another set-back to getting back to my research.”

“Re-search? What iz re-search?” He raised his tail in a question mark.

“Remember, he’s still learning our language and as you heard, it’s a lot different from his,” Orlan stated. He then turned to Aldin. “Study learning. Like how you are learning our language.”

“What call one re-search does?”

“Different topics, different names.”

Aldin drooped his tail again. “Don’t have the words yet. What call one stars re-search? Or how you mix things to make how-ver craft dome plas-tic paul-e-car-bon-it or my arm caste?” He lifted his left arm.

Again, Mara raised an eyebrow. “When not serving as representative, I am a research chemist,” Mara called up a drawing program and the screen split in half. She drew a simple atom diagram for water.

“Yes!” Aldin spun in place. “I unnerstand. Kem-ist study build blocks of all things.”

“Yes,” Mara smirked. Something about this little squirrel put her at ease.

“Now, more gen-ah-el. Is there gen-ah-el word for kem-ist, star re-search, wild cousin re-search, rain re-search, so on?”

“Scientist”

“That’s it! That’s the word I didn’t have earlier,” he chittered excitedly.

“Grand-father, father, I, all scy-N-tists. My re-search not like they. They re-search like Dr. Hanter. Mine not. Some-thing go wrong my re-search, send me here.”

“What did you study, Aldin?”

Aldin drooped his tail again. “Don’t have word. Will show simple things in it like Mara do. Maybe ‘nuf for you to give word.”

He picked-up Aouphril’s small flat screen. She nodded her permission. He opened the drawing program, remembering the steps Aouphril used the previous day. She reached over his shoulder to press the icon that would connect it to the large flat panel.

“I hope you unnerstand what I do. I still learn you words, but not start yet on right. Must use my right.”

He wrote-out the Mass-Energy Relevance formula. He pointed to each symbol. “Energy equals Mass times light speed times light speed. Don’t know word for something time self, that what little symbol here means,” he pointed to the superscript 2 next to the C.

Mara's eyes rounded. "You're a physicist."

"Yes, if that is what I think it means."

Mara shook her head. "I still have to order you all into quarantine. We can't risk you being a plague carrier."

Aldin looked puzzled at her. "Play-gah? Mean bad sickness?"

"Yes, I'm sorry. At least with all of you in quarantine, that gives me time to discuss with the rest of parliament about what to do about, you, Aldin. It also gives you that time to," she smirked using his way of saying it, "learn more our words. We will talk again. Maybe by then you can better explain what you were researching."

"As I told Orlan and Awfril, I unnerstand. You do what you must. My Elders wood do same. I don't want cause prob-lims. I not fight kwar-en-teen. Just sorry they too."

"Thank you. Good night." Mara terminated the call.

Aldin turned to Orlan and Aouphril. "Aldin sorry."

"Iz oh-kah," Aouphril reassured him. She turned to Orlan. "You may share my bed, but you must behave." She bobbed him on the nose tip lightly with a finger.

He drew an X over his heart. "I will. Besides, we have a chaperone," he said pointing to Aldin. "I'll be a gentleman." (gigglechitter)

Aldin rolled his eyes and shook his head only catching part of it, but enough to understand. He just wanted to get back to sleep. So, he went back to his cushion, curled up and was soon out cold. Orlan kept his word, though Aouphril allowed him to drape an arm over her. He giggled quietly once just before Aouphril drifted off.

"What?" she asked quietly.

"Listen."

Aldin was quietly chittersnoring, but if you listened careful, you could hear it. It almost sounded like he was grinding his teeth in his sleep, too.