

FOUR

Aldin checked in at the flight center, ignoring a few points and stares and the occasional, “Is that him?” Being named Ambassador was worse in some ways than how he had been confused for his famous grandfather back home on Terra. But it was a good trade-off. Unlike Terra, he had the freedom to travel in the open here. He had already seen more of this Earth than he had ever seen of Terra. Though he had only been here a little over two months he had already made up his mind. If there was ever a way to return to Terra, he wouldn’t. He’d request to be allowed to stay here.

He proceeded where directed to the boarding gate and glanced out a window at the flitter as the flight craft was called. It looked like a cross between a human airplane and a quadcopter drone back on Terra. There was no other way to really describe it. This would be his fifth flight on one since arriving on this Earth. It almost seemed normal to him to fly in one. He held up his flat panel as his combination ID and flight ticket for a steward at the boarding gate who ushered him through. Aldin found his seat and snuggled down for the long flight to the other side of the world.

“SQUIRRELY!” cried out a very excited, high-pitched youthful voice. “LOOK MARLE! A SQUIRRELY! CAN I PLAY WITH THE SQUIRRELY!?”

Aldin inwardly cringed as he opened an eye and quickly sat-up. He did his best to not let his tail whip about in warning as the young black Labrador-like dog a little bigger than him tugged at his mother’s paw as she tried to guide him down the aisle to their seats. Its tail was whipping back and forth excitedly. The mother glanced at him with a look of apology on her muzzle.

“Lokis, remember, inside voice. We’ve got a long flight ahead. And that’s not a wild cousin squirrel. That’s the Em-bass-ah-der. We need to leave him be. I’m sure he’s travelling on very important business.”

Lokis lowered his voice. “But I want to play with the squirrely,” he whined.

Aldin cleared his throat. “You need to ask me directly, young Low-kiss.”

Lokis squealed with delight. “Squirrely can talk!”

“Of course I can. My name is Aldin.” He glanced at Lokis’ mom. “And I am willing to go play with you, but only after the flitter takes off and we have permission to leave our seats.”

“YEAH!” Lokis bounced in place and then put his loose paw to his muzzle and continued in a near whisper, “Sorry, inside voice. Yeah.”

Lokis’ mom looked at Aldin. “Thank you, Em-bass-ah-der.”

Aldin nodded as the two made their way to their seats.

There were six young children on the flight. In addition to Lokis, there was a bobcat, a fox, two raccoons and an otter. There was a sniff and touch session, that Aldin only agreed to after making sure it was alright with the parents as he wasn't quite sure what was and wasn't completely acceptable. The farm meet-and-greet had turned into a hug and petting session and he wasn't sure if this would be similar or not. All six wanted to pet the "wild cousin" squirrel. Despite giving his name several times, they all called him, "Squirrely". They did ask with coaxing from their parents and only petted him after Aldin gave permission. Some were excited with how soft his fur was compared to some of theirs. They agreed the otter's was the softest with Aldin's a close second. After that, there was a rambunctious game of tag/chase. The pups/kits giggled and cheered at Aldin's acrobatic agility/antics in dodging the others. After a klick or so of play, Aldin dragged a large pillow into the middle of the play area and curled up on top of it.

"What are you doing, Squirrely?"

"Squirrely is tired. I need a nap," Aldin replied and let out a big yawn, covering his mouth with his tail.

Suddenly, a nap seemed like a grand idea to the others. They brought more pillows over and snuggled up to/around Aldin and each other. Before long all six were fast asleep. Aldin carefully lifted his head up long enough to look at the watching parents who mouthed, "thank you" to him. He smiled and carefully gave them a thumbs up before laying his head back down into the fur pile and going to sleep himself.