

“PUT THE EMBASSAHDER DOWN!”

“So, On-ray,” Aldin looked at him from where he dangled in the pine marten’s grasp, “last time we met, you tried to attack this ‘Talking meal,’ which did not turn out all that well, did it? You got five years in prison thanks to me. Here’s your chance for revenge if you prefer to stay in prison. And if you’re quick enough you might even gulp me down in four or five mouthfuls before they can do anything about it. At least then you’d have committed the crime for which you’re trying to serve the time. Of course, if you choose revenge, then you will not go home to your family anytime soon. Are you interested in freedom or staying here in prison?”

“PUT THE EMBASSAHDER DOWN!”

Enhray held Aldin there a moment in thought. Just one quick slash with his free hand just like the suicidal tree rat suggested. It was SO tempting. He then shook the thought from his head recalling how his last encounter with this small tree rat ended. And last time the tree rat had one arm in a cast. That wasn’t the case now. Enhray cussed again and then replied, “I’m not that stupid.” He turned to the guards. “I’ll bring the Em-bass-ah-der to you. Don’t fire. You might hit him!”

He carried the squirrel to the cell door. He dangled him near the lock until the light turned green. He opened it enough to set Aldin down and then locked himself back in the cell and held his hands in the air again. He mumbled another cuss word under his breath, which like the others, Aldin couldn’t quite catch. The guards rushed forward with their weapons drawn and put the Aldin behind them. Immediately, the indicator lights on their weapons turned green. No one noticed the wet paw prints Aldin left on the floor.

“Please do not shoot him,” Aldin calmly requested. “As you can see, no harm came to me.”

After some hesitation, the guards slowly lowered their weapons.

“Crazy tree rat,” Enhray mumbled. “Not happy seeing me in prison, you’re trying to get me killed!”

“Maybe I am crazy, but you are now talking more than just ‘go away’.” Aldin waved his arms at the guards. “Please put your weapons away. They are not needed. Now that I have gotten his attention, may I have some privacy with the prisoner so we can continue our conversation?”

All of security but the raccoon slowly filed back out after glancing at the coon, who nodded. Once alone, the coon thrashed his tail back and forth as he glared at Aldin, pointing a finger close to his chest. “I’m only allowing you to stay because you are the Embassahder. But I don’t care what your title is. Even if you were suddenly made Chancellor. If you pull a stunt like that a

second time you'll find your tail out that door," he pointed at the door behind him, "so fast the rest of you will have a hard time keeping up with it!"

Aldin nodded. "I understand, officer."

The raccoon stepped back out, except this time, he didn't secure the outer door.

Aldin made himself comfortable again on the sitting cushion. "Now where were we before that interruption?" He pondered a moment. "Oh, yes, I was asking you why you are in there and not home with your family where you belong."

Enhray sighed as he paced in the cell. "Obviously you won't leave me be until I answer your questions. I pled guilty to attempted murder."

"Now why would you do that?" Aldin briefly held his tail up in a curl. (curiousflick)

"BECAUSE I [PG-13] TRIED TO KILL YOU!" Enhray bellowed as he glared at Aldin through the bars. He threw his hands up in the air. "There, I've confessed to you now! Are you happy? Are you here to gloat at me, Em-bass-ah-der Tree Rat?" He added the title in a sarcastic tone.

"No, I am not happy," Aldin replied calmly. "Nor am I here to gloat at you. If all I was going to do was gloat, I would not have put my life in your paws just now. Instead, I'd have just sat here and taunted you until I got a reaction. However, that's not my way, On-ray."

"Uh huh, right. You'd have just let me rip your throat out. If so, you're crazier than I thought."

"Now, there, you're correct. I'd have tried to stop you, but by holding me by the scruff of my neck, I'd have been hard pressed to avoid serious injury. A squirrel's reflexes are quick, but that's one position that is difficult to defend from. Our combat training does not cover it 'cause the enemy we face back home is not large enough to lift us by our scruff." Aldin flicked his tail back and forth slowly a couple times.

"Anyway, back to our first encounter where you believed you tried to kill me. Did you really try?" He looked down at himself brushing at his fur and felt behind at the scruff of his neck with a hind paw. "You did not do a very good job of it. I came out of it unscathed. And I just gave you another chance. You had me in your grasp at your mercy and you did not even pierce my skin. After talking to your wife, I knew you would not, On-ray. You are not that bad a person the way she told it. Or she is a really good actress, and you just blew your chance at a tree rat snack." Aldin (gigglechittered) trying to lighten the mood up. Enhray simply stared at him.

"Look, On-ray, maybe all you really did was pick a fight, huh? And then some over-zealous judge or," he used the English word for the next word, "lawyer, or whatever it is you have in your justice system decided to press bigger charges, because of who you fought with despite

Parliament's charge of fighting-only. That was the only charge they wanted pressed. And for some reason you chose to plead guilty to the larger charge anyway. Sounds like you did not have a lawyer to advise you."

"I leapt at you with the intention of killing you."

"And you think I was not expecting that nor prepared for it? Back home some wild cousin predators tend to make that mistake from time to time with my people. They do not tend to make it more than once." Aldin started tapping away on his small flat panel. "According to Parliamentary Rules," he held the flat panel where the marten could read the text if he chose and paused a moment and (gigglechittered). "Yes, the very rules I had offered to let you reread just before I tossed your insult back at you and you jumped at me. Anyway, according to those rules, the maximum punishment for fighting on the floor of Parliament is 2 months prison time. It's been a little over 2 months now. You have more than served an 'appropriate' punishment for that crime. So, why not fight the new charge?"

"Is this a trick? I got off easy at five years by pleading guilty. If I go to trial, it could be twenty."

Aldin tapped his flat panel again read something, put an earbud to his ear and listened to ensure he was reading it right and then tapped something else. "According to this," he motioned at the text on his flat panel, "provided I am reading and hearing this right as my ability to read Common is not that great yet, but it improves every day. Anyway, as the 'victim' of this crime, if the per-pah-tray-ter is found guilty, and I am not satisfied with the punishment, I can request a new trial, with the understanding that the...per-pah-tray-ter may get a reduced sentence or be found not guilty and set free." He looked up at Enhray. "I suggest you withdraw your guilty plea and request a new trial. Otherwise, I will as I am not satisfied with the sentence you received."

Enhray bristled. "This has to be a trick. You want to see me serve twenty years don't you?"

"No, Eh-ray," Aldin responded calmly, "I want to see you go home to your family, leave this behind you, and get on with your life. I hold no ill will towards you. Live and let live. If your wife had not called me, I would not have known you were still in prison. Someone neglected to notify the 'victim' of your court date where you plead guilty." Aldin again pointed out this was not normal based on the laws he called up on his flat panel. "If I had known about it, I would have tried to stop you from doing so then and maybe you would already be home now."

"My wife is better off divorcing me and finding a new mate," Enray added dejectedly. "I lost my job. I can't support them. Who would hire me after everyone in the world saw that fight?"

"She loves you and is ready to take you back. Why else would she call me and ask for help? I also had a muzzle-to-muzzle talk with your employer just before coming to see you. He is willing to give you a second chance, but you'll be on probation for 5 months. Yes, I have been a very busy squirrel these past few days."

The pine marten stared at Aldin in disbelief. “Why would you do this?”

“Look, On-ray, what really happened that day is that you,” he pointed at the pine marten with his tail, “were the victim, not me,” Aldin pointed at himself with his tail. “It was my intention all along to pick a fight with the first representative to storm down on the floor in objection to my being there. And I planned on it with the understanding I would probably spend two months in prison. I figured it was worth it to quickly prove that I am more than just a wild cousin who learned to imitate a few words of Common and,” Aldin shrugged, “it would have given me a couple extra months to polish my Common before addressing Parliament. My accent, at least to me, is not as strong as it was two months back on the floor of Parliament.

“It takes two to fight. You just happened to ‘volunteer’ to be the other fighter. Of as some of our human-Fudd allies would say back home, you were ‘voluntold’.” Aldin trailed off as he looked over Enhray’s shoulder rather than directly at him a moment as his eyes seemed to briefly go out of focus. “You do not know how close you came to dying that day, On-ray. While I was ready to leap or dodge aside from whoever charged me, I had not anticipated someone leaping directly at me. I had all I could do to pull back on the killing blow. My people have been at war longer than I’ve been alive. The combat training I went through was intense. It is more or less ingrained into me. It has to be. The most common attack by the enemy is to leap at us with claws extended. When the enemy leaps at you, it’s kill or be killed. You hesitate, you die. It is fortunate for you I hesitated because you do not look like a devilbunny. In some ways, it is also fortunate that you slammed into the podium and got a concussion. If you had landed in the clear, turned around and leapt at me again, I do not think I could have held back a second time.

“If anyone should be serving time for attempted murder over that fight, it should be me, not you. Parliament chose not to punish me. Instead only you got punished. And,” Aldin shook his head, “you received five years for being made a fool of in front of a watching world audience. Now that right there is not fair and I am sorry it has come to this. That is why I am here to do what I can. I want to set things right. I have already declared your family wards of Nahmakanta so they are covered financially while we fight this. Provided, you would like to go home to them rather than continue to sit here and feel sorry for yourself.”

Enhray stared at Aldin and was silent for a while. Finally, he asked, “If I request a new trial, what exactly would you do?”

Aldin explained what he planned to do step-by-step.

“And if all that fails and I am right back here, possibly for twenty years.”

Aldin sighed. “I doubt you will wind-up back here. However, if you do, I am going to walk into that cell again, but this time I will spend the entire sentence with you or however long it takes

until the charges are dropped. You saw how the guards reacted just now. Imagine what they'd do then."

"You're truly serious, aren't you? Creator as my witness, you are beyond crazy."

"Yes, On-ray, I am serious," Aldin replied. "Crazy or not, we got started on the wrong paw. I do not expect you to respect me anymore now than that first day on the floor of Parliament. If you still consider me some trained wild cousin who learned a few words in Common so be it. But that does not mean I hold a grudge against you or anyone in the 'wild cousin' faction of that Parliament. Nor do I want to see anyone punished for something they did not do. Do we have a deal? Will you withdraw your guilty plea and go to trial?" Aldin held out his forepaw through the bars. Enhray hesitated a moment and then accepted it, shaking it once.

"So be it, Em-bass-ah-der Tree Rat."

"I would not tolerate that name from anyone else but you, On-ray. However, you may want to be more respectful in court."