

SEVEN

“Court is now in session. All rise for the honorable Justice Stepin Perraul.”

A black bear in black robes entered the court room and sat behind the judge’s bench. Even sitting, he towered over all present. After he sat, everyone else sat. He looked at the dossier on his flat panel and then looked up. “Bring in the perpetrator.”

Enhray was escorted in by two security guards. The bear looked down at the pine marten.

“You’ve submitted a request to change your plea to ‘Not Guilty’ and receive a trial by jury. Your request is denied. Once a perpetrator confesses guilt he cannot uncon...”

The bear stopped in mid-sentence as the doors to the viewing gallery opened and closed. He watched a small gray squirrel find a seat. The squirrel noticed the bear looking at him.

“My apologies, your Honor, for my lateness. I hope that is the correct term. Like Mr. On-ray’s original trial date, I did not receive proper notification about this hearing.”

Judge Perraul closed his eyes a moment, took deep slow breath that was almost a sigh, and then reopened them.

“Then you will be happy to know, Em-bass-ah-der, that I was in the process of denying the perpetrator’s request for a retrial.”

Aldin briefly drooped his tail. “Forgive me, your Honor, I have not had time to read-up on the proper procedure. However, if you deny his request, I will file whatever forms are necessary for a retrial as is my right as the victim.”

There were hushed mumblings among the few in the courtroom as again, Judge Perraul closed his eyes and this time sighed. He looked up again. “Em-bass-ah-der, please approach the bench.” He glanced at the ferret sitting next to Enhray and a lemur off to one side. “The perpetrator’s and government’s counsels will do likewise.”

Aldin made his way down to the bench and stood next to the ferret and lemur. Both of them towered over Aldin. The judge towered far above all three of them. “You may come up here. This sidebar conversation is off the record for now.” All three climbed up. Aldin had all he could do to suppress his wild cousin instincts telling him to flee from such a large predator. The judge was larger than any bear he had ever seen back home. The bear quietly spoke so only the three of them could hear him. “Em-bass-ah-der, the perpetrator has already confessed his guilt. He cannot request a new trial.”

“My client plea bargained, your honor, while still recovering from a head injury,” the ferret interjected.

Judge Perraul glared at the ferret. “You’ll only address me when addressed. You and the government counsel are only up here to hear what I say to the victim.” He turned back to Aldin. “This is not your Terra or whatever you call your home. Our laws are different here.”

Aldin nodded. “Yes, I understand that, your Honor. I have also briefly read through your laws/rules regarding trials. If the victim is not satisfied with the sentence, the victim can request a new trial. If you will not grant the perpetrator his request to a new trial, then I will file for one on his behalf. I am not satisfied with the sentence. It is too harsh. Parliament charged him with fighting on the floor, not attempted murder.”

All three stared at him. The ferret tried hard not to grin.

“The perpetrator or his family hasn’t threatened you in any way have they?” Judge Perraul asked.

“No, your Honor. In fact, I gave the perpetrator a chance to rip me apart in his jail cell two days ago. He had me by the scruff of my neck, but he did no harm to me. He simply removed me from his cell. I would guess you can find a report on it in there.” Aldin pointed to the judge’s flat panel with his tail. “You will also find there is no way for him or his family to bribe me. Parliament has yet to decide if I am allowed to work or not, so I have no account in your world banking system. No account, no way to get paid. All I have is the embassy ‘charge account’, but I’ve already tried to receive payments for speaking engagements through that with no success.

“As I said, I will file for a retrial as I object to the length of the sentence. He should have served a maximum of two months per Parliament rules. I understand the rules are different here. It would be much easier back at Nahmakanta. Back home, all I would need to do is request the charges be dropped and that would be the end of it.”

All three stared at him.

“Please repeat that,” Judge Perraul requested.

“Among my people if the victim requests the charges be reduced or dropped against the perpetrator, they are dropped or reduced accordingly. Of course we do not jail those found guilty as we are at war and cannot spare any paws to watch someone in prison as our numbers are small. I do understand the prison thing as humans use it back home. Among my people, the punishment meets the crime. A fight like ours would have resulted in several clicks to several hundred clicks of community service. Attempted murder would mean banishment from the colony. I could go on, your Honor. However, I will do whatever it takes to get Enhray’s attempted murder charge dropped. If simply requesting to do so does not work here, so be it. If that means I need to submit a request for a new trial, then that is what I will do.”

Now the ferret was smiling.

Once again, Judge Perraul closed his eyes a moment in thought. “Please go back to your seats, I need to do some research.” He stood up.

“Due to who the victim is, I need to do some research in my chamber. Court will reconvene in one klick.”

“All rise!” a security guard cried out as Judge Perraul departed through a door behind the bench.

Immediately, the lemur went over to Aldin. “Have you lost your mind, Em-bass-ah-der? He tried to kill you and you’re trying to have him released?”

“Counsel, as I explained to Mr. On-ray in his jail cell, I started that fight intentionally. It would not have mattered who it was that charged down on the floor to challenge me, I would have picked a fight with them to prove the point I am not just some wild cousin who was trained to speak a few words. Any sentence longer than he has already served is unjust and I will do whatever it takes to get him released.”

“You are crazy!” the lemur threw up her paws and stormed back to her table knowing she was going to have a difficult trial ahead if the judge granted his request.

The ferret then approached him. “I must look out for my client’s interests, Em-bass-ah-der. Is what you said up there and to my client genuine?”

“Yes.”

The ferret’s grin was extra wide.

A klick later, the door to the far chamber opened again.

“All rise!” a security guard called out. All did so as Judge Perraul reentered the chamber and sat down. Everyone else did likewise.

“I did some research and found that long before we were a united world, when the various regions were independent countries, most sent official representatives, what we call ‘Foreign Representative’ or as among the Embassahder’s people ‘Embassahder’, to those countries they had friendly ties with. If that foreign representative became victim of a crime, they had the right to have the perpetrator extradited to their home country to face trial under their laws rather than in the country the crime originated in.

“Technically, at the time the crime was committed, Al-den Bush-E-tail of Terra was not yet appointed, Embassahder of the Terran Nah-mah-kant-ah Free Squirrels. However, I will ignore that as he was appointed to that position soon after. Per our sidebar conversation, the Embassahder has made a request that the accused perpetrator be tried under the rules of his home country. Unfortunately, there is no way to extradite the accused perpetrator to Terra as we do not know where it is nor have any way of making contact with Terra at this time. Our laws do not allow a charge of this magnitude to simply be dropped as the Embassahder has indicated would be allowed in his country if the victim requests it. As a compromise, I shall allow the accused to withdraw his guilty plea and go to trial. That trial shall commence in one week. Counsels, prepare your arguments accordingly. The accused perpetrator is, hereby, transferred from the region prison to house arrest until said trial.” He then looked directly at Aldin. “There is to be no further contact between the victim and the accused until the trial. If contact is made between the two, this compromise is void, the guilty plea will be reinstated, and the perpetrator will return to prison to continue serving his five-year sentence.” Judge Perraul picked-up the gavel on his bench and hammered it once.