

SEVEN

The klick-long trip back into the forest preserve seemed to take longer than that to Aldin. Probably, because he was travelling to a different part of the forest. Once the hovercraft settled into the snow, Aldin tapped a few icons on his flatpanel. He slipped an earbud into each ear, said a silent prayer to whatever Creator oversaw this Earth, and leapt out of the craft. He made for the nearest tree. Climbing up 30 mits quickly, he paused and listened. He then called out in chitterspeak.

“Is territory claimed?”

Again, he paused and listened. All was quiet. He made his way over a few more trees, pausing and calling as he went. Several more trees and calls later, finally, he heard a distant barked reply. “Leave! Mine!” He waited long enough to see the wild squirrel coming for him and led it on a chase back towards the hovercraft. If he hadn’t lost the last bit of his tail crossing over to this Earth, the wild squirrel would have nipped it. As hoped, it blindly chased him into the hovercraft, before sliding to a stop inside the strange space. Chittering in panic, it skidded on the floor of the craft making for the entryway. “BIGGEN THING! TRUCE! DANGER! RUN!” it chattered.

“Close.” Aldin commanded in Common, and watched the entry snap shut before the wild squirrel could escape. He kept his distance as the other cried out in panic scrabbling at the closed entrance. It tried leaping up at the clear dome and bounced off. The program Aldin had set-up in his flatpanel was working. The earbuds in his ears emitted tones that canceled the other’s danger calls, allowing Aldin to remain calm and not panic himself.

“TRAPPED! BIGGENS COME! HUNT US! MUST ESCAPE! FLEE!” It cried out.

Aldin reached to tap an icon on his flatpanel when something thumped against the outside of the hovercraft. He hesitated and then jumped back as another squirrel leapt up and bounced against the clear dome of the hovercraft. It scrambled while looking in at the other wild squirrel.

“NO! RUN! BIGGEN TRAP!” the one inside cried out.

Aldin tapped a couple of icons in quick succession. A portion of the dome quickly opened as the one outside was scrabbling at it. It tumbled in and the dome closed behind it. It quickly moved over to the other wild squirrel.

“Biggen trap! We die!” the first one cried out again. The newcomer’s tail started wigwagging in fear.

Aldin had enough. He didn’t want to try gassing them for fear it might also affect him. So, he tried a different approach as he whistled loudly. The other two paused in their panic and stared at him with fear in their eyes. The floor was wet with their paw prints. Now that they were holding

still, he could see both were similar to the other he ran from the day before, gray in pelt with tassled ears, which was good.

“You safe. Biggen no hunt,” he calmly said to them.

They continued to stare at him wigwagging their tails. Aldin could clearly see the newcomer was older then the male that he led into the hovercraft. He calmly looked back at them.

“You no scared? Why?” the older squirrel finally asked. Both continued wigwagging their tails. “Strange ears.”

Great, just great. She’s female, Aldin thought to himself, *and obviously not in the database which only listed the male here.*

“Hard tell. I come to you. You no bite, I no bite. You smell. Then you understand.”

Aldin slowly crept towards them. The older one hesitated and then crept forward, sniffed and its eyes shot wide. She turned to the other who cowered back. “Come smell.” It cautiously crept forward and sniffed and his eyes also shot wide.

Aldin crept back a few paces. “What you smell?”

“You no smell right. Smell like,” she paused.

“Like biggen and squirrel both,” finished the male.

“Yes. I no squirrel. My people different. Small biggen. Is why I have rounded ears.” He waved his tail over his head.

They both cowered back and started to chatter.

“Hush! You safe. I no harm you. I sorry I trap you.”

“Why small biggen trap?” the male asked.

Aldin thought long and hard how to explain in simple terms and wasn’t sure how.

“I trap you as you no listen while defend territory from me. I bring you to female. If she chose you, you sire pups. If no, I bring you back.” Aldin paused looking at the older female. “I no know you already have mate.”

The older female chattered quietly. “I no mate pup of pup.”

“Sire dame,” the male stated pointing to her with his tale. “Wise elder.”

“Ah,” Aldin quickly understanding. “My people chitterspeak,” he pointed to the male with his tail, “grandpup,” and pointing to the female, “granddame”.

“You no hunt?”

(negative flick) “No. Come, I share food.” Aldin opened a small backpack, tipped it over and spilled out some seeds similar to sunflower seeds. He nibbled one to show they were safe. He then opened a bottle and poured water in a dish. “I share water.”

He backed up a little to give them some personal space. They crept forward and inspected the seed and sniffed the water before lapping it and then nibbling on some of the seeds.

While they ate, Aldin explained his purpose. “Territory of female is far. Take all day climb through trees. This biggen ‘thing’ fly. Take us there in,” Aldin paused not sure how they tell time thinking a moment. He held up three clawed fingers sideways, pointing up at the sun with his tail. “In time sun move that far in sky. No want meet female, I let you go.” He switched to Common briefly. “Open.” The hovercraft door opened.

Both stared at him as he uttered the biggenspeak word and then both eyed the open doorway, but neither fled. It seemed the male was taking his cues from his grandmother. As she stayed put, he did likewise, but he kept eyeing the opening and wigwagging his tail.

“Small biggen strange,” the elder female finally stated. “Why you help...she struggled with the strange chitterspeak word, “grandpup find mate?”

“Female try choose me. Small biggen and squirrel no make pups. Biggen Elders no allow. If he go and she no choose him, I return him here. Go different territory, trap different male and try again. Biggen elders know forest need more squirrels.”

The elder nodded. “Biggen elders wise.”

“If you,” Aldin pointed to the male with his tail, “no want meet female, I release you.” He pointed to the open hovercraft door with his tail. “Stay or go.”

Both looked at the open doorway again and then back at Aldin. They moved close to one another and closer to the open doorway. They chattered quietly for a bit, occasionally glancing at the doorway and at Aldin.

Now the grandson crept forward. “Small biggen take me see female.” He too struggled with the new chitterspeak word. “Granddame elder come. Watch small biggen.”

“I no trust you,” she added.

“You bring us back?” the male asked again.

“If female no choose you.” (affirmative flick)

The elder female spoke to her grandson. “If female choose you, you stay. Help raise pups.”

“And you, Elder?” the male asked.

“Female allow me stay, I help raise pups. Female say no,” now she glared at Aldin. “Small biggen bring me back.”

“Yes, I promise,” Aldin replied crossing his heart using the tip of his tail. Both stared in puzzlement at him. “I take elder home if female no welcome.”

“I no trust you,” she added.

“You wise elder,” Aldin replied. “Last chance to leave. I must close door.” He waited a moment and neither attempted to leave. “Very well. Prepare. We fly.” Aldin tapped a few icons on his flatpanel as both stared at him using it. The door closed which jumped them. He pointed up to the dome with his tail. “Ledge up there, you watch us fly.”

They looked at him doubtfully, wigwagging their tails.

Aldin shifted his flatpanel onto his back where its Velcro-like backing made it easy to cling to his fur and leapt up on the sill surrounding the interior of the dome. “Come, watch.” He lightly tapped the plastic dome. “You no fall out.”

They followed him up.

“Begin flight,” Aldin spoke out in Common.

They both stared at him realizing he just used biggen speak again. Before they could say anything, the movement of the trees outside caught their attention.

“We fly. Small biggen no lie,” stated the male

“We fly fast! Bird predator fast!” the female added.

“No, we fly faster. Biggen flyer start slow and then go faster,” Aldin explained as the other two stared in wonder.

“Small biggen strange.”

“You know I small biggen. You no trust me, yet you stayed. You strange, too.”

They were silent the rest of the short 15 ceklick journey. Aldin thought to himself that this part was almost too easy.