

SIXTEEN

Early that evening, Dr. Territin came back into the waiting room pushing Butternut on a wheelchair. “It appears to be working. He’s stabilized for now. Dr. Hanter believes it’ll be another day or so before we’ll know for sure. The two of you should go home. We’ll alert you if things change.”

“Thank you, Dr. Territin,” Butternut responded as she got out of the wheelchair. Her flatpanel chirped with an incoming message. She reached for it commenting, “Who could possibly be calling me? It’s not like I’ve announced my return.”

It wasn’t a call, but a text message. Her tail twitched as she read it. She read it a second time in disbelief and turned back to Dr. Territan. “Will Dr. Hanter need any more blood from me?”

“I don’t know.”

“Please go check with him. I’ll need to give it this evening or tomorrow at the latest.”

“Why?”

She held up the flatpanel with the message still clearly on it. “I need to report to the Capital District in four days. I’ve just been chosen as Representative for our Northeastern Hills Region for the 807th Parliament.” She drooped her tail. “I’m back only for a few days.” She shook her head. “What are the chances?”

Dr. Territan left. Butternut read the message again. “Wait, this message is a week old. I’m already late!” She chattered in panic. She was losing the fight with her wild cousin instincts. She needed to flee, but there was nowhere to go.

Sensing what was wrong, Raoul scooped her up to try and calm her. “You’re safe in my embrace. I’ll take you outside and you can climb and feel safe until you calm down. We can work through this afterward.” He carried her snuggled against his chest. She quivered against his embrace as her tail wigwagged uncontrollably. He made his way as quickly as he could out of the hospital, alerting a nurse along the way where they would be. As soon as they were outside, Butternut leapt up the closest tree crying out, “Danger!” in chitterspeak as she fled. Raoul shed a few tears. It was hard seeing her like this, but he would remain true to his pledge to her no matter what. He had waited six years to try and help her adjust.

He looked at her flatpanel she had left with him as she fled. There was a second unopened message, also from the Representative lottery system, time-stamped a few clicks after the previous message. *Well, we are mates now, right?* He thought to himself. *Hopefully, she’ll forgive me.* He opened the message:

We are in receipt your auto-response. Due to the unusual circumstances of your current assignment, Dr. Gowandle, your requirement to serve as Representative of Northeastern Hills Region is deferred until next term. Hopefully, you will receive this message prior to that time. Please confirm receipt as soon as you can.

Raoul sighed in relief. This was good. Emotionally, she wasn't ready to serve as Representative. Also, he had put in a petition for the Representative for their region in the upcoming parliament to consider. It wouldn't look good if it was his wife who brought it forward. With little thought to the process, he snagged the flatpanel on his fur, the back surface of which worked somewhat like what the Ambassador compared to 'Velcro' back on Terra, and began to climb. Maybe this bit of good news would help Butternut calm down quicker. They had five months to work on helping her learn to control her instincts.

Far above him, Butternut chirped, "danger," and wigwagged her tail.