

TWENTY-THREE

The following day Karle and Giguere were present in Dr. Kaynobble's office along with Aldin, Butternut, and the wild squirrel who stuck close to her.

"The tests are back from biology," Dr. Kaynobble started. "She died of the same strain of virus that nearly killed you, Ambassador. There was residual remains of the same strain in the tranquilizer darts. Biology also reports there was a vile of that strain missing from their immunology lab. This strain of virus isn't airborne. You have to come into contact with it. Someone who is sick rubs their hands against their nose, touch a surface, someone else touches the same surface and touches their nose or rubs their eyes, etc."

Aldin's tail thrashed about in agitation. "I do not know about the rest of you, but I can easily connect the dots here."

They stared blankly at him over the analogy.

(drooptail) "I am sorry for the Terran saying. I thought there might be something like it here. Let me try again. I can easily follow the trail here to the conclusion. Someone hacked your orders, Dr. Kaynobble, as to where in the forest preserve I was to be filmed. They intentionally infected the female squirrel there with this virus, probably only a day or two before my encounter with her to ensure she was contagious, but not yet showing signs of the virus. That would be another reason the alternative weather dates were so close to the date chosen for the filming. Though we do not couple, she bites me and infects me. It's obvious whoever the perpetrator is wanted to try to kill me or at the minimum get me in deep trouble or possibly both. And do it in such a way that it would look accidental. Instead, an innocent life and possible unborn pups were the victims."

"And whoever they are would have succeeded, if you hadn't found me when you did," Butternut added.

Dr. Kaynobble sighed deeply. "She was pregnant, but very early on. I have already notified the authorities. As this is an attempted murder case along with the confirmed poaching of a protected species, I had to report it as is the law. They will probably question each of us. Tell them what you know. Don't hold anything back."

"It shouldn't be too hard for them to find the perpetrator, should it?" Giguere asked.

"Normally, yes, it would be quick," Karle replied. "They could just look at the computer logs for the area hovercrafts for the time period in question, and eliminate those used by students and staff for legitimate research. Maybe do likewise to trace who had the darts printed. And video camera footage to see who stole the virus vile from the lab. But I don't think that it will be the case."

“Agreed,” Aldin chimed in. “If they could hack Dr. Kaynobble’s orders, they can hack those other records and alter or eliminate them.”

Meanwhile, Butternut explained in simple terms to her grandpup what had happened to his mate and that the biggens would search for who killed her.

“You’ll need to coax him to allow biology to exam him as a precaution,” Aldin piped in. “Either he had a milder version of the virus when he was younger, or he was lucky to not catch it from his mate.”

“He’s too afraid,” she responded.

Aldin leapt up on the desk. “After I trap you, did I lie to you?” he asked the wild squirrel in chitterspeak.

(negativeflick)

“Biggens fear you get sick like mate. Granddame and I go with you. Biggens test me first show you what they do. You see is safe.”

He hesitantly agreed. True to his word, Aldin had biology do every test slowly on him before they did the same to the wild squirrel. Butternut served as a security blanket when her grandpup got scared. When done, they learned he had the antibodies to the virus and reassured him he did well and was safe. They were gone from Dr. Kaynobble’s office about a klick.

Upon returning, and learning the wild squirrel was free of the virus, Dr. Kaynobble brought up the subject of the squirrel’s future. “He needs to decide where he will live. He can’t really stay here among us. It’s not healthy for him. I can just imagine how much his heart is racing while he’s in here. I think he hasn’t gone into panic flight simply because of how long he’s known you, love.”

“I know,” Butternut said and drooped her tail.

He switched to chitterspeak. “Grandpup.”

“I no your grandpup.”

“I know. I have no other name for you. Biggens use names. You like grandpup to my mate. Make you like grandpup to me. You can’t stay here. Not good for squirrel to live with biggens.”

(affirmativeflick) “Young pup, my dame warn me danger. No trust biggens long or depend on biggens. Depend on biggens no live on own.”

“Dame was wise elder,” Dr. Kaynobble praised. “You see trees outside. No squirrel claim this territory near biggens. You near biggens if you claim, but not with biggens.”

(negative flick) “Too open. No easy hide from sky predators. I go home.”

“Yes, we take you home. Or we take you different territory. We biggens watch squirrels in forest. I know female who just mate. She have pups early. Needs help. May not want help or may accept help.”

“Like granddame raise me?”

(affirmative flick)

“If female no accept?”

“We take you to home territory.”

The wild squirrel wigwagged his tail slowly. “I try.”

“Friend,” Dr. Kaynobble pointed to Aldin, “will take you as soon as you wish to go.”

The wild squirrel looked towards Butternut. “You no my granddame. Like granddame. I no forget.” She embraced him and he hugged back. When she let go he said, “I leave now.”