

TWENTY-SIX

Raoul look up as someone knocked at his office door. “Enter.”

A male fox entered and bowed. “You asked to see me, Dr. Kaynobble.”

“Yes, Representative Daon, I did. Have a seat.” Raoul waved to a cushion across from his desk. “Thank you for seeing me despite your busy schedule.”

“Then you know, Dr. Kaynobble that I can’t spare much time.”

“Yes, I’ll come to the point quickly. You run a wild cousin small rodent extermination service, correct?”

Daon closed his eyes briefly. “Yes, though I haven’t been able to concentrate on it while Parliament has been in session.”

Raoul nodded. “If this next question gets too personal, tell me and forgive me. Do you enjoy your job?”

Daon sighed deeply in thought before answering. “No. I don’t enjoy taking all those lives. There’s just so many of them. I can’t keep up with it. And I don’t have enough outlets for the resulting meat. Wild cousin rodent isn’t as popular as it was in my father’s time. That means many I kill are killed for nothing other than they’ve become a nuisance to whoever has hired me to eliminate them. I only went into it because it is the family business.”

Raoul nodded. “Thank you for being so honest. Have you considered trap and release?”

Daon laughed for a moment and trailed off as he look at Raoul and realized the raccoon was serious. “No. Where could I release them where they wouldn’t cause someone else trouble?”

“Deep in the forest preserve.”

“What?”

Raoul tapped an icon on his flat panel. “I’ve just sent you my wife’s report from her six years of living in the forest among the wild cousin squirrels. It’s an interesting read when you’ve got the time. In summary, they’re numbers are in decline. Based on my wife’s observations, the main reason for the decline is increased predation. Predation by predators that usual hunt wild cousin rodents. In her time out there, she didn’t observe a wild cousin rodent once nor signs of any. I had some of our students set-up camera traps in various placed in the forest. While those traps took pictures of predators, birds and wild-cousin squirrels, there was no sign of any wild cousin rodents. We’re not sure what killed them off, but...”

“But as wild cousin rodents are near the bottom of the food chain, with them gone, it’s upset the entire balance.”

“Correct. And that’s where you come in. How many small cousin rodents do you exterminate in a typical day?”

“On a good day, fifty.”

“With our current research budget, we can easily take twice that and release them in the forest preserve. We have the funds to cover the cost of doing so for at least one month with delivery rates at that level at your current rate of charge.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes.”

“You have a deal, Dr. Kaynobble.” Daon reached across the desk to shake paws.