

THIRTEEN

The lemur chancellor hammered the session of Parliament to order as Aldin took his seat in his designated spot as did the various representatives did throughout the chamber. The lemur pointed to Larel to step forward. "Larel, Representative of the Central Lakes and Forest District, has the floor."

Larel came down to the designated spot to address the chamber. "My fellow representatives. This live session has been called to discuss whether or not wild cousin squirrels are sentient. To that end, Ambassador Aldin indicated he knew of a wild cousin who might be willing to meet with us and invited them to attend this session. She agreed. I had the pleasure of meeting her on the flutter flight from my district. As the territory she claims as her home is in my district, though she is not a citizen, that still makes her someone I represent in this session. As such, she and the Ambassador agreed to let me introduce her to you. Ms. Pinecone."

The doors to the chamber opened and Pinecone nervously bounded in and headed down towards the chamber floor, leaving wet footprints as she scampered along. There were some upset murmuring from some sections of those assembled. Larel glared about the chamber. They quieted down without the chancellor needing to gavel them quiet.

"I have already come to the conclusion that Pinecone is sentient like you and I. I'll leave it up to your judgement as we talk to her and she to us. She does not have vocal cords like us and relies on a flat panel to speak to us in our language. I spent six click on a flutter flight with her and we spoke for some time. I know I wasn't being tricked. I was actually speaking with her." She looked about again. "I also won't stand by and let this become a repeat of the session when the Ambassador first came upon us. Should any of you object to her coming before us **AFTER** we had asked her to come, you'll need to get through me first." She looked towards the lemur. "I fully understand that if I fight here in the Parliament chamber, I'll spend three months in jail. I'm willing to serve that time to ensure the safety of our visitor." She glared out at the others present. "Do any of you who object care to share a jail cell with me?" She paused as no one moved and then looked to the lemur. "Thank you, Chancellor. I surrender the floor to our visitor as I see she is now in the visitor's circle." Larel went over to Pinecone and hugged her briefly, whispering in the small squirrel's ear, "You've got this." The bobcat then made her way to her designated seat cushion near the front of the chamber.

"Visitor Pinecone, a wild cousin squirrel, you are recognized as having the floor."

Pinecone nodded to the lemur, pulled the flatpanel off her back and typed as it read her words to the chamber. "Thank you, Chann-sill-lor. Greetings Biggen elders as my people would call you."

There were more hushed murmurs of disbelief in the audience. Pinecone ignored the interruption as she continued. "I know some of you will doubt it is me typing away and maybe someone else is trying to play a trick on you. As such, I ask that a couple of squirrel representatives who understand chitterspeak step forward to translate for me. I will address you for a while in my own language to put your doubts aside. I ask that neither Ambassador Aldin nor Representative Butternut be among the volunteers as they are very familiar with me." While two representative

squirrels made their way to the floor, she continued. “To speak Biggen to you, I need to use one of your flatpanel devices. As representative Larel speak, I don’t have the vocal cords needed to speak Biggenspeak directly to you. Before I go too far, that is what my people call you larger animals, Biggens, much as you call us wild cousins. Your language we simple call Biggen or Biggenspeak. I believe Ambassador Aldin calls it Common. Common has more words than chitterspeak. When I use chitterspeak, it may not be quite right. Please forgive me of that in advance. That said, I’ll put the flatpanel away for a short while.”

She tucked the panel onto her back and turned to the two Biggen squirrels who had volunteered. “You chitterspeak good?”

Both affirmative flicked in response. “Yes,” they added in Common.

She nodded “Good. You names?”

“Swifttail, Representative of Low Island Forest District.”

“Roundear, Representative of High Lakes District.”

She chattered a warning at them. “You no translate just now.”

Both drooped their tails and apologized before translating what she had asked of them and her scolding of them.

“Good. Thank you Elder Swifttail and Roundear. You Biggen names translate in chitterspeak. Many Biggen names no translate.” She listened to their translation. “I hear Biggen. Is important you speak in Biggen exactly what I say in chitterspeak. You no speak Biggen right I will know. Other Biggen Elders need hear chitterspeak have less words.”

She nodded again in satisfaction to their translation into Biggen. She then spoke slowly to allow her two translators time to repeat her words in Biggen. She gave the Parliament a brief overview about her growing up. How she met Jessophat and his family. She paused at the confusion both her translators had at the names of Kind, Sunshine, and Energy. She pulled her flatpanel off her back a moment to give their Biggen/Common names.

“Is why I was happy you names translate. Their names no translate.”

She continued for close to a klick leading up to her flutter flight and coming before the elders in their meeting place as asked. She thanked both Swifttail and Roundear and indicated they could go sit down. She pulled the flatpanel off her back again.

“I’m willing to start over in Biggen and better expand on my life story if you wish.” She looked at the lemur. “However, I am going to need a break, Head Elder. I’ve been fighting the urge to flee since stepping in here. There are so many of you and my mind is screaming at me to flee from all the predators though Ambassador Aldin has reassured me that you will not hunt me here. May I please leave for a little while?”

The lemur smiled at her. “I think we can all use a brief break. We shall reassemble in 50 ceklicks.” The lemur pounded his gavel once.

Pinecone swiftly ran to the door and out of the Parliament building. She scaled the nearest tree, crying out warning screees. She was soon joined by Butternut who seemed as scared as she was. The two of them spent nearly half the allotted time giving the occasional warning scree as they clung tightly to their tree branches.