

SEVENTEEN

Aldin's flatpanel vibrated. He rolled over in the hammock in the room he was using while Parliament was in session, careful not to disturb Butternut, who was still fast asleep. He reached for it to answer the incoming call. He smiled when he recognized Raoul. "Hello, potential future mate-brother. What's up?"

"Is Butternut with you?" Raoul asked with concern in his voice.

Aldin quietly gigglechattered, changing the angle of the camera to show her curled on her side sleeping in the hammock. "She's still asleep. I can wake her."

Raoul visibly relaxed. "No need. I was just worried."

Aldin's tail started to wigwag. "Why?"

"Karle is down to the local precinct."

"Karle?" Aldin paused a moment in thought. "Your skunk graduate student who is good with drones and just finished his degree. That Karle?"

Raoul nodded on screen. "After more than a year of investigation, the authorities have accused him with your attempted murder and for poaching."

"They believe Karle was behind making that cousin squirrel deadly sick?"

"And hacking into the computers to alter the schedule and location of where you needed to be to hunt for the butternuts that I had asked you to cache and then return to retrieve them."

"Spirit," Aldin mumbled. He paused for a moment and added, "However, I don't believe it."

"Why?"

"Why would he helpfully bring in evidence of what he did after he and Giguere found Nimble's first mate was dead. He's the one who found the darts. If he was involved, wouldn't he have done his best to hide those or at least make sure they weren't found?"

Raoul nodded. "Makes sense, but we'll have to let the justice system run its course."

Aldin sighed. "I just hope they come to the correct decision this time, unlike the last case that involved me. Thank you for the update, Raoul."

"I figured you'd like a heads-up before you get inundated with news reporters asking for comment."

Aldin drooped his tail. “Thank you for the warning. By the way, if Butternut hasn’t told you yet, Pinecone is fine with you two coming out to the colony mid-summer to ‘test the waters’.”

Raoul smiled. “Wonderful.” He ended the call.

Aldin let Butternut sleep for another 25 ceclicks before nuzzling her awake. He passed the news onto her. They had a light breakfast in the room rather than go out. It was decided it would be best for her to lay low for the day.

The reporters didn’t quite swarm around him, thanks to a group of Parliament’s security guards, but they did shout questions at him. He ignored most of them, but then paused.

“All I have to say at this time is that if true, I’m deeply saddened and disappointed. Saddened that if the accused is responsible, his actions cost a life. One, which at the time was viewed as a dumb animal, but a life all the same. If he is guilty, I’m disappointed that I had trusted him. On the other paw, if he is not guilty, I hope his name is cleared and the true perpetrator or perpetrators are captured quickly.”

One of the reporters shouted back, “Some have seen former Representative Butternut coming and going from your room, Ambassador. Are you cheating on your mate?”

Aldin wigwagged his tail in agitation as he responded. “Pinecone is aware of what Dr. Butternut Gowandle is up to and has approved. Dr. Raoul Kaynobble, Butternut’s husband, is also aware, approves, and has encouraged Butternut to do so. The four of us might partner together as a foursome in the near future depending on how things work out between Butternut and me. Butternut has been courting me since before I met Pinecone. The attempt on my life by the accused, if he’s guilty, nearly succeeded. Butternut saved my life by donating blood to me. The least I can do in return is give her some attention and see what comes. I don’t need to remind you that it is perfectly legal for citizens to have multiple mates. It is the same in ‘The Refuge’. No further questions.”