

ONE

Saniel hugged his parents and strapped a knapsack onto his back. “Are you sure, you don’t need me for the fall harvest. think the school would grant a delay for me if I’m needed.”

Jessophat chuckled. “We literally have over a hundred helpers now, Saniel. Get going.”

Carolyn sniffled. “Call us often.”

“I will, Mom,” Saniel answered as he hugged his mother again.

Blossom wigwagged her tail nervously as she embraced her parents and then her three brothers. “I’m going to miss the fall harvest. I could ask Schoolmaster Pekan for a delay.”

“You’re the one who was so determined to join Saniel,” Aldin replied as he hugged her again. “You’re going to be busy enough harvesting your new territory. While they will have food for you at school, it may not be what you like or can eat all the time. We’ll be able to handle the harvest here just fine with you away, Blossom. Of course, it’s not too late to change your mind, stay, help with the harvest, and wait until spring to start senior school.”

Blossom didn’t hesitate in her reply. “No, I don’t want to wait until spring. I feel I need to do this.”

Pinecone embraced her a second time. “Go my pup, be with your potential mate. There will be plenty food when you return for winter break.” She glanced at Aldin. “That what it called?”

Aldin flicked his tail up and down once.

Blossom put on her backpack. She made her way through the tree canopy to Saniel’s family tree, where he was waiting for her. A hovercraft soon arrived. They both got in and set their backpacks to one side. Saniel let Blossom put in the commands to take them to Rock City. Before she could hit ‘execute’, Saniel caught her attention and pointed up with his tail. She looked up through the clear dome in surprise as the canopy around them was filled with the members of The Refuge, all of whom waved to the two. They waved back. Blossom hit ‘execute’ and the hovercraft sped-off.

They were almost at Rock City when Blossom drooped her tail. She was reading through the school rules on her flatpanel and looked up at Saniel.

“It says here we can’t be roommates at school. We’ll be assigned roommates of the same gender.”

Saniel nodded. "I thought you had read about that already." He leaned over her shoulder and scrolled through the rules and pointed to a different section. "With permission of your roommate, you can have a guest spend the night. But I won't be asking mine right off. I suggest you do likewise. We each need to get to know our respective roommates first."

Blossom sighed, but accepted she wouldn't be able to snuggle with him at night for a while.

The hovercraft slowed as it entered the city and whisked them to near the entrance to the school before settling to the ground. After checking in, Saniel escorted Blossom to her assigned room. It happened to be just down the hall from his room. Blossom waived her paw over the lock mechanism and the door opened. She already knew the layout thanks to the tour the previous month. Two bed-hammocks, two desks with sitting cushions, a small fridge, and an entertainment panel. The window showed she was on the side of the building facing her 'territory'.

"See you at dinner," Saniel said as he hugged her briefly.

"Yes. Thank you, Saniel." She nuzzled him.

He turned to leave. As he stepped through the door, he nearly collided with an orangish-brown furred squirrel with tasseled ears, nimbly avoiding the collision at the last possible second, startling the other squirrel.

"Excuse me, I didn't realize you were right there," he apologized. "I'm Saniel." He offered a handpaw.

The other squirrel accepted the offered paw and looked at him carefully. "Moselyn. I thought you were going to knock into me. How were you able to avoid the collision?"

Saniel gigglechittered. "I channeled my inner cousin squirrel. Anyway, I'm sure I'll see you again soon." He waved to Blossom and headed down the hallway to his room.

Moselyn stared after him for a moment, before turning back to the doorway and entering her room. "Well, he's handsome," she quipped before noticing Blossom. "Oh."

Blossom bowed and offered her a forepaw. "Blossom. I heard you introduce yourself to my boyfriend as Moselyn. I guess we've been assigned as roommates."

She accepted the offered paw. "Yes, I am Moselyn Pinette. Blossom? Please pardon my confusion." She paused briefly. "You seem awful small."

Blossom gigglechittered. "Not for a cousin squirrel. I'm nearly full grown, just as I assume you are as a 'biggen' squirrel."

“Cousin squirrel?” Moselyn fell silent for a moment. “Wait. Didn’t Parliament just grant rights and privileges to cousin squirrels just this past spring? And most cousins can’t speak our language.”

Blossom nodded. “Yes, and yes. I was lucky in that I got Dad’s speaking gene. Otherwise, I’d have to type away on my flatpanel, like Mom, and let it speak for me.”

Moselyn stared at Blossom a moment. “You’re the Ambassador’s daughter?”

Blossom flicked her tail up and down once. “I am. But I worked hard to get into this school a semester early. Schoolmaster Pekan reassured me it had nothing to do with who my father is. I got in on my own merits.”

Moselyn sat down and slowly shook her head. “I had hoped to have an interesting roommate. You called me a biggen. What does that mean?”

Blossom gigglechattered as she leapt up onto the other cushion, sat and looked up at Moselyn. “It’s the term my people use for citizen species because you are all bigger than us. And I hope I fulfill those hopes, Moselyn, preferable on my own and not due to who my parents are. And, yes, I find my boyfriend, Saniel, quite handsome.”

“Oh, yes, I can see why you’d look at us that way.”

The two spent the next klick¹ learning about each other and their families.

¹ Klick-hour