

THIRTEEN

Blossom nuzzled Brave. “I must return to Biggen learning place. I will visit when I can, potential second mate.”

Brave bowed his head in thanks.

Aldin watched his daughter depart and then turned to Brave. “I know you still hurt all over. Are you less tired now?”

“I less tired today.”

“Good. I serve as Elder Voice for my forest, Brave. Eldest Elder Teacher wish speak to you.”

Brave chittered nervously.

“You have nothing to fear. He good Elder. He no like using title Eldest Elder. He use it when he must.” Aldin pulled his flatpanel off his back and showed it to Brave. “Has my daughter shown you Biggen viewer?”

Brave out of habit tried to move his tail and chittered in frustration before answering, “No.”

“This very special Biggen tool. It has thing like an eye in it.” Aldin pointed to a small disk opening on one side of the panel. He then swiped his paw along the screen of the panel and it lit up. Aldin held it up to him.

The panel showed Brave on it. Brave stared for a moment and reached forward with his right forepaw. The squirrel on the viewer reached out the same way at the same time. He chittered nervously. “That is me, more clear than I see when I look at self in stream or puddle.” He looked over his body in the image. “It is as Blossom and healers speak. There is a Biggen thing over my tail that keeps me from moving it, though I keep trying.”

Aldin nodded. “I wanted you to see how this works before we speak to Eldest Elder, who is still in our home forest.”

“How far is that?”

“It take two,” he held up two claws, “handspands time in Biggen flyer to get there. By paw, it would take many days.”

Brave whistled briefly.

“I will call Eldest Elder now.” Aldin swiped again at the screen and tapped a few symbols. There was a pause and then a grey furred squirrel with green eyes was watching them through the screen. Aldin peaked around the edge of the screen a moment so the camera would pick him up.

“Greetings Elder Teacher. The young squirrel before you is called Brave. I will be behind Biggen viewer holding it still so you two may speak.”

“Thank you, Elder Voice Friend,” Teacher responded. He wigwagged his tail in greeting. “Hello Brave.”

Brave bowed his head. “I no worthy.”

“Hush. I know you went through a lot. And thanks to young Blossom and Biggen healers, you will see your third” he held up three claws “winter. Biggen healers do incredible work. I would no see twelve” he held up all ten claws and then two more “winter coming up if no for Biggen healers. Elders in three” he held up three claws again “forests near you call for Grand Council. Do you know what that is, Brave?”

Brave shook his head back and forth once as he couldn’t wigwag his tail.

“In very large forests, the forest is broken into sections. Each section has an Elder Council. A Grand Council is when two” he held up two claws “or more of those councils gather to discuss very important matters. It can also be a gathering of Elder Councils from different forests. It is rare that one is called because of the distance involved. This will only be the second” he held up two claws “time I have been asked to help with in my short time serving as Eldest Elder. Before I speak at this quickly called Grand Council, I need you to speak to me, Brave.”

“On what?”

“I need you to speak to me about your former Elder.”

Brave nervously chattered. “Former?”

“Well, I no expect you will return to your old territory, right?”

“No,” Brave answered quietly.

“Instead, you’ll follow your potential mate back here to what we call, ‘The Refuge.’”

“So, now you my Elder?”

Teacher smiled reassuringly. “I am part of the Elder Council here, but I no head Elder here. I was Elder in different forest before I come to ‘The Refuge’.”

“What you want me speak about sire of dame?”

Teacher tensed a bit. “The Elder is your grandsire?!” He paused a moment. “That mean sire of dame or sire of sire.”

“Yes,” Brave answered quietly. “He no like me.” Brave told him all he could from the time Teacher had first visited their forest the winter before up through the attack giving as much detail as he could. Close to a pawspan of time went by. Teacher nodded and kindly encouraged him throughout and praised him on his bravery.

“Thank you, young Brave. I will present what you speak to the Grand Council. You are no the only squirrel harmed by this Elder who has violated many of the rules Elders are to follow. He will be lucky if he only banished when this is over.” The screen went dark.

Aldin tucked the panel back on his back and turned to the young squirrel. “I echo Eldest Elder. You fit name given you by Biggen squirrel Energy. Your grandsire will be punished for what he do to you and others. Thank you.” He bowed and left the room.

Brave curled-up and wished Blossom could have stayed one more day. He could really use another someone there right now. He felt more alone then he ever felt before.