

SIXTEEN

Moselyn stirred a little. Someone gently nuzzled the back of her neck. Her eyes snapped open as she quickly sat up.

“See, I told you, it wouldn’t take much to get her to move,” Blossom gigglechittered from next to her. “Thank you for finally getting off my tail, roommate.” Blossom leapt out of the nest and quickly scampered out of the room.

Moselyn rubbed her eyes with the back of her paws. She couldn’t believe it was morning already. She had slept soundly. She was startled again when a tail lightly brushed her cheek.

“Hey,” Saniel spoke now that he had her attention. “Thank you, again, Moselyn, for letting me stay and for joining us. I really think it helped her last night.”

She grabbed her tail to prevent it from wigwagging back and forth. “I slept soundly. I never sleep soundly.”

Saniel gigglechittered. “Maybe you just needed company and the feeling of safety it brings to the cousin deep inside.” He held his right forepaw to his chest briefly. “And you have a lovely fur pattern, Moselyn.”

Her eyes shot wide. “I do?”

Saniel scuffed a footpaw, looked down briefly and then back at her. “Yes. And it’s been hard to not say so before now. I didn’t want Blossom to get jealous. Afterall, she chose me first. But she confided with me this morning that she’s fine with me noticing, especially now that she has Brave as a second potential mate.” He reached over and took one of her forepaws in his and kissed it lightly. “I need to go clean-up before breakfast.” He got out of the nest and made his way towards the door.

“Saniel?”

He paused and looked back at her.

“You may drop by any night and nest with Blossom and, I hope I can join you.”

His eyes lit up. “Yes, of course. Thank you.”

Blossom returned as he opened the door to leave.

“See you at breakfast,” she said to him. He nodded as he left. She turned to Moselyn who was still sitting in the nest. “I’m glad you joined us last night. Was it as good as you expected it to be?”

“As I said to Saniel while you were in the bathroom, I’ve never slept so soundly.”

Blossom nodded. “Good. You should probably go freshen-up before we head down for breakfast.”

“Huh?” Moselyn replied before realizing she was still sitting in the nest. “Oh, right.”

Both Blossom and Saniel found they were summoned to see the Schoolmaster immediately after breakfast. Both were unsure why, but arrived at the office and were ushered in by Pekan’s assistant. To their surprise, there was another cousin squirrel present who was nibbling on a butternut near the fisher. She came right over to them and asked to sniff. They sniffed each other.

“I glad to meet the smart and biggen squirrels who save my pup who take name, Brave.”

“You are Brave’s dame?”

She flicked her tail up and down once.

“She is also the new local elder,” Pekan added. He held-up his flatpanel and it repeated his statement in chitterspeak. “It’s a new program still in the testing stages that translates between chitterspeak and ‘biggenspeak’.

Again, the new elder flicked her tail up and down once. “Is good Biggen tool.”

“And biggen teaching elder no scare you?”

Brave’s mother showed her wet paws. “He is scary, but I no smell blood, so I know I safe, just as Eldest Elder speak I would be.” She then gave her full attention to Blossom. “And you are pup’s potential mate?”

Saniel gigglechittered. “If she old enough, they’d already be mates, I think. Biggen healers put her blood in Brave to save Brave.”

Blossom blushed through her fur and flicked her tail up and down once in agreement. “This will be my first winter, Elder.”

Brave’s mother nodded and embraced her in a hug. “When the time comes, may you bare many pups, small Biggen called Blossom.”

“Does it bother you that Brave take name?”

She wigwagged her tail to left to right and back once in the negative as she released her from the embrace.

“Many things will change in this forest now that old Elder is gone.” Her eyes narrowed. “He was my sire, but he was no real sire.”

“Gone?” both Blossom and Saniel asked in unison.

Pekan jumped in. “Squirrel elders from three other forests came yesterday and put him on trial. He was found guilty of rape, murder, and attempted murder. He was castrated on the spot” Pekan shuddered visibly, “and banished. Your father transported him to a small park in the middle of Forestdale. If he tries to leave the park, he is to be hunted and killed.”

“I try to be good Elder as I’ve begun to learn. I hold council with those I am elder to. As decision in this case affects all, all need have say. It is decided that we will allow your teaching elders to bring Biggen pups into our forest to learn of the forest. We will allow use of...” she paused a moment trying to think of the word, “Biggen tool called backpack to help all during fall harvest. Many of the females who fled this forest plan to return in the spring. Is too late to come now. No enough time to harvest enough food for winter even with Biggen tool. If a squirrel wish take name, they may take name. I no choose one yet, but as Elder, I feel I will.”

“Elder,” Saniel asked, “what if some of us Biggens help you with the harvest?”

“What are you suggesting, Saniel?” Pekan asked.

Saniel switched to Common as he pulled his flatpanel off his back and called up the student handbook. “Each student is expected to provide at least twenty clicks of community service. I could recruit other squirrels here who have grown out their claws like me. We could help the Elder’s people with their harvest so those females could return sooner.” He started to repeat his proposal in chitterspeak, but Pekan’s program had already repeated it back in chitterspeak.

The Elder’s tail wigwagged back and forth for a bit as she remained silent. “I would need to speak this to the others as again, this would involve all. How good are you at harvest?”

“My backpack is big enough to hold you in it, Elder. My family harvest a forest near as big as yours. Until this harvest season, just the three of us, my dame, sire, and I.”

The elder’s eyes grew wide.

“Remember, we bigger than you. We need more food. And we trade extra food with other Biggens for Biggen things like this Biggen viewer. Let me gather five or six,” he held up five and then six claws, “other Biggen squirrels and we’ll show you. We’ll harvest for one pawspan. You show us were to stash nuts and seeds. Then you can decide if we help more. To attend Biggen learning place, we had to leave before harvest start at our home forests. It feel strange to no harvest nuts and seeds.”

“You no need nuts and seeds for yourself?”

“I and other Elders provide enough food for all pups we teach, Elder,” Pekan replied. “Their parents entrust their care to us while they are here.” He turned to Saniel. “If the Elder agrees to your proposal, I will count it as service time. Perhaps you can demonstrate how well you can harvest nuts tomorrow afternoon as there are no classes scheduled then.” He turned back to the Elder after his flatpanel finished translating his statement. “What do you think, Elder?”

She flicked her tail up and down once. “Tomorrow after midday. Come straight through forest, call out until I reply.”

Saniel bowed.

After a moment of no one talking, Blossom asked, “Does Brave know you new Elder?”

She wigwagged her tail left to right once. “No yet, but he will soon. Teaching elder will take me to him in Biggen flyer.”