

SEVENTEEN

Aldin watched the prisoner as the caged squirrel slowly stirred. Eventually, the former elder opened his eyes and groaned. “Water,” he rasped.

A biggen beaver stood nearby and glanced at Aldin.

“Go ahead, Dauvin. Give him some water,” Aldin said to the beaver.

The beaver filled a small dish. Slid open a slot in the prisoner’s cage, and slipped it in.

The squirrel within slowly lapped at the water. When he had his fill, he glared at Aldin.

“My orders are to take you to your new home in banishment,” Aldin chittered. “After your male member was bit off, I take you to Biggen healer so you no bleed to death. Biggen healer also give you herbs make you sleepy, reduce pain, and keep you calm when you wake. You sleep through most of the trip. Look to your other side.”

The former elder looked at the clouds passing by out the window. He could see they were very high up and moving fast. He fearfully wigwagged his tail. “We fly higher than predator birds?”

Aldin flicked his tail up and down once. “And much faster. We in large Biggen flyer. How much Elder knowledge do you really have, former Elder? Were you taught the world is round?”

The former elder flicked his tail up and down once.

“Our world is very big. Where I take you, if you look up at sun, in your old forest, it would be six handspands higher in sky. We fly a quarter way around the world, thanks to Biggen who controls this flyer.”

The former elder drooped his tail. “Why so far?”

“Others never want you to be able to return for what you did. This so far away, you could only return with help of Biggens. We fly to large Biggen colony. Within colony is small forest big enough that you will be able to live there. Local Biggen Elders agree to let you live there if you no leave. Biggens there know what you do. As long as you stay in forest, you live. If you try and leave, Biggens will hunt and kill you. They no longer call you smart squirrel. You now big rodent. Biggens will visit forest. If you attack them, they will hunt kill you. We land in two fingers time. Biggen beaver will give you food if you are hungry.”

The former elder wigwagged his tail left to right and back once.

The drugs, the doctor had injected in the former Elder did their job. The squirrel was cooperative through the rest of the flutter flight and the follow-up in the hovercraft. Once they landed in the small park, Aldin wheeled out the former Elder’s cage and opened the door, letting him out.

The former Elder glanced briefly at Aldin and darted up the nearest tree to start exploring his new territory.

“Hello Ambassador,” Aldin heard in English from the nearest entrance to the park. He looked over at the pine marten who waved at him. Aldin scampered over near the entrance but kept his distance.

“Hello, Enhray,” he replied in English wigwagging his tail. “I thought you didn’t want to see me in person. You said you couldn’t trust yourself.”

“I’ve been working on that,” Enhray responded switching back to Common and glanced at the new sign at the entrance warning visitors about the ‘large rodent’ prisoner in the park. “I’m just as disgusted as everyone else at what the new park ‘tenant’ did to be relocated here. Some have complained to the city council about not wanting him here. A citizen found guilty on that many counts of rape and murder would die.”

“His victims judged death was too merciful. So, instead, he was castrated and is here in the closest thing to a prison for a cousin squirrel.”

“How is this a prison?”

“Provided there are no bars around the edges, but he knows if he tries to leave the park and venture out into the city, he will die, as you and any other citizen who spotted him would kill him on the spot for the very reason you stated a moment ago. So, he is basically trapped in this park and he’s all alone...”

“Just as I had been in that prison cell.”

Aldin flicked his tail up and down once. “And you were only there a few months. He has received a life sentence.”

Enhray nodded and shuddered at the thought.

“If you think you won’t attempt to hunt me, how about we go get some lunch? Well for me, it would be supper. It’s been a very long day already.”

The marten smiled. “I would love that!”