

EIGHTEEN

“Brave,” the squirrel nurse chittered. “Are you awake enough for visitors?”

The young squirrel nodded. His eyes shot wide and he began to chitter nervously when a biggen fisher poked his muzzle through the doorway.

“I do not wish to scare you, young Brave,” it spoke in Biggenspeak. Much to Brave’s surprise the statement was quickly repeated in chitterspeak. “New Biggen tool let me speak in Biggenspeak and it then repeat in chitterspeak best it can. It will also hear your chitterspeak and repeat it in Biggenspeak for me. I teaching Elder. I no come any closer as I no wish to scare you worse. I glad you live. I carried you here. I come because I bring someone who is very anxious to see you.”

“Blossom?”

“No,” he responded. “She in class.”

The new Elder nervously poked her head around the corner under the fisher. She chittered excitedly as she raced over to his hammock and began to groom him in the few spots not covered with bandages. “My pup!”

“Dame?” Brave responded. “Dame! You live!” He started to groom her in turn.

“I so sorry, my pup who take name, Brave. I flee forest last summer. I should have taken you with me.”

“You flee?”

“My sire, the former Elder, forced me to couple with him.”

Brave shuddered. “I no blame you flee. He awful.”

“Elders from three other forests including the one I flee to come to our forest yesterday. They call grand council. They put old Elder on trial. His male member bit off and he banished for life.”

Brave shuddered again. “Who replace him as Elder?”

“I have, my pup. I still have a lot to learn, but I will do my best to be good Elder, unlike my sire.” She explained to him the immediate changes. “And I meet your potential mate. I hope you both raise many litters together once she old enough. No matter if here or in her forest.”

“I think I must spend winter in her forest. Healing Biggen Helpers say I will have these things,” he pointed to his forelimb and tail casts with his good forepaw, “on until mid-winter. I can no climb until they come off.”

She flicked her tail up and down once. “Yes, I speak to healer Biggen before coming to see you. I thank him for saving you and I understand. It will work out, Brave, my pup.” She groomed him some more in affection.

“You warn me as young pup to no trust Biggens. Or become pup forever.” Brave paused a moment. “It feel that way at first here. Biggens even clean me after I make bad water and leave pellets.”

“You are adult, Brave. You no pup forever. Things change. Biggens save you. Biggens help us remove old Elder and take him far away in banishment. Tomorrow, Biggen squirrel Energy and others will help us with harvest. No all Biggens bad.”

“If tail no held down like foreleg I would flick it up and down. Energy is quick at harvest. He help me for” he held up two claws, “pawspans using his big backpack tool. I fit in it. He gather as much nuts and seeds in that time as would take me,” he held-up five claws, “days to gather on my own.”

Brave’s mother whistled in surprise. “Energy will bring,” she held up five claws, “or” she held up six claws, “other Biggen squirrels with him. If they are all that good, we’ll have plenty of food and the other females can return before first snow.”

“That would be good, Dame.”

She nuzzled him again. “I can no stay long. Those I now Elder to need me and I need to prepare them for tomorrow’s visitors. I know you in good paws here. Heal and grow strong, my pup called Brave.”

A biggen fox entered the room and stood back as Brave’s mother finished her statement. He cleared his throat.

Brave chittered nervously.

“That Biggen healer who save your life, Brave.”

“You no scared, Dame?”

She held-up a forepaw to show it was wet. “I ride here with fisher elder in Biggen flyer. I meet fox healer. Yes, I scared. They biggen predators. Fischer scare me more than fox. Fischer could easily eat me in bite or,” she held up two claws, “bites. They very kind when you speak to them. Biggens no allowed to hunt smart squirrels. When you sniff them you smell no blood. They no hunt at all!”

The fox listened to the translation of this conversation and thanked Pekan for showing him the new translation app. “I would have a bad reputation if I ate my patients, Brave,” he replied with a chuckle. “Up until now I’ve only checked on you while you were asleep as I know I’d scare you.

I need you to be awake for some things I must look at. I'll hold still while you sniff me if you need to. I would give you my name, but it won't translate to chitterspeak." After the translation program fell silent, the fox doctor slowly approached and let Brave sniff him.

"He smells like a fox in our forest, right?" Brave's dame asked him.

"Yes," Brave replied and then his eyes shot wide. "Much strong scent as I would never get this close to normal fox in our forest." Brave sniffed some more and his eyes shot wide. "But I no smell blood." He looked up at the doctor. "You no hunt as my dame elder speak?"

"My father taught me to hunt when I was an older pup. But I don't hunt as I don't need to. Now, I need you to hold still as I check some of your wounds to see how they're healing."

Brave held perfectly still as the doctor removed some of his bandages to check the wounds. His dame gasped briefly at how long some of the gashes were and the lack of fur around the wounds. Brave held still partially because he was asked to and partially because he was too scared to move.

"I assure you, his fur will grow back. We had to shave..." he paused as the translation program asked for a different word, "cut it off to properly bind his wounds. It may not match when it grows back." The fox paused a moment. "What I mean is the fur where the wounds are may point in a different direction from the rest of his fur. But it will grow back." The fox turned to Brave. "You heal fast, Brave. I can remove the stitches from this one already."

"Stitches?" The word had translated, but Brave had no idea what stitches were. "What are those?"

The fox doctor thought for a moment to try and explain. "Have you ever nibbled a long blade of grass and then tie a knot in it?"

"Yes."

"Many of your wounds were long and deep. I had to use a tool like a blade of grass, but much stronger. I poked small holes in your skin to either side of the wound and passed that grass-like tool through the holes and then tied a knot in it tight to hold your wound closed so it could heal." He held up a mirror so Brave could see the wound in question. "This is one of the smaller wounds and only needed four stitches." The fox glanced at the flatpanel that paused at the number and instructed him to hold up four claws, which he did.

"What you need me to do?"

"I need you to keep holding still. Your mother can hold your good forepaw in hers while I do this if you want. I know you are an adult. I also know you are scared. It will sting a little as I remove the stitches." The fox doctor gently snipped the four stitches. He then removed them one at a time with tweezers and applied antiseptic to the tiny holes. Brave winced but did not move. "You

live up to your name, Brave.” The fox checked over his other wounds and applied clean bandages, again showing Brave the wounds using a mirror.

Brave chittered in distress. “How I live long enough for you to help me, healing Elder? So many, many long, deep cuts. I no see until now as all covered when I awake.”

“You lost a lot of blood. I wasn’t sure if you would live, to be honest. I’m also glad to learn the one who did this to you has been punished.” The fox finished changing Brave’s bandages.

“Alright, I want you to slowly sit-up.”

“Really? I was told I should no move.”

“That was when you first arrived. While your wounds are still healing, if you move slowly, you won’t reopen them.”

Brave slowly sat-up. The fox pulled a tool from around his neck and stuck two ends of it in his ears. There was a disk-like thing at the other end. “I am going to listen to your heart. This will be a little cold to the touch, but that is all it will feel like to you.” Brave held still while the fox listened to his heart with his stethoscope. “Breath in slowly...hold your breath a moment...exhale. Excellent!” He pulled the ends of the stethoscope out of his ears and dangled the instrument around his neck again. “I think you’re ready.”

“Ready?”

“Would you like to walk slowly around the room. You will need to put your weight on your good forelimb and not the one in the cast.”

The fox helped him down out of the hammock bed. The fox showed him a backpack-like device. “You will need to wear this.” There was a sling in the back of it. “We’ll need to place your tail in here to hold it in place.” Brave cooperated as the fox helped him into the device and his tail into the sling. “You will need to do this to your tail each time you want to move around the room for now as it still needs to heal. Ready?”

Brave looked to his mother briefly who flicked her tail up and down once in encouragement. He took a hop-leap, landing on his good foreleg. It was a little awkward, especially as he couldn’t use his tail as a counterbalance. And he found he couldn’t keep a straight line without leaping towards his injured side, but he was able to scamper slowly around the room.

“Excellent. The nurses won’t have to help you when you need to urinate or defecate. You can just put on the sling and come over to the room over here on the side on your own.” The fox led him over to the bathroom, which consisted of a trough in the floor. “Straddle the trough, do your business and it’ll flush it away.” He demonstrated for the squirrel, who stared in surprise as a quick stream of water flushed through the trough after the fox made bad water. Brave tried the contraption out and then returned to his hammock.

“When you first arrived, I thought you would be here a month,” the fox paused a moment listening to the instructions from the translation program and flashed all ten claws three times and then five more claws. “You’re healing a lot faster than we expected. I think we’ll be able to let you leave in about a week” the fox held up seven claws “to ten” he held up ten claws “days.”

Brave sat-up in the hammock and bowed to the fox in thanks. He hesitated a moment and then held open his arms. The fox understood and bent forward and gently hugged the small squirrel.

“Your name really does fit you, Brave. I have other patients to tend to.” The fox departed.

“I need to leave, my pup,” he mother said and hugged him. “You will heal as healer promised.” She and Pekan left. Brave felt lonely, but he also felt better than he had just a few pawspans of time before knowing his dame was alive, was the new Elder, and most importantly, she approved of Blossom.