

TWENTY-THREE

“Will you be coming home for a brief visit with us, Saniel?”

“No, Blossom. Moselyn’s claws are long enough for her to start learning how to climb, so I’m going to teach her here.”

“Our trees are bigger. You could teach her there.”

Saniel scuffed a paw and looked down a moment grasping his tail in his forepaws. “She’s asked me to sleep alone with her while you’re away.”

Blossom grabbed his forepaws and nuzzled him. “I hope the two of you sleep well.”

“You’re not jealous?”

She gigglechittered. “As long as you’re not jealous that I’ll be doing the same with Brave the next couple of days.” She scuffed a rear paw herself. “She was smitten with you the first time you nearly bumped into each other. I’ve encouraged her.”

Saniel’s eyes widened. “And you did that before Brave made his first moves.”

She nodded. “You said to our parents you would share me when the time comes so I could raise a family. Shouldn’t that go both ways?” She raised her tail briefly in a curl.

Saniel flicked his tail up and down once and hugged her. “You’re so thoughtful, Blossom. But it still feels like I’m cheating on you. So, it really doesn’t bother you?”

She flicked her tail left to right and back once. “Of course not. I really like her and I wouldn’t mind having her as a mate-sister. I hope it works-out.”

He hugged her more tightly. “Thank you. Say hi to my folks for me.”

“I will.”

Blossom arrived at the hospital and made her way to Brave’s room. Something was much different this time. The casts on his left foreleg and tail were smaller. The tail one held it up over his body if he was on his stomach. As he sat up, it continued to hold it up so it wouldn’t drag on the floor.

“Biggen Healer changed these, um,” (sighchitter) “No word in chitterspeak for them.”

“In Biggenspeak, the thing holding your broken leg and tail together to heal is called a,” She switched to Common for the next week, “cast.” She drooped her tail. “I no know of a word for it in chitterspeak.”

“Yes, these things,” he pointed to them with his good forepaw. “Biggen healer changed them. If I am careful, I can climb short distances with this new thing. And I can carefully move the end of my tail.” He twitched it slightly.

“That’s wonderful.”

“He cut and remove last of,” he sighed. “I no remember the word. It is in chitterspeak, but I no hear it before healer speak it. Biggen tool hold my wounds closed. Loops like grass with knots but stronger.”

Blossom flicked her tail up and down once. “I understand. Biggen words are ‘medical thread’ tied in knots. Also called stitches.”

Brave flicked his tail up and down once. “Yes that is what healer called them. He cut and removed the last of them.”

The fox doctor entered. Brave held his paws open and the fox accepted a hug.

“He good fox Biggen,” Brave said.

The fox turned to Blossom. “I take it Brave has filled you in. He heals quicker than most of my patients I’ve had in the past. So much so, I was able to change out his casts for lighter/stronger models. If you’re here to transport him, he’s ready to leave. The cost has been covered by your colony.”

Blossom bowed to the fox and read his name tag on his medical smock. “Thank you, Doctor Roxle. Come on, Brave. He said you can leave.”

Brave hesitated. “I can no climb far, how am I to get to the treetops in your forest?”

“I’ll fly you up to the entrance in the Biggen flyer we will take.”

“I saw you and your sire get in one last summer. They are big tool. Tree could no support one.”

Blossom giggledchittered. “Our trees very big. It will no be problem. Come.”

Brave was amazed at how fast they flew in the hovercraft. “We fly faster than predator birds!”

Blossom flicked her tail up and down once. “Yes, but even at this speed it will be close to two handspands to get to The Refuge.”

After Brave watched the world literally fly by for a while, he curled-up and napped. Blossom joined him. A trilling noise awoke them, scaring Brave a bit. Blossom explained it was an alarm she set to ensure they would be awake before they arrived. She went over to the command panel and typed in a change in their course. Brave stared at the huge trees as the hovercraft began to slow down and rise into the sky. It came to a stop on a huge branch on one of those trees and the doorway opened. Brave's home nest tree was only slightly smaller in diameter than this one branch.

"I told you that you wouldn't need to climb. After you get out, I need to bring the flyer down to the ground before I can send it on its way. It won't take me long to climb back up and join you."

Brave got out and watched as Blossom rode the flyer down to the forest floor far below. True to her word, she got out and was quickly back up by his side as the flyer flew back the way it had come.

"Welcome to your home away from home, Brave," she led him towards a round door in the tree. "Actually, this is new for me too, so I may be just as surprised. They were still working on this tree home when I left for Biggen school. If it is anything like the one Energy's family lives in, it'll be a combination of Biggen and smart squirrel things" She pointed down with her tail to the strange structure on the forest floor leading from the base of the tree back towards the local Biggen village. "And I have no idea what that is about. It was no there when I leave for Biggen school at harvest time. I will ask." She touched the door and it opened. "Hello?" she called out.

An excited chittering echoed from the inside and she was nearly barreled over by her mother. They hugged and sniffed.

"Dame, this is Brave, my second potential mate." She then looked at Brave. "This is my dame, Pinecone, she is one of the Elders here."

Pinecone and Brave sniffed each other. "I hear alot about you, Brave. Welcome." She pulled him into a warm embrace.

"Dame, what is that structure on the forest floor leading from the base of our tree?"

"That long story, Blossom. Local Biggen village no have teacher. Our Council of Elders met with theirs. We are allowing their pups to attend our school. What you see down there will be a tunnel from here to the village so after snow falls their pups may still come here."

"So, after buried in snow it will be like woodchuck tunnel?"

"Something like that. Biggens very busy last seven days building those. Just in time. I think first snow will come very soon. I smell snow in air at sunrise. Come, I show you around our combined Biggen/smart squirrel nest home."

Pinecone lead them into the tree home and Brave stared around. It was much larger than he expected and there were many Biggen tools. He froze as a Biggen raccoon rounded the corner from a different room. Blossom bounded right up to the raccoon and hugged him. The raccoon then scooted down trying to make himself look smaller.

“Come sniff, no be afraid, you no bite, I no bite,” the raccoon spoke in perfect chitterspeak.

Brave nervously approached him and sniffed him. To his surprise the raccoon’s fur smelled strongly of smart squirrel.

“Brave, this is Curious, he mate to Butternut, our Biggen things schoolteacher. She is trying to convince my sire to be her second mate.”

“Because I can no give her pups and she want pups,” Raoul added. “It long tale why I and smart squirrel are mates. There will be plenty of time later for I and she speak it to you. I show you your nest space.”

He led them to a stairwell. Brave stared at the strange to him steps.

“This Biggen tool for Biggens who no can climb up and down like squirrels. I can climb a little but no as good as squirrels.” He pointed to Brave’s cast. “And I think you can no climb much with that on, right?”

Brave sighchittered. “No.” The tip of his tail wigwagged left to right and back.

The raccoon nodded. “Well, these go all the way to the ground inside the tree. So you no trapped up here while you heal.” Raoul led them up to the next level and down a short tunnel to a room. “Blossom’s sire and dame build a nest for you. As you spend long time at healer place, you know about trough to leave bad water and pellets in?”

“Yes,” Brave answered as the tip of his tail flicked up and down once. It felt strange to him to have the bottom half of his tail restrained, but at least he didn’t have to concentrate on not letting it wigwag anymore.

Raoul showed him the bathroom next to the nesting space. “Is same here. I leave you two be.” The raccoon walked upright back down the tunnel to the stairwell.

Brave nervouslychittered. “He nearly as big as fox healer.”

“Curious is harmless. As you will learn later, he thinks he is a squirrel trapped in Biggen raccoon body.”

They inspected the nest.

“Is very big.”

“I think my dame and sire think Energy was coming home to visit with us.”

“Yes. I mean no just the nest. This tree. Is very big.”

“Trees here very old. Is why they so big.”

“I think all squirrels in my home forest could live in this one tree.”

“Well, come winter, there will be many squirrels in here sharing warmth when the storms come.”

Brave’s stomach grumbled making Blossom gigglechitter. “Come, let’s go find where the food storage is.”