

TWENTY-SIX

“Hello Brave,” Raoul greeted the injured squirrel as he set a bowl of hot cereal down on the low table off the kitchen. Brave was sitting on a cushion nibbling on an assortment of butternuts, seeds, and acorns.

Brave bowed to the raccoon. He was still getting used to how different things were in this huge tree two days after Blossom had returned to the Biggen learning place. He liked the soft sitting cushions. On the other paw, he was surprised to learn that Biggen teeth didn’t continuously grow like his own and that’s why they needed to cook their food, making it soft. He had tried a little of Raoul’s breakfast the previous day. He didn’t like it as it was too soft and mushy.

“Are you bored with staying in this tree?” Raoul asked between mouthfuls of cereal.

Brave flicked the tip of his tail up and down once. “Yes, but I can no climb much with this,” he raised his cast covered forelimb briefly. “I can climb Biggen path to ground, but then what?”

“You have no gone outside the way you came in and looked around?”

Brave’s tail tip wigwagged left to right and back again.

“After we done eating, I show you something.”

Eating nuts always took longer than it took the Biggen raccoon to eat his food. Raoul patiently waited for him.

“Come.”

Raoul led him out the main entrance onto the huge branch. It was so wide the raccoon could easily walk on it. He scooted down on all four paws much to Brave’s surprise.

“Is safer if I keep all four paws and claws on the branch, Brave. Is long way to ground. If I fall I might die. Look around.”

Brave did so. He stared in amazement at all the huge trees around them.

“I can no control my tail like you, Brave. I must point with my paw instead. Look over that way,” Raoul pointed with his left handpaw along the left side of the tree. “Do you think you could climb around to that other branch with that,” he switched to Common for the next word, “cast?”

Brave flicked his tail tip up and down once. It wasn’t more than his body length-and-a-half around to the other branch. He could have easily jumped the distance without the cast. He watched Raoul work his way around the tree using his claws. He could see the raccoon had to concentrate while doing it. He followed once Raoul was safely on the other branch.

“No tell my mate I do that. She get upset.” He pitched his voice a little higher. “You no squirrel. You no risk fall climbing like squirrel!” He did a good imitation of a gigglechitter. “I no climb as good as a squirrel, but I climb for many years.” He pointed along the branch. “Look that way, Brave.”

Brave looked along the branch. There was a crossing branch to the next tree low and close enough to this branch that they could cross without needing to jump. His eyes widened.

“It is like that among many of the trees here at this level. I can cross easily and travel through the canopy like a squirrel. Even with your cast, you can too. I could lead you, or I can find another squirrel to go with you, help you learn your way around, and help you find your way back. You no need stay trapped in our nest tree.”

“Curious, you really are squirrel trapped in Biggen raccoon body.” He bowed to the large raccoon. “Lead the way.”

Raoul smiled at the compliment and led Brave on a tour through the forest along easy to cross branches.

“...Curious then led me around the forest through the canopy. I no need climb or leap from branch to branch at level he lead me on.”

“That’s wonderful, Brave. I so worried you would get bored in nest tree.”

“After so long in healing place, I ready for change. I fought down fear and hug Curious to thank him when we return.”

“I’m sure it made him very happy.”

“It did. As he lead me around, I meet other squirrels I no meet when you here and all friendly to me.” Brave fell silent a moment. When he continued there was a bit of awe in the tone of his voice. “Including Eldest Elder. He insist I call him Elder or Teacher, but no call him Eldest Elder.”

“Teacher no like use Eldest Elder title except when must.”

Brave nodded on the screen as his tail tip flicked up and down once. “He invite me to Elder things,” he hesitated as he struggled with the next new-to-him word, “class starting tomorrow. I will start to learn from him, Elder Tassel, Elder Foxy, and your Dame.”

“That’s wonderful. Is rule our forest, any who wish may learn Elder things.”

“Elder Teacher explain to me why. Your dame’s dame very wise.” Brave scuffed a rear paw.
“And is something to do.”

Blossom flicked her tail up and down once. “Yes, my granddame very wise make that rule.” She yawned covering her mouth with her tail tip. “Sorry. I need to go sleep soon. I glad you are finding things to do at The Refuge.”

Brave flicked his tail tip up and down once, waved and ended the call.