

THIRTY-NINE

That night, the four of them nested in Saniel's family tree. Like back at senior school, Moselyn slept soundly. She was nuzzled awake by Saniel. She blinked, rubbed her eyes with the back of her hands and rolled over. She felt someone quickly dart out of the nest. Saniel gigglechittered.

"This time, it was Brave's tail you somehow pinned down," he whispered.

Moselyn yawned. "I'm going to sleep some more," she managed and settled back down tucked in to Saniel with Blossom, who remained asleep through this in between them.

"Of course, it's the middle of the night. I think you rolled over in your sleep and put pressure on Brave's bladder."

Moselyn quickly fell back to sleep. Soon after Brave returned and snuggled down on Moselyn's other side. As she was already fast asleep, she didn't notice he had snuffled her fur again.

"I no know how it would work," he quietly chittered to Saniel. "But I can get used to having two Biggen squirrels in shared nest. So warm." He yawned and quickly fell back to sleep himself. Saniel soon followed.

It was snowing moderately in the morning. Both Blossom and Saniel warned Moselyn that it was dangerous to venture out in such weather due to the lack of visibility. Moselyn took time to jot down notes of her initial impressions for smart squirrel life for her report. To her surprise, Blossom and Brave snuggled down on a larger sitting cushion and napped.

"In bad weather, that's what they'll do," Saniel explained. "Conserve energy by sleeping and wait out the storm." He nuzzled her along the cheek. "We could go back up to our shared room and do likewise. They might wake and join us at some point, but if you want some alone snuggle time, here's your chance."

Moselyn didn't hesitate, following him back up towards their shared room. Blossom cracked open an eye as they departed, smiled, as she hoped they would go off and have some alone time. She finally allowed herself to truly relax and was soon snoozing with Brave.

Moselyn followed him into their shared room. He got into the nest and she followed. He nuzzled her on the cheek. "Care for a little cousin squirrel-style grooming before we snuggle?" he quietly asked coyly and began to groom her backfur as she settled in next to him with licks and gentle nibbles. She stiffened. He quickly paused and began to apologize to her, but she cut him off.

"No, don't apologize. You caught me off guard, that's all. That...that felt pleasant. Please continue, but only if you help me learn to do the same in return."

Saniel nodded and soon, the two of them took turns grooming each other in the nest with licks, nuzzles, and gentle nibbles. After a brief time, they moved from back grooming to grooming each other's chest fur, which led to passionate kissing and licking of each other's noses, muzzles, and tongues. Moselyn rolled over, sprawled on her stomach, lifting her tail along her back, and arched under him. Saniel stopped himself though instinct screamed at him to mount her. Moselyn leaned-up, twisting her upper body enough to be able to nuzzle/nibble his cheek. She muttered a quiet, pleading mew.

"Why do you hesitate?" she whispered.

Saniel fought hard against the instinct within him to do as she asked. Tears filled his eyes as he collapsed onto his side into the nest next to her. "I can't. Not here. Not now."

She gently nibbled at his neck. "Why not?"

"This is The Refuge, Moselyn," he replied. "We follow smart squirrel rules here, which are the equivalent of Citizen Laws. If we couple here, we would be considered mates. In other words, the citizen equivalent of married."

Her eyes widened in surprise. "But we're not cousin squirrels."

"No, but as my family are members of The Refuge, we fall under their rules." He sighchittered and gently nuzzled her cheek. After a moment of hesitation, he continued. "It's too soon for me, Moselyn. I'm not ready for that level of commitment. We've gotten too carried away with the grooming. The times Blossom and I groomed each other last summer only led to snuggling and sleep. Not these sorts of urges."

Moselyn's tail drooped, but she accepted his reasoning. "Perhaps because you weren't mature enough then and she was too young for it to be more than grooming," she gently nibbled at one of his ears. "I'll give you the time. I'll ask you again sometime in the coming semester on some night we get alone back at school. The rules here do not apply there. I'm sure Blossom will want to go visit Brave at some point."

"I'll agree to that."

"Good." Moselyn snuggled down next to Saniel and nuzzled his chestfur. "I'll hold you to it," she whispered and was soon asleep.

He gently stroked her back with his free hand, the other being pinned under her. The Refuge's rule was the only thing that stopped him. He sighchittered quietly before sleep soon overtook him.