

FORTY-SIX

Carulin wasn't sure how long she sat there hugging her son. She knew it had been quite some time as she was starting to get cold as the snow clung to the portions of her fur she hadn't had time to properly dry off. Finally, a hovercraft arrived. A citizen marten and a citizen fox stepped out. Both sank slightly in the snow. A container hovered between them. Both wore constable badges on their chest fur.

"Will you be alright a moment, Saniel?" She asked. He sniffled and nodded. She released him from the hug and turned to the constables. She shivered slightly "Thank you for coming so quickly. I am Carulin of The Refuge. My husband, Jessophat, serves as an elder of The Refuge. That's the equivalent of a town councilor. At the moment, he is somewhere between here and Rock City in a hovercraft. This is our son, Saniel."

"I'm Constable Jeanna," the marten stated. She nodded to the fox. "This is Constable Makaden."

The fox left the container hovering by Jeanna, went back to the hovercraft, and returned with a blanket that he offered Carulin. She wrapped herself in it as she thanked him.

"Please forgive me as I must ask you these questions," Jeanna stated glancing at her flatpanel. "Who is the deceased, m'am?"

Makaden moved the container over by Blossom's body. The fox opened the container. He gently brushed the snow off her body, lifted it, and carefully laid it in the container.

Tears rolled down Carulin's eyes. "Blossom Busheytail," she answered and continued with answers for the next few questions before they were asked. "Smart cousin squirrel, about nine months old, equivalent to a 11- or 12-year-old citizen. Death by predation."

Jeanna did her best to keep her composure, but gasped. "The Ambassador's daughter?"

Makaden paused in his work and looked towards his partner.

"Yes," Carulin answered.

"Creator bless," both the marten and fox uttered.

"Jeanna, please come see," Makaden requested.

She came over and he showed her Blossom's broken neck and the puncture wound to the chest.

"Creator bless," Jeanna uttered again as her partner closed the container. After closing it, purple lights lit up in the lid indicating a proper seal. He guided it back towards the hovercraft. She turned back to Carulin and Saniel. "At least she didn't suffer." She looked back at her flatpanel. It was always tough needing to collect the dead, but usually, death was by illness or natural

causes. Not by being killed. Murder of any sort was rare in their society. Yet, she had offered to do just that a season earlier in her appointment as temporary ambassador to the smart cousin squirrels surrounding Rock City. Citizen predation was next to unheard of but did occur in the outer villages once in a while.

“Type of predator?” Jeanna asked, going through the questions she had to ask.

“A large raptor. See for yourself, at least what’s left of it,” Saniel replied quietly.

Jeanna looked closely at Saniel for the first time and noticed the blood and feathers in his fur.

“I tried to save her,” he stammered as his eyes filled again with tears. “I gave chase after the bird took her in its talons. It landed and the bird was swallowing her. Her tail...it was still twitching as the bird swallowed her. That’s when I caught-up and killed it trying to save her. I tore it open to pull her out. But...but...she was dead long before it swallowed her.” The tears flowed freely as Carulin hugged him close again.

“Master Saniel,” Jeanna replied. “Sometimes with blunt force trauma, like how Ms. Busheytail was killed, will result in nerves firing off for a few ceclicks after death causing muscle spasms. That is most likely what caused her tail to twitch as you witnessed. Were you and she friends?”

“They were dating,” Carulin stated as she hugged and rocked her son again.

Makaden walked over to the blood-stained depression to look at the partially ripped-apart bird carcass. He uttered a cuss under his breath. He looked over at his partner. “Jeanna, this reminds me of the owl incident a year-and-half back.”

“That was this same forest,” Carulin replied. “The smart cousin squirrel who died in that incident did so saving Saniel from the owl.”

Jeanna stared at the two citizen squirrels. “Small world.” She turned to her partner. “In what way?” she asked as she moved over to take a better look and gasped. “I’ve never seen such a huge raptor.”

“A falcon to be specific,” Makaden added. “Larger than any falcon I’ve ever seen or heard of. Just like the giant owls last time. That was just before you were assigned to assist in this area.”

Jeanna snapped photos of it with her flatpanel. She turned back to the two citizen squirrels. “Were you the only witnesses to her death?”

“I was not a witness,” Carulin replied. “Two others besides Saniel saw her die. They are at our home. The rest of the Council of Elders should be there by now.”

Jeanna nodded. “Please take us there.”

Carulin looked her over and then the fox. “You will have an easy time, Constable Jeanna, as I see you have full claws. Are you as good with them as your cousin species?”

“I can climb if that is what you are asking.”

“Good as our home is 15 mits above the forest floor. A little less than that right now due to the snow cover.”

Makaden ears twitched as Carulin looked over at him. “You could probably land your hovercraft on a branch, or we can drop a rope ladder down for you.”