

FORTY-SEVEN

Makaden brought another, larger hover container out of the hovercraft and over to the eviscerated falcon carcass. Donning gloves and with Jeanna's assistance, they collected the remains. As the container sealed, the lights on it turned purple just like the ones that now contained Blossom's remains. They walked it back to the craft and indicated to Carulin and Saniel to join them. It was over a half kamit¹ back to their nest tree. Saniel was shocked at the distance. He hadn't realized how far he had chased the bird trying in vain to save Blossom.

Jeanna piloted the hovercraft up onto the branch outside the entrance and waited for the others to step out. As they went in, she brought it down to the snow-covered forest floor and easily scaled the tree back up. Jeanna quickly observed everything within as she entered. Makaden had waited by the entrance for her. In addition to Carulin and Saniel, there was one more citizen squirrel with rather unusual fur coloration and tassel ears, whom Carulin was now comforting with her son, the three of them in a group hug/huddle. There were six cousin squirrels, one with fur nearly as orange red as her law enforcement partner. Another wept as she was hugged by two others. The last two were near the others, but also seemed to not want to be in the way. She recognized one of those two as Eldest Elder Teacher. Someone cleared their throat behind her. She turned her head and saw a citizen raccoon in the entrance. She stepped aside for him.

He glanced at her and her partner's badges as he stepped through the doorway, closing it behind him. "Pardon me, Constables," he said. "We're outside of the local power grid. We need to keep the door closed as much as possible to minimize the amount of heating necessary, which in turn, minimizes the drain on the batteries which need sunshine to recharge."

"And you are?"

"Dr. Raoul Kaynobble," he introduced himself and bowed to her.

"The cousin squirrel expert?" Makaden asked

He nodded as Jeanna tapped a few icons on her flatpanel.

"Aren't you a little far from home?" Makaden continued. "This isn't Nadowahoc, Northeast Hills region."

"Yes, this is a little far from my previous home. My current home is about a hundred mits back that way now," he said pointing back at the entrance. "I got word of what happened almost immediately afterward." He tapped the flatpanel on his hip with a claw. "You'll want to watch your step out there about three mits from the entrance. There's semi-frozen blood on it. So, I would guess that is where it happened."

"And you're living here now because?" Jeanna asked.

¹ Kamit-kilometer, approximately six-tenths of a mile.

“I made the move for my wife’s sake. She was recently the Parliament representative for Northeast Hills region. She’s now a teacher here at The Refuge.” He pointed to one of the cousin squirrels trying to comfort the one who was weeping. “There was an accident in her lab at Nadowahoc College resulting in her transformation from citizen to cousin squirrel. She spent six years living among cousin squirrels and saw a lot of predations and comforted a lot of those who knew the dead. When she returned, she never could quite suppress the cousin fear instincts around citizens. That is why we’ve relocated here and it’s working out here for her quite well so far.”

He pointed to the huddled group of cousin squirrels. “The one weeping is the Ambassador’s wife, Pinecone Busheytail, who is a member of the Council of Elders, and Blossom’s mother. The other one comforting her is her mother, Tassel, who is the head Elder here. The one with fur nearly the same color as your partner is Elder Foxy, leader of those who survived the fire outside of Forestdale last spring. She and the others relocated here and quickly integrated in. The remaining two are Eldest Elder Teacher, and Brave. The latter is from the forest next to Rock City Senior School and is spending the winter here recovering from injuries. The other young citizen squirrel with tasseled ears is Moselyn. She is a student at Rock City Senior School and came here for the Solstice break to study cousin squirrel life. Finally, Ambassador Aldin and Carulin’s husband, Jessophat estimate they are still half-a-klick away.”

“You don’t seem to be in as much grief as them.”

“Trust me, I’ll break down later and will probably weep. The deceased was special to all here. However, right now, I need to look and act calm for their sake.”

Jeanna nodded. “You’ll excuse me. Dr. Kaynobble. I need to conduct more interviews. She moved over towards the three citizen squirrels. Makaden stayed by the entrance with Raoul.

“I’m sure I’ll be more hinderance than help due to my species and size,” Makaden stated.

Raoul nodded. “Though Jeanna may find it a challenge herself. Cousin martins prey on cousin squirrels.”

Moselyn explained what she witnessed to Jeanna and broke down crying again. She pointed towards Brave before Carulin wrapped both her and Saniel in a group hug under the loaned blanket. Jeanna turned towards Teacher and Brave. The two cousin squirrels watched her approach but neither fled, though their tails twitched nervously.

Teacher started typing away on his flatpanel and it spoke for him. “We meet again, Constable Jeanna, though some day, I would like us to meet under better circumstances. At least now I have some grasp of written Biggenspeak.” He turned to Brave as he continued to type. “Constable Jeanna, this is Brave. You’ve seen him before, but only through recording.” He turned to Brave and switched to chitterspeak. “This Biggen Martin serve as Biggen Elder rule enforcer. She also was Elder Voice for Biggen Elders at your dame’s sire’s trial. She hunt catch him when he try to flee from trial. She hold him down while he was punished. She offered to hunt kill him if Grand Council had decided that as his punishment.”

As her flatpanel translated the conversation for Jeanna, the martin looked him up and down, which made Brave nervous.

“Your fur looks out of place on parts of your body,” Jeanna stated, “but not too bad. You’ve healed well compared to how you looked in your video testimony about your grandfather.”

Brave slowly typed on his flatpanel as his tail wigwagged rapidly. “Thank you. I still learning Biggenspeak, Biggen Elder Rule Enforcer Jee-Nah. Is hard to do when instinct is screaming, ‘run, martin will kill eat you!’ I know you will no do that. When I no scared is easier. I still scared after seeing Blossom hunt killed. As for former Elder my old forest, he no grandsire to me. I glad he punished and banished.”

“Would it help reduce your fear if I crouch down and look smaller?”

Brave’s tail wigwagged left to right and back once as he typed on his flatpanel. “No. I’ll fight the fear best I can. Teacher warn me you would ask questions. Ask.”

“As you have stated you saw Blossom die, would you please explain what you saw?”

Brave drooped his tail and nodded while he typed. “Yes. I see my potential mate, Blossom, hunt killed. Large predator bird swoop in very fast. No time cry warning. Take Blossom with talons She speaking when hunt killed, cut off mid-word. She no suffer. I cried out warning after she hunt killed. I try pulling Moselyn into tree to safety. Where one predator bird, there can be two. She froze in fear on tree branch. I bite her to get her attention. She then follow me in. Sunshine,” Brave paused a moment. “That smart squirrel name for Carulin. She rush out of bathroom dripping wet. She got us to calm down enough to tell her Blossom was dead. She then raced out to look for Sanial as he no come in with us. I summon Elder Council as she instruct. Moselyn and I then hug crying over loss of our friend.”

“Thank you, Brave.”

Brave wept and chattered. “Blossom saved my life. She give blood healer put in me so I would live.” His tail drooped. “I could no do same for her.” Jeanna’s flatpanel translated it for her.

“I’m sorry for your loss. I must speak to your Elders.”

He nodded and scampered over to Carulin, Sanial, and Moselyn. They gathered him into their group hug/huddle and he wept with them.

Jeanna approached the group of cousin squirrels. Pinecone pushed back the tears. Butternut stepped aside as the other Elders including Teacher gathered with Pinecone. They spoke quietly among themselves. They broke out of their huddle and Tassel stepped forward.

She typed into her flatpanel. “As we have Biggens who do not chitterspeak, I will type Biggenspeak. Elder Rule Enforcer Jeanna, you appear to need to speak to us Elders. Speak.”

Jeanna nodded. "Thank you. I wish to pass my condolences onto all. My partner and I also need to know what to do with Blossom Busheytail's body."

All the Elders stared at her. Tassel typed-replied, "Blossom was hunt killed. How is it you recovered her body?"

Saniel pulled out of his mother's embrace and nervously stepped forward. His fur was still splattered with blood and feathers. "Elder Tassel, I killed the raptor. It had swallowed Blossom whole. I then ripped it open and tried to save Blossom, but she was already dead."

"We have also recovered the body of the falcon that killed Blossom," Jeanna replied.

Tassel looked at the others who flicked their tails up and down once. "Show us this fall-can."

They followed the martin out of the tree and down to the hovercraft and returned after ten ceclicks. All four of them were nervously wigwagging their tails.

Tassel typed again. "Saniel, please step forward."

"We, Elders have seen this fall-can that hunt-killed Blossom and you then hunt killed."

Saniel bowed his head. "Yes, I thought Blossom was still alive and could be saved. I will eat the bird if required of me."

Tassel's and the other Elder's tails wigwagged left to right and back once as she typed. "You were very lucky in your kill. This fall-can was big enough that it could have hunt-killed you. While you could not save Blossom, you saved many others here. We rule you do not need to eat your kill as you were defending the colony."

Saniel bowed his head. "Thank you, Elder Tassel." He looked at the others. "And Elders Pinecone, Foxy, and Teacher." He returned to his mother and the group hug/huddle.

Jeanna spoke up. "What is this about Master Saniel thinking he needs to eat the falcon?"

Tassel typed on her flatpanel. "Is rule here at The Refuge and at some other smart squirrel forests. If you kill, you must eat your kill unless that kill is in self-defense or in trying to save another's life. Jessophat, Carulin, and Saniel joined our colony when it was formed. So, they follow both Biggen rules and smart squirrel rules. As he was trying to save another's life, though in vain, we have ruled he does not need to eat the fall-can as you call the predator bird."

Jeanna nodded. "Thank you. We still need to know what to do with Blossom Busheytail's body."

Pinecone shed a few tears as she typed. "We must wait for my mate."

Jeanna nodded again. “Very well. We shall wait.” She moved over back by her partner to give the squirrels some space.

Jessophat and Aldin arrived soon after. Both went straight to their mates and comforted them. Tassel gave them a few ceclicks and then chittered for attention. She typed on her flatpanel. “Biggen martin Rule Enforcer Jeanna wish know what is to be done with Blossom’s body.”

Aldin stared at Tassel and then at the martin. “Her body? I was told she died by predation. How is it that her body was recovered?”

Saniel stepped forward. “I tried to save her, Ambassador. I killed the falcon, ripped it open, and pulled her body out of its stomach.” He drooped his tail. “But then I saw she was dead long before I had killed her killer. The Elders have ruled I do not need to eat the falcon.”

Aldin scampered over to him and hugged him tightly, holding him for a few ceclicks weeping silent tears into the larger squirrel’s chest fur. He then pulled back and looked up at Saniel. “Thank you for trying and for recovering her body. Her death won’t be in vain.”

“What do you mean?”

Aldin pulled his flatpanel off his back and called-up the Rock City Senior School agreement he and Pinecone had signed to allow Blossom to attend. The same agreement Saniel’s parents had to go over with him. Aldin scrolled through it to show Saniel a specific section.

Section 32, Paragraph C, by initialing here you have discussed with your child about organ donation should he/she pass while attending school and they agree to be a donor. Or by initialing here, you have discussed the same with your child and they do not wish to be a donor.

He showed Saniel that the first line was initialed. “I know of one potential recipient already and there may be others depending on which organs were not damaged. Once the medical examiner has done what they need to do, I need to reach out to my contacts in several forests.”

Aldin paused a moment and then continued. “There’s one more thing, which may be a bit harder for you and your classmates She reached-out to me after the optional lab she took where she killed and dissected a small rodent.” He paused briefly. “And ate as much of it as she could with her lab partner finishing it. She asked me to help her complete the required documents to will her remains to the school’s biology program if there were any recovered after her death. Of course, none of us imagined this would happen so soon.” He shed a few tears.

Pinecone moved up next to her mate and quickly typed. “Blossom continues to help others even after her death.” Her eyes filled with tears and Aldin embraced her. The two wept on each other’s shoulders.

