

FORTY-EIGHT

From: Pekan, Schoolmaster, Rock City Senior School

To: All Rock City Senior School students and parents

Subject: Spring Semester delayed due to student death

It is with a heavy heart that I report that our first cousin squirrel student, Blossom Busheytail, was killed near her home by predation yesterday afternoon. Our condolences go out to her family and friends. Out of respect for the deceased, we will delay the start of the spring semester by a week, giving those of you who knew her more time to mourn at home. We have counselors in place near all of you for those who wish to use them. We will also have counselors on campus.

Moselyn's flatpanel buzzed indicating an incoming message. She answered it and was surprised to see Schoolmaster Pekan on screen.

"Schoolmaster Pekan?"

The fisher nodded. "Hello Moselyn. I hope you are doing alright after what has happened. There is a counselor in Oak Valley, about a 20 ceclick hovercraft ride away from you should you feel you need to speak to one."

"Thank you, Schoolmaster," Moselyn bowed her head. "I might put those services to use. It's been a rough time here."

Pekan nodded again. "Very understandable. Due to the circumstances, you will not be required to write a report about your stay at The Refuge."

Tears filled Moselyn's eyes. "I will still write and turn one in, Schoolmaster. If for no other reason than because Blossom would have expected me to finish this assignment."

"Very well. I'm sorry to bring this up, but I must. School policy is that no one is to have a room alone. But we don't have any new female students joining us this term. Due to the circumstances, I can waive that policy for this term only or you can be moved into a triple with two other existing students. Next fall you'll be back to a regular room with a new roommate."

Moselyn closed her eyes thinking for a moment. "If possible, I'd rather be alone this semester. I suspect Sanial will need company and it would be easier to provide that company if I don't need to plan with two other roommates."

Pekan nodded. "Very well. One more thing. Your parents wish to speak to you. As you know we shield students exploring alternative lifestyles from family pressure. However, due to what has

occurred, I said I would ask, warning them you might not wish to speak to them. They never sent a reply through me from your last message.”

Moselyn closed her eyes in thought for a moment. “Give them my mentor’s contact info. I’ll let her judge whether or not I should speak to them at this time.”

Soon after the constables had left the previous evening, Blossom’s siblings and their potential mates arrived, wept with the others and pulled Brave away with them, naming him their brother in blood and they would mourn the loss of their sister with their brother. Brave hadn’t returned yet. So, lunch was a quiet, somber event that day with it being just Saniel’s parents, Saniel, and Moselyn.

“I spoke briefly with your parents this morning as you requested, Moselyn,” Carulin spoke as she lathered cherry preserves on a piece of toasted butternut bread. “I told them that before they pass judgement on this lifestyle, they should come see what it’s like for themselves. Then, and only then, if they wish to speak to you, I’ll allow it.”

“How did they react?”

Carulin looked directly at Moselyn. “They cut-off the call.”

Moselyn’s tail drooped. “Thank you. Obviously, if I spoke to them, it would just make things worse.”

Saniel remained silent, looking down at his lunch, but not touching it.

“And you, young man,” Carulin lightly scolded Saniel, “had best eat something. You know she’d want you to go on with your life. I’ve arranged a counselor session for you later this afternoon over in Oak Valley as you, obviously, need it.” She glanced at Moselyn. “The counselor can take you both at once, or back-to-back if you feel you need it too, Moselyn.”

“Thank you, Carulin. When I spoke to Schoolmaster Pekan earlier this morning, he suggested it. I do feel I need to talk things through with a professional and not just about Blossom.” She drooped her tail.

Saniel finally picked up the butternut butter and cherry preserve sandwich and started eating. But he continued to remain silent.