

FORTY-NINE

“I’ll need to apologize to Mom for my sulking and thank her for making me go,” Saniel stated as he and Moselyn got back into the hovercraft for the trip back to The Refuge. “Though, I will probably need some more sessions once we’re back at school.”

“I’m happy to see you starting to sound normal again. Though, I think the counselor will need help from the look on his muzzle when you finished describing the encounter.” Moselyn shuddered a little.

As the hovercraft lifted off, Saniel reached for and squeezed Moselyn’s hands gently. “I appreciate your willingness to sit in on that, Moselyn. I wasn’t sure if I could share it only with him. Though, I was afraid I would traumatize you in the process. It really did help to get it off my chest, so to speak.”

“I trust and care for you, Saniel,” she replied, gently squeezing back. “We shared that trauma. It was best we worked it out together. You did the best that you could with the circumstances.” She scuffed a footpaw. “And I’ve watched a lot of horror films over the years.”

Saniel was taken aback. “Horror films?”

Moselyn nodded. “I liked to scare myself.” She fell silent for a moment and then continued more quietly. “But now that I’ve experienced the real thing, I don’t think I’ll watch many of those anymore.” She then waggled her fully clawed toes on her left foot. “And now, I also know that I’m in the right about growing these out.”

“Are you really sure about your decision?”

She nodded. “I believe I’ve grown a lot inside in these past two weeks at The Refuge, Saniel. I’ve made a lot of friends among your smart squirrel neighbors. Why would I want to abandon that now, especially, when that would mean leaving you? You heard me in there. From the first day I met her, Blossom wanted me to be there for you.”

Saniel smiled while shedding a tear. “Thank you.” He squeezed her paws gently again and then released them. “So, do you wish to work on your report on the ride back?”

Moselyn gigglechattered. “Silly. I can work on that later. Right now, what I’d like to do is comfort,” she switched to broken chitterspeak, “my potential mate.” She leaned over and started to groom his right arm and neck with licks and gentle nibbles. Saniel didn’t resist and began doing the same. Remembering her earlier promise to him, mutual grooming was as far as it went on the ride back.

As they entered Saniel's home, a familiar voice chattered out and bounded-up to the two of them. All three group hugged.

"Brave!" Moselyn exclaimed. "I was starting to worry about you."

"Sunshine speak you go see special healer," Brave chattered, drooped his tail and pulled his flatpanel off his back and typed. "Sorry. Carulin said you both went to see a special healer, one who helps with the hurt inside."

"Yes, we did," Saniel replied. "He was a big help. If you need to speak with him, we can help you get an appointment."

"But you might find it hard to speak to him, Brave," Moselyn added. "He's a wolf."

Brave nervoustailtwitched at the thought of speaking to a biggen wolf healer. "I'm alright," he typed. "It helped me to spend time with my three new brothers and their potential mates. I nested with them last night. They want me to continue nesting with them. Will you mind if I nest with other smart squirrels instead of you?"

"Of course not!" Saniel replied.

Moselyn offered to hug Brave and he accepted the embrace from the larger squirrel. "You are a very special friend to us, Brave. You are welcome to join us anytime. We are not offended you wish to nest with your new brothers."

Brave bowed in thanks and typed some more. "I also talked with Elder Foxy. She is very helpful. She has seen a lot of smart squirrels die." He shuddered all over for a moment. "She also surprised me with some of what she said. She knows of three or four females who might try to win me over in a few weeks after I'm allowed a little more time to mourn," he drooped his tail, "Blossom's death." A few tears trickled down his eyes.

"So soon?" Moselyn asked.

"Smart squirrels move on quickly. We must. As a prey species, if we dwelled on a loss for long, we would never have a happy moment. And Blossom would expect me to move on, just as she would do so if it had been me instead of her who was hunt killed." His tail drooped again. "Elder Foxy said those females have been eyeing me since I first arrived, but kept their distance because Blossom already claim me as hers. They would have had to approach her first for permission, much as she gave you permission to win Saniel over. It will be dark soon. I need to get back to my brothers and their potential mates."

"Wait here a moment, Brave," Saniel asked. He darted up to his room and returned quickly with a small brush in his hands.

"That Blossom's Biggen fur brush tool," Brave chattered in surprise.

“Yes, she had left it in my room after the last night we all slept together. She reminded me when you and Moselyn were play chasing, per the rules in many smart squirrel forests, Blossom and you were already mates because she saved your life. I’m sure she would have wanted you to have it. So, this is now your fur brush.”

Brave took the brush and clutched it close to his chest, closing his eyes and more tears ran down his muzzle. “I smell her scent on it,” he chittered. Sanial quietly translated the exchange to Moselyn. Brave then reached out to Sanial with open arms and the two hugged tightly.

“Thank you,” he chittered as they released each other. Brave turned to Moselyn and typed on his flatpanel. “Will you please brush my back, Moss?” He offered the brush to her.

“Of course, Brave,” she replied. She took the brush from him and gently stroked his back fur with it. He arched into it and chitterpurred at the attention.

As she finished, he looked to Sanial and chitterspoke. “That feel so good. You lucky she Biggen like you, Energy. Else, pup or no pup, if she led me on chase right now, I would become her mate.”

Sanial gigglechittered as he translated for Moselyn. She hid her face in her tail in embarrassment because a little part of her was starting to feel as attracted to the smaller cousin squirrel as she was to Sanial.

“Maybe you need to find out who the females are who are interested in you, Brave.” Sanial stated. “Then, require them all to brush you. The one who does the best job wins.”

They all gigglechittered at the suggestion.