

Alephmon's Small Christmas

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Content warning: Flattening, Micro, Toony silliness

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Dark clouds gathered above, blocking off the lone moon. A heavy shadow lay upon the Digi Freelancer's castle, from its high walls to the houses and shops. Various Digimon working for the Freelancers shut their doors tight, hoping it would withstand the storm.

Stry the Veemon leaned out the window on one of the wall's eight corners. "Hmm. I don't like this at all."

"Maf? Anything wrong?" Alephmon the folf piled up blankets on their beds, so they held three layers. Even with internal heating flowing throughout, it felt best to prepare for winter. "Outside of it being pitch black, that is. Maf."

"The temperature was dropping like crazy since the sun went down," Stry answered. He glanced at a thermostat, with all the red liquid at the bottom as a chunk of ice. When he breathed outside, his breath turned into a white frost. "I think we'll be facing a blizzard."

"Maf!" Alephmon widened his eyes. "That's no good!"

"I know." Stry leaned back and shut the window tight. He brushed his ear-like appendages, bright blue like the rest of his body, so they regained some warmth. "We'll need to assess any possible damages once the blizzard runs its course."

Stry sighed and rubbed his nose, which held a white spike. He rubbed his neck, white at the front like his face below the nose and down to his belly. His feet-paws, plantigrade with three white claws that extended half as long, tapped on the wooden floor. He hummed briefly before strolling to the white table near the corner.

Alephmon joined him, with the two glancing at the map on the table. It showed the walls surrounding the houses and shops in an octagon shape. At each corner lay battlements, circular in shape and having Greek letters to identify each one. It also listed where each Digi Freelancer worked and lived, recording Alephmon and Stry in Battlement Alpha.

"We worked hard in rebuilding this place," Stry said. He planted his palms against the table with a light pressure that caused the table to creak in pain. "I hate to restart everything again so soon."

"Maf. Just try to relax." Alephmon patted Stry's back just below the red bandana. "Our freelance group has expanded a great deal in the last four months. We're much more prepared thanks to building the power core here." He pointed at the Old Throne, which stood at the north just outside the walls. "And we still have a lot of Digizoid

thanks to Kajimon. Even if the storm caused some damage, we'll manage. Maf."

"I only hope you're right, buddy." Stry took a closer look at the map. "Though now that you mentioned it, Kajimon's own house and workplace haven't been completed, right?"

"Right, maf. Kuromon told me he received blueprints on Kajimon's place when he visited the other day." Alephmon rubbed his chin. He wondered if he should have asked about the progress of his sword, Checksum, but pushed that thought out of the way. "Though he said that he'll need to revise them."

"Oh?" Stry raised an eye, interested. "What's wrong with them?"

"Maf." Alephmon thought about it for a few seconds, recalling Kuromon's words. "Kuromon said that the house was on the large side."

"Large side?" Stry snickered at that. "Kajimon is one of the largest Digimon we have. Both of us can ride him at the same time."

Alephmon giggled at the mental image. "Yeah, maf. Just that, from what Kuromon told me, it's large even for him. As in ceilings reaching as high as fifteen feet and

rooms large and wide enough to fit in the smaller homes here."

"Sounds like an ego problem, then." Stry rolled his eyes. "We can downsize it and, if he, well, showed his annoyance, we'll remind him that he should be thinking as a team with one member no more important than the other."

Alephmon nodded. "That's what Kuromon said as well, maf. He would've told Kajimon that, but he disappeared into his room after handing over the blueprints."

"Sigh." Stry shook his head. Kajimon has hung around with the others since joining the team, even if he was too fond of pranking others. For the past two weeks, though, he spent more time in his room than hanging out with others. It grew so bad that Stry or Alephmon saw him only at dinner time. It did not help that he kept his temporary room locked, regardless of whether he was in. "We'll confront him tomorrow after checking for damages and repairing them. Where is he holed up, by the way?"

"Right here." Alephmon pointed at one of the southwestern battlements.

Stry nodded and glanced over the map again. Four paths stretched from the northern, southern, eastern, and

western gates, meeting at the frozen fountain at the center. The road also split into various branches, where houses lay all around. Trees numerous enough to make a forest stood at the northern half, reaching a bit over the southwestern side. Rivers flowed from the north and south, with the northern one passing through the walls; they planted filters on one end to drink from the river without worry. A bay stretched through the western wall, reaching far and large enough for them to place boats. That wall could open to the sea if they so desire.

Stry glanced at the reader. "If you're curious as to why this castle looks different from previous portrayals, just know that the world is always expanding with new recruits, and the writer didn't know the full scope yet."

"Maf?" Alephmon tilted his head. "Who were you talking to?"

"Er, ah, nobody in particular!" Stry rubbed the back of his head; a healthy blush formed on his cheeks. "Vevehehe."

Alephmon snickered and patted Stry on the back of his head. "You're a goof. But that's why we love you."

"Awww." Stry reached out and hugged Alephmon. "Thanks, buddy!"

#

The nighttime's darkness deepened so that even those with good night vision only saw no further than their nose. It grew colder, with frozen leaves hanging on trees or the ground. The wind stilled as though holding its breath. The rivers and nearby bay turned into ice, starting from the sides and spreading within.

Up on the Old Throne, an old statue stood. When Alephmon and Stry found it, it held deep cracks, with most of the paint flaking off. When they arranged for repairs for the castle, they also got the statue refurbished. At this time, it stood in its full glory with no cracks and was covered in blue, silver, and yellow paint. It held its sword on its right wrist, which was planted between its legs. Its head glanced upward as though daring the weather to do its worst.

As though by response, snow fell upon the castle. The wind strengthened, knocking out leaves that still hung on the trees. It grew colder by the second, enough that any Digimon outside would freeze within an hour. Other than the wind, it grew silent.

In short, a harsh blizzard in the Digital World.

On the southwestern walls, snow piled high to the point of reaching its heights. The windows groaned from

the weight and force until they shattered. Snow piled inside the two battlements on multiple floors. Stones on the walls groaned and split, only hanging on by the snow's pressure.

Within, a lone Digimon remained sleeping in ignorance of the storm.

#

Morning came, and it could not come any soon.

Alephmon, Stry, and several Digi Freelancers stood outside the southwestern wall. Though the snow sank since the previous night, its damage remained unmissable. Multiple gaping holes lay on the side, from cracks to gaping holes, with the pieces on the snow pile or inside. All the windows shattered, with Alephmon picking up a shard and wincing at it.

Castmon the fox Digimon stood behind Alephmon, adjusting his black and red plaid scarf. He glanced around with his sunny yellow eyes, with them filled with nervousness like the first day he came. Toximon the chincat Digimon, noticing Castmon's expression, patted him on the back to reassure him. Castmon gave a shy smile back in response. Nekozukimon the lion Digimon joined them, hugging both simultaneously with a wide smile. Castmon's rubbery body squirmed in response.

"It's as bad as I feared." Stry paced back and forth, rubbing his chin. "How soon will Kuromon get here?"

"Stormymon and Levin are rushing to his and Ember's forge up north in the mountain," Neko zukimon answered. He took a step forward and balanced a kunai on his index finger. "They should be back within a half hour or so."

"Good." Stry nodded. "We can check for damages on the exterior." He turned to Castmon. "Head to the top and see if it caved in."

Castmon nodded and stretched his right arm toward the wall, with it making squeaking sounds. Once he gripped the second floor, he zipped upward like a rocket. He angled his trajectory so he landed on the top of a battlement instead of crashing against the wall. He landed on the snow, which he almost slipped on but grabbed on the side for balance. He exhaled in relief.

"How is it up there?!" Stry shouted.

Castmon knelt on the floor, with it having a gaping hole at the center. Electrical sparks sparkled near the bottom, making him wince. He turned back and faced down to Stry and the others.

"It's caved in," Castmon answered. "And I see something sparking down there."

"What did you say?" Stry stood on his toes. "Louder!"

"It's caved in," Castmon said a bit louder. "And I see something sparking down there."

"LOUDER!!!!"

Castmon blushed, inhaled to the point of his chest doubling in said, and said, "It's caved in."

Despite it all, his voice remained soft.

Stry sighed and flopped on his back.

Castmon blinked and jumped down the wall. When he reached the bottom, he asked, "Was that too loud?"

Everyone stared at Castmon with a blank expression.

"Maf. Don't worry about it." Alephmon approached and snugged Castmon by the side. Castmon blushed in response but smiled as well. "All good?"

"Er, no. It's caved in, and something is sparking up there." Castmon snagged a piece of glass from Alephmon and waved it a few times. It went under his scarf several times, and when he pulled it out, it was a potato instead. "Here you go."

"Woooooooooah!" Alephmon took it and glanced it over. His eyes shone from pure joy. "How did you do that?"

“Er, a magician doesn’t reveal his secrets.” Castmon winked. “Sorry—”

“Alright!” Stry jumped back up. He shook off some of the snow. “From what you said, Castmon, it took out the power system for the two battlements here. We’ll need to work on repairing the damages, but first, the wall here. This mess isn’t going to clean itself. We need to get moving on getting the snow out of here. That way, when Kuromon and Ember get here, they can focus on patching up the exterior.”

“Right!” Nekozukimon pressed his palms together and made hand signals with them. His tail tip ignited with orange and red flames. A second later, he breathed fire at the snow. “Let’s melt it up!”

Stry stared in horror. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!?!?”

Nekozukimon stopped firing out flames to answer, “Melting the snow.”

“I MEANT SHOVELING THE SNOW OUT, NOT MELTING IT!!” Stry’s face turned bright red from rage.

“But that sounds like back-breaking work.” Nekozukimon shrugged. “Besides, this is much faster.”

“YOU’LL CAUSE *MORE* DAMAGE TO THE WALL!!” Stry bounced with each syllable. “WE DON’T NEED—”

Toximon pulled out her hammer and smashed away a chunk of the snow.

"AND WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!?!!" Stry turned to Toximon. The red in his eyes seemed to spread to every bit of it.

"Um, using my hammer to blast away the snow?" Toximon tilted her head, even flattening her right ear, in confusion.

"YOU MIGHT HIT THE WALL INSTEAD!!"

"Don't worry. I'm plenty careful about what I hit. Right, Alephmon?"

"GAH!! JUST GET A SNOW SHOVEL! ALL OF YOU! WE'RE DIGGING OUT THE SNOW! NO BURNING, SMASHING, OR EVEN PUNCHING THE SNOW OUT!" Stry huffed for a few seconds. "I swear, I might revert back into a Digiegg because of you lot."

Alephmon held his breath, careful not to move an inch.

Nekozukimon and Toximon sighed and nodded to Stry. They went around the corner to the gate to get a snow shovel. Castmon glanced at Stry with sweat drops forming on his brow. He then followed the other two, catching up with them. The rest of the Digi Freelancer joined them,

hunting for snow shovels. Stry sat down on the snow, trying to calm himself by breathing in and out.

Alephmon watched the others, sensing that someone was missing.

He hummed and turned to the wall.

He stared at it until it clicked.

"Kajimon!" Alephmon widened his eyes in horror.

"Hmm?" Stry turned his weary head to Alephmon.
"What are you talking about?"

"He's not here!" Alephmon twisted his head around.

"So? Why would that be a problem?" Stry shook his head. He planted two fingers on his forehead, just above the large yellow V. "I didn't think to call him because, given his feral shape, he wouldn't be able to hold a shovel. The only thing that would be useful in this case is burning down the snow, which would damage the wall and the foundation underneath. I'm sure he's resting in that room of his up there—"

Stry flinched and turned to the wall.

"Wait. He's sleeping in this part until his home is built!"

"Exactly! And, as you said, there's no power! He must be freezing!" Alephmon rushed around the corner. "I'll check on him and see if he's OK, maf. If he isn't, I'll drag him out of that room!"

Alephmon reached the southern gate, where Nekozukimon, Toximon, Castmon, and others carried snow shovels. Nekozukimon offered an extra one to Alephmon, but he rushed by without taking it. Nekozukimon blinked before shrugging. Toximon glanced back, curious, but Nekozukimon kept her walking toward Stry.

Within, lightbulbs shone with light. At the same time, it felt colder than usual despite the heaters cranking it. Alephmon rushed up the stairs, with the wooden steps creaking underneath him. Once he reached the second floor, he ran within the walls toward the lower part of the southwestern battlement.

As he approached, the lightbulbs stopped shining above his head; the only lights came from outside. It also grew much colder than before. He huffed, with his breath turning into frost. He rubbed his light blue fuzzy arms up and down, trying to warm up. It worked momentarily, but he lost the heat just as fast.

Alephmon glanced back at his empty scabbard, which caused him to think about the previous month. He

surrendered his sword to Kuromon to upgrade it as soon as they brought the rest of the Digizoid. He and Ember felt confident they could do so with some of the Digizoid they got. They went as far as testing which type Alephmon was compatible with, which they discovered was Blue Digizoid.

While Alephmon knew blacksmithing was not done in a day, he still felt nervous about how long it took. Plus, he felt weaker than before without his sword since he had no other means to attack or counterattack without using his fists. Stry offered to take Alephmon's mind off it by training with his fists instead.

It did not go well.

It took them hours to pry Alephmon off the wall.

Alephmon reached the battlement, where it grew even colder. Snow lay within, coming in from gaping holes in the walls and on the ceiling. Snow covered one of the statues, modeled after the one on the Old Throne. No electrical lights shone, or any heater rumbled, with it without power.

He shivered a bit, cold to the point of wishing to have a pelt like Ember. His tan shorts, which held a black belt with black slings on the side, bounced against his knees. His red bandana covered much of his chest, though with no

ability to retain heat. His fingerless black gloves, snug against large hand-paws, only made his fingers feel frozen. Though his light blue fur with a white belly and chest retained much of his heat, it felt lacking in this cold. Maybe he should make a pelt from leftover Garurumon's fur or maybe from a WereGarurumon like Ember.

Alephmon rushed through passageways until he reached Kajimon's door. It was made of wood with iron nails keeping it together. Instead of a doorknob, it held a latch that, if pushed down, opened the door. Above it had Greek letters, with three carved in but two by claw instead of a tool.

It said:

ηβπ

"Maf? I wondered when he added that?" Alephmon reached up and rubbed π, one of the two a claw carved out. "Maybe we should try chatting with him more."

Alephmon inhaled and pressed down on the latch.

It refused to move.

"Maf!" Alephmon knocked on the door hard. "Open up, Kajimon! It must be freezing in there!" He slammed his

shoulder against the door. "Come on, Kajimon! Let me in and help!"

Alephmon gritted his teeth and kicked the door.

The door cracked open and swung inside.

Alephmon blinked and stepped inside. He held his breath from wonder and to avoid smelling the room. It smelled like strong detergent; he wondered how Kajimon slept in this room without complaining. He thought about where the smell came from until he felt a prick under his foot-paw. He pulled it away, rubbing it for a few seconds. Shattered glass from a couple of beakers lay on the floor, where the smell was the strongest. It froze on the wooden floor.

Two tables stood between Alephmon, both around his chest-to-neck area of height. Each held a variety of beakers, test tubes, flat-bottom flasks, and even a conical flask. Burners lay around as well, with one underneath an empty flask. The flask opened to a tube, which stretched to another flask with a filter. Alephmon reached for the other flask and checked inside, but it held only frost. He lowered it, only to place it too close to the edge. It shattered on top of the frozen spot into multiple glass pieces.

"Eep! S-sorry!" Alephmon blushed from embarrassment. He searched around the room and under the tables for a broom and dustpan but saw none. So, he gulped and gently gathered up the shattered glass on the floor, even from the previously broken beakers. He set them on an empty spot next to a rack full of test tubes. "Maf, I'll pay for a replacement! I promise!"

Alephmon inched around the cold room, trying not to step on the unknown frozen liquid on the floor. He turned to the small burner, wondering if he should turn it on to heat the room. He shot down the idea as fast, doubting it would help with the cold. Instead, he glanced at the test tubes, filled with liquids colored from red to violet.

"Maf, I must say that I didn't think he was interested in alchemy," Alephmon said to himself.

For a moment, he saw a flicker from a floor. He glanced down, only to see a tiny toy shaped like a fox. It pressed its paws against its face. It looked familiar for some reason.

Alephmon shrugged and, spotting a desk near a wall, walked toward it. He took care not to step on the toy along the way. It had no chair or cushion behind it to sit on. Several pieces of paper lay on it, with a couple of them written on. A frozen ink bottle stood next to the documents.

Alephmon thought about it momentarily, wondering if he would intrude on Kajimon's privacy by reading it. He felt curious, though, and decided to at least focus on the topmost paper.

On the paper's top, it held doodles of three feral foxes, with the leftmost one largest and the rightmost smallest. Above each lay numbers 12 ft, 6 ft, and 1 in. A sun symbol lay on the largest fox's chest, while a snowflake symbol lay between the smallest fox and number.

On the paper's center, it held drawings of two different potions. On the right, it had the letter R and a downward arrow. On the left, it held the letter B with an upward arrow. Between both held a number and letter: 1H.

The paper's bottom held a few doodles of Alephmon, Stry, Kuromon, and Ember.

Alephmon blinked at the page. "That looks pretty neat. I wondered how Kajimon drew them, though. Maf."

He twisted around and spotted a firepit next to a window. A funnel lay above it, aimed toward the window to expel smoke from inside. Some ash lay on the wall, though; the floor held splinters from firewood. None remained in this room, though.

Alephmon glanced around the room and inched toward the lone bed. It lay next to one of the shattered windows, with some snow falling inside. The snow landed on a bed, where a large pile of snow had already lay. Glass littered the mattress. Alephmon lifted a blanket, knocking aside the snow, but saw no Kajimon underneath it.

"Where are you, buddy?" Alephmon asked, though more to himself. He glanced at the test tubes on the rack and folded his left ear to the side. "Maf? What do they hold?"

Alephmon rushed to the table and picked up one of the test tubes. The red liquid shook from him grabbing it, unfrozen for some reason. It held no labels on it, making it a complete mystery. He tilted his head, a thought building in his head. He wanted to drink it but wondered if it would be safe. Plus, would Kajimon get mad at him for this? It would be best to put it down if he was around.

But he was not around.

"What he doesn't know won't kill him." Alephmon uncorked the test tube and drank it down. The taste reminded him of strawberries for some reason. He set the tube back on the rack. "Whew. Now, what will it do? Will it bulk me up? Or will it give—"

Alephmon's stomach gave a sudden lurch, enough that he dropped the cork onto the floor. He held onto his stomach, hunched down. His face turned green for a moment.

"Ugh. I think it disagreed with me. Maf." Alephmon's pain left just as fast, and he stood up straight. He turned to the table and blinked in confusion. While both tables were high for him, he could see their contents before drinking it. At this moment, his eye level only reached as high as the table. A couple of seconds passed, and it grew taller than him. "Maf? It's growing?"

Alephmon glanced around the room, with everything growing, and it clicked in his head.

"Wait. I'm shrinking!"

Without thinking, he jumped to the table with more test tubes. His feet-paws no longer touched the floor, dangling in the air. He pulled himself up, but it grew more challenging to hold on. He felt his fingers slipped from the table, too small to get a good grip. He glanced at the floor, which was growing farther by the second. He winced and let go from the edge. He stood at half his previous height when he landed on his rear.

"Eep!" Alephmon twisted toward the bed, but it looked much farther away. He sprinted toward it, but the distance between himself and the bed grew. It towered over his height, and any idea of climbing became laughable. The wooden grain on the floor grew larger, enough that they felt like prominent ridges beneath him. He stopped sprinting and collapsed onto his knees. "I-I can't reach it."

Alephmon's face turned bright red from the sprint and how much he shrunk. The tables behind him stood like giants with no way to reach the top. The distance between him and the bed stretched so long that it would take several minutes to arrive. The crystal-like frost grew visible, littering all over the floor. He picked one up, like a baseball, and tossed it. By the time he stopped shrinking, he stood at an inch tall.

"M-maf." Alephmon glanced at the towering bed before him. Even if he reached it, what would he do then? Would he climb the sheets to the top or hide underneath? Neither option felt safe. "H-help!"

His voice became no louder than a squeak to anyone of regular size. His breathing increased, with his chest huffing in and out. Sweat formed on his forehead. He slammed his palms against the floor, gripping at one of the

wood grains. His eyes' irises and pupils shrunk in size. He felt his heart pounding against his chest.

"Try to stay calm, maf." Alephmon breathed faster. "Try to stay—"

A soft stepping sound came from the side.

He yelped and jumped.

He landed and scooted away from this figure until his eyes regained focus.

A feral-shaped being stood before Alephmon, just as small and sheepish. His bright red fur fluffed out from the cold. He flattened his back ears while taking a step back. He wore a light blue bandana around his neck, covering a ruff of white fur. His white claws rubbed against the wood grain, though not enough to cut through it.

It took Alephmon a second for it to click. "Kajimon!"

Alephmon jumped onto his feet-paws and rushed over to Kajimon. Kajimon flinched and took another step back, an embarrassed look painted on his face. Alephmon ignored it and hugged Kajimon by the neck. Kajimon blinked his sea blue eyes before relaxing and smiling, hugging back. They swayed their tails, with Alephmon's gray with a light blue tip and Kajimon's red with a black tip.

"It's good to see you. I was so worried, maf."
Alephmon let go and patted Kajimon on his head. "Though I never expected you to be an alchemist, maf."

Kajimon lowered his eyelids halfway.

"Er, sorry for drinking one." Alephmon rubbed the back of his head.

Kajimon shrugged and patted Alephmon's shoulder. A three-dimensional illusion appeared between the two, showing an even tinier Alephmon with a blue potion. Alephmon watched as his illusion counterpart drank it and grew. The illusion enlarged, reaching the original's size and beyond, towering three times larger than them. The illusion faded, with Kajimon collapsing from the pressure of maintaining it.

"Eep!" Alephmon caught Kajimon and steadied his footing. "Trying to make illusions that large strain your Rookie mode, doesn't it?" Kajimon nodded and breathed in and out. Alephmon rubbed one of his ears and nodded. "But yeah, I guess it's good that I didn't drink the blue one. Reminds me of when I first met Fauxmon, when Kuromon patted her head."

Kajimon tilted his head in confusion before shrugging.

“Ahahaha. Well, I guess you drank your shrinking potion as well?” Alephmon grinned wide.

Kajimon hesitated and glanced around. When he stared at Alephmon, he exhaled and pointed at the windows around them, each shattered and brought in snow from the previous night. An illusion played again, this time with a miniature Kajimon. A snow illusion fell on top of that Kajimon, shrinking him.

Alephmon widened his eyes in surprise. “Maf! So, snow and cold can shrink you?”

Kajimon blushed but nodded.

Alephmon grinned. “Woooooooooah! I thought you just grew in size! But I think it’s cool that you can shrink!”

Kajimon blinked and averted his eyes, his blush growing brighter.

“It’s true, though! Maf!” Alephmon patted Kajimon’s back, just above the green A on his back. He recalled Kajimon’s recent actions, with the pieces falling into place. He asked, “I guess that’s why you haven’t been coming out of your room recently, maf?”

Kajimon nodded. He played another illusion with a mini Kajimon, who shivered in the cold. That Kajimon shrunk in size, causing him to toss firewood into a firepit

and ignite it with his flames. He waited a bit before stretching a paw and absorbing the heat, restoring his height.

Alephmon nodded. "And as it grew colder, you shrank faster and needed more flames to undo it, maf?"

Kajimon lowered his head and nodded.

Alephmon rubbed his knuckles against Kajimon's head. "Silly! You shouldn't hide it from us! We wouldn't mind seeing you tiny like this! In fact, you look adorable!"

Kajimon blushed and sucked his lips.

"Well, you do!" Alephmon snuggled Kajimon close. "We're a team, you know. We help each other, trying to assist others' weak points. If we knew sooner, we would've assisted instead of making fun of you."

Kajimon blinked and turned to Alephmon in the eyes.

"Remember. You're a part of the Digi Freelancers now. We're all friends who help watch the other's back." Alephmon rubbed one of Kajimon's ears. "No one should be bullied for any reason."

Kajimon's lips curled into a smile, and he licked Alephmon's face. He stood on his hind legs, causing them

both to fall onto the floor. Alephmon laughed, with Kajimon still licking his face.

“Ahahahaha. Thanks, buddy.” Alephmon grinned. Kajimon hopped off, letting Alephmon stand back up. Alephmon continued. “So, how long will I be small?”

Kajimon raised a single claw.

“Er, one day?”

Kajimon shook his head.

“One hour?”

Kajimon nodded.

“Maf. Well, I guess we can’t do much about it other than wait.” Alephmon sighed. To him, it meant that time stretched on forever. He glanced at the desk, which was just as far of a distance as the bed. “Say, I didn’t get a close look, but I saw that you can draw.”

Kajimon nodded while tilting his head.

“I was wondering since you seem to prefer communicating with illusions of pictures and plays, not words.” Alephmon rubbed his chin in confusion. “Yet, when we found your ‘temple,’ you left a message with words instead of symbols. I was wondering why you don’t summon words in order to talk.”

Kajimon sighed, which formed into a pure white bubble. It held a point aimed at his mouth. Within the bubble, words formed.

It said:

"Because it would get awkward to keep 'talking' like this."

The bubble faded away after ten seconds.

"That's a fair point." Alephmon rubbed the back of his head while laughing. "I asked because you're very creative in communicating without using words."

Kajimon blinked and tilted his head.

"It's true, maf!" Alephmon patted Kajimon on his head. "Say, perhaps you could try to tell a story while we wait this hour out. Does that sound neat?"

Kajimon hesitated for a moment. He shifted his eyes down, uncertain of his skill. Alephmon rubbed Kajimon's ear a few times.

"I'm sure you'll do just fine, maf." Alephmon grinned wide. "Just try to use your illusion to tell a story. Alright?"

Kajimon inhaled and nodded.

Alephmon cheered and sat down in front like an audience member.

Kajimon sat down as well and focused his eyes on the floor. At once, an anthro fox illusion appeared between the two, with that fox the size of his paw. He held a sword that shone cold in the light. Alephmon leaned closer, interested in this illusion.

#

Stry sighed, digging snow off from the castle's wall. Nekozukimon dug alongside him, using the flame on his tail tip to soften the snow. Stry felt tempted to object since that might still cause damages, but decided not to. Besides, this made the job easier and better than using a flamethrower attack.

Stry raised an eye at that thought, wondering who would use fire to burn away snow from their lawn.

Toximon shoveled out the snow along with Castmon as a team. First, they piled the snow behind them away from the wall. Once it reached their heights, Castmon inhaled so much air that his chest swelled five times its previous size, even stretching the scarf around his neck. Toximon would grip Castmon in place while he blew the snow away.

Stry watched with confusion, but it worked.

Within half an hour, they finished digging the snow outside.

Stry winced at the sight since it gave him a better look at the damages. Even without several fist-sized holes, it still held multiple cracks that stretched yards long. If left unchecked, it could create openings for a possible attack.

The last thing Stry wanted was to give aggressive Digimon an opening.

"It seemed we came just in time," a new voice said.

Stry smiled and turned to the right. Stormy the wolf Digimon stood at the center, with his black and electric blue cape blowing with the wind. His dark gray and blue fur fluffed up with the cold despite trying to hold a calm expression. Ember the Gabumon stood at his left, wearing a pelt from a WereGarurumon instead of a Garurumon down to the belt. Kuromon the shadow wolf Digimon stood at his right and further back. His grayish-black and gray fur held neon red computer chip lines on his chest, under his eyes, and on his ears.

Stry smiled. "It's about time you came back." He tilted his head, searching for a fourth Digimon. "Though, where's Levin?"

"As soon as we got back, Levin went straight to bed," Stormymon replied. He sighed. "He was exhausted after

running to Kuromon's forge and back, and I didn't want to push him to do more work."

Kuromon slinked to the wall and rubbed one of the cracks. "Hmm. This'll take a while, especially in the cold. I'm not sure if I'll finish by the end of the day."

"You're hard on yourself, partner." Ember approached and patted Kuromon on the back. "I'm sure you'll fix it before sundown. If not, well, you do better in the dark anyways."

Kuromon turned to Ember with a shy smile. "Thanks." He turned to Stry and the others. "I'll get right down to work."

"Excellent!" Stry gave every Digimon around a proud smile. "I'm proud of you all, though more work must be done. We also need to get inside and clean out any possible snow within. No burning." He glanced at Neko-zukimon for a moment. "We'll also need to clean out other debris to prepare for repairs. And Kuromon?" He turned to him and winked. "If you need help or supplies, you can always ask."

"Right." Kuromon glanced at everyone and flattened one of his ears. "Though, where's Alephmon? I would've expected him to also be working here."

Stry paused and widened his eyes. "You have a point." He glanced at the second floor. "He went to check with Kajimon a bit ago. I wondered what's taking him." He sighed. "I'll go up and find him."

Stry rushed around the corner, leaving his snow shovel stuck in the snow. The others watched until his tail disappeared behind the wall. Toximon grinned wide and wagged her tail.

"You know? I'm going to check on Alephmon as well!" Toximon dropped her snow shovel and half skipped/half ran, following Stry. "I'm sure Stry won't mind."

"Um, shouldn't you wait—" Stormymon began, but Toximon disappeared behind the corner. He sighed and shook his head. "Ugh." He turned to the others. "We should do what Stry said and go inside the wall, cleaning it up of snow and other stuff."

"Yeah. Ember and I can handle it out here." Kuromon nodded. "We'll let you know if we need any help."

The others nodded, walking toward the wall's corner toward the gate. Stormymon picked up the two snow shovels that Stry and Toximon left behind and studied them. He glanced at Neko zukimon and piled the snow shovels over his arms with a mischevious smile only an older

brother would have. Nekozukimon puffed out his cheeks at Stormymon in annoyance, with Stormymon sticking out his tongue in return. Castmon, who watched behind them, covered his mouth and giggled.

Soon, Kuromon and Ember were left alone outside.

"It's time to get to work." Kuromon turned toward the castle's wall. "You brought the supplies, Ember?"

"Always!" Ember opened the chest pouch and pulled out concrete sealant, a caulk gun, putty knives, and more. Despite the pouch's size, it held enough space to contain some flat wooden boards larger than the outside. It was one of the things Kuromon upgraded when they got the first round of Digizoid in. Ember pulled out a long box wrapped in light blue paper for a moment before pushing it back in. "Say, partner? Will we give Stry Alephmon's gift to hold onto? After all, it's only a few days until Christmas, and it would save us a trip."

"Hmm. Might as well." Kuromon blushed for a moment. "Ready?"

"Yes, partner!"

#

"Woooooooooah!" Alephmon watched the illusion play out with intense interest. "So, this red 'fox' was sent to the

past by this raccoon fellow in an attempt to age him out. However, this 'fox' received a gift from a previous adventure that changed him into a kitsune, allowing him to live through it and become even stronger. This also gave him experience while in the past that hammered out his desire for revenge, becoming wiser along the way. Is that right?"

Kajimon nodded and smiled.

Alephmon wagged fast, happy that he got it right. In the past half-hour, he attempted to understand what Kajimon's story 'told' with only visuals and no words. He got some of it wrong; he never understood who this black fox was, which Kajimon insisted was not the red fox's brother. He did not understand why the red fox could also transform into a human and, for one adventure, turned into a brown wolf.

Still, Alephmon felt happy with himself for the ones he did realize.

"I bet, if we have a narrator to go with these, it'll go a long way." Alephmon wagged his tail fast while grinning. Kajimon blinked and glanced away while blushing. Alephmon continued, "Don't give me that. You did—"

The floor vibrated beneath them.

Alephmon and Kajimon flinched and stood up.

The vibration faded, only to return with greater strength.

"Maf?" Alephmon flattened his ears back. "Is-is that someone walking toward here?"

"Eta Beta Pi?" Stry's voice sounded thunderous in Alephmon's tiny size, causing him to wince and cover his ears. Stry spoke again, "We'll need to fix that to what it was before. Sigh." In a louder voice, Stry said, "Alephmon! Kajimon! Are you in here?!"

Even with his ears covered, Alephmon almost fainted from the sheer force of his voice. Kajimon stood, not crippled at all by his voice. Alephmon glanced at him with one eye, wondering if his sizeshifting abilities granted him immunity to this inconvenience.

It was either that or Kajimon adapted faster.

The door swung open, making a creaking sound.

Stry, a giant to the two, stepped inside.

"What happened to the door? Did Alephmon kick it open?" Stry shook the handle before turning inside. "And what's all this stuff here? Better still, how did Kajimon get that stuff inside in the first place?"

"NOT AS LOUD, STRY!!" Alephmon shouted.

Alephmon's voice, even at the top of his lungs, only came as incoherent, high-pitched squeaking. Stry blinked and rubbed one of his ear-like appendages. A second later, he shrugged and walked deeper inside. The shaking grew worse.

"Alephmon? Kajimon? Where are you two?" Stry glanced around, careful not to step on the frozen patch on the floor. "Did you sneak out?"

"WE'RE STILL IN HERE, MAF!!" Alephmon waved his arms above his head. "LOOK DOWN AND—"

Stry went around the table, picking up an empty test tube. Without looking down, he lifted his flat foot-paw and lowered it above Alephmon. Alephmon stopped yelling and instead pulled out a white flag from nowhere. He waved it a few inches above his nose.

"Maf."

Kajimon grabbed Alephmon by the scruff and pulled him out of the way. The foot-paw landed with a thud that almost knocked Kajimon off his paws. He regained his balance and tossed Alephmon over his head.

"Maf?" Alephmon blinked and landed on Kajimon's back. The flag disappeared from Alephmon's fingers,

waiting for its next chance. Alephmon grinned and patted Kajimon on his head. "Awwwww! You saved me!"

Kajimon grinned with pride.

"Ugh. How can someone miss a six-foot-tall feral fox and a folf half that size?" Stry shook his head. "Unless Kajimon has already disappeared, and Alephmon is searching for him. That sounded like him, alright." Stry glanced at the floor and kneeled. "And what's with this cork?"

Kajimon rolled his eyes and turned toward the exit. It looked so far away at his and Alephmon's tiny sizes. He hesitated, but Alephmon's patting reassured him. He nodded and, with a jumping start, sprinted toward the door.

Alephmon tugged on Kajimon's scruff, ensuring he did not grab too tight. Despite the possible danger, he held a wide grin. He envisioned riding out to a battle with a sword, armor, and steed ready for anything. He wondered if Kajimon thought the same.

They reached halfway toward the door when the ground shook again.

Toximon poked her head through the doorway. "Oh, Stry~! Have you seen Alephmon yet?"

"Ah, Toximon!" Stry stood up and set the cork and test tube on the table. "Nah. I haven't seen them. Kajimon must've left long before, and Alephmon should be searching for him."

"You mean like a game of hide and seek?" Toximon wagged her tail back and forth. "I love playing those games!"

"Er, I'm not so sure—"

"I bet they're hiding underneath that bed!" Toximon rushed inside the room.

Kajimon widened his eyes at the incoming foot-paw.

Alephmon yanked Kajimon's scruff to the left.

Kajimon followed Alephmon's tugging and dodged to the left.

The foot-paw landed a mere half-inch away from them.

"Whew. That was close." Alephmon sighed. He turned back and watched Toximon rush over to the bed. "At least we're safe."

"A-HA!" Toximon flipped the bed over to check underneath it. Snow flew by and slouched onto the floor. Other than that, nothing lay underneath it. Toximon lowered the bed with a nervous smile. "Er."

"What are you doing?!" Stry flailed his arms around with his cheeks turning red. Despite that, he did not crash his fist against the table. "You can't just touch others' property without their permission! Heck, you could cause a chain reaction with this stuff here!"

"Oh?" Toximon glanced around and saw Kajimon's stuff on the table. "Oh, wow! Those look so cool! Is Kajimon an alchemist?"

"I don't know." Stry shook his head. "Maybe he's an apothecary."

"Oh, wow!" Toximon's poison green eyes shone with joy. Her expression turned into confusion. "Er, what's that?"

"Basically, he practices medical care by preparing medication."

"Oh! Like a doctor?"

"Something like that, yeah."

"That sounds so boring! He must be an alchemist."

Kajimon rolled his eyes again before sprinting through the door, carrying Alephmon along the way. He reached around the corner and stopped after running a couple more feet. He planted against the wall, panting in and out.

Steamy sweat flowed out from his forehead before he collapsed onto his belly.

Alephmon hopped off and rubbed Kajimon's cheeks. "You did good, Kajimon. You saved us. You deserved a rest, maf." He turned toward the open door. "At least we're safe now."

#

Ember walked down the hallway while glancing at the walls. "Whew. This is hard work."

Kuromon and Ember worked on repairing the wall, sealing any cracks they spotted, and boarding up large openings. An ordinary worker would need to use scaffolding on the high walls; Kuromon, a living shadow Digimon, had no such limitations. Within a half-hour, they completed the initial stage of repairing the wall.

Kuromon prepared to seal the windows behind boards for the next stage until they received replacements. While doing this, he sent Ember to mark out any damages done inside, structural or otherwise. Ember completed the first floor and went up to the second floor to do more checking.

Besides, since Stry should still be on the second floor, Ember thought it might be a good time to give Alephmon's present to him.

“He’s going to love this.” Ember grinned and snickered.

Ember spotted an open door and heard Stry talking to someone inside.

“No, I think Kajimon must be some kind of herbalist. I mean, look at the grounded-up plants there.”

“That still sounds boring!” A voice that belonged to Toximon said. “He must be a potion maker, like an alchemist!”

“Er, not really.” Stry’s tone sounded strained. “An alchemist, more or less, researches and experiments to transmute common metal, like iron, into gold. I don’t see anything allowing him to do such testing.”

Ember snickered and approached the room—

A pair of bugs, one bright red and the other light blue, lurked by the wall nearby.

“Ugh. Bugs.” Ember went to stomp on them.

Just before Ember’s foot-paw landed on them, one seemed to raise a white flag.

Ember blinked and shrugged. “Must’ve imagined that.”

“Hmm? Oh, hey, Ember!” Toximon waved.

"Hey there." Ember grinned and stepped inside.
"What's going on?"

"Ah." Stry spun around and waved at Ember as well.
"We're discussing what Kajimon is doing in here. You can see various vials, flasks, and more on these two tables."

"Yup! Kajimon must be an alchemist!" Toximon huffed out her chest and set her hand-paws on her hips.

"Nah. He must be some kind of apothecary." Stry shook his head.

"Nu-uh! These must do a whole lot more than heal!" Toximon pointed at the test tubes filled with multiple colors of liquids on racks. "I bet one can change you into a big, scary monster!"

"Toximon, look around the room and think about what you said." Stry pointed at the intact floor, tables, desks, and bed. No damage lay upon them. The only things broken were the cracked walls, thanks to the blizzard, the broken window, and the glass from the broken beakers.
"You see?"

"Er, what was I meant to see?"

"Think about it!" Stry huffed out his cheeks. "Kajimon kept to himself since he moved in here, not letting anyone know what he planned to do. He rarely left outside of the

castle. If these potions cause such changes, he could only test them on himself. If he did, the best time would be within this room. You follow?" Stry only continued when Toximon nodded. "So, if he did change into a 'big, scary monster,' there would be obvious signs. The fact that this room is still pristine suggests it doesn't happen."

"The ash marks don't look, um, 'pristine' to me." Toximon pointed at the fire pit by the wall.

"You know what I mean!" Stry shook his head.

"Er, Stry?" Ember said while digging into the pouch. "Weren't you looking for Alephmon?"

Stry blinked. "I completely forgot!" He huffed at Toximon. "Aren't you a—"

"Sorry for interrupting, but this is for him." Ember pulled out a light blue present and handed it to Stry. "Just hide it until it's Christmas, OK?"

"Oh?" Stry took it and glanced it over. "Um, OK. I'll—"

Ember winced and grunted all of a sudden. "Hmm?"

Toximon tilted her head, noticing Ember's discomfort. "Are you OK?"

"Sorry. I stepped on a couple of bugs before entering. One might still be alive. Give me a moment." Ember lifted—

A flat figure stretched out from underneath Ember's foot-paw.

"WHAT?!?!" Ember fell in confusion and disbelief.

This light blue flat figure grew in size, with both eyes spiraling.

"ALEPH!?!!" Stry took a step back. His eyes popped out from their sockets before he pushed them back in. "How did you get underneath Ember's foot-paw!?!?"

"Maaaaaaf." Aleph kept growing until he returned to his natural size but was still flat. He popped off from Ember's foot-paw and fluttered onto the floor.

"Oh, wow!" Toximon's eyes sparkled like the night's stars. "So, that's where you've been hiding! Pretty clever!"

"HOW?! WHAT?! WHEN?! WHERE?!" Ember's golden eyes widened, doubling in size.

Alephmon's eyes kept spinning for a few seconds. He shook his flat head and rolled up to glance at the others. "Whew. It wore off at last."

“What happened?!” Stry crouched to Alephmon’s side. His body turned white from shock, with blue lines over his head. Alephmon waved a flat hand-paw at him, which only made him grunt. “Were you tiny?!”

“Maf, ahahaha.” Alephmon rubbed the back of his flat head. “Yes. I was tiny thanks to Kajimon’s—” He paused and widened his eyes. “KAJIMON!!”

Alephmon lunged over to Ember’s foot-paw with panic seeping in. He rubbed against it, trying to pry something off. The others remained still, each one confused in their own way. After some seconds of prying, Alephmon pulled something flat and bright red from underneath Ember’s foot-paw.

“Are you alright?!” Alephmon held an inch-tall Kajimon, who lay there flat as paper. His tongue stuck out, which made him look adorable. His eyes were replaced by a pair of Xs. “Kajimon!!”

“Woah! He got tiny!” Toximon leaned over Alephmon’s shoulder and giggled. “He looks so cute!”

“Er, Alephmon?” Stry breathed in, with color returning to his body. He hid the present behind his back. “Could you explain what happened?”

"That goes double with me!" Ember stood up, still in disbelief.

Kajimon shook the Xs off from his eyes and glanced up. Above his head, a white flag waved back and forth. Alephmon sighed in relief and turned to the others.

"Ahahaha. Yeah." Alephmon stuck a flat tongue out in embarrassment.

#

Evening came, with both Alephmon and Kajimon sitting next to each other in the dining room, no longer flat as paper. They drank hot chocolate with the other Digi Freelancers, with Alephmon from a cup and Kajimon from a bowl. Kajimon sat three feet tall from head to shoulder, not as small as before but half his usual height. He held a shy expression, which Alephmon helped relieve by patting his head.

Stry pulled out a couple of apple pies and set them next to the two pumpkin pies. "Mmmmmm. These smelled nice and ready!"

"Huh." Stormymon pulled out a couple of chocolate pies from the refrigerator. "You sure are in a pie mood all of a sudden. What made you decide to make so many?"

"You know, I'm not sure." Stry pushed back his chef's hat to scratch his forehead. "I've been thinking of pies since entering Kajimon's room."

Kajimon, who listened in, covered his smirk with his front right paw.

"It'll take a while for these pies to cool down. If you want to join the others, you can," Stry told Stormymon. Stormymon nodded and stepped out of the kitchen and into the dining room. He sat next to Nekozukimon, who slurped some ramen. Stry cleaned his hands while humming to himself. "Eat a better pie~"

The door swung open, with Kuromon and Ember stepping in. "Jeez, Stry. I can smell your wonderful cooking from outside."

"Thank you." Stry winked at them. "Now, how goes the repair?"

"We managed to set the stones back into place and nailed in reinforcements on the lumber supports," Ember answered. "We'll need to ensure they remained set and repair the electrical system."

"From what you said, Kajimon shouldn't sleep inside his temporary room for a while now," Stry said. He lowered his head somewhat. "Is that right?"

"Pretty much," Kuromon answered.

"In that case, he'll sleep in Alephmon and my room until the repairs are complete." Stry shrugged. "Alephmon has been begging for it. Besides, given that he wouldn't be as big, I can't see it as a major issue. Heck, he's already halfway shrunk."

Kajimon blushed and seemed to shrink further.

Alephmon side-hugged Kajimon, which made him smile.

"Welp, I'll sit with the others until you serve the pies!" Ember walked over to the dining room, sitting next to Toximon.

Kuromon turned to follow, but Stry grabbed his shoulder.

"A moment, please," Stry said.

Kuromon blinked but nodded. He leaned in close to Stry's ear-like appendage. "I know this may not be relevant to what you wanted to talk to me about, but I want to ask. Have you got the Christmas gift for Alephmon?"

"Yup," Stry whispered back. "I hidden it along with my own in the one place he'll never think of searching." Stry winked. "Behind a special cavity in the wall."

“Ah. Very clever.” Kuromon winked back.

“So, I want to discuss the plans for Kajimon’s house with you.” Stry touched a pie’s tin for its temperature but pulled it away while wincing. “Alephmon told me about them last night.”

“Right. Don’t worry. I already drew up new plans for it. It’ll be sized like the oth—”

“No.” Stry shook his head. “We’ll add an extension to the room so he can practice his potion-making without those odors. We’ll even make it micro-friendly for him. But the size is no longer an issue.”

Kuromon flattened one of his ears. “Um, what? I would’ve thought that someone like you would oppose someone in the team having a place bigger than the others.”

“Normally, yes. But I’m willing to make exceptions, especially for practical reasons.” Stry inhaled and exhaled. “We assumed that, unless Kajimon got hit with fire, he’ll remain six feet tall. However, as we all found out, the seasons can also affect his heights.” He glanced at Nekozukimon, who was burning Stormymon’s tail with his own. “Even after he used his flames on Kajimon hours ago, he already shrunk half his height.”

Stormymon jumped and hopped around the dining room, patting the flames off his tail. Nekozukimon snickered with a wide grin, wagging his tail. The others laughed and cheered when Stormymon put out the fire. He sat back down and smacked Nekozukimon's head.

"Yeah. So?" Kuromon tilted his head. "In fact, that explains how, as Maboroshimon, he could fit inside that cave. He just needed a bit of snow to shrink."

"Think about it. Kajimon would be an inch tall during the winter." Stry leaned closer to Kuromon. *"What do you think will happen to him during the summer?"*

Kuromon opened his mouth, considered what Stry said, and closed it. He nodded. "I see what you mean now."

"I'm glad you do."

Stry pressed his hand against a pie's tin again. It felt warm enough to serve. Satisfied, he carried the pies onto the table. Each Digimon stared at them while drooling.

"OK. The dessert is ready. Dig in!"

All of the Digi Freelancers cheered, grabbed a slice, and ate.

Though Christmas was only a few days away, it felt like it had come.

About Author

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my story! I really appreciate it. If you enjoyed it, then you'll definitely want to check out my gallery accounts at:

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I'd love to hear from you and answer any questions you may have.

Thanks again for your support, and I can't wait to share more of my work with you soon!