

On the far wall, something sparked. A loud piercing noise followed and more things sparked and popped. The whine increased in pitch painfully. Smoke bellowed forth. The squirrel took two steps back grasping at its ears. A bright flash engulfed the squirrel. He thought he was dead for a moment. Then, there was a quiet fresh breeze. He felt the sensation of falling as his vision cleared and he realized that's exactly what was happening. (SCREEEEEEEE!!!!) He smacked the edges of multiple branches, none of which he could grasp as the ground came up quickly. He felt pain and quickly surrendered to the darkness.

The squirrel groaned as he came to. He opened his eyes slowly. Blurry light came into focus as he blinked a few times. He was semi-curling up in a comfortable sleeping position in a hammock-like bed, very similar to the "ferret hammocks" the Fudds provided to scouts, rigged-up on a single pivot point so it could rock around to imitate swaying in a tree. Except, this one was larger. He winced as he stretched his back, which ached in several spots. He tentatively swished his tail and could see that the last inch or so was gone based on the bandage there. His left arm was bandaged and bound between two small pieces of wood. He must have broken something, but it didn't hurt as much as it could have. He could feel several smaller scrapes and bruises, but those were superficial compared to his arm and tail. Whoever had attended to him knew their first aid well.

"O ohoini sjeckg?"

He looked towards the speaker, a young female squirrel, or so he thought. She was larger than a gray should be. Or maybe his eyes were playing tricks on him after that fall. She must have been half-again as large as him. Her pelt was a tawny brown mixed in with salt pepper gray. She was also tassel-eared like a western Douglas squirrel or maybe a Eurasian. The tassels were reddish mixed with the tawny brown. She was sitting back on her hind legs looking at him.

"Where am I?" he asked.

She looked puzzled at him as she repeated herself, "O ohoini sjeckg?"

He shook his head in the negative while giving her a puzzled look back. "I don't understand you," he responded and she gave him the same puzzled look. It occurred to him she didn't understand English any more than he could understand whatever it was she spoke. Either that or he had taken a bad blow to the head. He tried native squirrel, or as they called it back home, (chitter)speak. (chitter)speak had a rather limited vocabulary having been derived from the limited language of "normal", non-intelligent squirrels. She may not understand it either, but it was worth a shot. "chitchit?" (Where I?)

Again she looked puzzled, tilting her head slightly staring at him, like she almost understood. He repeated himself more slowly. Her eyes grew as large as saucers, but still she did not answer.

He sighed. *Must be patient,* he thought to himself. Slowly he said in (chitter)speak, “I no speak you,” he pointed to himself, his mouth, and then at her with his tail. “You no speak me,” he pointed to her, her mouth, and then at himself with his tail.

She nodded. He continued. “You hear (chitter),” he pointed to her ears. “You no speak (chitter)?” he raised his tail in a question mark.

There were tears in her eyes as she nodded and then shook her head in the negative. At least she understood the tail emote, provided nod is yes and shake side-to-side was no. It was puzzling she could understand but not speak (chitter)speak and she didn’t use tail emotes. Well it was a starting point. This would be a huge challenge as they didn’t have a common language and using (chitter)speak would only be one way.

“Up down yes?” She nodded. “Side side no?” Again she nodded, paused in confusion and shook negative. Then nodded. He could see she was frustrated. He slowly and gently reached out with his good arm, touched her forepaw, and drew it to his left forepaw, which she let him do. He then patted her forepaw with his good forepaw.

“Is ok,” he said in English and then switched to (chitter)speak. “Hard talk no speak same,” he said. Again, she nodded. “I,” he pointed to himself with his tail, “Aldin,” he said slowly bracing himself for the reaction to having been named after his famous grandfather. Always, when he first introduced himself to strangers, they’d think he was his grandfather.

“All-dun,” she repeated with no reaction other than a happy expression on her muzzle at learning his name. She pointed to herself with her other forepaw, “Aouphril.”

This time, Aldin nodded. “Ohfril, chatchit. Scee (help me. Thank) Ohfril.” He carefully raised his bandaged limb, wincing. “longchitter (Tired),” he yawned. “softchit (sleep).” He let go of her forepaw, curled back up in the hammock, and quickly fell asleep.

Aouphril, looked nervously at the strange, small squirrel. He looked like a wild cousin. But she had never seen one in this area since moving there several years ago. It was obvious he wasn’t one as she remembered seeing them a few times growing up, but that was elsewhere, not here where she had moved to. A wild cousin would have panicked upon awakening and immediately tried to escape. She had taken that into consideration when she had brought, *All-dun, that was the name he said, All-dun. Funny name,* when she brought All-dun into her home after he landed at her feet outside. She had made sure that he was facing an open window when he awoke just in case so he’d have an obvious escape route if he had been a wild cousin. All-dun quickly proved he was intelligent. He definitely wasn’t wild. He seemed so calm, despite the language barrier, especially when he gently took her hand in his. Maybe he was suffering from shock. She checked him over. He was breathing normally.

Yet, he could speak like a wild cousin and he looked so similar to one in body proportion, especially his paw-like hands. With claws like those, he could easily race up a tree like a wild cousin if his arm wasn't broken. She regretted that her mother forbade them from speaking (chitter)speak as she was growing up. Mother thought it would make them look too much like hicks. Her mother had strange notions like that. It was one of the reasons Aouphril had moved so far from home. But she had never gotten around to studying it. She got so busy studying other things in college and then there was work. Now, she regretted not finding the time to learn to speak it for the fun of it and to rebel further against her mother. She was surprised she understood enough of it for that short exchange. Perhaps it was ingrained in her kind? She shook her head. Who knows? Something to ponder later. Right now, it was obvious she needed to tell others about him. There was no way she could handle this alone. If he had been a wild cousin, maybe she could have, but no, he was intelligent. She'd need help. Fortunately, she had a good idea who to ask first.