

TEN

Once they were out-of-site of the couple, he brought the hovercraft to a stop again.

“Why small biggen stop?”

“Must retrieve biggen eye thing,” he said as the hovercraft door opened. The drone entered and settled into its crate. He started the hovercraft up again and turned to the elder wild squirrel. “I must warn you, again, Elder. There are many, many biggens.”

“I stay with you, they no hunt me.”

“Yes, we speaked that. Elder wise. But, there are many, many biggens close together. You need name other than, Elder.”

“Name?”

“There are many, many biggens. Many squirrels, many raccoons, many foxes. They each have name to tell one another apart. Faster than sniffing all the time.” He pointed to himself with his tail. “My name is,” he switched to English, “Aldin.” He switched back to chitterspeak, “Name mean, Friend. Not all names have a meaning in chitterspeak.”

She starred at him a moment. “Small biggen name, Friend?” She flicked her tail back and forth a bit. “I take name,” she chattered something he didn’t understand.

He drooped his tail. “I no understand name,” he said as he opened up another pack within which he had his last few butternuts from the fall harvest and offered her one.

She gigglechittered as she accepted the nut. She repeated the name again and pointed to the butternut. “Silly, Friend, you no know this? I take name, Butternut.” She held the nut up again.

It was Aldin’s turn to learn a new word. He practiced it a couple times and smiled. His flatpanel beeped indicating an incoming call. Butternut looked warily at the device as Aldin slid it off his back.

“As I warned you, Butternut, biggens have many strange things that will scare you. But this one is very useful thing.” Aldin answered the call. At the other end was Dr. Kaynobble.

“I’m checking in, Ambassador. How did things go?”

“Success, sort of,” Aldin replied in Common as Butternut watched him.

“What do you mean?”

“My former ‘mate’ has a new mate and they have coupled.”

“Wonderful!”

“But...”

“But, what?”

Aldin slowly turned around so the flatpanel’s camera could see Butternut and she could see Dr. Kaynobble on the device. Aldin switched to chitterspeak. “I’ve got company as you can see. This is Butternut, a squirrel elder.” He glanced at Butternut. “This biggen thing also has eye thing. Raccoon is a biggen elder. He see us as we see him. In biggenspeak his name is,” Aldin switched briefly to Common, “Dr. Kaynobble.” He turned back to the camera. “I no know Biggen Elder name in chitterspeak.”

Thinking quickly, Dr. Kaynobble replied in rough chitterspeak, “Call me, Curious. Aldin, why is Butternut with you?”

“Elder Curious, I see Biggen territory,” she answered for him.

“And she no accept no for answer,” Aldin added.

Dr. Kaynobble did a good imitation of a gigglechitter. “I see. I prepare for visit. See you in three-tens,” he switched to common for the next word and then back to chitterspeak, “ceklicks, Aldin and Butternut.” The screen went dark.

Aldin spent the time on the trip trying to prepare Butternut for what she would see including that “biggens” walked on just their rear legs.