

PROLOGUE

(CHATTER!) “My territory! Intruder LEAVE!”

Aldin held his “ground” on the tree branch cautiously wigwagging his tale as the male squirrel charged at him. He stopped short when Aldin did not flee nor try to fight back. He stared at Aldin a moment and recognized his tail with the missing tip.

“Small Biggen, Friend?” the squirrel asked in chitterspeak.

(affirmativeflick) “I come check. See if you need leave.”

“I well. Mate well. Mate feeding our pups. I no leave. This mate and my territory. Nest tight. Last litter weened, still here.”

Aldin smiled. “I tell Butternut. She be proud. I bring gift from Butternut. Seeds. Enough for you and mate for,” he held up three claws, “three days.” Aldin tapped the backpack on the branch next to him with his tale.”

“You no stay. Mate no like Biggens.”

Aldin nodded. “Show me where leave seed and I leave.”

“I show and share story on way, then you leave. Story tell why mate no like Biggens. Mate tell pups last litter this story. I no hear story before. My dame no speak me and litter mates story. No know if she know story.” His tail drooped. “If dame know story she die before she speak story.”

“Mate say this story speak by dame to pups and by dame before and before many, many times. She no know how far back. Long, long time ago. Different Biggens then. No like Biggens now. Strange Biggens have little fur, stand and walk on back legs. Big as bears. Biggens predators. Biggens prey on all other animals and on each other. Biggens know many things. Biggens take squirrels and make smart like our Biggens. Smart squirrels escape from Biggens, fear Biggens eat them. Smart squirrels live deep in forest far from strange Biggens.

“Biggens no wise. Biggens think they wise and control all. Biggens make big fire. Biggens no control fire. Fire top predator. Fire grow and grow, burn, and eat around whole world. All Biggens die. Most animals, prey, predators, birds all die. Fire kill, eat all. Burn and eat all trees and plants. Smart squirrels know many things when fire come. They no know how stop fire. Some flee from fire, go far, far away and no return. No all escape. Those no escape hide in burrows like woodchucks. Burrows full of food, nuts and seeds. Some other animals also hide in burrows. After fire eat all on surface, have no more to eat, it starve and die.

“Then animals who hide in burrows come out. Smart squirrels replant forest. Smart squirrel elders fear fire. Elders fear squirrels make mistake like old Biggens and fire come back. Elders command smart squirrels forget Biggen ways. Is only way stop fire come back. Most obey. That is why we no like Biggens now. Some smart squirrels no obey elders. They chased away from

forest. In time they grow big and turn into our Biggens. They grow lonely and make other Biggens. Mate warn pups no trust Biggens. Danger. Trust Biggens you forget how live like squirrel. Become pup forever.”

Through the retelling of the tale, they had made their way to a tree hollow within which Aldin empty his backpack of the seeds and nuts. They had travelled most of the way back as Butternut’s gradnpup finished. He paused and looked at Aldin.

“Not all Biggens bad. You, Granddame Butternut, Grandsire Curious, and Biggen squirrel with name no meaning chitterspeak no bad.” Again, he drooped his tail. “Mate think different. Tell Grandame Butternut,” he paused a moment. “No recall word you say once.”

“Thank you?”

“Yes. Tell Granddam I say thank you.” He paused again. “Thank you for all.”

Aldin nodded and returned to Nadowahoc College. He quickly sought out Raoul and relayed the tale to him. Raoul informed him he had heard a similar tale before elsewhere. However, he appreciated the second source.