

SIX

(CHATTER!) “Intruder! My territory! LEAVE!” The male squirrel called out as it charged at Aldin.

Aldin held his ground as he had flashbacks from his recent visit with Butternut’s adopted grandpup. Pinecone got between him and her mate. The male stopped short. He looked at Aldin and then Pinecone in confusion.

“Why Pinecone no chase off intruder?”

Pinecone moved over to her mate and groomed him a little, letting him do likewise as he sniffed her. His eyes widened as he pulled back.

“I smell Biggen raccoon.”

Pinecone nodded. “Yes, Biggen raccoon, Elder Curious, visit Biggen squirrel Kind, mate, and pup. I greet elder like Biggens greet.” She pantomimed a hug.

Twig nervously chattered. “Danger trust Biggens.” He looked past her to Aldin. “Who you?”

“Biggen name, Friend. If you sniff you understand. You no bite, I no bite.”

Aldin remained calm as Twig sniffed him. His eyes shot wide again as he did so. He quickly retreated next to his mate. “Smell like squirrel and different.” He paused a moment. “Smell like Biggen and squirrel both.”

“That is what I am. I squirrel and Biggen both. Small Biggen?” Aldin shrugged. “I Biggenspeak.” He switched to Common/’Biggen’. “Pinecone say you hear some Biggen. I call myself a small Biggen squirrel. My people can Biggenspeak.” He switched back to chitterspeak. “My people like Biggens here.” He pointed to his throat with his tail.

Twig chattered nervously.

Aldin drooped his tail. “Friend sorry Twig fear him. I no mean scare you.”

“Small Biggen, Friend, strange. Smell squirrel and Biggen both. Biggenspeak but look, move like squirrel. Where small Biggen squirrel territory?”

Aldin drooped his tail again and replied in chitterspeak. “I no know where my people territory. I lost. Is hard explain. I answer as can in chitterspeak though Biggenspeak have more words. I guess. Biggens guess. Guess is all I can speak. Do you ever look at pinpricks in night sky?”

Twig flicked his tail up and down once indicating affirmative. “I look if wake in night. No leave drey or nest. Danger leave at night. Many night predators.”

Aldin nodded, paused at the strange look Twig gave him and then flicked his tail up and down once. “Do you know what pinpricks are?”

“Biggens say they like sun but far, far away.”

“This no my world. I guess my squirrels’ territory on different world near one of those far suns. Why I think that? Pinpricks make pattern. I show on Biggen viewer.” Aldin pulled his flatpanel off his back and called-up the night sky. He traced the frying pan constellation. “See? These pinpricks look like Biggen food holder. My home night pinpricks different.” He called-up the pattern and pointed out the Big Dipper where the local frying pan should be with an extra star in the handle. “This why I think my home is no here but near one far suns.”

Twig chattered nervously.

“On my world I in burrow doing Biggen learn thing. My people use burrows hide from our Biggens” Aldin pointed down with his tail. “Hole open under me. I fall. No fall in ground. Strange, I fall in sky. No tree close. I confused how I got in sky. I scream scarred. Hit ground hard, break front leg. Hit ground hard sleep. Sleep long time. I wake in Biggen squirrel nest. Biggen see me fall and help me. Was hard speak to Biggen. Biggenspeak different my home. I speak my home Biggenspeak, show different.” Aldin gave the same sentence in chitterspeak, Common, and finally in English. “I love butternuts.”

“Friend home Biggenspeak strange. No sound like Kind Biggenspeak.”

“Biggen squirrel take me to healer. Bind leg. Leg heal. I learn hear/speak this world Biggenspeak. Biggens welcome me. I live with Biggens. This world new home. I no know how contact my people.” Aldin drooped his tail and switched to Common/Biggen. “Pinecone said you understand some Biggenspeak. Biggenspeak has more. If I knew where my world was and could contact my people, I’d tell them how nice this world is. Many would come here. It would be hard to explain and take a long time as to why. Our Biggens not so nice as yours. Your warning to no trust Biggens fits our Biggens. We hide from most of our Biggens.”

Aldin pointed to himself with his tail and shrugged. “I don’t know how else to describe my people. We live like squirrels but in colony something like a Biggen town. We care for the forest. We can Biggenspeak. We use Biggen tools we find useful. That’s why I say I’m both a squirrel and Biggen. So, small Biggen?” He raised his tail briefly in a Terra English question mark-like curve and shrugged his shoulders like a Biggen would.

Pinecone pulled her flatpanel off her back and called-up the video of Aldin’s encounter with Enhray in the Parliament chamber the previous year. Twig’s eyes shot wide again as Pinecone pointed to Aldin in the video and then to Aldin there in front of them. She froze a frame on the flatpanel and zoomed in, showing her mate the notch in Aldin’s tail and the same notch in the tail in the squirrel in front of them.

Twig chattered nervously again. “Small Biggen squirrel fight Biggen martin. Defeat martin. I remember. I watch with mate at Kind’s nest.”

“Friend, brave small Biggen,” Pinecone added.

“Martin and Friend now friends, as I say before to you Pinecone,” Aldin answered.

“Why brave small Biggen here?” Twig asked.

“Biggen raccoon, Curious and Friend friends. Curious ask me come. Visit you, mate, and Biggen squirrels.”

“Why come?”

Aldin shrugged. “You need ask Curious why, Twig. I guess and is only guess.” He switched to Biggenspeak again. “I think Curious wants to see how much Biggenspeak Pinecone has learned. And maybe to see how you are doing, Twig. Curious did arrange for you to meet Pinecone.”

“When small pup, Dame warn me no trust Biggens or become like pup forever. She right. I like big pup when Biggen healer bring me here. I very scared. Biggen squirrels scared me. Then Pinecone come. Free me from Biggen trap. She lead me away into forest and help me grow.”

“All thanks to Curious,” Aldin pointed out. “Will you come and meet him?”

Twig hesitated in answering as he nervously wigwagged his tail.

“You don’t need to decide now, Twig. But think about it. I should get back before they start to worry. You live near Biggens, you understand how they can worry about the smallest thing.”

Twig flicked his tail up and down once.

“Tell Curious I come later,” Pinecone added.

Aldin’s flatpanel beeped and he drooped his tail sighchittering. “I told you Biggens worry.” He pulled it off his back and answered the call. “Hello ‘Curious’.”

“Our hosts will be serving dinner soon.”

“I was on my way back.”

“Good. Will Pinecone and Twig join us?”

“You can ask them. They’re right here.” Aldin turned his back to the two squirrels so they could see Raoul and he could see them.

Raoul switched to chitterspeak. “Pinecone and Twig come to Kind’s nest, eat? Kind share butternuts.”

Pinecone glanced at her mate. Twig hesitated a moment and then nodded. "I go for butternuts," he said.