

SEVEN

It took a lot of coaxing on Pinecone's part to help Twig to work through his fear with the Biggen strangers present. He eventually fought through his fears as he knew there were butternuts. Neither the Biggen woodchuck with the name he couldn't say nor the Biggen raccoon, Curious, made any sudden moves. They held still while he sniffed them. They then settled in a circle around the Biggen-made platform to eat. There were butternuts for them and other cooked food for the Biggens. 'Cooked' was Biggenspeak word for it. He knew no word for it in chitterspeak. Twig wrinkled his nose at the strange smell of it. Having the platform between them and the Biggens helped him be brave enough to sit with the stranger Biggens. The Biggens used tools to lift the cooked food to their mouths to eat. Twig always found it strange. Small Biggen, Friend, ate butternuts like them instead of the Biggen cooked food. Friend said he loved butternuts. Well, so didn't Twig, which is why he worked up the courage to come into the Biggen squirrel nest with the strange Biggens there. There were more butternuts than they could eat. Kind was always so generous when they come to see him, his mate and their pup who was many, many seasons older than him. It was one of the reasons he feared coming. It was just like his dame had warned him when he was a pup. Trust Biggens be like pup forever. If they ate with Biggens all the time, they would never need to look for food or save food for the long winter. They would become just like pups relying on the Biggens for food! Biggens always had more than enough food. He understood the Biggens didn't mean to do that to them. It was just their way to share food with friends. Biggen raccoon, Curious, and Biggen woodchuck must have really liked their cooked food. Neither they nor their hosts talked as they ate. After the Biggens ate all that was in front of them, Twig was slightly startled as the Biggen raccoon, Curious, leaned back from the table and patted his tummy with a paw.

"You feed us too well and too much, Jessophat and Carulin."

"I'll echo that," the Biggen woodchuck added. "I fear if you feed us like that at every meal, I may not be able to climb the ladder in just a few days."

Twig didn't understand all the Biggenspeak but caught enough of it to understand the Biggens enjoyed the cooked food and ate too much of it. Kind and Sunshine were always so generous with food.

"Thank you," Sunshine/Carulin replied. "We only cook like that for guests and on special occasions." She looked over at Friend. "What could be more special than having the Ambassador visit us."

Friend twitched his tail. "I'm just a 'smart' cousin squirrel given a special title because Parliament didn't know what else to do with me. So, they gave me a title and appointed me the special representative of my people, whom I have no way to contact."

Twig did his best to hide his surprise. Friend no say he Voice to Biggen Elders. He understood that Biggen word, 'parliament' meant Biggen Elder council. He watched them with Pinecone on the Biggen viewer when Friend first went before them and fought the Biggen martin who tried to

hunt/kill him. He had forgotten they choose him as Voice for his people. At least that is how Pinecone explained that was what Biggen word 'Embassador' meant.

Curious chuckled as he looked over at Friend. "Well you've done your best to fill the part."

Sunshine/Carulin glanced at Twig, Pinecone, and Friend. "Do any of you need more butternuts?"

"You two are very generous hosts," Friend responded. "I wish I could eat more, as I love butternuts. There isn't anything like them I ever had back on Terra. Sadly, I can't eat any more. Like Fousette, if I eat like that every day, soon, I'll have a hard time to climb as my stomach would get in the way."

Twig drooped his tail briefly. Friend's people no have butternuts! Butternuts were the best. How could they not have butternuts?

Pinecone quickly typed on her flatpanel and it spoke. "Kind and Sunshine so generous. In fall it would take Twig and I two days to gather and eat that many butternuts. I am..." she hesitated a moment. "stuffed. I think that the Biggen word. No eat no more room here." She patted her tummy.

Twig wigwagged his tail nervously as he eyed the two visiting Biggens. This was the part he always dreaded. Biggens will want to talk and talk and talk. "Like mate, I no eat no more. Kind and Sunshine generous. You no like other Biggens my dame warn me. Thank you." The last word combination seemed strange to him in chitterspeak. His mate had taught it to him. Was Biggen term said when given gift like butternuts they shared. It pleased the Biggens when he said it.

"I hear warning before," Curious chittered, which surprised Twig. "What your dame warn you of us Biggens, Twig?"

Twig hesitated a moment. "Is no nice. Kind, mate, and pup different. No know if you different. Dame warn littermates and me when small pups no trust Biggens. Danger. Trust Biggens become like pups forever. Biggens come from those disobey Elders, refuse forget old Biggen ways. Is why Elders chase off in old story."

"My dame said same," Pinecone added in chitterspeak rather than type her response in her flatpanel. "Kind, Sunshine, and Energy different, like big squirrels no Biggens. Curious different. Curious kind Biggen Elder raccoon. Curious help me. Curious speak to Biggen healer. Healer agree bring you here, Twig." She snuggled up to him and nibbled an ear affectionately.

"Pinecone, I Biggen raccoon. I no Elder. Biggens different."

"You tell me you see over three tens winters." She held up all ten claws three times. "Makes you Elder."

Curious sighed. "Biggens different, Pinecone. We speak this my last visit. Biggens live long time. We can see six tens winters. I no Elder."

Twig was surprised. He knew Kind and Sunshine see close to three tens winters and Energy see ten. He never knew how long Biggens live. Was long, long time. He nuzzled his mate back in affection for nibbling on his ear and then added. "I was like pup forever with Biggen healer. No blame healer. He help me. Healer no squirrel sire, no squirrel dame. No know how teach me be no pup squirrel. Pinecone teach me." He waved his tail about. "I always scared come here. I come with mate. I always scared. Biggens always have food. Lots of food. Always generous. We come here, always have food. Come here, no need find food. Easy choose be pup forever. I know Kind, Sunshine, and Energy no mean to make us pups forever." Twig drooped his tail. "No know how explain. Biggens different from squirrels. Kind, mate and pup like big squirrels. Still Biggens." Twig turned his head towards the entrance "We need leave soon. Sun go down soon. No safe night climb. Many night predators. I hear one very dangerous one two nights past." Twig did his best to make a hooting noise. He was worried about the night predator bird coming around. It also made a good excuse to leave before the Biggens make him talk and talk well past time to sleep.

Friend wigwagged his tail nervously and used Biggenspeak. "You have those here?" He paused a moment and sighed. "Well, I don't know the Biggen word for it if it is like what we have on Terra. On Terra we have a night predator bird who sounds like that. In our Biggenspeak, we call it," Friend gave the English word for owl. "In our chitterspeak," Friend gave the chitterspeak word for owl.

Twig never hear chitterspeak word before. Was easier than night predator bird. He would try his best to remember it.

Friend continued in chitterspeak. "Predator bird big or bigger than Curious. Hunt on fly. Make no sound when fly. Drop down from up, surprise, strike fast. You no know it there until after it hunt catch you. Big foot claws." Friend held his front paws apart the distance he was trying to describe. His tail began to wigwag faster like he had spotted a predator.

Now Twig's tail wigwagged fearfully at the description of the large predator.

"Hold squirrel one foot. Eat/swallow squirrel whole. No always kill before eat/swallow. Ours hunt sunset through night to sunrise." Friend shuddered as his tail continued to wigwag rapidly as he now glanced toward the entrance.

Kind called up an image of a new Earth owl on his flat panel. The image looked like a great horned owl on Terra. "One of these?"

Friend's tailwigwagging increased to almost a blur as he did his best to not call out a warning chitter. "Yes," he responded in Biggenspeak. "You have them. On Terra they hunt smaller rodents more than squirrels. But we still fear them for good reason."

Twig saw this as proof that Friend was more like squirrel like them rather than a Biggen, even if he could Biggenspeak without tool. He just as scared of the owl/night predator bird as him. He was right to be scared. Unlike ground predators, owl could snap you off a tree branch.

“In Biggen, we call this,” Kindgave the Biggenspeak/Common word for owl. “And if there is one in the area, that’s concerning. I have never seen one in the forest, only pictures,” he pointed to the image on the flat panel. “It says here they can stand taller than Curios like you said, Aldin. Some have a wingspan as wide as two mits.” He turned to Twig and Pinecone. “That’s a little longer than this table. For your safety, you should go home now.”

“I’ll accompany them to help keep them safe,” Sunshine volunteered, and escorted Pinecone and Twig out into the forest.

Twig was happy to get away from the Biggen nest, even if Sunshine followed them. He understood she meant well in her Biggen way.

After Carulin and the two wild cousin squirrels departed, Jessophat turned to his other guests. “This is a bigger problem then I said to our neighbors. Owls are a protected species. I can’t just look for it and trap or kill it. I’ll need to contact some experts to trap and relocate it. I can’t have that sort of predator here that can not only kill my neighbors but potentially harm or kill Sanial. If it’s on the larger side, it could even harm Carulin or me.”

Aldin’s tail was still nervously wigwagging. “I think I’ll be joining you two in the guest room tonight.”

“I don’t blame you, Ambassador,” Raoul responded.

“I had planned to head out at sunrise to go take care of the business I have while here in the Forest and Lakes District. I guess I’ll be leaving a bit later for my own safety.”

“Take the hovercraft. It’s not like we’ll need it for a few days, and I can summon another one if you don’t return before we need one.”

“Thank you, Raoul.”