

FIVE

“Great Grandsire Teacher, is good to see you again.” The forest Elder wigwagged her tail in greeting at the squirrel on the Biggen viewer hanging on the wall in her old nest hollow.

Teacher smiled on the flatpanel wigwagging his tail in greeting to his great grandpup.

“I worry,” she said. “Try call yesterday. You no answer.”

“We have big snowstorm. Snow four days. Is why I no answer. Flat tools on our tree top snow covered. Can no make energy for flatpanel if snow covered. We uncover this morning. Snow deep as Biggen squirrel Kind stand-up on back legs and Biggen mate Sunshine stand on Kind’s shoulders.”

His great grandpup chattered in surprise as her eyes grew wide. “You sleep through most of snowstorm?”

Teacher wigwagged his tail left to right once in the negative. “No sleep much. We keep very warm in Kind’s next. Plenty food. No need sleep through storm. Squirrels here warn me winters colder, longer with more snow than your forest, Great Grandpup. I no believe before. Now I believe. When snowstorms come, spend much time in Biggen nest. Much time talk, speak stories. Friend speaks how his people live and share territory. Live in forest like squirrels and live in colony like Biggens. Colony have central meeting place. Place where all gather when danger or big storm. All work together at harvest time, gather and share food. No fight over territory. Always truce as share territory with all. All help each other.

“Squirrels here speak of things he speak. Many squirrels speak we already spend near half winter like Friend’s people. We already share food after bring most food from all squirrel middens to here. Biggen squirrel Kind’s big nest like meeting place in colony. Elder Tassel let all decide together by show of tails like Elder council. All choose in spring, we try live like Friend’s people. Though we become small Biggens, we still live in forest. We can tend forest. Forest no die. All live, squirrels, small Biggens, and Biggens in peace, truce, no fight.

“Biggen squirrel Kind also listen to Friend and watch vote. He offer his nest for meeting place. Kind, mate, and pup ask join colony with us. Squirrels agree let Biggens join colony. Is as Pinecone speak in past. They more like big squirrels than Biggen squirrels. They become big small Biggens.” He gigglechattered at the remark and she did likewise.

“Friend speak many things about his people. They have Elder Council like in your forest. Here, if they had council, no one remembers. All old Elders killed, eaten by owl.” He drooped his tail. “Squirrels here decide by show of tails to form Council for our colony. Tassel head Elder. Squirrels choose Pinecone, Kind, and I for Elder Council for our colony. Choose Friend Voice of Colony to Biggen Elders like he Voice for his people he can no contact. Friend can Biggenspeak. Easy choose Friend for Voice. Friend agree to be Voice.”

“Big changes, Great Grandsire Teacher. How you feel on changes?”

He glanced to his left and right and replied in a near whisper. "I both scared and excited. Is different. Hope good different. We see. After hear Friend speak of his people, I still think Friend's people are squirrels who flee fire long ago."

She nodded. "But you no find his people when you go around world speak Elder Biggen rules."

Teacher drooped his tail. "No, we no find his people."

His great grandpup changed subjects. "Has squirrel arrived yet from our forest? He raised by small Biggen Elder Butternut."

Teacher flicked his tail up and down once in the affirmative. "Biggen Elder Butternut's grandpup no grandpup arrive just before storm with other squirrel. He no choose name yet. He say mate died. He no say how."

His great grandpup drooped her tail. "They argue fight about Biggens. She chase him out of nest and through trees. Predator bird drop out of sky and hunt/kill her. Snatch her in claws, fly away. He flee straight to me. I comfort him best I can. I explain about your forest. He choose to go. I call Biggens. Small Biggen Elder Butternut come get him. He cry into her shoulder as she comfort him like dame to pup. Elder Butternut make good dame. We speak briefly. She agree to help raise pups who lose dame and sire like in past if need. She only agree if she raise them in Biggen territory. We decide those she raise will go to your forest, Great Grandsire."

"Is good. We need more squirrels. With Butternut grandpup no grandpup, and other squirrel, we now have four tens" he held-up all ten claws four times, "squirrels. Other squirrel arrive with Butternut's grandpup have tassels like us, fur black as dark hollow except chest. Chest white. I no see squirrel with black fur before. Two females, littermates, from other forests eye him and Butternut's grandpup. I think they both have mates soon. Elder Tassel decide when Pinecone/Friend's pups born will be late enough for all others then try make pups. Wait until then, pups won't come until spring."

"Is already late enough here to make pups, Great Grandsire." She patted her tummy. "I growing pups. Mate is happy. He speak he no sire pups for three winters. He very proud sire."

Teacher smiled. "I happy for you and mate."

She bowed in thanks.

"One more news to report, Great Grandpup. Our Elder Council rule all squirrels here learn Elder things."

Her eyes widened in surprise.

"Tassel speak is important all know Elder things. She no prepared be Elder when she become Elder. She no want that happen to others here if owls hunt us again."

His great grandpup shuddered remembering what happened.

“Elder Council take vote. I no vote. Others agree with Tassel. I start teaching others Elder things. I live up to name I take.”

“You do live up to name, Teacher, Great Grandsire. I must inform our Council of this.”

“I understand. Is why I tell you, Great Grandpup.”

“Give my blessing to Great Granddame Tassel, Great Grandsire. We speak again in seven days.”

“She happy you honor her as Great Granddame.”