

EIGHT

“Hello?” Butternut answered in Common. She stared at the screen in surprise and switched to chitterspeak. “Grandpup?” She wigwagged her tail in greeting.

Her adopted grandpup wigwagged his tail in greeting. “Granddame Butternut! This Biggen tool works!” he exclaimed excitedly. “Elder Pinecone teach me. I careful on time. I know sun six pawspands higher in sky your territory than here. I happy to see you.”

Butternut smiled at her adopted Grandpup on the screen. “I happy to see you too, Grandpup. Are things good for you in new forest?”

“It different, Granddame. Good different. I learn. I like. Many here take name. Others suggest name to me. I take name, Nimble.” He whirled his tail proudly.

“Is good name, Nimble. You always fast on paws as pup.”

He paused a moment. “I learn new chitterspeak word from small Biggen, Friend, explain is like what you do for me. You adopt,” he struggled a little with the word, “me like own grandpup. He teach me other chitterspeak word say you would like hear it. Thank you, Granddame Butternut. If no for you, I no live now. If no for you, I no have new chance after I lose last two,” he held up two claws, “mates.”

Butternut puffed-up in pride at what she heard. “I proud of you, Nimble. You ***ARE*** my grandpup though I no bare your sire. You always be my grandpup.”

Nimble puffed up a bit on screen at the praise and whirled his tail happily. “I busy since come to new forest, Granddame. Squirrel different forest come at same time. Biggen healer raise him. Healer no know how teach him be squirrel. I adopt other squirrel like littermate, teach him how to be squirrel. He take name, Shadow.” Nimble glanced off screen. “No be afraid, Shadow, come see my Granddame.”

A black furred squirrel with tasseled ears hesitantly pokes into view of the camera. He nervously wigwags his tail.

“You no reason be afraid, Grandpup Shadow,” Butternut said encouragingly. She gazed at him through the screen.

“You call me grandpup?” He asked nervously.

Butternut wigwagged her tail up and down once in the affirmative. “I adopt Nimble when pup raise him to adult. He adopt you as littermate. Makes you my grandpup, Shadow. I proud call you my grandpup. “I like your black fur. Is striking.”

Shadow’s eyes seem to light-up before he hide his face behind his tail bashfully at the praise.

“See, I told you, Granddame Butternut nice.”

Shadow tried the new chitterspeak word Nimble used before. “Thank you, Granddame. I lose sire and dame as young pup. Forest far, far away. Teacher show me world on viewer.” Shadow drooped his tail. “Old forest other side of world. Nimble help me later, call Biggen healer. I thank healer save my life.”

Butternut nodded. “Biggen healer will like hear that.”

“Granddame, we call give you names we take. And call give other news.” He chittered off screen and two more squirrels with peppery grey fur and rounded ears appear in view of the camera. They looked exactly alike, as they gazed nervously at the image. “These two littermates different forest, come here like us. They no choose names yet. They choose us. We share, all four mates.”

Butternut smiled and whirled her tail happily at the news. “Welcome to our family, grandpups. As I speak before to Shadow, you mates my grandpups, make you my grandpups. May you see many winters, raise many healthy pups.”

Both the females bowed in thanks. One spoke. “I scared when Nimble say he call small Biggen Elder.” She wigwagged her tail nervously. “I see I no need be scared. You nice small Biggen.”

“You have small Biggens in your forest. You have Biggens in your forest. Why you afraid? I live far, far away near Nimble’s old territory. Call me Granddame. Call me Butternut. No call me Elder. I no Elder now. Biggens different. Many, many Biggens. We take turns serve on Elder Council. Only serve one,” she held-up one claw, “time for two,” she held-up two claws, “seasons. I serve last summer through harvest time.”

The female flicked her tail up and down once in understanding. “Granddame Butternut kind give us blessing.”

The other female spoke up. “May I ask Granddame Butternut how old you are?”

Butternut gigglechittered. “Some Biggens no like speak how old one is. No feel bad. You no know. I adopt you as family. I answer. Biggens grow slow, live long time. I born Biggen squirrel. Was Biggen pup ten and six,” she held-up all ten claws followed by six more claws, “winters. I adult Biggen for ten more winters. Accident happen. Other Biggens no understand accident. Accident change me from Biggen to smart squirrel.” She paused a moment. “I very, very scared after change. I flee mate to forest. I meet your Elder Teacher. He teach me how live like squirrel. I live there help raise squirrels no dame, no sire, like I do for Nimble for six winters. I return to Biggens and mate last spring. Mate take me back though I flee from him. He no look for other mate while I live in forest.” She paused again for a moment. “I speak all this as no easy answer question, Grandpup. Do I count time as both Biggen and smart squirrel or just time as smart squirrel? If both, I see three tens and three winters.” She held all ten claws up three times followed by three claws. “If no count Biggen squirrel time, I see seven,” she held up seven claws. “winters. Biggens can see seven tens winters. Will I see that many now I no Biggen?” She shrugged. “Only creator know.”

“May you see many more winters, Granddame,” Nimble responded for the group. “We must go.”

“Take care all of you,” Butternut replied before ending the call.