

TEN

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

One of the females who had chosen Nimble as one of her mates bowed on screen. “Granddame Butternut. Littermate and I take names. I Lily, she Buttercup. Buttercup grow pups.” Lily drooped her tail. “I no grow pups.”

“Give my blessings to your littermate and your mates, Grandpup Lily. Why you no grow pups?”

Tears started to roll from her eyes. “Both Nimble and Shadow try make pups with me and Buttercup many times over,” she held up five claws, “days. Pups no take in me. Buttercup speak pups grow in her. Nimble and Shadow worry. Speak to Elder Voice Friend. Friend take me, and Nimble to Biggen healer. Shadow stay with Buttercup. Healer biggen woodchuck, both kind and scary. Healer no chitterspeak. Friend speak to and for us. Healer make me sleepy. He look in me where pups would grow as I sleep. When I awake he tell me I can no grow pups ever. He can no heal.”

Now a few tears fell from Butternut’s eyes. “Oh, Lily, I so sorry. If I there, I comfort you like you my pup.”

“Elder Teacher suggest I call, speak to you. He say you know how I feel.”

Butternut raised an eyebrow briefly. “Has Nimble told you about my mate, Grandpup?”

Lily wigwagged her tail left to right once in the negative while she sniffled.

“As I speak to you and other grandpups before. I born Biggen squirrel. Accident happen change me to smart squirrel and I flee mate to forest. When I return to Biggens, he take me back as mate. He is a Biggen raccoon.”

Lily’s eyes widened. “Squirrel and raccoon can no make pups!”

“No, we can no make pups, Grandpup. We try though we know we can no make pups. Biggens choose mates for reasons other than make/grow pups. Is why I help raise squirrel pups who lose dame and sire.”

They looked at each other in silence a moment before Butternut continued. “You can do the same, Lily. You can help Buttercup with her pups when they come. You can help others too.”

“How, Granddame?”

“Start with Elder Pinecone and Elder Voice Friend. Ask help them when pups come. You can no nurse pups. You can help keep pups warm when Pinecone need go eat or make bad water. She bare pups in past. She can teach you how to help.”

“Granddame Butternut wise. Elder Pinecone bare four pups. Keep her and Friend very busy. I will ask to help them.” Lily paused a moment and struggled with the next two words, “Thank you, Granddame. I think that words Nimble use last call. I go now.”

“You and the others take care, Grandpup Lily.”