

FOUR

(chitterchitchit) “Come out. Is safe.”

A squirrel with singed fur poked its muzzle out of a burrow hole. “I smell biggens. Is no safe!”

Foxy wigwagged her tail in reassurance. “They good biggens. Biggen Elders send them to help us. Our Elders were teaching me Elder things before fire.” She drooped her tail. “We no find Elders yet. Makes me Elder for now. Biggens have names for all things. Biggen squirrel name Oakpointyhill.”

“Strange name.”

She flicked her tail up and down once. “Biggens all have names. Most have no meaning in chitterspeak. Oakpointyhill speak chitterspeak good. He good biggen. Our Elders trust him before fire. He has food and water. Biggen rabbit with him no chitterspeak. Name no meaning in chitterspeak. She biggen healer. She look you over if you let her.”

The singed fur squirrel crept out of the hole and wigwagged his tail nervously over his head. “They no hunt/kill me?” He looked over her shoulder and could see the biggens a little way off.

“No, they safe. They no hunt/kill me. They no hunt/kill you.”

The singed, scared squirrel wigwagged his tail up and down once and then chittered back down the burrow. Two others nervously emerged. They too had singed fur, but not as bad as the first. They looked about in panic searching for some place to climb as they saw the two biggens behind her.

“Is alright,” Foxy assured them. “They good biggens.”

They wigwagged their tails nervously. “Our dames warn us no trust biggens. Trust biggens become like pups forever.”

“Sometime must risk trust biggens. Must risk be pup forever. Which you choose? Stay and starve/die or risk be pup forever but live. No hard choose.”

All three wigwagged their tails up and down once in agreement. Not a hard choice. Live or die. This new elder was wise.

All three slowly crept towards the two biggens, who slowly crouched down to let three scared cousin squirrels sniff them. All three whirled their tails over their backs nervously as they sniffed. The biggen squirrel gave them food and water. He chitterspoke for the healer who checked over them slowly and gently. She rubbed an ointment on their burns, which cooled them. It was as the new Elder said, they were good biggens.

As the biggen rabbit finished tending to their burns, the first to emerge from the burrow spoke for the three. "Elder what become of us? Forest gone. No place hide from predators. No trees to give us food. We starve if predators no hunt/kill us first."

She hugged each of them in reassurance like they were her pups. "Biggens will take us to other forest. You need choose which forest. Right now, they take you some place safe from predators. Is truce like winter nests. You no go thirsty. You no starve. I will explain when I rejoin you."

"You no come with us?"

"I help Biggens find other squirrels who survive fire. Would you have come out if only biggens here?"

They wigwagged their tails left to right and back in the negative.

"How long would you survive out here if I no come with biggens?"

The first answered, "A few days." All three drooped their tails. "Then die of thirst if no rain."

"If a predator no find hunt/kill us first," the second added.

"You good Elder come look for us," praised the third. He looked to the other two who raised their tails briefly. "We trust you. We will go with biggens to other squirrels and wait for you."

Foxy went through the same process again, and again. The Biggen viewer in the flyer that Oakpointyhill controlled showed a heat signature when they were near an occupied burrow. She would then coax the squirrels out and convince them to let the Biggens help them. There were also many, many charred bodies of squirrels and other animals. It distressed Foxy to see all the dead.

On the second day, Oakpointyhill's tool indicated there were five squirrels in the burrow in front of her. Again, as many times before, once the biggen flyer landed, she scampered up to the burrow and called out. (chitterchitchit) "Come out. Is safe."

A squirrel with singed fur poked its muzzle out of a burrow hole. "Biggens start fire. I smell biggens. Is no safe!" The female squirrel replied, then paused while staring at Foxy. She quickly leapt out of the burrow and nearly bowled her over in a hug. "DAME!!!" She cried out while shedding tears. "You live!"

"Pup!?" Foxy exclaimed in reply shedding tears of her own as she hugged her adult pup from her litter two winters before.

Her adult pup flicked her tail up and down once. She chattered back down the hole and her mate and their three pups from that winter slowly emerged. "Is my dame!" Much hugging occurred.

“Biggens!” Her mate chattered when he spotted Oakridge and the rabbit healer near their hovercraft a little way behind Foxy. He darted back towards the burrow pushing their three pups ahead of him.

Foxy chattered loudly freezing him in his tracks. “I now Elder,” she said. “I no endanger family. They safe biggens. Biggen Elders send them to help squirrels. Biggen squirrel named Oakpointyhill. He have food and water. He chitterspeak good. Biggen rabbit with him healer. She no chitterspeak. Old Elders trust him. I trust him. You can trust him. Come.”

“Elder?” Her daughter asked.

Foxy drooped her tail. “Yes, we search for other survivors. We find Elder who start teach me Elder ways. She dead. We no find others. No other survivors see more than four winters to my five. Makes me Elder.”

Her daughter turned to her mate and pups. “Come. Elder dame speak biggens safe. We go to biggens.” Her mate did not argue.

It was as Foxy promised. They had all the food and water they needed as the rabbit healer gently checked each over.

“Oakpointyhill take you to Biggen place safe from predators where other squirrels wait. It truce there like in winter storms or when must flee from predator. When search done, we go to new forest.”

Her daughter chattered quietly to her mate. He flicked his tail up and down once and then hugged her. Their pups hugged their mother. She turned to Foxy. “Mate and pups go. I stay. I help find others.”

Foxy hugged her daughter. “You wise beyond your winters.” She turned to Oakridge who didn’t need an explanation as he was already placing a call for another search team that needed a cousin squirrel. Foxy’s daughter wasn’t the first to volunteer to help.

Foxy’s daughter nervously wigwagged her tail when the second flyer arrived with a biggen beaver pilot and biggen squirrel medic. Introductions were made and they were off to do as Foxy and Oakridge were doing.