

FIVE

Twenty or so squirrels milled about in the strange biggen space. It was as the new Elder had said. The biggens provided them food and water. A biggen healer tended to those with burns. A biggen squirrel who chitterspeak good spoke to and for them. They were amazed by the biggen tool in the other room that washed away their bad water and pellets when they needed to make those. Over the next two days more squirrels arrived in ones and twos. Those who were there before helped the new arrivals. In total there were thirty-eight by late on that second day. Near sundown the new Elder returned with the biggen squirrel named Oakpointyhill. All the squirrels swarmed around her nearly overwhelming her.

“You find no others?”

Foxy dropped her tail. “We find no more squirrels alive today.” Tears fell from her eyes. “I see many dead, burned squirrels and other animals. Is awful. I recognize Elder who start teaching me Elder ways. She dead like all the others.”

They all drooped their tails and they all wept for lost loved ones, young and old. “I need rest. I and others who are helping Biggens search will try one more day tomorrow to find more squirrels.”

One of the late comers asked, “Elder, is it true that you will go to forest of Elder of Elders?”

Foxy flicked her tail up and down once. “He no like title Elder of Elders. He speak call him Elder or Teacher. I was part of the first group of survivors Oakpointyhill found. I speak to Elder Teacher on Biggen viewer. His forest is one who asked for more squirrels last winter. Is different there.” She described how they lived in a colony. “Those in the survivor group at that time by show of tails all choose to go to Elder Teacher’s forest.” She looked about. “The rest of you must choose so Biggens know where to take you. If you fear new different way Elder Teacher’s forest, his pup of pup of pup is Elder in his old forest. Is like here before fire. One thing different in Elder Teacher’s forest, all take names like Biggens. You who go there chose name when ready. I already take name. I am Foxy.” She told how she survived the fire as only those in the original group knew.

“Is good name,” many agree.

“I go where you go, Dame, Elder Foxy” her daughter declared. Her mate and pups agreed. The rest who were not part of her original group huddled together in small groups and spoke quietly among themselves. Then one by one, they declared that she was their Elder and they would go where she goes. She was moved by the gesture.

Oakridge chose this moment to speak-up. “Squirrels rest now. One more day we search as your Elder Foxy state. The morning after that you begin journey to your new home.”

The following day found another dozen survivors. Again, all chose to follow Foxy to The Refuge. The next morning after that, another cousin squirrel arrived with Oakridge. He immediately scampered over to Foxy and bowed before offering to allow her to sniff him. Her eyes widened as she finished.

“I remember you. Small biggen named Friend who come to speak to our Elders last harvest time.”

Aldin bowed again. “And you have come a long way from the nervous squirrel you were at that time, Elder Foxy. I am here to take you to your new home. Those who live in the colony call it ‘The Refuge’.”

Foxy thought of the name for a moment. “Fitting name for those here who have lost our home.”

“Gather your people together, Elder Foxy. We have a long trip ahead. I came to make that trip a little easier. You will no need to ride in what feels like a trap. As I can Biggenspeak, we will no need a biggen squirrel with us to translate. I know how to fly small biggen flyer. I will take us to larger biggen flyer. A biggen otter will fly us to near The Refuge. From there I will again fly us in a smaller flyer to your new home. It will take all day.”

True to his word, Aldin piloted, well programmed, the extra-large hovercraft from the emergency shelter for the fifty survivors to the flitterport. From there, an area had been closed-off from the public so the squirrels could scamper from the hovercraft and into the waiting flitter without encountering any other biggens. That is until they were on board and saw the biggen beaver. He crouched down so all could sniff him. A door opened and a biggen otter came out and like the beaver, she crouched down and let them sniff her. Aldin explained that their biggen names didn’t translate into chitterspeak. The beaver, Dauvid, would provide them food and water when asked. He understood, but could not speak chitterspeak.

After the otter went back into the pilot chamber, Dauvid showed the squirrels how to fasten the “trap-like” harness in the seats. Aldin explained how it was needed for safety as the flitter started and ended its flight, indicating the light that would turn on when they needed to strap on the harness. Many were amazed as they gazed out the windows at how high and fast they flew above the clouds. Dauvid was very helpful providing food and water as requested and showing the squirrels where to leave pellets or bad water. Those who used the flitter’s bathroom were now used to how the water suddenly whooshed through the trough to take their urine and feces away as it was similar to the one in the emergency shelter. It still amazed them. Aldin explained some about ‘The Refuge’ on the journey. Many took turns explaining how they survived the fire.

When they landed, they stared as Aldin hugged both the biggen beaver and otter like family. He explained to them it was a way biggens thanked each other or said goodbye. They all proceeded to do likewise, though all were quite scared doing so. Aldin led them into another large hovercraft and within a pawspan of time (roughly one klick¹), they arrived at The Refuge. More introductions were made and the newcomers were ushered into Jessopha’s tree hollow and down

¹ Klick-hour

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into a space to rest for the night. The space smelled of other squirrels, so all felt safe and were quickly asleep after their long journey.