

SEVEN

A citizen martin appeared on the large screen in Jesophat's living space. Some of its facial fur looked singed. It looked straight at the camera and at the young citizen squirrel on his screen.

"Hello? Who's calling?"

On screen, the young citizen squirrel bowed. "I am Sanial, son of Jessophat. I am calling you from 'The Refuge' as the local cousin squirrels are calling it. You are Mr. Ehnray, correct?"

The martin nodded. "'The Refuge'? Ambassador Aldin Busheytail's home?"

Saniel nodded as his tail flicked up and down once. "Unfortunately, he and my parents are away at the moment. Our newest Elder, Foxy, wishes to speak with you. I will translate as best I can. I had already explained to her roughly what we would say to each other up to this point."

Foxy nervously creeps into view of the camera. Her tail swirls behind her back. It takes her a moment to compose herself. Saniel chitters reassuringly to her. He then turns to Ehnray. "I'm reassuring Elder Foxy that you are no threat to her and reminding her that she is the one who asked me to call you." As he finishes, she starts chittering. He translates, "Use biggen Martin's name I can no pronounce as you Biggenspeak for me, Energy." Saniel adds, "Energy is my chitterspeak name, Mr. Ehnray." He chitters back to Foxy, who continues.

"I new here. I and others who survive fire flee old burned forest to this one. I learn from other Elders here, Mr. Ehnray, you brave and go fight fire that destroy our old forest."

"Yes, I fought the fire as many others did. Some were badly burned doing so. I was lucky to only burn a little fur. It was an awful thing."

After Saniel translates Ehnray's reply, Foxy chitters something else to Saniel. Saniel chitters back. They seem to sound nearly the same going back and forth until Saniel nods. Saniel turns back to Ehnray. "Foxy's people have less chitterspeak than is used here in The Refuge, Mr. Ehnray. They are learning eagerly and quickly. She wanted to know the proper way to pronounce the chitterspeak word for 'thank you.'. Among them, they would simply bow in acknowledgement." He repeated it one last time in chitterspeak.

Foxy chattered 'thank you' while bowing, and continued chattering, pausing for Saniel to translate.

"Thank you, Mr. Ehnray, for risking your life to try and save our old forest. Pass my people's thank you on to the other biggens who also fought the fire. May your healers help those injured to heal quickly." Foxy bowed again briefly. "The other Elders here explained to me how as an older pup, your sire take you to our forest to learn to hunt. Obeying your sire, you hunt/killed and ate a squirrel. You and your sire no know we smart then."

Ehnray closed his eyes briefly. “Yes, it is true. As an older pup, I hunted, killed, and ate a squirrel in your forest. I did not know squirrels were smart until Aldin’s arrival.”

Foxy paused a moment listening to the translation. She flicked her tail up and down once and chittered some more as Sanial translated. “Any debt you think you owe us for obeying your sire long ago is no more. As the surviving Elder of that forest, I forgive for what you did.”

Ehnray’s eyes widen briefly. He bowed his head as he tried to fight back tears. “Thank you, Elder Foxy,” he finally managed. “That means a lot to me.”