

TWELVE

Back near their nesting tree, Birch led her pups to the brook to wash the cherry stains off their muzzles and to drink.

“See, Kind and Sunshinre are no all that bad,” Foxy said while getting a drink herself. She lapped for a while and then continued. “They’re more like big squirrels who use biggen tools as I and Elder Tassel speak in past. Did you see their pup quietly took what they brought to the nest down to the other cool midden while we talked about how Sunshine preserves cherries.”

“I still scared. I know they no mean harm,” Birch replied after she lapped some water. “They biggens. Is one thing hard to accept in our new home.”

“Is alright. I scared too. We get use to them in time,” Birch’s mate tried to reassure her. “Dame Foxy right. Compare them to other Biggens we met before coming here. They different. More like us than other Biggens.”

“Speaking of biggens,” Foxy replied as her memory was jogged. “Other biggens will come visit soon and stay for rest of summer. These are no the ones working on other meeting/storage trees. Different biggens.”

Birch and her mate wigwagged their tails nervously. Their pups paid no attention as they splashed each other in the brook. They had long since finished washing their muzzles and turned the task into a game. It had become a very warm early summer afternoon. They were pretending they were otters and beavers, enjoying the cool feeling of the water soaking their fur as they splashed about and swam.

“You no go too far,” Birch chided them before turning back to Foxy.

“Other Elders tell me they safe,” Foxy continued. “One is biggen raccoon who spend much time learn about smart squirrels. Other is smart squirrel like us who born biggen squirrel. Had accident other biggens no understand and grow small into smart squirrel. Raccoon and squirrel mates.”

The Birch and her mate gasped.

“Yes, is strange what some biggens do. She also former biggen Elder. Biggens have one biggen Elder Council for whole world. So many biggens, they take turns serve as Elder. Serve for two seasons. She serve last summer through harvest time. They come so she can try get Friend be second mate like just now with Elder Tassel’s pup. Pinecone share Friend with her so she can have pups as she and first mate can no make pups.”

“Biggens strange to choose mate no same as them. No can make pups then,” Birch’s mate stated.

Foxy flicked her tail up and down once in agreement. “Biggens can be strange.” She looked up at a nearby tree trunk as Pinecone made her way down towards them. Her four pups followed and quickly joined the others in their splashing game in the brook.

Pinecone flicked her tail up and down once in agreement as she overheard Foxy’s final sentence. “Agree, biggens can be strange. By the noise those three are making,” She pointed towards the pups in the brook with her tail. “I know I find you here.” She bowed to Birch and her mate and wigwagged her tail in greeting. “And now mine have joined yours.” She gigglechattered a moment. “Is a good day to play in cool water. I know you and others who come from Foxy’s forest are still adjusting to our ways here in The Refuge. So are we. I think always truce rule is good. If no truce, we could no meet like this without first asking ‘Truce?’ and then approach each other nervously. And pups could no play together. Is as new to us as you. Change can be hard. We all try this new change together.”

The other adults flicked the tails up and down once in agreement. Though things were different in this forest, they could see how that different was good compared to their old forest. They all watched the pups’ antics for a time. Finally, Pinecone looked at Foxy. “I drop by to speak to you Elder Foxy. Elder Kind ask we hold council meeting this evening a pawspan before sunset at Kind’s nest.”

“What we discuss?”

Pinecone gigglechattered briefly before answering, “cherries.”

Foxy drooped her tail.

“Is no bad,” Pinecone reassured her, touching her shoulder briefly with one of her forepaws in reassurance. “You no worry. You and family no in trouble. You see.”

Birch’s mate wigwagged his tail nervously. “As I speak before you arrive Elder Pinecone, Kind and Sunshine scare me.”

“They more like big squirrels than Biggens,” Pinecone replied echoing Foxy’s earlier statement without knowing it. “Once you get to know them you will agree. I very scared of them when I first meet them. I got use to them in time. And they no scary like biggen elder bobcat I met last summer. We flew on large biggen flyer together. We learned a lot from each other. We hugged.”

The others gasped. “Biggen bobcat no hunt you?”

Pinecone wigwagged her tail from left to right once. “No all Biggens hunt. She no hunt. I scared when I hug her. I did so to show I understand she good biggen.”

They fell silent for a few ceklicks before Pinecone continued. “I want to watch pups play more, but I must go speak to Elders Teacher and Tassel about meeting.” She turned to Birch, “May my pups stay a while longer and play?” She raised her tail briefly in a curl.

Birch flicked her tail up and down once and replied, “They may stay. No pups for long. They have fun while pups.”

Pinecone flicked her tail up and down once in agreement with Birch’s statement while bowing in thanks. She then called out to her pups. “Cloud, Chitter, Blossom, Twig!”

The four pups paused and looked at their mother. “Ah, Dame, we leave already?” Blossom asked for the four of them. “We just start have fun.” All four drooped their soaked tails back into the brook. Chitter, in the center and a little ahead of his three siblings suddenly shook all over, splashing the others with the water he shook out of his fur. He grinned back at them.

Pinecone wigwagged her tail left to right in the negative. “I must leave and go speak to your grandsire and granddame. Birch speak you may stay.”

“Yeah!” They were joined in by Birch’s pups in their excitement.

“When Birch speak you need go home, you obey Birch like she your dame. No argue. You leave when she speak leave”

“We will!” they called out in unison and then looked at Birch, bowing slightly. “Thank you, Dame Birch!” Chitter’s siblings piled on top of him, dunking him in the brook. They all then quickly went back to splashing with the others.