

## THIRTEEN

Foxy arrived at the meeting to find that the other members of the council and Aldin were there ahead of her. "Am I in trouble?" she asked as she nervously wigwagged her tail.

All wigwagged their tails left to right and back once, even Kind.

"You no in trouble," Tassel stated on behalf of the others.

"Elder Kind, as you ask for meeting, speak," Tassel replied.

"You and your family did surprise my mate, Foxy," Kind stated. "She can no preserve all the cherries you and your family harvested today. Is why I ask for meeting. Some of what I must speak I can only use Biggenspeak for." He drooped his tail and looked at Foxy. "I know you no hear Biggenspeak. I try my best to explain in chitterspeak, but it no have enough words. I may need Biggenspeak for some of it. I drop Elder title we all Elders here except Friend, no need use title."

All flicked their tails up and down once on the suggestion to drop titles for the meeting. Foxy briefly bowed her head in understanding. Inside, she was a little afraid to learn Biggenspeak, but understood she would eventually need to do so as an Elder of the colony due to how they must interact with Biggens now and then. She was as afraid of learning it as her daughter was afraid of Kind, Sunshine, and Energy.

Kind accepted the head nod as permission to continue. "Sunshine will preserve some cherries tomorrow and your grandpups will help as already arranged, Foxy. We no have the tools to preserve all you, your family, and the others harvest today. Sunshine has tools for cherries from one tree only as that is all we need in past. There is only one tree in what had been our territory before we joined The Refuge. My pup, Energy, suggest we contact nearby Biggen colony. They have tools to preserve the rest and more. I speak to them on Biggen viewer and discuss. I speak to them again after discuss with other Elders. Is why I ask for meeting. Cherries belong to colony."

Kind paused gathering his thoughts before continuing. "What classes you attend here so far, Foxy?"

Foxy was caught off guard by the question which seemed a change of subject. "I learn Elder things from Teacher."

"Have you attended any of Friend's classes about Biggen things?"

Foxy wigwagged her tail left to right and then drooped it. "I miss last class when you, Tassel, and I climbed through our combined territory. My grandpups attend. They explain to their dame, sire, and I how Biggens choose to learn a lot about one thing and trade that knowledge or food with each other. I think you try explain a little about trade as we look over territory. You trade extra butternuts for other things. It sound strange to me."

Kind visually relaxed. “Good. I was no sure where to start. We must trade for the work Biggens are doing to make other trees into meeting and midden storage. If send squirrel to healer, must trade for work healer does.”

“I speak sound strange, but I understand a little. Biggens doing such things no have time to gather food.”

Kind smiled and wigwagged his tail up and down once. “Yes, is one way to look at it. I ask this council meeting to discuss trading extra cherries to help with that work. Biggens in nearby colony would trade some of the cherries to preserve rest. We then trade preserve cherries for other things we need here.” He looked at Tassel.

“There are three more cherry groves in our old territory,” she said without needing to be asked. “The one you harvest today was small with six trees. The others have as many as five and ten trees each.”

“There is also one cherry tree at far end of what was my territory as I speak before,” Kind added. “Was only tree I knew before our climb the other day. Is why Sunshine was so surprised by all the cherries today. I suggest we send out squirrels to eat what they wish and then harvest rest to trade with Biggens.”

“What can we get from Biggens for cherries?” Foxy asked.

“This where it gets harder explain in chitterspeak,” Kind replied. “Biggens use trade system called,” he switched to Common for the next word, “‘credits’.” He switched back to chitterspeak speaking the word, credits, in Common as needed. “Biggen who has things or service you want may no want what you have to offer in trade. That is where credits are used. Different things worth different number credits. Biggens trade credits for what they do and to get what they want. I know Pinecone and Friend,” he nodded to each, “understand Biggen trade system. I no know if the rest of you do.”

“I know what grandpups explain,” Foxy responded. “No more.”

“I try to learn,” Teacher replied. “Is complicated.”

Tassel flicked her tail up and down once. “Same as Teacher.”

Kind nodded. “Yes, it can be complicated. Right now, Biggens will trade four credits for one,” he switched to Biggenspeak for the next word and back to chitterspeak, “kilo<sup>1</sup> of ripe cherries.” He looked at Foxy. “Kilo is Biggen measure for weight. You weigh about half of one kilo. I weigh about one kilo.”

Foxy flicked her tail up and down once as she considered how much she, herself, weighed in Biggen measure system. “Is that good trade for things The Refuge need from Biggens?”

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<sup>1</sup> Kilo-kilogram, 2.2 pounds

Kind flicked his tail up and down once.

“How we trade to Biggens who hollow out trees for extra meeting places and midden storage?” Foxy asked raising and curling her tail briefly. “We no harvest all cherries yet.”

Kind drooped his tail. “I make trade from my credit um...midden, no right word in chitterspeak, but is closest word. I need more chitterspeak numbers to explain amount. I know all now understand one through ten and then count in tens. If only count in tens will take a while to explain amount.” He turned to Aldin and switched to Common. “Does Terran chitterspeak have a word for one hundred?”

“Yes, I haven’t taught the word as it has not really been needed until now.” Aldin replied and chittered the word. Kind repeated it. Aldin nodded that he got it right.

“How about a thousand?” at the questioning as they understood those numbers in Biggenspeak. Tassel, Teacher, and Pinecone began to wigwag their tails rapidly as they began to wonder just how many Biggen credits this cost if he was asking for the word for a thousand. Tassel and Teacher didn’t have a concept of how big a thousand really was, but it had to be big. They had heard the term before. Pinecone understood as she had lived most of her life with Kind and his family.

Again, Aldin chittered the word and nodded when Kind repeated it correctly. He then asked in Common, “Just how much is it costing, Jessophat?”

Jessophat drooped his tail and replied in Common, “We’re off grid and need solar panels in addition to the work of hollowing out the trees, plus wiring for the lighting, plumbing, small leach fields for the bathroom, and wells. Believe it or not, it’s less costly that way than one large leach field and well in between the trees. Less plumbing and less likely for something to freeze-up in winter.”

“So how much?”

Kind drooped his tail. “About seventy-thousand credits, Aldin.”

Tassel, Teacher, and Pinecone wigwag their tails even more rapidly not believing what portions they understood of the conversation. Foxy’s tail started to wigwag nervously simply because of how they wigwagged their tails though she didn’t understand a word of the Biggenspeak other than ‘credits’ though she could tell it wasn’t good by the distress in Kind’s voice.

Aldin chitter-whistled long and loud at the amount. He then turned to the others. “I need explain for you to fully understand. Is very big number. You know ten,” he held-up all ten claws. “My people call ten tens one hundred.” He flashed his ten claws ten times. “Ten hundreds is one thousand, which I won’t demonstrate. It take too long.” He paused as they nodded. He looked at Tassel. “How many squirrels live in The Refuge?”

Tassel thought for a moment. “about one hundreds and five tens,” she replied and looked at Jessophat, “And three biggen squirrels.”.

Aldin nodded. “Good.” He turned to Foxy. “How many nuts do you normally gather for winter?”

Foxy thought for a moment as her eyes grew very wide. “Depends on the nut. If butternuts five thousands.” Her eyes widened briefly again. “Thousand is very large number.”

Aldin flicked his tail up and down once. “It is. I ask to make sure you understand when I explain next.” He paused a very brief moment. “Kind trade biggens seven tens thousands,” he switched to Common for the next word and then back to chitterspeak, “credits for tree work.”

The other cousin squirrels all chitter-whistled long and loud.

“Is very big number,” Tassel stated.

Teacher was too surprised and shocked to say anything.

They all fell silent a moment. Foxy’s body seemed to tense-up. Her tail wigwagged back and forth rapidly for a moment as she worked the courage to speak-up. “We should have squirrels eat what cherries they want and harvest some of the rest to trade with Biggens as Kind suggest. If Kind trade from his biggen trade midden for The Refuge, we must refill his trade midden. Is no right Kind give so much for all of us. We also no only forest dwellers who rely on cherries and other food sources. Would be no right if we take them all.”

“Foxy wise beyond her winters,” Teacher praised. “We must be careful to no take all the cherries just as when we each had own territory, we no take all nuts from trees.”

“Agreed,” Tassel replied. “All in favor of harvesting some of the cherries to trade with Biggens to help refill Kind’s trade midden?”

The others except Aldin and Kind raised their tails in agreement. Aldin, not being a member of the council, knew he should not vote. The others looked at Kind when he did not raise or drop his tail.

“I no vote as vote affects me. Is no right I vote on this,” he said. The others accepted that explanation.