

## FOURTEEN

Satisfied with that decision, Tassel continued. “We must create our own trade midden for The Refuge,” Tassel looked directly at Jessophat. “Our people already owe you so much, Kind, for helping us survive last winter. You should no do this from your trade midden for us.”

Again, all members of the council including Kind raised their tails in favor of establishing a bank account for The Refuge.

Aldin spoke up. “Kind and I suspect you would choose to do that. Biggens have rules on how ‘trade middens’ work. Right now, only Biggens, certain small biggens,” Aldin raised his tail, “and Biggen colonies may have trade middens. Kind and I work with Biggens so they will treat The Refuge like a Biggen colony and allow our colony to have a trade midden.”

“It is why I spend so much time away from The Refuge the last few weeks,” Kind said and then looked at Foxy, “You no here when I last need to do this when Council choose Friend as Elder Voice to Biggens. Is hard explain without Biggenspeak.”

“Biggenspeak have symbol version,” Pinecone jumped in. “Many Biggen rules require use of symbol version to remember decisions later.” She pulled her flatpanel off her back and started tapping at the screen. “I show you example.” She turned the viewer around to show symbols on the screen to Foxy. “This biggenspeak symbols for ‘The Refuge.’” She tapped a small square next to it and the viewer spoke ‘The Refuge’ in Biggenspeak. “And this is what it sound like in Biggenspeak. This is how I Biggenspeak to biggens when I must.” She tucked the viewer back on her back. “Biggenspeak symbols are needed to track who has a trade midden and how much they have in it.”

Kind nodded and flicked his tail up and down once. “I draw a lot of biggenspeak symbols over last few weeks so The Refuge will have a trade midden. I know it would take time and you would ask sooner or later. Biggen rules require at least two council members draw symbols to create colony trade midden. Biggens consider Friend as council member as he serve as Elder Voice.”

Tassel leaned over and hugged the bigger squirrel in thanks and then she hugged Aldin. “Thank you, both of you, for all you’ve done for us.” When she pulled back from Aldin she added looking at both of them, “Next time you deal with Biggens for The Refuge, bring it to Elder Council first.”

Both bowed in acknowledgement of the light reprimand.

Kind then turned to the others again. “I ask Friend to be here as he is our Elder Voice. I suggest we have Friend speak to Biggens about trade. What we Biggens call, ‘negotiate,’” again he used Biggenspeak for the last word and then switched back. “If he is willing, that is.”

Aldin bowed his head briefly. "The Refuge is my home as much as yours. I serve the Council as asked. I will do this with the Council's approval. Biggens offer you four credits a kilo. Maybe I can get us a little more."

All the members of the council raised their tails once to appoint Aldin as their trade negotiator.

"Are we done?" Teacher asked. "Sun set soon."

"Almost," Tassel replied looking hard at Aldin. "Last winter you took Lily to healer. How you trade with healer?"

"I give from my trade midden, Tassel."

"Is no right. We should refill your trade midden too."

Aldin wigwagged his tail left to right vigorously. "No. Is my fault you form colony instead of go back to old ways of individual territories. You become more like me, like Small Biggens, whether you believe so or no. I want colony to succeed. I have credits to share. I know what like to no have trade midden. It was hard when I first arrive among Biggens with no trade midden. I had broken foreleg."

Tassel gasped. She hadn't heard that story during the winter. A broken limb was a death sentence for a squirrel.

"A biggen give from his trade midden to healer to bind my break so it could heal and I can climb again. Biggens struggle to give me trade midden after. Once I had trade midden, I trade my knowledge of my people with Biggens for credits. They have many old rules in place about trade midden. They had to make me a 'Biggen' to give me one. That was before I join The Refuge. I still trade in that way. I trade my credits as I choose, Tassel. If you try to refill my trade midden for Lily's healer visit, I will move them back to the colony's trade midden."

Pinecone stepped in. "Before the owl attacks, if there was a winter storm and you shared your nest and food with others, did your require them to replace food you share?"

Tassel wigwagged her tail left to right and back once. "No, I share with others in one storm. They share in next."

Pinecone flicked her tail up and down once. "Is like that. Friend help Lily. Lily already return what Friend give her and more with how she help care for your grandpups,"

Tassel flicked her tail up and down once. "I understand. We one colony. We help each other."

Pinecone and Aldin flicked their tails up and down once.

Foxy drooped her tail. "How many of these Biggen trade things were needed to help my people?"

“Biggen Elders will no tell me,” Aldin replied. “They say, they give credits needed to help you and the others move here after bad Biggens burn your forest. Is least they can do to make up for bad Biggens.”

Foxy simply nodded in acceptance. The others agreed to end the meeting and dispersed into the forest.