

## EPILOGUE

That evening, as they played in the brook near their nest tree, Birch's pups spoke about helping Sunshine cook cherries and all that they had learned about biggens. The pups did their best to explain how Sunshine cooked cherries. Their sire confirmed to Birch what they explained. Even Birch was amazed at the differences between them and biggen squirrels. Her mate admitted he was now much less scared of Sunshine. He described to Birch how the biggen smelled more like them, like the forest around them, then how the other biggens smelled, the ones who helped them after the fire. He explained how Sunshine was kind and patient with the pups answering their questions as best as she could in terms they could understand, even after Brighteyes had accidentally asked the question Birch had warned him never ask any squirrel. And how that led to how the process of 'making pups' was different for biggens after asking him permission to do so. Birch was amazed to learn biggens only had one pup at a time. She had simply assumed some very hungry predators had taken Energy's littermates. It never occurred to her that biggens only had one pup at a time.

Over the next three days, those who harvested the cherries ate their fill of the fruit. However, there was still plenty to send to trade with the Biggens while leaving a portion in the trees for other animals and birds as the Elders had decided. Aldin, Jessopha, and Saniel, made many trips in hovercrafts between the cherry groves and the food processor. Throughout the harvest period Birch's pups would speak to anyone who would about their experience cooking with Dame Sunshine and what they learned about biggen squirrels.

Blossom tagged along with Saniel indicating she wanted to learn how to pilot a hovercraft. Saniel was a good biggenspeak teacher, so, she reasoned, he would be good at teaching how to pilot a hovercraft. Both sets of parents suspected there might be something more to it than that. However, they were all too busy with this harvest "dry run" to discuss it at that moment. By the end of the third day, Blossom was able to pilot the hovercraft herself and she was quite proud of the accomplishment. When she was sure no one was looking, she briefly snuggled Saniel in thanks.

In all, roughly ten thousand kilos of cherries were sent to be processed and sold. Aldin was able to negotiate a slightly higher fee of four-and-a-half credits per kilo pointing out the cherries were wild organic, harvested by hard working cousin squirrels proud to share their bounty with Biggens. The produce distributor he negotiated with would use the same argument to fetch an even higher price in retail locations and make a good profit. Cousin squirrel harvested wild cherries were a novelty hit in the market and sold-out quickly.

The Elder council agreed more cherry trees would need to be planted for future harvests. Tassel ceased worrying about the success of the fall harvest. Instead, she worried to herself if there would be enough midden space to store it.