

(chitter, chit, chit!) A reddish brown tassel-eared squirrel raced down the tree. It leapt at and embraced Butternut and she warmly returned the embrace. “Granddame Butternut!” Nimble excitedly chattered. “Is true. You come the long way to The Refuge to visit.”

Butternut flicked her tail up and down once as they let go of each other. “Yes, your Grandsire Curious and I come visit.”

Raoul did his best to wag his tail in greeting. A citizen raccoon’s tail muscles aren’t as complex as a cousin squirrel’s. Nimble came over to him and only nervously wigwagged his tail a little.

“I know you no threat to me, Grandsire Curious. Is still hard to fight the fear.” They hugged. “Welcome to The Refuge.”

“Where are your mates and pups?” he asked.

Nimble chattered something inaudible before continuing. “They scared of you, Grandsire. They no used to Biggens around other than Kind, Sunshine, and Energy. You are much bigger Biggen, twice as tall as Elder Kind,” he looked over to Jessophat and bowed slightly. “I try to coax them.”

Nimble scurried back up the tree. They heard a bunch of chittering back and forth.

“I’ll back off so that they might come down and meet you at least, hon,” Raoul offered as he backed off several mits¹.

After several ceclicks², three other adult cousin squirrels followed Nimble down. Introductions were made. All sniffed each other and then they each embraced Butternut. She praised all three of them, especially Shadow for his black fur. Raoul got down on all four paws again. Lily, Buttercup, and Shadow nervously approached him with Nimble leading and encouraging them on. Eventually, they sniffed him. Raoul chitterspoke to them quietly so as to not spook them too badly, though they jumped a bit in surprise when he chattered fluently.

“See, I no bite. I no hunt my grandpups.”

The three of them stared at him briefly.

“Grandsire Curious good biggen,” Nimble stated.

“You call us grandpups?” Shadow asked for the others.

Raoul moved his tail up and down once. “Yes. My mate, Butternut, adopt you as her grandpups. She my mate. Makes you my grandpups.”

¹ Mit-meter

² Ceclick-minute

Buttercup moved back towards the tree and chittered up into the canopy. “Come, pups! Is safe. Meet your great granddame and great grandsire.” She looked towards Nimble. “I use right names?” Her tail curled briefly.

Nimble flicked his tail up and down once.

Slowly and hesitantly, four season-and-a-half old, nearly half-grown pups made their way down the tree trunk. They first made their way to Butternut. They all sniffed each other before she embraced each of them as Buttercup introduced them. She pointed with her tail to the all-black male one first who looked just like Shadow right down to the tasseled ears. “This is Night. Night, this is your great granddame, Butternut.” She then pointed to a female whose fur was a mixture of black and peppery-gray with rounded ears, “Eve...” She then pointed to a male with fur a mixture of peppery-gray and reddish brown and tasseled ears, “Swift...”. She finally pointed to the other female who looked exactly like her with her rounded ears and peppery-gray fur. “Tansey...” It was quickly obvious to Butternut who was the father of which pup for all but Tansey.

It took a bit more coaxing to get the pups to meet Raoul. They were also surprised when he chitterspoke to them quietly and kindly, praising each of their fur patterns. It was only then that the pups noticed Jessophat, Pinecone, and Aldin. All four wigwagged their tails at the Elders in greetings and then glanced at each other.

“With Great Granddame and Great Grandsire visiting, you know what that means?” Eve chittered excitedly.

“Elder Kind and Dame Sunshine will share lots of butternuts!” all four chittered in unison.

They scampered over to Jessophat. “Is true, Elder Kind?”

Jessophat flicked his tail up and down once. “Yes, in one pawspan we eat lots of butternuts with your great granddame and great grandsire.”

“YEAH!”

“Come pups,” Lily called out. “We go clean in brook.”

The pups followed their second mother up the tree. The other adults followed. Raoul stared after them. After observing how Butternut interacted with them, he could see why she desperately wanted pups of her own. He felt a slight tinge of guilt that he couldn’t give them to her. It wasn’t the first time he wished he was a squirrel rather than a raccoon. Well, maybe with a little more work on Aldin, he would help her get the pups she wanted, even if he wasn’t the father of them.

“I think our adopted granddaughter has the right idea, love,” Raoul stated. “Come, let’s go freshen-up. Maybe Pinecone and Aldin would care to join us?” He glanced at the two of them.

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Aldin only hesitated a brief moment as he glanced at Pinecone. The two of them followed Raoul and Butternut into the guest quarters.