

The council gathered in Jessophat's tree in front of his large flatpanel. Aldin, Butternut, and Raoul joined them. On the screen were the regional education governing board, a group of five citizens, beaver, otter, ferret, squirrel, and badger. A second gray squirrel with tasseled ears stood to one side. The otter spoke for the group as before. The second squirrel immediately repeated what the otter stated in relatively good chitterspeak, saving Jessophat from needing to do so for Foxy.

"Thank you for agreeing to meet on such short notice and for your patience," the otter stated.

"We contacted our counterparts in the other regional boards for help with your proposal. We didn't expect such a quick decision ourselves, but a decision has been made. Ms. Butternut, it has been decided that you may teach in the format you have proposed," the otter paused a moment.

"But?" Butternut suggested realizing why the otter paused.

The otter nodded. "Yes, there is a 'but' involved. As you are new to teaching the curriculum, you will need a mentor on site to watch, observe, and assist. Once the mentor is satisfied with your teaching skills, you'll be allowed to teach on your own. With the mentor present, you may have a larger class." The otter bowed to the second squirrel who was translating. "This is Hidget. She has volunteered to serve as your mentor. She has five years' experience teaching the common curriculum on her own among various citizen species." Hidget bowed after finishing the translation.

Butternut nodded and glanced at Aldin. "Embassador, would you mind going to the entrance of Jessophat's home, connect your flatpanel's camera to our connection with the committee, and show them what it looks like outside?"

Aldin scampered over to the entrance. He panned the camera around showing how high off the ground they were in Jessophat's tree. There was some gasping from those on the committee. He returned to his spot behind the council.

Butternut smiled. "My turn for a 'but'. As you can see, we're not at ground level here. The classroom is still under construction in what will be our new home." She gestured to Raoul, Pinecone, and Aldin with her tail. "It will be at about the same height as it would not be safe to have it at ground level due to predators. It also needs to be that height as Jessophat has warned me the snow is quite deep here in the winter. At one-point last winter it nearly reached the entrance of his home."

There was some murmuring back and forth on screen. The gray furred tasseled ear squirrel drooped her tail briefly as the others all looked at her. Several members of the board were frowning. Hidget wigwagged her tail back and forth a few times before responding first in Common and then chitterspeak, "I'm still willing to do it. I should have known, but didn't consider that as cousin squirrels, of course you'd be most comfortable up in the treetops."

Butternut bowed in thanks. "Thank you, Hidget, for offering to serve as my mentor. Perhaps that could serve as your chitterspeak name, much like my husband goes by Curious."

Mentor Hidget nodded. "I'll accept that."

"You'll also need to grow-out your nails into claws, Mentor Hidget. You have about a month."

Hidget's eyes shot wide. "Why?"

"Remember my warning," Butternut replied. "You're going to need to climb. How else do you plan to make it to class? We can provide a ladder short-term, but it'll be easier for you to climb using your claws."

"It is not as hard as you might think," Jessophat reassured Hidget. "Once you have the proper length claws, that is. You'll have plenty of assistance in learning. We'll have you climbing like you were born a cousin in no time."

Hidget closed her eyes briefly and quietly sighed, resigning herself to the changes. She then looked at the screen. "Understood. I'll arrive in a month."

"We'll contact you again, when it is closer to the date we'd like to start classes," Butternut concluded. "Thank you for your assistance and to all the councils involved in the process."

The screen went dark. Foxy screed-out in joy. She turned to Butternut and pulled her into an embrace.