

Two days later, the Council met and turned to Raoul. Without being verbally asked, he spoke.

“I spent all morning collecting the traps I laid out across the forest and counted the small rodents found in each trap and released them. Like in Teacher’s previous forest, there were fewer small rodents in each trap than there should have been. With small rodents in decline, predators who normally hunt them, will now try and hunt you more.” He paused a moment realizing he said all of that in Common and then translated it loosely in Chitterspeak.

Foxy bowed in thanks. “You may use Biggenspeak, Curious. It help me learn. I ask if I no understand.”

Raoul looked towards Tassel and Teacher. Both nodded and flicked their tails up and down once. He didn’t need to ask Pinecone, who he knew understood Common.

“Thank you,” Raoul continued in Common. “As you know, Biggenspeak has more words.”

The four cousin squirrels each flicked their tails up and down once, while Jessophat nodded.

“What we do?” Foxy asked raising her tail briefly in a curl.

“I will try contacting local Biggens who hunt small rodents as I did when I lived near Teacher’s old forest. Small rodents are a big problem for Biggens. Not many Biggen predators like to hunt/kill them. With no predators preying on them, they grow in numbers quickly in Biggen areas. If locally it is like back near Teacher’s old forest, those who do hunt them have more to kill then they or other Biggens can eat. I think they would gladly release them alive in this forest, starting in the two cherry groves were the fox encounters have occurred.”

The Council members glanced at each other. All raised their tails.

Tassel looked directly at the citizen raccoon. “Curious, we ask you to speak to small rodent hunters near here. Kind will assist if you need help. We grant permission to Biggens who hunt small rodents to release them in our forest.”

Raoul bowed accepting the assignment. The Council dispersed into the canopy leaving just him and Jessophat. Raoul turned to the Citizen squirrel. “Do you know of any reputable exterminators within a klick hovercraft trip from here?”

Jessophat smiled while slowly wigwagging his tail. “I know of a couple. I’ll place some calls as I know you’re busy overseeing the construction of your new home and school. If I find interest, I’ll let you know and let you follow-up.”

“Thank you.”

That evening, a hovercraft arrived outside Jessophat's home. Raoul was there to greet the occupant, a weasel named Choran. They shook paws and exchanged pleasantries.

"Normally, people hire me to get rid of small rodents, not to bring small rodents to them, Dr. Kaynoble." Choran looked about nervously. "It is safe to be here, right? Do we have permission to be here? I remember the recorded warning given to Parliament this past spring."

"I assure you that permission has been granted for you to be here, Choran." Raoul looked up into the canopy and chittered, surprising the weasel.

A chitter came back from the canopy and a squirrel descended into sight of both Biggens. Pinecone pulled her flatpanel off her back and started typing quickly on it. The device spoke her typed words for her. "I am Pinecone, a member of the Council of Elders for The Refuge. That's like a member of one of your town councils, Mr. Choran. I have been watching and observing from further up this tree since you arrived. You have permission to visit our forest and leave behind all the live small rodents you wish." His flatpanel chirped briefly. "That's a message from me with a written statement stating you have permission. Raoul will show you where to start."

Raoul bowed towards Pinecone. "Thank you, Elder Pinecone."

Choran followed the raccoon's gesture, bowing and thanking Pinecone.

Pinecone likewise bowed and typed away some more. "It is us who should thank you, Mr. Choran. With more small rodents in our forest, the predators who hunt them will leave us alone, hopefully." She tucked the flatpanel back on her back and scooted back up the tree, quickly vanishing from sight.

Choran raised one eyebrow briefly and turned to Raoul. "Should I use your first name as Elder Pinecone did?"

"Please do," Raoul replied. "Do you have any small rodents caged up with you today or do you just want to see where to leave the first batch when you do have some?"

"This is for real then, right? The cousin squirrels here want me to dump my excess catch in their forest?"

Raoul nodded. "It is just as Jessophat and I explained to you through video call earlier today and as you just heard Elder Pinecone state. The small rodent population in this forest has decreased. Cousin predator species that rely on them in their diet are turning to hunting cousin squirrels. They lost one half-grown pup to a fox a little over a week ago and almost lost two more a few days ago, including one of Ambassador Aldin's and Elder Pinecone's sons."

Choran's eyes widened a moment. "Very well. I just happen to have a cage full in the hovercraft."

“Great. I’ll show you were to take them. The permission granted to you will continue each time you return with more to release.”

Raoul showed him the spots to start at. Choran released his first batch of small rodents in the nearest cherry grove. After they parted ways, Choran had a lot of time to think on the trip home. Having a dumping ground for his catch would be very helpful financially. There was a cost involved with having to dispose of small rodent bodies beyond what he or others interested could eat. On the other paw, there was his cousin he was close to. Sadly, that cousin didn’t think cousin squirrels should be treated the same as citizen species. He did not want his cousin to learn of how he was now aiding the cousin squirrels of The Refuge. He had a lot to think about.