

TEN

The following morning Saniel, Blossom, and Pekan entered the edge of the forest. Saniel climbed a tree and took a deep breath. Before he could call out, a squirrel with a bitten ear dropped onto the branch in front of him and chittergrowled.

“Why you here, Biggen?!” he snapped.

Saniel was briefly startled. “This my potential mate’s territory. As such, she allow me in it.” He pointed down with his tail. “If you are the Elder, our Biggen teaching Elder wish speak to you, elder-to-elder.”

“Pup of pup warn me you would come,” he replied gruffly. “If Biggen Teach Elder wish speak, he come up here.”

“He no scare you, Elder?”

“Biggens no allowed hunt smart squirrels. You no scare me. He no scare me. He want speak, he come up here.” The elder thrashed his tail about in agitation.

Saniel looked down and relayed the Elder’s wishes. Pekan spoke and Blossom translated. “I old Elder. I no good climb. I come partway. You come partway. This one,” he pointed to Blossom as she translated, “chitterspeak for me. That one,” he pointed-up to Saniel, “Biggenspeak for you.”

The Elder flicked his tail up and down once in agreement. They met on a branch large enough to support Pekan about 5 mits up. Blossom had a backpack on that she wiggled off to show the Elder it was full of butternuts. The Elder’s tail wigwagged nervously, the only fear he showed with Saniel and more so due to Pekan close by, though all of them could smell he was scared. The Elder refused to admit he was scared and stood his ground on the branch.

“Speak, is harvest time. Winter come quick. I have little time for Biggen concerns,” the Elder barked before he started nibbling on one of the offered butternuts.

Pekan bowed as Blossom had instructed him. He spoke quietly so as to not spook the Elder and was careful not to smile so as to not show his fangs. She translated for him as he said she would. “Thank you for taking the time, Elder. I am the head teaching elder here. My Biggen name no translate in chitterspeak. I and the other teaching elders teach two hundred older Biggen pups Biggen things here.” He paused as he watched Blossom flash all ten claws over and over.

The Elder whistled. “That lot of pups to tend. Why you speak to me on this?”

Saniel translated word for word and added, “I think he wants you to get to the point, Schoolmaster.”

The Elder glared at him. “I know you speak more than what I speak.”

“Yes, Elder. I explain your time is important and he should speak exactly why he ask to speak to you.”

Blossom translated this exchange for Peka who nodded.

“Some of the Biggen things we teach include the trees of the forest and the animals that live in it. I know you know that Biggens banned from forest because of bad Biggens elsewhere. I ask permission to bring Biggen pups into your forest to learn about the forest.”

“Good you no waste time.” He wigwagged his tail left to right and back.

“That tail wigwag is no, Schoolmaster,” Saniel translated.

Peka sighed briefly. “Why no allow, Elder?”

“I allow small Biggen within sight of Biggen teaching place. That good enough. You want teach in forest teach here. You and Biggen pups stay out of my forest.” He chattergrowled and turned to Saniel. “You will speak no more of your forest to other squirrels here. You will keep to the part of the forest you allowed in.”

Saniel flicked his tail up and down once bowing to the elder. “Yes, Elder.”

The Elder turned to Butternut. “I warned you no choose squirrel my forest for mate!”

“Elder, I have obeyed,” she moved over by Saniel and nuzzled him. “This one my potential mate. I speak to you in summer and promised I no choose squirrel in your forest.”

Again, the Elder chittergrowled. “You lie. I know you choose pup of pup.”

Blossom chatterspat at the Elder. “I no lie, Elder. Your pup of pup try get me choose him. He try hard. He bring me food. He praise me. I tell him I still pup and no see first winter yet. He no believe. He no fear potential mate. He challenge potential mate. I forbid fight. I know he lose if he try fight my potential mate.”

The Elder’s eyes narrowed. “You no need worry he ask you again.” He wigwagged his tail in agitation and darted back into the forest.

All three of them stared off into the trees through which the Elder vanished.

Peka sighed again. “That didn’t go well.”

Blossom and Saniel nodded. Saniel’s eyes suddenly went wide.

“Brave!”

“What? Who’s Brave?” Pekan asked.

“It is the name I gave the Elder’s grandson after he tried to fight me to win Blossom for himself, Schoolmaster. The Elder said we don’t need to worry about him asking Blossom to choose him anymore.”

“Oh, Creator, no!” Blossom’s tail started to wigwag in worry. “Do you think he would do that?”

“There’s only one way to find-out,” Saniel replied and darted off into the forest straight towards Brave’s territory.

“Do what?” Pekan asked

Blossom turned to the fisher. “Harm him in punishment. You observed how gruff he is.”

“Harm his own fur and blood?!” He scooted down the tree as quickly as he could. “Show me the way, Blossom. Saniel may need our assistance.”

The two of them entered the forest, Blossom leaping branch-to-branch and Pekan following as best he could on the ground smashing through the undergrowth. Stealth was obviously not needed.

Saniel could easily hear Pekan crashing through the undergrowth. “Over this way, Schoolmaster,” he called out. “I’ve already summoned a hovercraft.”

Blossom was by his side first. She cried-out when she saw Brave’s bloody, mauled body. “No!”

“He’s still breathing, Blossom. There’s little we can do here. We need to get him to a hospital.”

Pekan arrived at the same time as the hovercraft. Without being asked, he got into the craft and pulled out a meal tray to use as a makeshift stretcher. With Saniel’s help they gingerly lifted Brave onto the tray. Pekan then carried the tray into the hovercraft.

Pekan uttered something under his breath that neither Blossom nor Saniel could quite hear as they joined him in the hovercraft. It quickly powered up and zoomed into the city. Though Pekan remained silent the rest of the trip to the hospital, both Blossom and Saniel gave him as much space as they could due to his tense body language. Both wigwagged their tails nervously.