

NINETEEN

Saniel and the five other citizen squirrels who joined him met with the forest Elder. Each had a backpack on.

“You speak true how big your backpacks are,” she stated. “Come, let’s see how well you can harvest.”

Saniel and the others followed her up into the canopy. They spread out and began to work, quickly filling the backpacks. She showed them where to empty them. They filled that hollow and several others in a pawspan of time. Her pup hadn’t exaggerated. They were quick and efficient with their backpacks.

Others had gathered near the end of the pawspan of time watching in amazement. When the time was up, Saniel and the others perched on a large branch while the cousin squirrels gathered around their new Elder and spoke quietly to one another. All the tails raised in unison. She came over to them. “How much time can you give?”

Saniel looked at the others. “It’s four klicks until dinner time.”

“We’ll need time to clean-up. Tell her three klicks.” The others agreed.

Saniel turned back to the Elder. “We can help you for three more pawspans.” He held up three claws.

“Good. You’ll split up and help a specific squirrel for” she held up one claw “pawspan. Another squirrel will then find you and again, help them for” one claw held up “pawspan. And again, like that for last pawspan. Then all come back here.”

Saniel and the others nodded. They split off with individual squirrels as instructed. Three klicks flew by rapidly. They returned together as instructed. To their surprise, Schoolmaster Pekan was sitting on the forest floor waiting for them. They gathered around him. As they did so, the Elder arrived as did all the other squirrels. They spoke quietly among themselves. All raised their tails. The Elder came most of the way down the tree.

“Biggen Teaching Elder, these Biggen pups help us much. What they harvest in the last,” she held-up four claws “pawspans of time would have taken us at least” she held-up five claws “days. If they could help us for another full day, all the other females could return now instead of next spring.”

Pekan listened to the translation provided by his flatpanel and nodded. He turned to the six citizen squirrels and praised them. “What do you think? Are you willing to work with them all day tomorrow?”

“Schoolmaster,” Saniel spoke for the others. “We’d love to,” the others nodded, “but we have classes.”

“You will receive excused absences if you are performing community service, which I deem this is.”

None of them hesitated in agreeing to return.