

## In Squirrel Town

by Howard B. Famous

"Come, little sleepy-eyes, it's time to get up," said Mrs. Squirrel, one morning. But little Bushy-Tail was having such a nice dream about a wonderful tree where all kinds of nuts grew side by side on the same branch that he did not answer. Only his eyelids quivered ever so little, so his mother knew he was pretending.

"Come, come!" she repeated. "Little Hazel Squirrel is up and playing outside."

In a twinkling he had jumped out of bed and pressed his furry little nose against the window pane. Little Hazel was playing far out on a leafy branch with one eye on Bushy-Tail's house, nestled in a forked limb close to the trunk. She waved her lovely gray tail when she saw him and began chattering very fast.

"Wait a minute," Bushy-Tail called back, "I'll be down in a jiffy."

And he was in such a hurry that he tied his tie on sideways and brushed his furry tail the wrong way, which made him look very funny. He even forgot to take a bite of the nice breakfast his mother had left on the table for him. Right through the window he bounded, instead of walking through the door as he had been taught to do, and landed close beside Hazel, far out on the leafy bough.

"Oh, Hazel," he cried, "I've had the loveliest dream!"

"You old sleepy-head," she answered, "you lay abed dreaming when you might be out playing in the fresh air."

"Hazel," Bushy-Tail began, teetering up and down on the branch in his excitement, "I'm sick of peanuts, aren't you?"

"No," she answered, "I love them. Mother says they make my coat thick and sleek."

They were city squirrels, you know, who lived in a park and had their daily supply of peanuts left at their door by the park-keeper.

"No, I am not sick of peanuts," she continued. "But what has that to do with your dream?"

"Everything," he went on. "Oh, Hazel, I dreamed of a most wonderful tree where all kinds of nuts—hickory, walnuts, chestnuts and hazel-nuts—grew side by side on the same branch. We must hurry and get there before they are all gone," and he jumped up so quickly that Hazel went spinning round and round the branch she was holding on to with her sharp little claws.

Now, Hazel was a good little squirrel who always talked things over with her mother, so as they were hurrying away across the park she suddenly stopped. "I forgot to tell mother where I was going," she said.

Her play-fellow grabbed her by the tail. "It's to be a surprise," he whispered. "We will make

little baskets of dry twigs and carry home enough for everybody.” This sounded fine.

The pink in the sky was by now beginning to fade. Presently Mr. Sun poked his head over the hilltops far away. He saw the runaway children and he thought to give them a scare that would send them home. So he bounded out from behind a cloud and sent a long, dark shadow right across the path in front of them.

“Oh, my,” cried Hazel, “what’s that?”

Both children were so startled they jumped straight up in the air and landed on the other side of the dark shadow.

“Let’s go home,” suggested Hazel, but when they turned to go they saw their own shadows and of course they knew them. How they laughed then, for who would think of being afraid of a lifeless shadow?

By and by they met a workman. He had a dinner-pail in his hand and in his pockets peanuts for the squirrels, for every morning and night he passed through the park. Now, the good citizens of the town had made laws that no one should harm a squirrel and the squirrels knew this. So Hazel and Bushy-Tail were not afraid of the workman and when he knelt down and held out some nuts to them, they ran right up to him, chattering all the while.

Bushy-Tail took one of the nuts, cracked it with his teeth and, holding it with both hands, ate very greedily. For, you see, the sight of the nuts reminded him he had not eaten any breakfast, and suddenly he became very hungry.

Hazel was not a bit hungry, so she put the nut in the pocket of one of her cheeks, which made her look as if she had the mumps. Then she ran up the workman’s arm and perched on his shoulder, where her soft, bushy tail brushed against his ears and tickled him in the neck.

Poor little Hazel Squirrel. Little did she think the wonderful tree they were looking for was only a dream-tree. But how was she to know that all kinds of nuts never did, nor ever can grow side by side on the same branch, save only in the wonderland we enter through the gates of sleep.

“I don’t see your wonderful tree anywhere, Bushy-Tail,” she said.

“I think it’s down this way a little,” he answered. And once more they scampered off together, chattering and waving their lovely tails.

Source:

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