

Discontented Squirrel

adapted from 'Fables' by George Moir Bussey

THERE was once a squirrel who passed his days in a cool and pleasant wood at the foot of a ridge of mountains. For the first years of his life, he lived quite happily, jumping from tree to tree, burying nuts among the leafy floor and sleeping in cosy tree hollows. But after a while, he began to look towards the mountain ridge with longing:

“Why must I spend all my time in this wood, running up and down the same trees, gathering nuts and dozing my time away in a hole? The birds of the wood may go wherever they please, and in the winter may even go to another country so that they may have sunshine all year round! My neighbour Cuckoo tells me he is going. Even little Nightingale. To be sure, I don't have wings like them, but I do have nimble legs. If I don't use them, I might as well be like Mole or Dormouse!

I dare say I could easily reach that blue ridge I can see from the tree tops. It must be a fine place, for the sun comes directly from it every morning. And it often appears covered in reds and yellows and the finest colours imaginable.

There can be no harm in me trying to reach it. I can soon get back again if I don't like it.”

So the squirrel set out the following morning, taking as many nuts as he could carry with him for the journey.

He soon got to the edge of the woods, and came to the wide, open moors that reached to the foothills of the mountain range. He crossed the moors before the sun had risen in the sky and then stopped to eat his breakfast. When he felt full, he began to climb the side of the mountain. It was difficult work scrambling up the sides, but the squirrel was used to climbing and carried on with enthusiasm.

However, he often had to stop and take a breath, so it was well past midday when he arrived at the top of the first cliff. Then he stopped again to eat his lunch. He turned to look back at his progress and saw the wood, stretching out far below. As he looked, he thought to himself how small it appeared, the place that he had lived in all of his life. Now he could see the whole of it, it was no wonder he was restless with his life there.



When he turned back to continue his journey, however, he saw another great cliff rising in front of him, higher than the one he had already climbed. He decided to rest a little longer before setting out again. But he found he wasn't quite as nimble as before. The ground was rough and rocky, and he was surprised to find it was getting colder, not warmer, as he neared the sun.

He had hardly travelled any further before he began to feel tired, and that his enthusiasm was nearly gone. He started to wonder if he should turn back and return home before night fell. While he was deciding what to do, he heard a distant rumble of thunder, and dark clouds began to gather around the mountain, so that the squirrel couldn't see what was in front of, or behind him. Then the clouds dashed hail down onto the poor squirrel, and a strong wind came up so that he was unable to move at all! He couldn't find the path back home to the woods, which was now the only place he wanted to get to. Even worse, he had dropped all of his nuts and couldn't see to find them again.

The storm raged until night fell. The weary squirrel clambered under the shelter of a rock, and curled himself into a ball, tired, hungry and cold, listening to the howling wind around him.

When the morning broke, the sun rose over the distant cliff. The frozen and aching squirrel crept out from under the rock, trying to find the path home. But as he was crawling across the ground, a hungry kite whirled in the sky above and then swooped down, picking up the squirrel in her talons.

The poor squirrel was terrified as the kite sped across the sky. 'I am doomed to become food for the kite's hungry children,' he thought to himself, when suddenly an eagle, who had watched the kite seize her prey, followed in pursuit. As the eagle overtook the kite, she dropped the squirrel in order to defend herself.

The squirrel fell through the air for a long time, finally landing in a tall tree, the thick leaves and tender boughs breaking his fall. After lying still and breathless he finally looked around. With delight he saw that he was in the very tree that he called home.

"Ah, my dear tree, my dear hollow, my dear nuts and leaves!
If I am ever tempted to leave home again, I would wish to go through all the misery and danger that has befallen me, as long as I found myself at home once more.
This is where I belong!"

