

SUNDAY SQUIRREL

M-N
3 PAGES

It was an early spring morning. I could hear the birds chattering out in the trees. I could also hear the chit-chit of a squirrel, in what I presumed was squabbling. The sun was bright and the morning looked glorious. As I turned over in bed to get a better view of the tree tops through the second floor window, I glanced up to take in the blue of the sky. I was shocked to see a tiny little squirrel staring straight at me through the window only feet from the side of the bed. He chittered loudly in what I now recognized as a sound of fright and despair. I could see that he was clinging with his little claws to the stucco wall at the top of the window which stood two stories high at the back of the house. I froze. I didn't want to scare him into releasing his hold and falling thirty feet to the ground. The poor little guy continued his frightened call.

A long almost-in-my-genes history of saving animals put my mind to work on how I was going to help him. My mother had always been ready to come to the aide of any animal in need of rescue. As kids, we had more than one baby bird or a litter of baby rabbits that we fed and tended to until they were able to be released. My mother would even save bumble bees and butterflies from our small plastic swimming pools, placing them on leaves in the sun to dry out their wings. As I watched this little squirrel, I could think of nothing I could do. If I would move toward him, I was sure that he would panic and release his tenuous grip on the stucco. He would get frightened and fall.

As I lay motionless, I watched as the little guy desperately reached for a hold on the glass of the window. I knew what would happen before it happened. It took only a millisecond for Baby Squirrel to realize it too. Though it was within a short blink of an eye, it seemed as though it happened in slow motion. Just as if in a cartoon scene, not finding a grip as he grabbed for the glass, he slid down the face of the window, seeming to look in on us as he descended. In retrospect, I doubt if the look of horror that I attributed to him was really his. It was more likely my mind's reflection of what I would have felt had I known that I was falling. And fall he did, as I let out a genuine scream. At the same time I jumped out of bed to run

downstairs and out to the back yard, not knowing what to expect but trying to prepare myself for the worst.

I searched the ground below the window. No baby squirrel. Where did he go? At the time we were having the back wall of the house repaired. There were tools and equipment neatly stacked. I finally found the little guy still alive, crunched in the corner under some of the timber. He was looking quite frightened and perhaps a bit surprised that he was suddenly on the ground. Truly, a bit of anthropomorphizing never hurts when encountering baby animals.

I gave some serious thought to the situation. I hoped that Mama Squirrel would come along, but if she didn't he might be truly lost. Or worst case scenario, get killed by our little fox terrier. After the experience of free falling thirty feet and surviving, that certainly would be a gruesome and unfortunate fate.

I ran into the house to get a cardboard box and a pair of gloves. Outside again, I reached behind the wood pile to gently pick him up. As I did, he swore at me profusely. I didn't know such a little guy had that kind of vocabulary. With such a cacophony of expression he certainly didn't seem injured by the fall, at least as far as I could observe. I carefully placed him in the small cardboard box. I put the box in a round plastic washtub that was sitting outside, so that I could see where he was. I went back into the house to get myself a cup of coffee.

Returning to the sun room, I pulled up a chair, and with my cup of coffee sat down to wait for the Mom-to-the-rescue scene of the story. I didn't have to wait long. It was only ten minutes before she arrived on the scene. After a bit of sniffing around the washtub, calling to Baby, and getting responses, she hesitantly jumped into the tub to inspect the situation. Baby was free to go. Mom hopped out of the washtub obviously expecting Baby to follow. Baby stayed in the box. In again went Mom, and out again. Baby came out of the box, but the washtub sides were too high. She tried again to entice him to leap over the side. She did it with such ease. I didn't want to go outside and help him out of the tub and scare her away. Suddenly, after a hail of chit-chat commotion from her, she jumped in again. This time she took the little guy by the scruff of the neck and with a single

bound was out of the washtub. She took a couple of small hops over the lawn with Baby still held tightly by the scruff and went up over the wooden fence.

It was a good ending to a traumatic experience, at least for a baby squirrel. I wonder if he's still telling family and friends the story of that Sunday morning, free falling thirty feet and then being rescued by Mom. All, of course, after giving that human with the gloves, a few very choice words.