

The story of the young squirrel.

In a beautiful park there lived some red squirrels. There were several families all living peacefully together.

The red squirrel families were very happy families. The parents were kind and good and provided well for their little squirrels. They took their little squirrels on outings around the park and they knew lots of different places in the park to visit and have fun. The parents taught them about the park so that they gradually became confident and brave in the different parts of the park's land.

One or two of the older red squirrels lived in a different part of the park as these had become old enough to find their own food and could tell good nuts from bad nuts. They had learned how to build their own nests to keep safe from danger and had many friends. All the red squirrels met regularly and travelled around the park to visit each other.

One day, quite suddenly, one of the Daddy squirrels, who had several little squirrels in his family, left the park and went into a large forest, called the 'Forest of Light'. The Mummy squirrel and the younger squirrels had not known that this was to happen. The Daddy squirrel did not know this was to happen either and so could not tell the rest of the family that he would not see them again.

Let me explain about this forest.

This 'Forest of Light' was different from most forests as no squirrel living in the park had ever seen it or been there and come back to tell everyone what it was like. It was a long distance from the park and no one actually knew the way. There were no signposts and no one had any map to help them find this forest, but all knew that the forest was 'somewhere', but no one knew where. So, you may ask, 'how did anyone go there if they didn't know where it was?'

For each squirrel, there was a special, but secret time, but no one knew when. When it was time for a squirrel to go to the 'Forest of Light', they were collected by a special, kind squirrel whose home was in the forest. No one was able to travel to this forest until permission was given. But, once that happened, then they had to go. No squirrel knew when it was going to be their turn, and they couldn't say 'no'. Once in the 'Forest of Light', no ordinary squirrel could return to the park. But, all the squirrels knew that sometime, usually when they were old squirrels, they would be collected one day, taken to the forest and then they would meet their loved ones again.

Any bad squirrels, and, sadly, there were a few in the park, who hurt others would be taken when it was their turn, but they were lost for ever. Why? Well, there was another forest called the 'Forest of Darkness'. This was even further away and it was just for those who were cruel or unkind. No one ever met up with them again.

Only kind squirrels were taken to the 'Forest of Light'. Daddy squirrel had been very kind, so everyone knew that he would have been taken to this forest.

The rest of the family knew they would not be able to see the Daddy squirrel again until they, themselves, were collected and taken into the forest. They had to learn to live in the park without him and it was not easy.

When they understood that Daddy squirrel had gone to the 'Forest of Light' and wouldn't be coming back to them, all the squirrels who had loved him cried such a lot. They knew that the 'Forest of Light' was a very special, kind, and happy place, but they missed Daddy squirrel very much.

The younger ones, who didn't quite understand, were angry that Daddy squirrel had not told them about leaving for the forest. They did not know that he had not known of this journey and that that was the reason he could not tell them all or been able to prepare them for when he left. The young squirrels were angry with him but they also thought that maybe they were the reason that he had to leave. The little squirrels thought they may have been naughty or done something they shouldn't have done and so Daddy squirrel had been taken away. That was of course, not true, but it was all very, very upsetting.

One day one of the little squirrels was sitting on a low branch of a special big oak tree in the park. This was the tree which most of the Daddy and Mummy squirrels used to show the younger squirrels how to climb and jump. They often played 'Hide and Seek', hiding on its big, safe branches beneath its many leaves. This little squirrel usually ran up and down having fun, but now he was very sad and was sitting very still. Yes, he was crying again as it was his Daddy squirrel who had gone to the Forest of Light.

He heard a soft cough near by and then he heard it again. The little squirrel looked up and, through his tears, he saw a kind, wise and very old squirrel sitting nearby. The light shining through the tree made the old squirrel's fur look as if it was made of silver.

The little squirrel had not noticed the old squirrel, and he did not remember having seen him before. The old squirrel spoke to the little squirrel gently. He asked him to remember the games he had played racing up and down the tree when he was watched and helped by Daddy squirrel. He asked him to go and look for the special nut that Daddy squirrel had helped him to bury, just in case he needed it. He thought he needed it now. It was by the roots of the tree.

The little squirrel stopped sobbing and did what the wise squirrel had told him.

First of all he remembered the jumping from branch to branch which had been fun, and, after a while, he remembered the laughter he had shared with his father.

He searched where the nut had been buried and he found it. As he was looking at the nut, the old wise squirrel said, "Now, shut your eyes and just remember that day of fun and laughter."

The little squirrel did as the wise old squirrel with the silver fur told him and remembered the sunshine and laughter of one of the fun days with Daddy squirrel. Then, when he opened his eyes again, the nut seemed to change colour. First it became lighter and gradually changed to become a beautiful bright orange nut. Do you know, that for the first time since the Daddy squirrel had left, the little squirrel laughed as he remembered him.

He went in search of the other nuts that had been buried when he was with Daddy squirrel. He remembered other different, but happy times that they had spent together. He found these nuts and, as he remembered more fun times and laughter, all the nuts became different bright colours. They became green or blue, red or yellow and some sparkled in the light. He made a nest shape of oak leaves and he carefully and gently placed the coloured nuts into the nest. He placed the nest in a safe place between two branches where the wind could not blow it down.

In the days and weeks afterwards and when he felt sad, he would go to see his collection of bright nuts and sit and look at each nut separately. Then he would remember the good times when he and his Daddy squirrel had had fun and laughter.

Gradually, do you know, he didn't need to go to the nest of nuts to remember. Instead he only had to think of his Daddy squirrel to remember and smile at those happy times. Though he couldn't see or speak to him, it seemed, at last, as though his father was with him when he needed him or thought about him. His sadness gradually went away.

One day he met the wise old squirrel with the silver fur again and told him of the different coloured nuts he kept in the nest of oak leaves. The wise old squirrel then told him that he had seen his Daddy squirrel. You see, this wise old squirrel was able to travel, not only into the 'Forest of Light' but also out of it again. He was the only squirrel in the world ever allowed to go there and yet come back to the park again.

He told the little squirrel that Daddy squirrel had asked him to tell his young squirrel that he was very pleased to know that he was no longer sad and to always remember the coloured nuts and the good memories. Daddy squirrel had said that those memories were his gift to the young squirrel. The wise old squirrel said that Daddy squirrel wanted him to laugh and play again and be happy. He wanted the little squirrel to know he still loved him and all the family just the same as he always did when he was with them, and he always would love them. He asked the little squirrel if he would tell the others in the family about the coloured nuts and tell them to find their own collection in the same way.

Then the little squirrel asked the wise old squirrel a question he had not dared to ask anyone, not even his Mummy squirrel. He was frightened of the answer, but he really, really needed to know.

'Is my Mummy squirrel going to be collected and go into the 'Forest of Light' soon?' His eyes filled with tears.

The wise squirrel said, 'Oh no. Those who choose who should go there know that you all need Mummy squirrel, especially now that Daddy squirrel is in the forest. Your Daddy was really needed in the 'Forest of Light' for something very important, so he had to be collected. But she will stay with you for a very long time.'

The little squirrel told the rest of the family about the wise old squirrel and what he had said. The other squirrels saw how the little squirrel was less sad and smiling again, so they did what they were asked to do.

Each squirrels collection of coloured nuts was slightly different and each one learned to feel much better when they looked at them.

Slowly and gradually the park began to seem a happier place again as they learned how to remember the good times they had spent with Daddy squirrel before he went into the forest.

I am so pleased for them, aren't you? Sometimes, of course, they would still have a tear, and I suppose they always will have now and then, but most of the time they could think about Daddy squirrel without sadness.

One day the little squirrels would grow up and when it was their turn to go into the forest, they would meet with Daddy squirrel again and talk and laugh together. But until then they all had a lot to do.

They wanted Daddy squirrel to be proud of them, so they were kind to each other, helped their Mummy squirrel and worked hard at all their tasks.

They knew then that Daddy squirrel would know about them and be smiling - somewhere in the 'Forest of Light', however far away it was.

