A Fable entitled: The Squirrel’s Tale

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Abstract

RED SQUIRREL—his real name was Aloysius, but none of the other squirrels on the farm could pronounce Aloysius—was tired of the same routine. Each morning he would rise, eat a breakfast of seed corn and play hide-and-seek around the bright machinery that stood in the yard. After a noontime nap, all the squirrels would climb the haymound, wrap their tails about themselves and tumble and roll to the foot of the hay. Or they would pick a black walnut from the biggest tree in the grove, if it was late summer, and feast on a sweet nut for dinner.
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by John R. Carroll
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But Red was unhappy. He had spent two long years on
the farm—all of his life! Like most young persons at
maturity, Red longed to see the city, with its buildings and
parks. Red had heard of the level, grassy fields in the
parks. Why, around here, he thought, the only grassy
spots were the hilly pastures that had to be shared with
the cattle, or worse yet, the sheep.

So when the farmer and his wife drove to the city on a
vacation, Red travelled with them. He tiptoed onto the
back seat and snuggled behind a garment bag, where he
fell asleep. He awoke when the farmer’s wife bounced her
purse on his tail in her efforts to “shoo” Red. Red obliged
her and quickly alighted on the hard city pavement. He
was thrilled by what he saw!

There were buildings with window ledges there, four
and five stories high, nearly touching the clouds. And
there was a big vine-covered building with rock-like
benches in front. On the benches sat old people, even older
than the farmer and his wife, and the old people fed the
pigeons and the squirrels, too.

And the parks were even better than he had antici-
pated. There were as many trees as in the farm grove,
and each had much more space to stretch its huge limbs

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And closely cropped grass surrounded everything. And it was all wonderful!

Red learned quickly from his new city friends. He learned which trees stored the most nuts. And he learned to avoid the blue jays, young human beings and dogs, especially dogs, for they were worse than sheep. And the traffic that rumbled on every side of the park had to be dodged if you were to cross the street.

Sooner or later, and for Red it was sooner, the newness dissolved. Oh, Red had fun romping in the park, but it was the same fun he had in the haymound. He decided that he should move on to a new place, a new experience. Because he knew of no other place except the farm, he paid a visit to the squirrel that lived in the ivy-covered building, a gray squirrel respected for his seemingly limitless knowledge.

Red told his story to the gray squirrel while they sat in the shade beneath one of the stone benches. And when he had finished, the wise gray one questioned him.

"Aloysius," for he was indeed articulate, "when you lived on the farm, did you ever spend an entire day in the cornfield listening to the music of the leaves in the wind, and the cornstalk organ pipes? And did you watch the barn swallow's peculiar flight, or count the bubbles as the water in the pasture creek dove over the rocks in its bed?"

Red could only shake his head, "No," and his face displayed bewilderment.

"Do you remember the excitement you felt when you first saw this city?"

At this, Red answered, "Yes. Everything was so new and immense, so big and wonderful!"

The gray squirrel continued. "If I told you of new places, each time you arrived at one you would recapture that feeling, but when it wore off, you would have to travel again. Eventually you would run out of new places."

Red's eyes quit fidgeting and settled on the concerned face of his friend, waiting for a more encouraging note.

"But it is possible to recapture that feeling without ever leaving home. On the farm you failed to see the
newness of the familiar things about you. And in this city
there is enough to keep a squirrel content for five
lifetimes. You have spent your time here looking
without—if you’ll pardon the expression—seeing."

The gray one slowly, thoughtfully walked around Red.
And when he turned to face Red again, his tail caught the
sun so that his gray head sparkled in silhouette.

"A happy squirrel is one who stops often and, with
amazement and wonder, surveys that which he has seen
everyday, but finds it is never exactly the same. And in
that, he finds joy."

The gray squirrel turned to leave. Feeling that something had been left unsaid, he hesitated,
twisting his head just enough to look at Red through the
corner of his eye.

"Go, Aloysius, and see the immensity of the
familiar."

Red walked away with new purpose. And as he was
crossing the street, he noticed a nest on a window ledge.
He looked very closely and saw a mother robin feeding
her babies, teasing them with each tasty worm, and
making sure they did not try to swallow too much at one
time. Then a black Chevrolet ran over Red and killed him.

The moral is evident: There is much to be said for the
contentment one finds when struck by the immensity of
the familiar; but one must always look both ways before
crossing the street to avoid being struck by a car.