

Squirrels Rule (by Ute Maria Sproulle)

Two squirrels were searching for food. One was Tarzan, the other Friend of Tarzan, also known as FT. They were both good at climbing, leaping, scampering but Tarzan was better. And he knew it.

Every morning they would set off early, leaving their cosy perch in the chestnut tree. FT thought it was way too early. He preferred to sleep, listening to the birds, watching the sun rise.

But Tarzan was determined. "We need to get food. We've got to store away enough for winter. Trust me, you'll thank me when it's cold and snowy."

FT agreed, he knew how hungry they would get. He also knew that squirrels could remember up to 100 different hiding places where they had buried their food. They had never needed 100 different places because they never had enough food. But it was nice to know they could.

Tarzan and Friend of Tarzan set off. First stop was Mr Davidson's garden. He always put out seeds and nuts for the birds in a big bird feeder. Easy to get to, scampering along the clothes line on which it hung. Easy-peasy even.

Today something was different. The bird food was on a platform on top of a tall pole. "No problem," Tarzan said. "All we have to do is get around that wire thing on top."

FT didn't like it. "You go. I'll wait here and catch the nuts."

"Coward," said Tarzan as he climbed further up Mr Davidson's oak tree. "Watch me!"

FT watched as Tarzan jumped from the highest branch onto the platform. He also watched as the platform sprung upwards catapulting Tarzan back into the oak tree.

"Have a nice trip?" FT asked, trying not to smile. Tarzan flicked his tail, which narrowly missed FT's head, to show that he was not amused.

“I’m not giving up, if that’s what you mean. We’ll try Mrs Pennyman’s garden.”

It was a good choice. She would hang big, juicy fat balls on large branches in her cherry tree. They were incredibly yummy.

But this time the fat balls weren’t hanging from the cherry tree, they were on top of a long pole in the middle of the lawn. Not a tree in sight.

“Oh well,” said FT, “we’d better search somewhere else.”

“Nonsense!” barked Tarzan. “I can climb that pole no problem, even if you can’t. Watch and see how it’s done.” He smirked and scampered across the grass.

Friend of Tarzan watched as Tarzan climbed up the pole. And he watched as Tarzan slid down the pole. Then he saw Tarzan climb up again and slide down again. This was getting boring.

After the 10th time, Tarzan returned. He squatted, panting, next to FT.

“There’s something greasy on that pole. I can’t get a grip on it.”

“Ah,” replied FT, “that would explain it.” He thought a moment and then asked, “Why don’t humans like squirrels?” It was beginning to look that way.

“Oh, they like the red ones alright. They’re smaller and cuter than we are. And red. I’ve heard Mrs Jenkins next door say we’re only grey rats with bushy tails. Rats! I ask you.”

Well, this wasn’t getting them anywhere. Two gardens down, so should they try a third?

There was Mr and Mrs Jenkins’ garden but there was no bird feeder. They peeked through the hedge. The window to their kitchen was open and lovely smells were streaming out.

Friend of Tarzan thought of a plan. "What about one of us creating a diversion outside. Then the other one runs in, stuffs his cheek pouches with food and runs back out?"

"Hmmm," reflected Tarzan. "A better plan would be, you create a diversion inside and I stuff my cheeks with food."

Friend of Tarzan didn't think much to this plan. "What about our exit strategy?"

"We just run out through the open window again. That's our exit!" Tarzan gave an exasperated sigh.

FT had no choice but to go along with Tarzan's plan. But he still didn't like it.

They leapt onto the window ledge and looked through the window. A big pot of soup was simmering on the stove. Mrs Jenkins was chopping more vegetables to put into the soup.

Mr Jenkins placed a plate of apple slices and walnuts next to her. "Here's desert, dear. I'm just going out into the garden to water the plants."

"We need to be quick," hissed Tarzan. "You jump in and run around the kitchen. The lady will scream - they always scream - and chase you. I'll dive in and grab the food. You run back, grab more food and we both jump out the window."

It sounded quite simple but FT still had a sinking feeling that this plan wouldn't work either.

But what choice did he have? As Tarzan always reminded him, he was Friend of Tarzan and obliged to support him. So, he gave one almighty leap and flew through the window, nearly landing in Mrs Jenkins' cooking pot.

It was hard to say who screeched the loudest, Mrs Jenkins or FT. Luckily the soup ladle was perched on the edge of the pot and FT caught hold and propelled himself up the wall.

Scampering up and down, followed by Mrs Jenkins' screams, he saw Tarzan stuffing his cheek pouches with fruit and vegetables. So far so good. FT was desperate to get close enough to stuff his share. Unfortunately Mr Jenkins had just appeared banging a broom on the wall and at FT.

Where was their exit? Blocked by Mrs Jenkins, who was waving her arms in front of the window, unaware that Tarzan was still stuffing away behind her. Nice work if you could get it.

Then FT saw it: the cat flap! They had often encountered the Jenkins' cat prowling around the garden on the lookout for squirrels. FT gave one final leap, landed in front of the flap and scampered out.

Tarzan had seen it, too. He had also finally been noticed by the lady of the house who was using the soup ladle to try and crush him.

Time to go. Tarzan jumped to the floor, scurried to the cat flap and - met the cat just coming in.

Both animals looked at each other, startled and surprised. But the cat was licking its lips and you could tell he fancied a nice, fat, juicy squirrel for dinner.

On the window sill FT watched as the cat chased a very stuffed Tarzan around the room and behind the counter.

FT did not see what happened next. But he had a feeling that the next time he saw Tarzan he would be Friend of Tarzan no more.