

## The Acorn Harvest

It was getting colder, and the trees' leaves were starting to sprinkle, like lemon zest off a grater. A family of squirrels sat peacefully on a branch. This family of squirrels had always lived in the backyard of a family of humans. The humans planted an abundance of food, but the fresh produce disappeared almost instantly, leaving behind a small hole in the ground that resembled a crater on the moon.

In the yard stood a large oak tree that dropped just enough nuts for squirrels to survive. It was home to the Mirm family.

One morning, the Mirms decided it was time to collect nuts for winter. They planned to scavenge the base of the tree.

"Benny!" Mrs. Mirm called. "Breakfast will be ready in two minutes!" The little squirrel trudged out of his small room. "This is going to be so exciting," Mrs. Mirm shrieked with joy. "Your first ever acorn harvest!"

Benny was two years old. The previous year, Benny was sick with a stomachache because a careless human fed him a blob of mashed potatoes, which happens to be horrible for squirrels.

He sat down and nibbled on the aging acorns from the previous harvest. "Get changed," Mrs. Mirm said firmly. "We should start collecting acorns no later than thirty minutes past sunrise. Don't want that Puff family to hog the acorns again." The Mirm family quickly got dressed and sprinted down the steep spiral staircase of the old tree, nearly tripping and tumbling down.

"So Benny, you want to look for these. They sometimes are hidden, but you'll be able to recognize them." Mrs. Mirm picked up an acorn, then stuffed it in her cheek. Benny scavenged, even poking into the nearby ivy patch. Finally, Benny spotted an acorn on the ground. "Hey, this is one, right?"

"Yep, just pick it up and store it in your cheek!"

So Benny picked it up and stuffed it in his mouth. He carried on, collecting acorns, picking up more acorns than both of his parents combined. But after they had been harvesting for an hour or so, both of his parents saw something they had never seen before.

"Oh my goodness," Mrs. Mirm shrieked. "What has happened to your cute little cheeks?"

Benny put his little paw up and touched his face, hoping to understand what was happening.

"Your hand," Mr. Mirm cried. "It's all puffy!"

Benny's cheeks had nearly doubled in size, and his hand was so plump it looked like an enormous tomato.

"Quick!" Mrs. Mirm ordered. "Let's bring him to Mrs. Coo. She'll know what to do!"

The worried family sprinted to the lemon tree pot, dug away the safety pebbles, and hopped into the hole, with Mr. Mirm in the lead. They then blasted their way through the door at the bottom, creating a horrible bang.

“Jimmy, is that you?”

“No, Mrs. Coe.” Mrs. Mirm replied, out of breath. “It’s us, the Mirms.”

Mrs. Coe wobbled over to the living room. That’s when she spotted Benny’s cheeks. Then she noticed his hands.

“Oh my,” she said. “What did you touch last?”

“Well, we were collecting nuts for the winter.”

Mrs. Coe thought it over. What had happened to little Benny?

“I believe this is a bad case of hives.”

The Mirm family was confused. We didn’t get anywhere near the bees, Mrs. Mirm thought to herself.

Mrs. Coe read her mind. “No, no, it has nothing to do with bees. I’m afraid that if the last thing Benny touched was nuts, he is now allergic to nuts and can’t ever eat nuts again.”

“But,” the parents said, completely in sync. “How will he eat?”

“He’ll have to eat something else,” Mrs. Coe replied. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I must finish my soup.”

The Mirm family trudged out from under the lemon pot. Then just when things couldn’t get any worse, Benny tripped on a mound of dirt, went airborne, and tumbled down into a dark tunnel. That’s when Benny heard a rustle. He was about to scream when he heard a voice.

“Oop,” a furry animal whispered. “Sorry about that. I need to pop up everywhere to find food.”

Finally, Benny peeled himself off the tunnel floor. He saw a gopher, then quickly put two and two together.

“My name’s Woodrow!” the gopher said excitedly. “I was kind of listening in. I have tunnels against the walls of Mrs. Coe. Wise squirrel, she is, but Benny, I’m sorry that you had to receive that dreadful news.”

“Thanks,” Benny said. There was an awkward pause. “Nice place,” Benny said, breaking the silence.

“Thanks. Anyways, if you can’t eat nuts, what are you going to do?”

“I’m not sure yet.”

“Well, I have plenty of different plants stored here,” Woodrow said proudly. “Usually, my neighbors and I eat fresh vegetables, like cabbage and carrots from the humans’ backyard. If you like, you are welcome to return for the banquet tomorrow.”

That’s when Benny heard a voice.

“Benny! You okay?”

The voice echoed down, with the sound waves bouncing off the walls for what seemed like forever.

“Yes. I’m okay. Actually, I’m great.”

Benny seemed completely unfazed, but the parents were worried. “We’re going to drop a vine of ivy, which is the only thing we could find. You are going to grab on. Understand?”

“Yes,” Benny groaned. “Hopefully, I’ll see you tomorrow, Woodrow.”

“See you soon.”

When Benny returned to the sunlight, he was bombarded with questions.

“What were the craters like?”

“Was anybody down there?”

“How did you not see the hole?”

But Benny answered none of them.

“Guess what?” He didn’t even wait for a response. “There's a gopher down there named Woodrow. He’s quite friendly, actually. It turns out there's plenty of other foods I can eat, like carrots and cabbage! He invited me to his banquet tomorrow, so is it okay if I return later?”

“I suppose,” said Mrs. Mirm. “But first, let’s all get some rest.”

Not eating nuts wouldn’t be an issue for young Benny. That night, Benny went to sleep quickly, dreaming about the Thanksgiving feast he would have the following day. A feast that he would be able to partake in. A feast that would not pose any problems to his new allergy. Soon after, he would invite friends and family to a vegetable harvest he would plan, so everyone would be able to see that there are other delicious foods besides acorns.