

a breakfast serials story

The Black Squirrel

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Chapter 1 The Black Squirrel

It hadn't been a good night for Mac. He'd been troubled by a bad dream. He'd been having bad dreams for years, but last night's had been the worst--so bad that it woke him up, twice.

The first time he woke, he thought he could still hear the echo of roaring engines. Giant bulldozers had been rumbling through the forest, trees falling before their blades, wood beneath their treads, as the animals fled and the sky filled with smoke.

The second time he woke up, just before dawn, was even worse. Everything was too quiet. For a moment he thought he was in that silent gray world left behind after the bulldozers in his dream were done. A world where all the green was gone and every blade of grass, every tree had vanished. No animals, no birds, nothing but huge shadowy buildings and dead concrete.

Mac sat on the edge of his bed looking out the window at the old maple tree. When he was little, his imagination used to run wild after they put him to bed. He'd start by worrying about all the people and things he didn't want to lose. Mom and Grandma and Uncle Bear, his friends and the nearby forest, that magical place

everyone called Grama Lampman's Woods. Then he'd start imagining that everything he loved would vanish when he closed his eyes. So he'd try not to sleep. But when he did, the bad dreams would come. He'd wake up crying. Then his mother would come in and sit on his bed.

"It's all right, Little Eagle," she'd say, stroking his forehead.

Gradually, the bad dreams had become less frequent. It had been a long time since he'd had one--until last night. He looked out at the maple tree. It was still there. Looking at Old Maple made him feel better.

"Old Maple is the chief," Uncle Bear had said. "End of winter, maple gives us sweet medicine sap. So we respect and thank the maple tree."

Mac always listened to Uncle Bear. Uncle Bear had given him the nickname of Mac. Short for Magaesosis, which means "Little Eagle," his Indian name. The archery trophies on his shelf were because of Uncle Bear. He'd told Mac learning the bow would give him confidence. Uncle Bear had been as surprised as Mac when his nephew could hit whatever he aimed at. Mac had won every archery tournament for his age group.

Mac shook his head. That dream was still stuck in his mind. In that dream, Old Maple had been cut down. In fact, all the trees in Grama Lampman's Woods had

been cut down. Even though all the kids in the Redstone School had signed the petition that Mac started to protect that woodland, it had still been destroyed! In the dream, someone had been laughing the kind of laugh he'd heard on the playground when a big kid pushed a little kid down, a bully's laugh. In his dream, he'd looked for the one who laughed, wanting to stop him like he'd stopped that bully. But all he saw were shadows, dark shapes crawling over the broken trees. Shapes that looked like giant black squirrels.

Mac went to the window. *It was just a dream*, he thought. *The special town meeting hasn't even happened yet*. He leaned out toward the closest of Old Maple's branches, the one so close it brushed his third-floor window. Then he saw something on that branch. In the quiet Saturday morning shadows he hadn't noticed it until it sat up on its hind legs. It was a black squirrel.

The black squirrel stared into Mac's eyes. Mac didn't like that stare. Squirrels weren't just cute little furry creatures who ate nuts. They ate meat, too. Some big ones snatched baby birds out of their nests.

The black squirrel moved closer. It was really big. Mac found himself remembering the story Grandmother Kateri had told. Long ago, squirrels were bigger than bears. All the other animals were terrified of them. Those monster squirrels wanted to destroy the human beings. But Gluskabe, the hero who protected the people, shrank the squirrels down small.

Were those old-time giant squirrels black? Mac asked himself. And is this one getting even bigger? As it crept toward him, the branch bent under its weight. The squirrel looked as large as a Labrador retriever now!

I should close the window, Mac thought.

But he couldn't move. The dark eyes of that squirrel were like deep pools of water drowning his will. It was as if he were hypnotized. The squirrel came closer, its

mouth open. Its teeth were big and sharp as chisels. A regular squirrel can chew through just about anything with those teeth, even a metal roof. But this squirrel wasn't regular. It was jumbo extra large!

Get away, said a voice somewhere in the back of Mac's brain. But he couldn't move.

Then another voice spoke: Grandmother Kateri's remembered voice telling him something she thought he needed to know. *If you are ever in real trouble, take a deep breath and shout!*

The black squirrel was close. Its paws were reaching out for him. It now seemed to be the size of a mountain lion. If it did grab him, he'd be like one of those baby birds caught by this giant's little cousins. He was about to be breakfast for an overgrown rodent.

Mac tried to take a deep breath, but he couldn't. He felt the black squirrel's hot breath on his face.

Next Week: The Voice in the Tree

Glossary and Pronunciation of Abenaki words:

Gluskabe (glew-skah-bey): An ancient Abenaki hero who had the power to change things.

Magaesosis (mah-gey-sew-sees): Little Eagle

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