

a breakfast serials story

The Black Squirrel

Written by Joseph Bruchac

Illustrated by David Fadden



Chapter 2 The Voice in the Tree

The story so far: Although Mac had always respected the old stories from his Indian ancestry, he never expected them to come to life in the shape of a giant black squirrel about to eat him!

The monster squirrel's breath was hot and moist on Mac's face. He could hear it breathing, hear the scratching of its long, sharp claws against the side of the house as it reached for him.

But with his eyes closed he could no longer see the creature's hungry dark eyes. He no longer felt paralyzed. And Grandma Kateri's remembered words of advice repeated themselves in his mind and gave him strength: *If you are ever in real trouble, take a deep breath and then let go!*

He closed his eyes even tighter, clenched his fists, took that deep breath and then let out an old-fashioned yell so loud that it rattled the windows.

"WAAIIII-HEEEY-HEEY-YOOOOO!"

With that yell, it was as if the air had cleared around him. It felt like the difference between a sky filled with

storm clouds and a sunny spring day. Mac opened his eyes. The black squirrel was gone. It was a beautiful spring morning. He traced the firm, familiar wood of his windowsill with one finger. Maybe he'd been imagining it after all, sleepwalking in the middle of a dream.

He leaned out the window cautiously and looked around. No black squirrel. Not even a white mouse! But then he saw something that made his heart jump into his throat. There, on the side of the house, just to the right of his window, were four deep, ragged scratches. Scratches that might have been made by big sharp claws.

"You did well, Eagle Boy!" said a high, bright voice from the branches above.

It made Mac jerk up and bang against the window. Rubbing his head, he looked up.

Barely visible through the leaves, a face looked down at Mac. It was hard to tell how far away that face was, even though the voice had sounded close. "Oooh," said the face among the leaves, "I bet that hurt! Good thing you didn't do that when the Black One was about to grab you. By the way, who taught you how to shout like a mteoulin, one of our old-time men of power?"

"Grandma Kateri taught me," Mac said. But as he said it he found himself wondering why he was answering a question from someone up in a tree. And

would that person even know who Grandma Kateri was. He looked up, trying to find that face.

“Ah-hah!” said the high quick voice. It was coming from someplace closer, though Mac could no longer see the face of the one who was speaking.

“Kateri! We always liked that one,” the high, quick voice continued. “She was always one for knowing old things, even though she didn’t talk much about them. A good listener that one, even when she was a little girl.”

Mac was feeling dizzy. He didn’t understand this conversation. He didn’t understand what was happening to him today. *It is a dream*, he thought. *I must still be dreaming.*

“No,” said the person in the tree. “You are not dreaming, Eagle Boy. You are awake and you need to stay awake. We have work to do now that you’ve passed my first test. With the Black One, that is.”

“Your test?” Mac said. He was beginning to feel really upset. “You mean you, whoever you are, you made me see that thing? Show yourself! Right now, or I’m going to shut this window and go back to bed so I can wake up and get away from this crazy dream.”

What happened next happened so quickly that Mac was never able to really explain it to anyone. It was as if a whirlwind—not just a wind but a rainbow of light, a

burst of birdsong, and the smell of sweetgrass and ripe berries all rolled into one—suddenly swept through the leaves of the tree and washed over him.

“Here I am,” said that high, light voice. But it no longer came from nowhere. It came from right in front of him. There, in the exact same spot where the black squirrel had been, stood a smiling man. He was dressed in the old way, with clothing made out of deerskin and moccasins. He looked just like an old-time Indian except for one thing. He was no bigger than a chipmunk!

Next Week: **Two Things**

Glossary and Pronunciation of Abenaki words:

Mteoulin (mah-tee-ow-lin): A man of power, a medicine man

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