

Hungry Thanksgiving Eyes

Since early morning, Bushy Tail had been collecting acorns, chestnuts, and berries. It was mid-afternoon on a sunny autumn day, and Bushy sweated in his thick squirrel coat.

"This is so boring! And I have the bucket only half full," moaned Bushy. "I can't go home till it's filled up!"

Just then, he saw his friend, Tree Swooper. Bushy Tail was just an ordinary squirrel who could scamper up trees and make short leaps from branch to branch. On the other hand, Tree Swooper could take off and sail through the air from tree to rooftop to high wire. Bushy envied Swooper's ability to fly through the air like an acrobat and to quickly gather food for the winter months.

Swooper's home in a nearby tree was already overflowing with his tasty supply. Bushy scratched his head. Those nuts sure look tempting! Swooper has more than he really needs. Hmm. . . . I know! I'll finish filling my pail with some of them . . . while he's not looking.

So Bushy Tail did just that. As he scooted off with a full bucket, he heard someone calling his name. It was his grandfather Old Cane Squirrel's voice:

"Did you ask that flying squirrel's permission to take his acorns and chestnuts, Bushy?"

"Uh, yes," he lied. Then, "Well, nu-no."

"You have no right to take them," his grandfather said. Bushy unhappily poured them back in Swooper's hole. "You'd better get back to work, 'He who will not . . .'"

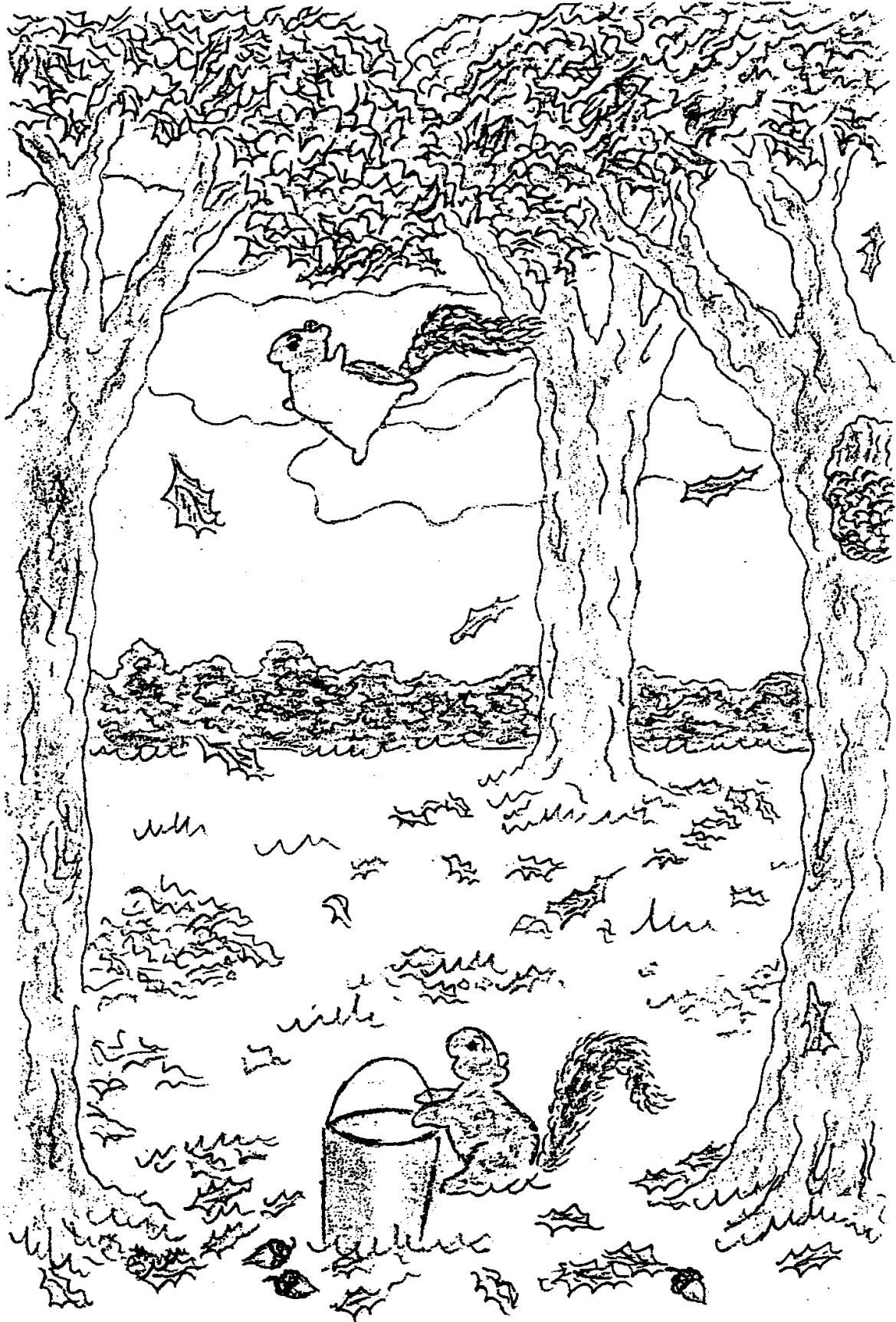
"' . . . work, won't eat,' I know, Grandpa." Then Bushy worked hard, until he had filled his bucket to the brim.

Now on the same day and for many days before, Granny Goodies had been working energetically. Every year at this time, for weeks before Thanksgiving, she baked delicious cookies shaped like turkeys and praying paws. She also made breads - banana, spice, raisin and nut; and pies of every kind - apple, berry, pumpkin, mince, and the squirrel family favorite - chestnut-acorn pie.

On Thanksgiving days, Granny always insisted on cooking all the dressing, potatoes, yams, gravy, carrots, and peas. Also, she ground the cranberries, oranges, apples, and nuts for cranberry salad, with her hand grinder. She would let her fourteen grandsquirrels help, but she always told the moms to take a day's vacation.

After all the food was prepared and all the moms and dads, aunts, uncles, and cousins had arrived, other animals that the grandsquirrels didn't know, started to knock on the front door. There were chipmunks, rabbits, beavers, woodchucks, foxes, and many more. Granny Goodies always seemed to know each of them and never turned any away. Her grandchildren had come to accept this tradition, though with the arrival of each guest, they knew there would be less food for *them*. But they never questioned their grandmother, until *this* year.

"Why do we always have these free-loaders?" complained Bushy Tail. "They eat half the food, but don't work gathering and cooking the food, like *we* have to!"



"Hush, Bushy!" scolded Granny. "We have more guests at the door. Bushy, you and Swooper go fetch a few more folding chairs from the storage shed." So Bushy and Swooper went out to the back yard and opened the door of the shed.

"There're the chairs," said Bushy. "Let's go. I'm starved." As they dashed over to get the chairs, the shed door slammed shut.

"Here, I'll get it," Swooper said.

But when he tried to open it, the handle broke off. There were no windows in the shed and just a little light leaked through the wood boards. The friends tried to pry the door open with various tools, but it wouldn't budge. Then they called for help and banged on the door for a long time.

In the meantime, no one in the house seemed to miss them, because there were so many animals crowded together. Finally, after dinner and dessert had been served, someone noticed the missing squirrels. Soon they were found shivering in the shed with their stomachs growling loudly. They went inside and ate the few leftovers from the huge feast.

Then everyone moved to the family room, where they played games, talked, told jokes, and sang around the piano. At the end of the evening, Grandpa Cane read aloud from his Bible. The guests then said their good-byes and left. When all the guests were gone, Granny called Bushy Tail and all the other youngsters from the squirrel family to her side.

"Now, I'll answer your question, Bushy," Granny said.

"I know, Granny," Bushy said. "Chi-Chi Chipmunk can't see well, and Ronnie Rabbit hobbles instead of hops, and Zachary Beaver's very old, and Miss Kitty has no home. I know it's hard for them to get food."

"Yes, Bushy Tail! I know you have a caring heart!"

"But what about Sneak Fox and Quick Duck and a lot of the other guests?" Bushy asked. "They don't seem to have any problems. It isn't fair we're the ones who worked so hard to gather and cook the food, and they, who didn't help at all, gobbled half of it down!"

"Oh, Bushy . . . didn't you see their eyes? Theirs were the saddest of all," Granny said. "You all have so much to be thankful for. Your tummies get full every day, and your hearts are always overflowing with the love of family and God.

"Our guests, though, when they arrived, had not only empty stomachs, but empty eyes as well. But when they left, they were full of love - ours, and most important - God's love. *We* gave them food for their stomachs, and *God* gave them food for their souls."

"Okay, Granny, okay. You're right." Bushy said. "Can we help you start making cookies for Christmas, so we'll have plenty to share with everyone we know who needs God's love."

"I wanna help" "Me too!" "Please, Granny!" the grandsquirrels cried together.

"Of course, dears! But it's your bedtime now. We can start in the morning."

So all the grandsquirrels put their pajamas on, kneeled by their beds, and said their Thanksgiving prayers. That night Bushy Tail dreamed all the animals and people, children and grown-ups in the whole world were best friends with Granny Goodies, each other, and God.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Matthew 5:7 NIV

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it for Me.'" Matthew 25:40 NIV

