

Three Squirrels

By Esu Matra

Once upon a time there were three squirrels: Sammy, Skipper, and Spikey. They were on a quest – a type of journey - to get some nuts. They and their squirrel friends had eaten so many of the nuts and goodies in their home forest that there was not a lot of food left.

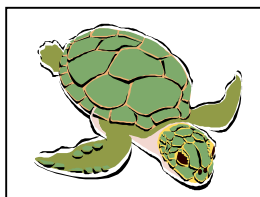
So, as they traveled, they came to a river. This river was not so wide, but it was wide enough that they could not jump across. It was not so deep, but it was deep enough to stop them from walking on the bottom. It was not so cold, but it was cold enough that they did not want to swim across.

But, on the other side of the river, Sammy, Skipper, and Spikey could see lots of trees with lots of nuts growing on them. They were getting very hungry.

Sammy said "Hey, we can swim across, it's not so cold!" and he jumped in the water. After only a short while he learned something else about the water in the river: it was not moving fast, but it was moving fast enough to sweep him downstream faster than he could swim across.

Skipper and Spikey watched as Sammy was swept away downstream by the river water. They were sad that their friend was lost in the water. They were also even more hungry than before.

They thought about how to get across. Skipper said "Look - I see a turtle! I will ask him for a ride across!" He asked the turtle to come over to the shore of the river.



“Turtle, can you give me a ride?” Skipper asked.

“My name’s Townsend.” said the turtle, “And, I’ll be happy to let you ride on my back to get across.” Townsend replied.

So, Skipper jumped onto the turtle’s back, which was a very hard and slippery shell. They started for the other side of the river, with Townsend swimming with his head below water. Turtles can swim for a long time under the water before they have to come up for air.

About half of the way across, Townsend started to go under water. Skipper’s feet were starting to get wet, and the shell was getting more slippery. Skipper was upset as Townsend swam deeper under water. The water was getting deeper and only Skipper’s head was above water.

Skipper asked the turtle "Why are you going under?"

Townsend said "I see some food on the bottom – some delicious morsels. I’m hungry too – it will only be a second. Hold on!"

Spikey, who was watching from the shore, also said “Hold on!”

But, soon the water went over the squirrel’s head and he could not hold on to the slippery turtle shell any longer. Skipper let go and tried to swim, but the water was still moving fast. Skipper was still swimming as he was swept down the river out of sight of Spikey. Townsend was swimming down to the bottom of the river.

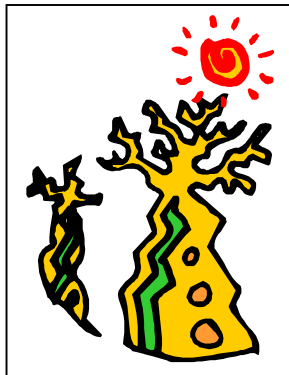


Spikey was very upset to see his friend disappear. He was also mad that the turtle didn’t wait. Townsend finished eating and came up for air, and rested on some rocks on the other side of the river. He didn’t know what happened to the squirrel, and looked puzzled.

Now, Spikey was very determined to get over to the other side to eat, and also to talk to Townsend about his behavior.

Right about that time, Spikey noticed a vine swinging from a tree above the water. The vine looked like a long rope, and it was hanging down from a branch high above him. A soft wind was moving the vine back and forth, back and forth.

Spikey realized that he could use the vine to swing over the river, and jump to the other side. He climbed up, up, up... all the way to the high branch.



Then he climbed down, down, down to the end of the vine. He was close to the water, and he lowered his tail so it was touching the water.

Using his tail, Spikey pushed the vine – and himself – further out over the stream. Then he and the vine moved back towards the shore. As they swung out again, he put his tail in the water to push himself farther out. Spikey's tail was working like the paddle in a boat, pushing him across the water. He swung back and forth, back and forth, getting farther and farther across the river.

Pretty soon, Spikey was swinging more than halfway across the river. He thought to himself, "Just one more big push, and I will be able to jump from the vine to the other side of the river!"

And that is what he tried to do. As Townsend watched from the other side, Spikey pushed his tail into the river and paddled his bestest and biggest paddle! He was moving out far – almost across the river. Then he let go, jumping from the vine out towards the land.

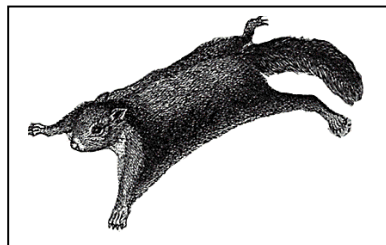
But, something was wrong. Spikey was all wet. His tail was wet, too. It was so wet that it dragged in the water as he jumped. Spikey did not make it across. He dropped down fast into the water.

Spikey swam and swam, but the water was moving even faster on the other side of the river. He was being swept downstream too fast! He was swimming as hard as he could as he passed by Townsend. The turtle was watching, and he slowly moved his head to follow Spikey as he floated by. Townsend was not going to be any help getting Spikey out of the water. Turtles move too slowly to make good rescuers.

Spikey kept swimming and swimming. The river was getting all jumbly and topsy-turvy, and he could not see where he was going. Spikey was going backwards, forwards, and sideways – getting spun around by the fast water.

Then he felt like he was falling, falling, falling. He was going down a small waterfall. It would be fun if he wasn't so dizzy from all of the spinning around. He landed in the water at the bottom of the waterfall with a big SPLASH!

Spikey knew some flying squirrels, who have extra skin to help them glide... but even they probably didn't fly when they were all wet!



Spikey was too tired to swim very fast. He floated in the water, watching the waterfall. Then he turned around, and saw that the river was gone! Well, not gone... it was changed. There were rocks everywhere, and the water moved between them. The rocks were close together, and Spikey went to one and climbed up on it.

He looked around. Not too far away, he saw a squirrel jumping to another rock. It was Skipper! Skipper was jumping from rock to rock, moving to the other side of the river.



“Skipper!” yelled Spikey.

Skipper turned around and said “C’mon, slowpoke, get over here! We’ve got to catch up.”

Spikey then saw that Sammy was already on the other side of the river. He was running towards the first tree he saw, so that he could climb up and get something to eat.

“Sammy, save some for us!” shouted Spikey. Sammy just chirped his loudest chirp, and started eating some acorns.



All of the three squirrels ate and ate until they were too full. They all took a little nap. Then they gathered some nuts to take back to the other squirrels. Spikey, Sammy, and Skipper had found the best way across the river, and they went back to tell the other squirrels all about it.

And, of course, they lived happily ever after.

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