

Where Did I Put That Nut?



Mo Squirrel was a strong climber and a fast runner. He also was a very smart squirrel. He could flip over a rat trap to knock out the bait (usually a tasty bit of peanut butter!), and he could raid every bird feeder in the neighbourhood.



But one thing he could not do was remember. All summer and fall, he buried caches of food, but when winter came, he couldn't remember where they were.

Mo was up in his family's drey, high in a notch in a maple tree. His sister Saskie, was there too, gnawing on an apple scrap.

"Mo, what's the matter?" she asked. **"You look sad."**

"I feel so stupid," said Mo. **"Last winter I couldn't remember where I'd buried my nuts. What's the point of storing food if you forget where it is?"**

"You can find your caches, Mo. Just use your nose. It will lead you to the right spots."

"My nose isn't the problem. I can smell buried nuts, but I can't remember whether they're mine or not. Last winter whenever I dug up any nuts, some other squirrel would run over and scream at me. I couldn't find my own caches."



Saski gnawed at the last bit of the apple core and thought for a minute or two. **"Come on. Let's practise."**

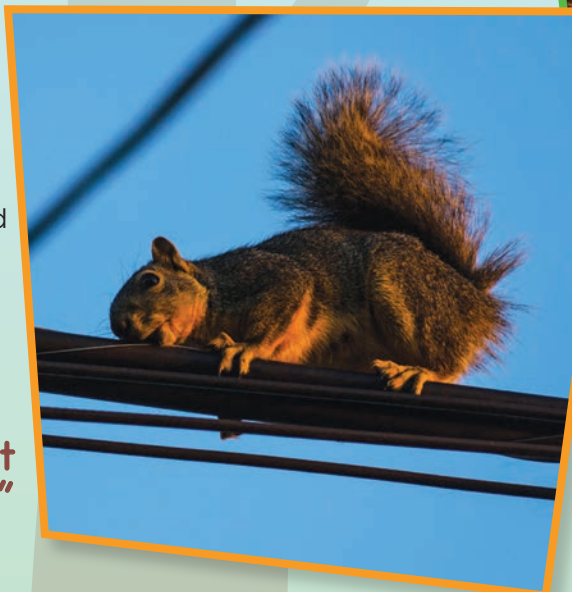
Saski led the way through the park, up a power pole and along the squirrel highway (that's a power line to you and me) to a garden with an apple tree.

"Now look around. What do you see?"

"Hmmm. An apple tree?"

"Yes. Anything else? Can you see something that might help you remember this particular place?"

"Well, the house has a red door."



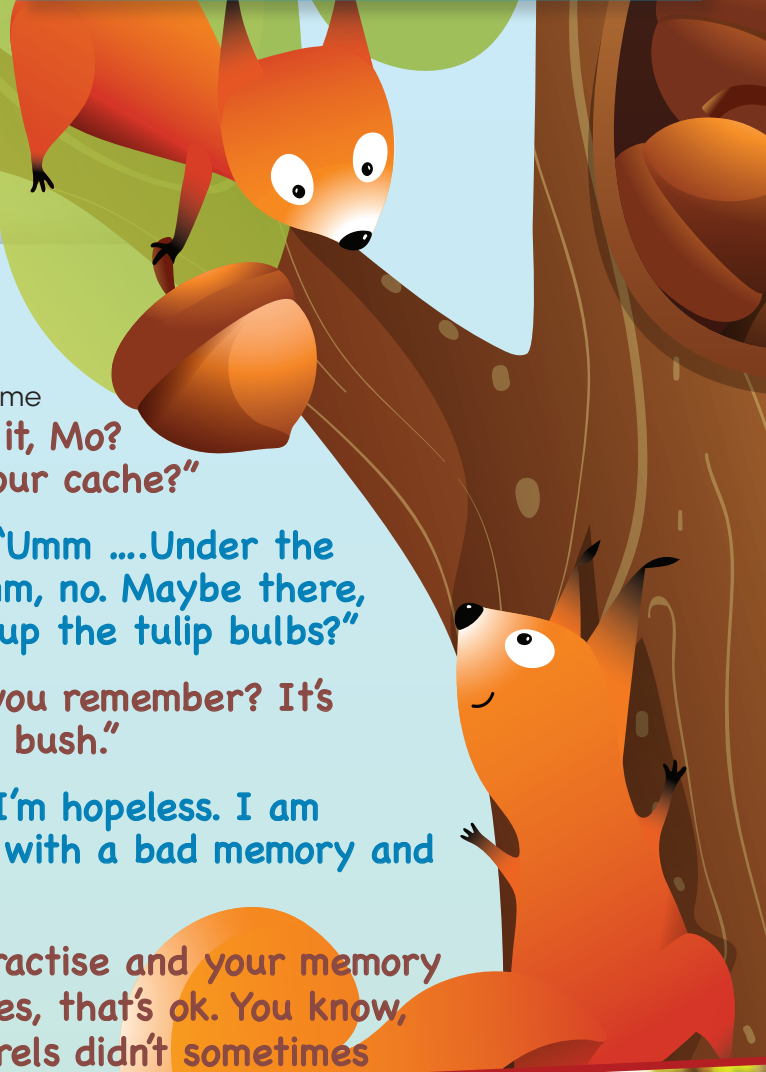
"Good. Now let's go find some food to hide."

They crossed the yard and approached the bird feeder. It was supposed to be squirrel-proof, but Mo and Saski shinnied up the pole and leapt on to the feeder tray. They each grabbed a mouthful of seeds and jumped back down.

Mo chose a spot under a rose bush to hide the seeds. He dug a hole with his front paws and buried them. Then he smoothed the dirt and put some leaves over the spot to hide it.

"Now make a map in your mind. How close is your cache to the apple tree? How far is it from the red door?"

Mo closed his eyes and tried to get a picture in his mind of the location. **"Ok. I've got it."**



The next day they came back. **"Where is it, Mo? Can you find your cache?"**

Mo looked around. **"Umm ...Under the apple tree? Hmm, no. Maybe there, where we dug up the tulip bulbs?"**

"Oh Mo. Can't you remember? It's under the rose bush."

Mo got very upset. **"I'm hopeless. I am just a squirrel with a bad memory and that's that."**

"Don't be upset, Mo. All summer, we can practise and your memory will get better. And if you forget sometimes, that's ok. You know, there wouldn't be any hazel trees if squirrels didn't sometimes forget where they buried hazelnuts. Same with oak trees: they get started when a squirrel forgets his acorns. A forgetful squirrel actually helps the trees and all the creatures that need the trees."

Mo thought for a moment. He would try to get better at remembering; he'd practise all summer. But if he forgot a few caches when winter came, well—that would just mean more nuts for the future.

