

Cheeku and Chikootichoo

By Esther David

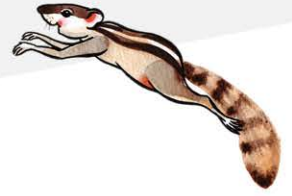
Cheeku liked to watch squirrels in the park near his house. When he was tired of playing with his friends, he would lie on the grass and watch the squirrels. He always carried peanuts in his pocket and left some on the ground, hoping that the squirrels would come down and eat them. They did just that, and Cheeku even noticed a particularly plump squirrel that was bolder than the others. She often came close to him and quickly picked up a nut in her mouth, before running back to the tree.

Slowly, she came to recognise Cheeku and every evening when she saw him, she would call out to him with a shrill “Chikootichoo”. Gradually she even learned to accept nuts from his palm. Cheeku named her Chikootichoo. It was the beginning of a long friendship between Cheeku and Chikootichoo. Cheeku always recognised Chikootichoo, as her ears were darker than the other three striped squirrels in the park.

One day, when Cheeku was helping Baa clean the courtyard, he saw Chikootichoo sitting on the terrace and calling out to him. Happy and surprised, Cheeku told Baa, “Look, Chikootichoo has come to our house!” Baa smiled and said, “Maybe, she reached the terrace by climbing the drain pipe.” As Baa was speaking, Chikootichoo jumped into the courtyard, ate some crumbs and scampered away to the park.

Cheeku told Baa excitedly, “I am so happy that Chikootichoo came to meet me!” Baa thought for a while and answered: “It should be all right, as long as she does not build a nest in the house.”





Soon, Baa forgot all about Chikootichoo, but Cheeku was sad. For the past few days, he had not seen her in the garden.

Then, one day, Cheeku opened the door to his room and heard a rustle. Frightened, he closed the door immediately and called out to Baa. She held his hand and said, "Come let us look in your room. Maybe it is just a bee." Baa opened the door and saw the shadow of a squirrel behind the window curtain. The squirrel peeped out from behind to see what was happening.

Cheeku recognised her and jumped with joy, "Oh, it's my Chikootichoo!" But, Chikootichoo was frightened and ran out of the room. Baa lifted the curtain and informed Cheeku, "Chikootichoo has built a nest in a niche on top of the door." She asked Cheeku to climb a chair and bring the nest down.

The nest was a huge ball of coconut fibre that the squirrel had woven with strings and rags, but it was empty. Baa picked it up and went to the park with Cheeku. Then, Baa left the nest near a tree. They hid behind a tree and saw how Chikootichoo picked up her nest in her mouth and carried it up the tree, placing it on a branch.

Two weeks later, Cheeku went back to the park to find Chikootichoo. This time, she was not alone but had two tiny baby squirrels by her side! Baa gave a bag of peanuts to Cheeku, saying, "Chikootichoo may have a brain no bigger than a jowar seed, but she has the memory of an elephant!"

THE END

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