

Neeka and the Squirrel Highway

Charlie Wes Harris

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In this inventive and engaging story, a young girl's father helps her work through a sudden fear.

Neeka and the Squirrel Highway by Charlie Wes Harris is an imaginative tale about a little girl whose father helps to soothe her fears.

Neeka loves her family, her school, and her home. When she was very small, in another home, squirrels occasionally visited her backyard, and she loved them. After the family moves, though, squirrels become a common sight, and Neeka forgets her former affection for them.

One day, she comes home from school and finds a squirrel asleep in her father's bed. She runs screaming from the room. Her father helps her understand that the squirrel meant no harm, telling her that their chimney might be a squirrel highway and describing the very human activities that the squirrel engaged in while in their home, reminding her of her previous appreciation for the creatures.

Clear writing uses a great deal of detail to bring Neeka's world to life. The pleasure she takes in her daily routines is an appealing quality, as is the relationship that she has with her father.

The book is text heavy, imparting an overabundance of details—such as information about Neeka's school—that does not seem relevant to the central plot. The accompanying illustrations by Daniel Majan are lovely, and though they follow the story, the actions of the text don't always align with the illustrations on the accompanying pages.

Designed to confronts feelings of terror in a child's life, the story may not necessarily translate as it intends to: as a comforting response for children to the violent acts so prevalent today. Neeka is certainly scared of the squirrel when she finds it in her home, but her father quickly reassures her, and she almost immediately remembers her love for the animals, making larger lessons about addressing fear elusive.

Neeka is an enjoyable and inventive story, offering an amusing reaction to a startling event, that will certainly appeal to young audiences.

CATHERINE THURESON (November 13, 2017)

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