

## Squirrelly the Squirrel and Starlett

Larry Friend

Sidney "Mindy" Makis, Illustrator

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*Squirrelly the Squirrel and Starlett includes enough imaginative storytelling to captivate young minds to the very end.*

A squirrel finds love while learning the tools for survival in Larry Friend's fantastical nature children's book, *Squirrelly the Squirrel and Starlett*.

Squirrelly is the oldest of a litter of seven. He and his family live in a tall oak tree in the backyard of a kind woman who provides a feeder for the squirrels. Even though Squirrelly learns how to build a nest and collect food, life changes when he left is on his own during the winter. Aside from working hard to forage for nuts, Squirrelly meets Starlett, and the two start a family. Their companionable teamwork helps them to survive, especially in the midst of danger.

Frolicsome and comedic anthropomorphic scenes on the front and back covers of *Squirrelly the Squirrel and Starlett* give an inkling of what to expect in the story. At first, the plot is more focused on its nature aspects: a litter of squirrels is born; the animal parents have to work hard to care for their helpless babies; additional nests are needed as the family grows. Details include the types of feeders that the squirrels find around and the squirrels' ingenuity at obtaining food earmarked for other animals.

But then the story shifts, with the squirrels taking on human characteristics beginning in chapter three, as Squirrelly works with his father to build a new nest and a conflict arises because of his brother's lackadaisical behavior toward helping. Chapters consistently close on light cliffhangers, and the story morphs into one riddled with relatable themes about family life and its challenges, love, and relationships.

Storytelling is nuanced, and the plot twists and turns. Some of the more difficult language is italicized, including words like "turbulence," "disassembling," and "rejuvenate"; they may overwhelm the advanced reader crowd, but a detailed glossary is included.

Curious young minds may ask for clarification with situations that don't match a fantasy setting. One such example can be found between the narrative's description of a traditional squirrel's nest compared to the Victorian-styled home and deck illustrations, both of which are set within crooks of the oak. Regardless, there is plenty going on in the plot to create interest from beginning to end.

Although the object lesson on life at the story's close doesn't fit well with the flow of the narrative, *Squirrelly the Squirrel and Starlett* includes enough imaginative storytelling to captivate young minds to the very end.

ANITA LOCK (January 30, 2019)

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