



# LUCKY

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Summary: Lucky is a young red squirrel who was rescued from a hawk and now must somehow make his home among the Cloudfoot clan of larger, gray squirrels who live in the city park—and trouble is brewing, for the rival gray squirrels known as the Northenders are planning an invasion.

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# 1

## Cloudfoot Avenue

**L**ucky?” It was a soft voice, a kindly voice, pulling him out of the Darkness. “Lucky squirrel, you’re shaking again. Are you awake?”

*Awake? I don’t want to be awake, he thought. It’s happened again. This isn’t my home-tree. I’ve woken up on Cloudfoot Avenue—again!*

“It’s all right, Lucky, you’re safe with me.”

*I’m not going to open my eyes yet. I’m going to breathe slowly and stop shaking. It’s happening again today, but maybe tomorrow I’ll wake up back home. But will I? Ever?*

Lucky had lost count of how many times he’d thought this. Every day he hoped he’d be back in his home-tree again, snug and safe in his own drey-nest. Yet every day he woke up

in an alien world with this creature who called herself a squirrel.

She said he was safe—she said she was his mother now. But she wasn't *right*. She didn't even look like a squirrel, with her horrible gray fur that smelled of smoke and dust.

He knew she wasn't right. He knew he'd had a mother before this "First Daughter" squirrel, brothers and sisters too. For a fleeting moment, just as he woke, he could remember them. Then they slipped away, replaced by memories of shrieking wind, splintering wood, and sharp talons.

Then, thankfully, the Darkness came again.

*Maybe my family are just a dream, he thought. But I know I'm not named Lucky, and I know you're not my mother!*

He never said it to First Daughter. She was kind to him and it would hurt her feelings.

"Lucky, I know you're awake!"

He opened his eyes obediently and looked up at the strange squirrel who wanted to be his mother. She smiled and nuzzled him out of the warm moss-lined bed at the base of her drey-nest. He uncurled and stretched. First Daughter towered over him. Even with nose and tail extended he was half her size. Why wasn't he getting any bigger?

*Bud and branch, thought First Daughter, am I doing the right thing? I can't keep him hidden in my home-tree forever, but he's so small!*

She'd tried to feed him up. Maybe he was supposed to be this small? Perhaps this was normal squirrel size in *his* home-trees. His fur was a peculiar red color, and his ears . . . She didn't even want to think about his ears . . .

*There's nothing more I can do*, she thought. *I must stop worrying*. So she began the morning grooming, cleaning his face and strange tufted ears with her sharp little tongue.

Lucky wriggled and started to giggle—it always tickled! First Daughter smiled again. He'd stopped shaking and seemed happier now.

A scratching noise outside the drey stopped her in mid-stroke. Lucky stiffened and wrinkled his nose. There were other creatures out there. He could smell them.

“Stay here, Lucky, I won't leave you for long.”

First Daughter's drey was a hollow ball of tightly woven twigs, a warm and dry nest. She pushed through a small hole in the curved wall, arched over the edge, and jumped out onto her home-tree, where the drey hung safely between two great spars of wood.

*I'm not going to hide in the moss-bed*, thought Lucky. *I'm not going to be afraid*. So he crept up to the drey wall, straining to hear fragments of conversation over the rustle of leaves and unfamiliar distant rumbling sounds.

“It's too early for the Cadet Troop.” This was First Daughter; he knew her voice.