



nce upon a time there was a little girl who lived with her granny in the woods. She was a told she very naughty girl and that she caused trouble everyday. Luckily, her grandmother was wise, patient and kind and knew that the girl was so angry because she missed her parents. They always went off to work and were so far away they were awake when she was asleep so she got no calls on the phone. This was a lonely life for her. Though her grandmother truly was patient kind and wise, she was very old. She couldn't play or run or do anything but sit in her chair and read old books.

One day while her granny was napping, the little girl wandered off into the woods. She left the house, even though her grandmother told her she was not allowed to wander in the woods. She just wanted to pick the flowers on the other side of the hill. "I won't be long. Grandmother won't even notice." So she put on her red hoodie and walked. She walked over the fallen log, across the meadow, up the hill and down the other side, towards the river.

She was sad to see that there were no flowers because it was after the frost. She looked at all the frozen and drooping flowers and started to get cold herself. She looked to the horizon and noticed the sun was going down very quickly. She grabbed some acorns to toast so the whole trip wouldn't be for nothing. As she did, a little hand reached out and touched her thumb.



"Scuse me. Those are my acorns," said a sprightly looking squirrel.

"What? Did you just talk to me?" said the girl in the little red hoodie.

"Well, it wasn't the acorns talkin'," said the squirrel in a strong Philadelphia accent.

"I didn't know squirrels could speak."

"We can, but most of us choose not to talk to the youmans."

"You mean humans."

"No I don't. We call you guys youmans, cuz you're always looking out for you, man," said the squirrel while looking at his claws. "I ain't afraid to speak up, specially when you go to grab my stash."

“Well, I didn’t mean to steal. I actually came out to pick some flowers for my grandmother.”

“It’s almost December, you-girl. The flowers are all gone.”

“It’s getting cold, I better be going home now. Grandmother will be worried if I don’t get home before dark,” she said with a little worry in her voice.



“I’ll show you a shortcut, but you must promise not to think negative thoughts or speak too loudly,” said the squirrel mysteriously.

“Follow me.”

The girl and the squirrel set off together but the squirrel was very fast. The girl kept losing sight of him as he scampered over the forest floor. Suddenly, he hopped behind a huge oak tree and disappeared. She looked up and he was waving his little paws hand to tell her to climb up.



Luckily she was a great tree climber and grabbed the branches with both hands and swung herself up. The squirrel seemed pleased with her stunt and opened a small door in the tree.

She was amazed to see the lighting bug lights. the glow in the dark glowworms and the phosphoresce of the rocks along the path. The glowworms and lightning bugs looked at her curiously and shone a little brighter to see her better.

“Who’s THAT?” said the largest and brightest glowworm. “And is she AWAKE?”

“We won’t be long and she’s so young, no one will believe her. She’ll forget it in time.”



“What is this place?” Whispered the girl to the squirrel.

“We are in the in-between.”

“What’s the in-between?”

“It’s the place that’s neither here nor there, get it? IN-BETWEEN? Sheesh, you youmans are so thick. It’s a wonder you can think at all.” said the squirrel.

“That’s not nice. Why did you even bring me here?” said the girl. “I didn’t ask for a shortcut.”

“I know, but if you went back by yourself you would have been eaten by a wolf. And so would your grandmother and the huntsman is at the huntsman convention and wouldn’t be able to save you.”

“How do you know that would happen? Can you tell the future?”

“Just your future. I’m your Guardian Squirrel. I’ve had many names, Mungo, Peapod, Joey Packadoughnuts, Frankie Cheesesteak, Spock, Louie Pork Chops, Pippy Fuzzy Joe, Dookie, Faffie, Micky Diamonds Snich, Stevie Birdpooie, Buggy, Bobby Long Shot. Largeman, Joe Snuff Charlie White, Louie Hadagut, Big Nose Pete but you can call me Joey Acorns.”

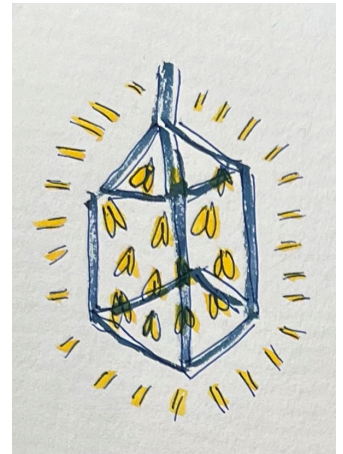
“Why do you have so many names and what’s this about being my “Guardian Squirrel?” she asked disbelievingly.

“Well, every kid who is having a hard time gets assigned a Guardian Squirrel. You’re my 300th, kid client!”

As they are talking they walk and walk along beautiful passages filled with jewels and beautiful patterns of light and shadow. There are passageways that go off to the side. The air is fresh and it seems that while they were inside the air felt like they were outside. She could hear faint and relaxing music coming from everywhere.

Finally, she said to herself, I’m having an adventure. I’m not sure what’s happening but I don’t feel afraid. This is a strange place but I feel more at home here than I did in any of the houses we lived in.

“We turn here and ‘Ah, cha cha cha!’ You are at your grandmother’s house. Next time you go looking for flowers, check the clock and the calendar. It won’t be so easy peasy next time. You promise?”



“I promise. Thank you for helping me to get home, Joey. Will you ever speak to me again?”

“Probably not. I get reassigned all the time. But listen to me, whenever you need help, you can go outside into the natural world by looking up at the sky. You can go deep inside yourself and get to the secret passageway see the lovely colors and beautiful sounds any time you wish.”

“Is that true? The place you took me to is inside myself?”

“Yes, and no. I took you though the in-between where we could walk together. Yours is a lovely castle. We only went through a few sections. You have a lovely inner life, girly! You don’t need to go anywhere to find it. Just close your eyes and think of me and I’ll come running from whatever I’m doing to help you get there.”

Wow, Joey whatever your name is. This is a lot to figure out. I’m going to talk to Granny about it. She once told me that animals were her friends. I wonder if this is what she meant.”

“Who do you think named me, Joey Bagadoughnuts!”

Chapter 2

“What do you mean? Do you know my Granny? How? She’s so old!” LG said in disbelief.

Oh, you think SHE’S old? Oh, that’s rich.” He laughed with a chuck chuck chuck sound that made LG think he might be choking. “I forget youmans think like that. Your grandmother is just a baby! What is she 79? She just finishing her first steps. It’s cute you guys think this is all there is. Kinda sad, too. That’s why I wanted to show you the secret way home.”



“Does Granny know the ways? Did you teach her?”

“No, those were the days when we couldn’t actually talk to our clients. We had to use signs and sign language. It was a tough gig, I’ll tell you now. But youmans have things so screwed up in your heads that we are allowed to talk to you for a year, more or less. You won’t remember this, but you’ll remember what I taught you. How does that sound, saweetie? Do you mind if I call you “Saweety? It suits you. You’re sweet.”

“Yes! I like it much better than my given name, Myrtle. The kids call me...”

“Myrtle the Turtle?”

“Yes! It’s horrible. Especially days when my mom makes me wear a turtleneck.”

“C’mon Saweetie. Let’s go see Granny.”

They open the large green door to the cottage. Inside it is quiet and dusty. There is an old lady in a rocking chair by a window. She has long grey hair and large glasses, and is wearing a beautiful but torn shawl over a colorful but shabby caftan. She turns around and peers through smudged glasses.

“Is that you, Myrtie? Where did you go? I was out of my mind worrying about you. I thought you might get eaten by a wolf!”

“It’s me, Gran. I’m sorry I made you worry. I couldn’t stay in the house anymore and went off to find you flowers.”

“Flowers?! At this time of year? Oh, dear. I see I have much to teach you about the seasons and the cycles of life. I learned it long ago when I was about your age. I had a friend, Joey Bagadoughnuts and we’d tear around South Philadelphia looking at all the plants.”

“Did somebody say DOUGHNUTS!” Said the squirrel as he jumped out from behind Saweetie Myrtle.

“Who is that? What’s that animal doing in the house!” Granny screamed as she jumped out of her chair and onto it.

“It’s me! Joey Bagadoughnuts! From the neighborhood!” He hops up and does a little dance for her. One that she remembers and also starts to do in her halting and slow way. Her eyes open in wonder and she opens her arms and says. “Oh, Joey! I missed you so much! Where have you been? How can it be you? Wait, why and how are you talking?!”

“Ah, it’s complicated. Let’s just say youse youmans are distracted by all your little dramas and your stories that you don’t look at nature as much, so some of us got together and asked for a voice in the matter. We won 375,465,311,416 to 2.” Joey seemed very loud of this accomplishment while Granny was still staring at him open mouthed.

“Granny, said Myrtle Why don’t you sit down and I’ll make us all tea and roasted acorns.” She look worriedly at her grandmother’s face, but she looked happier, younger and more alive than she ever saw her before.

“Oh, Joey, do you remember the ‘meanies’?”

“How could I forget? They were the meanest kids in South Philly. But we took care of ‘em didn’t we Daisy Jane?”

“Daisy Jane? But that’s not your name. Your name is Granny” said Myrtle.

“Oh, I’ve had a lot of names in my life. When I was born they called me Baby Boo. Then just Boo. Then when Joey came along he saw me picking daisies from my neighbors window box and called me Daisy Jane, and now you call me Granny.” Granny’s face was glowing. She made a knowing wink at the squirrel, as though they had many adventures together.

Myrtle brings over the tea tray and they all sit around the table. Joey sits on the table because he is so small, but no one mentions it. The teacups were warm in their hands. The roasting acorns made a wonderful smell and the teacups were warm in their hands. They were feeling warm and content as it started to rain outside.

It was so strange and wonderful to have a talking squirrel as a guest that Myrtle didn't mind the quiet. She realized it wasn't quiet at all. The pitter patter of the raindrops, the screeching of the big black birds and the crackling fire filled the air with a natural music she had never noticed before. It was as though they were talking silently. Smiling and sighing, closing their eyes or looking out the window. The rumble of thunder woke them out of their reverie.

Myrtle had questions. Lots of questions.

"How old were you when you met?" she asked Granny and Joey.

"I was about 4 or 5 and you were, what? 250?"

"About that. I lost count at the Industrial Revolution."

"So you're telling me that you are over 300 years old? No way." Myrtle's eyes opened wide.

"Way." said Granny and Joey in unison.

"I'm what they call 'immortal' I just keep on livin'. It can get tiring, but I take long naps everyday. Speaking of which, I'm getting sleepy. Mind if I stretch out here on the fluffy chair? It looks so cozy and I'm (yawns) and falls over fast asleep."

"Granny! How come you never told me about Joey? He's so cute?"

"Well, honestly, I forgot about him. It was so long ago and so much has happened since then. But as soon as I saw him, it all came back to me." Granny looked thoughtfully at her old hands and sighed.

"Who were the 'Meanies' and what did you guys do to get them off your case?"

“They were a family of boys that used to tease me on the way to and from school. They put wet leaves in the hood of my jacket, called me names, pushed me down once or twice. They left my best friend Julie alone because she had two big brothers, which I did not.”

“One day after getting knocked off my bike, a little squirrel comes up to me and reaches out his little hand as if to help me get up. I take it and he does pull me up with such ease and strength that I immediately felt better. He made a little bow and did a little dance to make me laugh. He took out a tissue and helped me dry my tears.

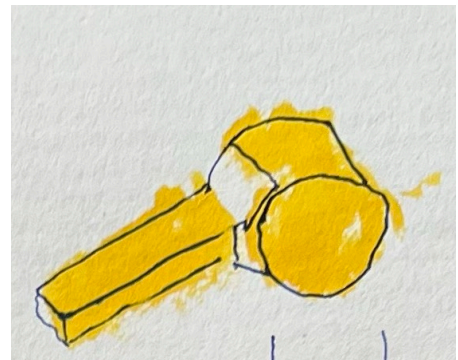
“Oh, Granny! I’m sorry they did that to you! Did you and Joey figure out a way to beat them up?” Myrtle punched the air with her fists. “I’d go like THAT and like THIS! Pow! POW!”

“No, we did something better. Joey pointed out when the “Meanies” were beating up on other kids. After the Meanies were gone, I’d give them a hug and a tissue and ask them to join our team. The Meanies bullied so many kids that I had my own group in no time. With the coaching of little Joey, we made plans together on how to stand up for ourselves. We roasted acorns and talked about our troubles and what we wanted to be when we grew up.”

“What happened next?”

Well, little Angela Marano was playing by the river when the “Meanies” came up in their camouflage jackets and their red hats. They took the dolls she was playing with and pulled off their heads and looked inside. “Ha! An airhead just like you!” Now Angela had a secret weapon, she had a very loud whistle! She blew it so hard the Meanies had to hold their ears. When the gang heard it we all ran towards the sound of the whistle. We surrounded the Meanies and outnumbered them three to one. We all started blowing out whistles at the same time. Squirrels came from everywhere and began chattering at the Meanies who got so scared they ran away and never bothered us again. All we had to do was show our whistles and they went away.”

“Wow, Granny! That was smart and non-violent! We learned about non-violence at school, but I never thought about using it in the playground.” Myrtle looked at her Granny with new and admiring eyes.





“Sometimes I forget that you were young once, Granny.”

“You know, Myrtie? Sometimes I forget that I was young once, too. Thanks for reminding me.”

Enfolding each other in their arms and sighing contentedly, closing their eyes and gently falling asleep.

### Chapter 3

“Hello? Hellooooo! HeLLOO! Yoo hoo! Sleepyhead!”

Myrtle woke with a start. The fire was out. The tea was cold. Granny was gone.

“Wh-what time is it? What day is it? Where’s Granny?”

She went out to get some groceries and she said she had to stop at the school.

“Oh, no,” thought Myrtle. “They are going to tell her about the paint.”

“Did they say why they wanted to talk to her? Oh, why didn’t she wake me up?”

“She tried,” said Joey Acorns. “You were out like a light. Is there something going on at school?”

“No.” Myrtle lied and looked down at her feet as Joey Acorns gave her a look. “Yes.”

“Let me guess, bullies.”

“Yes, but they don’t push me down, they just make me feel bad.”

“How do they make you feel bad?” Joey hops closer and puts his little hand on hers.

“They call me names.” Myrtle said softly.

“Like what? Oh, Myrtle the Turtle?”

“Yes, and worse. I don’t even want to go there anymore. I just want to quit school and watch television all day.” Myrtle sat down on the couch and folded her arms. A little tear rolled down her freckled cheek.

“Now, now. Let’s not feel sorry for ourselves. Did you hear your Granny’s story? You come from a long line of bully busters. We’ll figure this out together. When do you go back to school?” Asked Joey as he took a pad and pen from a little bag.

“After Spring break in 4 days! Mom and Dad will be come pick me up in three days.” Myrtle said as she picked at the threads in the blanket on the couch. “Then I’ll have to go back the next morning.” More tears rolled down her face.

“Listen here, girly. We are going to make it so you have the best time at school. I know it can be hard to go along and get along, but I got my ways. I’m going to teach them to you just like I taught your Granny and so many others. AND it’s going to be fun!”

Myrtle sniffled. “Fun? What’s that? I haven’t had any fun since I got here.”

“What?!” exclaimed Joey. “Your Granny was the funnest of the fun! What a sense of humor!” Joey doubles over laughing at something he remembered.

Just then they hear the key in the door. Granny was home and she had lots of bags.



#### Chapter 4.

They began right away. Granny got a roll of brown paper and they started planning out their strategy. First to deal with getting feelings hurt. Joey said all the mean things that the kids said to her, but in a funny voice. They made a song called Myrtle the Turtle and it was a very fun song to sing inside her head. They also sewed a cape that she could wear when she was writing or painting. It would keep the world off her shoulders while she was being creative.

Granny reached into the bag and brought out some lovely notebooks and pens to remind her how important she was to Granny and how important it was to pay attention in school and get great grades. Granny wrote notes in pages so they could be found later when Myrtle least expected it but most needed to hear encouraging words. “You can do it!” and “You are so smart and brave! I am proud of you. Love Granny.”

Myrtle learned to climb a tree, to skip a stone over the water and how to make popcorn from scratch. It was hard work, but it was fun to think that she was going to have a better time at school. She wasn’t going to cry or be upset. She actually felt sorry for her bullies. Like Granny said, “What people say about you says more about them than about you.” and remembering the way inside if things get rough.

Why did she have to do these things anyway? Why were the kids allowed to be so mean? Shouldn’t THEY be the ones doing all the work? Why do I have to be the better person all the time. Sometimes I’d like to punch them right in the nose!” Myrtle punches the air like a boxer. “Pow! Bang! Bang! — Boom! Boom! Boom!”

Joey jumps onto a branch and looks Myrtle in the eye. “Hang on a second there, Rocky. I’ll tell you something. I’ve seen a lot of streetfights. You know what they solved? Nothing. You know what they did? They hurt everyone. Not just the ones with the black eyes and busted out teeth. Everyone who sees violence or is even near anyone who does gets hurt. You get me? Knocking someone’s teeth out might sound like a good idea, but all you’re left with is bad feelings, a sore hand and maybe a visit from your local policeman.”

“He’s right, Myrtie. You see this scar? I tried to fight my way out of an argument and got walloped. It still hurts sometimes and I did worse to the other guy. Let’s not go that way and see what kind of creative solutions we can come up with. Three heads are better than one!”

The next day after a warm delicious breakfast they got to work. Myrtle did 5 jumping jacks and 4 push-ups. Granny called the parents of the other kids who were being bullied. They all agreed that the way to help the kids is to give them the tools they need to work together. Myrtle called her parents and told them about being bullied at school. They got upset and were telling her they would call the principal.

“Mom, Granny and I are handling it. She’s pretty smart!”

“Oh, good. Granny does know a lot, but things have changed since she was little.”

“Yeah! It’s not as bad now! Did you know Granny got knocked off her bike?”

Myrtle asked.

“No! I had no idea.” Her mother said in surprise.

“Yeah, the bullies were mean back then. But she out smarted them and she’s teaching me to be smart.” Myrtle realized she wasn’t scared to go back to school. She was actually looking forward to trying out some of the plans Joey Acorn wrote in a tiny notebook.

“Sounds good, honey. I can’t wait to give you a big hug when we pick you up tomorrow.

Myrtle looked down at the tiny notebook and squinted to read the tiny script.

A is for “Avoid the Bully

B is for “Be Brave”

C is for “Can Do Attitude”

D is for “Don’t Bully Back”

The list went down n, but that was a lot to think about. How could she avoid the bully? She usually saw them on the way to school. She’d leave 8 minutes early and walk to school with Josie from the up the block who was also having trouble getting to school without trouble.

As for being brave, Myrtle pictured herself standing tall and having an invisible shield around her that kept any of the words from getting in and hurting her. She also imagined the words being paint and giving the paint nothing to land on.

“But what is a “Can Do Attitude, Granny?” she asked, knowing what it meant, but wanting her granny to tell her in her colorful memorable way.

“A can do attitude is something you need to plant like a seed. You need a good heart and a strong back and a good sense of humor.”

Joey Acorn jumped in, “What about D?”

“Don’t Bully Back? How could I even do that? The guy is ten feet taller than me and is as big as a house! He’s got disgusting clothes and smells bad.” Myrtle wrinkled up her nose.

“How do you feel now that you said all that? Do you feel like you have power over your bully because you called him names?” Granny asked gently.



“No, I feel worse, like I just swam in dirty green water. I don’t like feeling this way.” Myrtle said looking down at her feet.

“That’s how bullying feels to the bully. At the moment it feels like you are winning, but afterwards you feel slimy. The difference with you is that you’re learning and talking and making plans. You’re not just going to go be a bad person just because someone is being a bad person. Does that make sense?” Joey hopped over to Myrtle and put his tiny hand on her knee.

“Yes, it does. But it doesn’t explain how to handle it when it’s happening.”

“You can use humor.”

“Like make a joke? Like how tall and big he is?”

“No, not a joke about someone’s differences. Use your creative imagination and you’ll come up with something. Humor and strength are great weapons against someone who is trying to make you feel bad and small.”

Joey looked up at Granny and they shared a knowing smile.

“Granny was a crack up. She had a sharp tongue and a wicked sense of humor.”

“I still do!” said Granny with a wink. “Oh my! Look at the time. We better get to sleep your mom and dad are coming to pick you up in the morning.”

“Ugh, I don’t want to go home. I don’t WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL!” Myrtle starts to wail.

“Now now, Myrtle. The trick is to think about what it would be like if everything turned out great. It might not, but it might! As long as you’re scaring yourself with stories about how bad it’ll be, throw in a story about how fun it will be to see the look on the bullies faces when you all blow the whistle. Think about how fun it would be to laugh in the face of danger, how much better it will be to have a few friends on your side. Imagine the best possible outcome and get a good night’s sleep.” Granny hugged Myrtle and wrapped her shawl around her tiny shoulders.

Joey climbed up and gave her a little kiss on the cheek. “I gotta go now, sport. But I’ll be watching you from the playground tree on the left side. I’ll be in the big sycamore. Look for me! I won’t be able to talk, but I’ll switch my tail at you as a signal to “Be Brave.”

That night, the worried little girl learned she could change her mind. When she started to get scared of walking to school, she imagined showing up early and playing on the playground with her friend who will walk with her. When she thought of being cornered by the bully and him saying mean things, she imagined herself laughing and telling him a joke that surprised him so much, he walked away. Lastly, she thought of the grownups in the school, how they should probably know about what is going on. She pictured herself in the principal’s office standing up for the kids who were having a hard time and the grown ups listening.

The next morning Myrtle woke up to the sound of her parents coming up the drive. She noticed that the heavy feeling in her chest was gone. She didn't feel like she was going to cry for no reason and she was very happy to be going back home with her Mom and Dad.

“