

RED & GINGER

- a squirrel's tale.

by Barry Martin.

1

“Found anything?” asked Red the squirrel as he bounded up to his friend Pea the peacock.

“No, nothing so far” replied Pea. “What about you?”

“Nah, nothing. Still looking. Got to stay hopeful, eh?” answered Red.

“I’ve been keeping an ‘eye’ out too.” joked Pea, looking over his shoulder at his magnificent tail.

“Good one, Pea,” smiled Red. But, then his face went more serious. “Right, back to the search.”

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Elsewhere, on Sanctuary island off the south coast of England, Doe the deer is drinking from a pool.

She looks up suddenly as she hears something or somebody approaching.

Ginger, Red's twin, a young female squirrel comes into view, looking left and right and up and down.

“Still searching,?” enquired Doe.

“Yeah. We've split up the island between us, so we don't miss anywhere. There's got to be some more out there somewhere.” said Ginger.

Red climbs a tree and sticks his head inside a hole. He then jumps down quickly and runs off, chased by an angry woodpecker who taps him on the head with his beak.

“All right. All right 'Pecky. Take a chill pill!” cried Red, waving his paws about. “Put up a 'Do not disturb' sign next time.” Then rubbing his head, he muttered “What a grouch! Must have got out of the nest the wrong side!”

A beaked, blue blur with a red tummy zooms up to Red's face and comes to a halt in a split second, hovering.

Red jumps back surprised at first then half laughing, says "Ki, you crazy kingfisher. Slow down! You'll wear yourself out."

"No luck over there, Red," said Ki. Ginger bounds impressively into view. She straightens out her tail and smoothes down her fur like a fashion-conscious teenager, and hands on hips, declared: "Not one. Not even a sniff of one. Zilch!" Then, shrugging her shoulders, she asked Red "What about you?"

"Nothing," replied Red with an air of resignation.. "Ki and I have drawn a complete blank too.....well that's it then. It's obvious that you and me, sister dear, are the last red squirrels on the whole of Sanctuary

island. That last very cold winter and the food shortage must have wiped all the others out.” Pausing, stroking his chin, he added “Right – that’s it. I’m calling a meeting at the lily pond. Pass the word on. We’ve got to work out what we’re going to do, Sis...”

“OK, Bro,” said Ginger as they all went off in different directions.

2

All the island’s animals were there: rabbits, Sika deer, hares, peacocks, peahens, lizards, frogs, toads, all sorts of wading birds and of course Red, Ki and Ginger.

Emperor dragonflies whizzed about busily on the surface of the water.

“Right,” said Red, jumping up onto a wooden bench

and rearing up onto his back legs so everybody could see him. “Here it is in a nutshell. Nutshell! Sorry about that. This is serious. We’ve been up and down the island. We’ve searched every hole, tree trunk and drey……of all the reds that once used to be here……there’s none left now except Ginger and me. I remember when……”and Red’s mind drifted back to a time when he and his family had gone on a lovely picnic.

Red was showing off his gymnastic skills doing all sorts of circle combinations round a horizontal tree branch before flipping and landing perfectly on the ground below. “Hey Ma! Hey Pa! What about that?” he shouted to his mum and dad as they watched him.

“Very good, son,” said his mother as her husband put his arm around her. “But you just be careful, young man. One of these days……you know what they say about pride coming before a fall.”

“OK mum,” replied Red. “I’ll be careful.”

He then spotted some young female squirrels tittering together, obviously impressed by his antics.

“Stop it girls,” he said. “You’ll make me go red.”

“You’ve always been red, stupid!” called Ginger.

“Right, who’s next?” she shouted to a bunch of red boy squirrels who were still rubbing their bruises and bumps from their last beating at the hands of the ‘Ginger Ninja’ as she was known. They all rushed at her from different angles. But with a devastating mix of judo throws, karate kicks and tae kwon do moves, she left them all in a groaning, moaning heap.

“What about you, monkey boy?” challenged Ginger as she mimicked his aerial antics and perfect landing.

“Any time, little sis,” smirked Red beating his chest like a big wrestler as he walked towards her.

“Hey, less of the ‘little’,” warned Ginger. “I was born a bit before you. So a bit of respect for your elders if you please.”

“We’ll see who’s top dog,” smiled Red. “Top dog?” he wondered looking at himself all over. “Whatever! OK. Let’s do some smack down squirrel!”

The pair then started to square up to each other, pushing and grabbing at each other’s fur.

“I gave you such a lesson in martial arts that day,” interrupted Ginger as she re-enacted her ‘triumph’ with some smart shadowed moves against an imaginary opponent.

“In your dreams ,Miss Jolie! I won fair and square, if I recall!” countered Red.

“The only thing that was square that day was your head, after I’d reshaped it!” answered Ginger with a grin.

“Hey!” complained Red, wanting to carry on the

argument.

“OK you two! Time out!” said Ki, making a ‘T’ shape with his wing fingers like a sports coach. “Now Red, you were saying.”

After glaring at Ginger for a moment, Red finally turned away, asking: “So, has anybody got any suggestions as to what we do now?”

The meeting went very quiet for a short while.

“There’s only one thing for it, then,” said Ki breaking the silence. “You’ve got to leave Sanctuary and.....,breaking into a comedy Scottish accent,.. scoot off up to Scotland.”

Dancing a little Highland fling over some branches on the floor, he added: “There are still plenty of reds up there in Haggis country.”

Red looked stunned. Then he found his voice again:

“Yeah, that’s easier said than done, my fine, feathered friend. That means travelling the length of Grey Britain to get up to see our Caledonian cousins, and that’s one long, dangerous journey. Those grey squirrels have got it in for us, they’re bigger than us and there’s tens of thousands of them.”

“If we work together, bro,” interrupted Ginger, punching her fist into the flat of her other hand, “ we can do anything, and if we meet that leader of theirs, Bushy...he’d better watch out!” As she spoke, she flipped up the end of a grey wooden bench with her foot and then flattened it into the soft earth, no legs now showing, with a flying 360 degree reverse kung fu kick. The other animals broke into applause, some chanting: “Ginger! Ginger! Ginger!”

“OK,” said Red, “but that is going to take some serious planning.” As he spoke, he rolled out a map

drawn on a piece of old tree bark which showed Grey Britain in grey and Sanctuary and Scotland in red squirrel red. Stonehenge, London and the Midlands capital of the Grey Britons are all featured on the map.

“First,” said Ki, tapping the map with his wing tip, “you’d have to swim to the mainland. It’s only two or three miles and then walk pretty much due North until you reach the safety of the Scottish border.”

“Walk! All that way!” complained Red. “Forget that! We could maybe hitch a ride on one of those human-type mechanical car things though to ease the strain on the old foot- bones.”

“Hold it! Pause and rewind, little brother,” shouted Ginger. “First things first.

Swim?! I don’t do swimming. Do you see any gills on me? I’m a Gemini not a Pisces! And there’s

the tides and currents too. It'd be just too dangerous. There's also all that salt water. It'd absolutely ruin my fur." As she speaks, Ginger fluffs up her coat and magnificent bushy tail like a fashion-conscious miss of the new millennium.

"What about flying?" she continued. "I don't think so," she said, doing an impression of a flightless bird trying to take off.

"Go by balloon?" She sees a vision of her and Red up in the air underneath a small blimp. A bird flies into the balloon and pops it. Both start to fall, with their faces full of terror: "Aaagh!"

"I don't think so!.....now if we had a raft or something, that'd be different."

"That gives me an idea!" blurted out Red. "Ki, Ginge. Collect together some food and meet me at the old castle tomorrow as the sun is going down."

Ki and Ginger looked at each other confused, but then both said “OK.”

3

Red, Ginger and Ki were looking over a small castle wall at a twenty-seater tourist boat skippered by a dopey-looking, tall and scrawny father and son team. The boat was tied up to the pier with some rope.

“That, shipmates,” said Red, pointing at the boat and looking very pleased with himself, “is our ticket off the island. Right. Ki, here’s the plan. You create a diversion, while we get on board up that mooring rope over there.”

“Gotcha,” replied Ki. “Here goes.” Then in an old-style airforce pilot type voice, he added: “Flight leader to ground, aerial display ready for action. Over and out. We have lift-off!”

With that, Ki took off and performed a brilliant

aerial display and stunt pilot demonstration all mixed into one, whizzing past the two boatmen's noses to get their attention. The younger one extracts an index finger from his nose and wipes a snotty bogey under a bridge panel by the wheel, after checking his dad hasn't seen him.

“ 'Ere, dad. Look at that blue tit. He's in a hurry, in' he “ says Junior.

“That's not a blue tit, you half wit,” snaps his father. “That's a kingfisher. Very few of them about, there are – a bit like your brain cells!”

Dad then farts sumo – style by lifting his leg sideways. “Ah, that's better!” he added. “Must have been those beans we had for lunch!”

Puffing out his cheeks with the effort, the son then copied his dad's actions but twice as loud and with a bigger knee-bend and bigger angle between his legs.

“Must have been!” concluded Junior. “Wow, look at that little critter go!” he added as Ki zoomed past for the umpteenth time.

With the boatmen’s attention distracted, Red and Ginger saw their chance and tiptoed up to the mooring rope. Grabbing onto the rope, Red started to expertly clamber along upside down towards the boat. Just as Red was about to scramble aboard, Ginger took to the rope.

But with the two rodents’ combined weight, the rope suddenly sagged, ducking Ginger beneath the water and immersing Red’s tail.

“Oh Man! Just look at me!..Actually don’t!” moaned Ginger, scrambling on board in a most unlady-like manner, and then trying to ring out her tail like a dish cloth.

Tittering at his sister’s plight, Red shook his tail and

said: “Shush, sis.....! They’ll hear you. And anyway, I hear the wet look is in this year!”

“Oh ha ha!” fumed Ginger.

Ki, seeing that the two squirrel stowaways were on board, did a victory roll with his wings and winked at Red and Ginger before flying up high to keep an eye on their progress. Red gave a quick thumbs-up sign back and Ginger waved warily, out of sight of the boatmen.

“Junior!” shouted the Dad. “Stop playing ‘watch the birdie’ and cast off. There are no passengers to pick up.” Red and Ginger, crouching down out of sight, exchanged a knowing look at each other at this remark.

Soon the boat was chugging along towards the mainland, making lots of comical bottom-burping type noises. “Was that you, again?” queried the Dad playfully of his son. “No second helpings of beans for you next time.”

“Oh pops!” smiled Junior, knowing full well he’d get his usual double rations next meal time.

Red and Ginger start to enjoy the trip, pointing at sights to each other, like the other islands in the harbour, the huge Channel-crossing catamaran ferry in the distance, other small boats and landmarks.

“Look, there’s Sandybanks beach,” said Red, pointing. “That’s where we’ll jump off, when the dynamic duo here aren’t looking,” indicating the father and son with a nod.

Suddenly Ginger scurries to the very front of the boat, climbs onto the highest point and puts her arms out horizontally and enjoys a ‘Titanic’ moment. “Hey, Red,” she whispered loudly. “Look at me. I’ve always wanted to do this!”

Red, horrified, hissed: “Are you nuts?! Get down!”

The humans will see you!” Sure enough, Dad and son heard and then spotted two bedraggled ratty-looking creatures in the twilight.

“Rats! We’ve got rats on board, pa. Look!” Picking up some mops, the dopey duo try to whack their unwelcome visitors. But the more nimble, light-footed squirrels lead them a merry dance up and down the deck. At one point, the dad and son pair even bump into each other as Red and Ginger dodge them at the last second.

Ki, seeing their plight, darts down to help his two chums by whizzing to and fro in amongst all the frantic chasing and mop swishing.

Finally though, the two squirrels are cornered at the front of the boat as the two scrawny men move in menacingly, mops at the ready. Red and Ginger edge out onto the slim pole and have to jump and then swim for shore as the mops swish by their heads.

Fortunately they only have 100 metres or so to squirrel-paddle to safety.

“Made those scurvy stowaways walk the plank, didn’t we, Pa?!” said the Son with an evil glint in his eye.

“Yeah, nice one Captain Hook!” answered his Father sarcastically. Then he had a thought.

“Hang on a minute. If you and me are both down here, who’s skippering the boat?”

Suddenly a massive shadow loomed over them. Then an ear-splitting ship’s horn sounded as the enormous Catamaran ferry towered above them, dwarfing their tiny boat.

“Aaaargh!!!!” cried the dad and son together as the Cat swallowed them and their boat down its curved central section. Inside, the boat spun around three times and then was fired out the back like a cork out of a

champagne bottle.

Dragging themselves out of the water onto the beach, Red and Ginger looked back to see what all the commotion was about and caught sight of the two boat men's spectacular flight and landing.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” laughed a delighted Red. “Rats, indeed! Serves them right. That Cat's caught the *real* rats! Ha! Ha!”

As he laughed uncontrollably, holding his belly, a jet skier flashed by, flicking up a fish right into Red's mouth in mid-ha!

“Ha, ha, ha!” giggled Ginger seeing her brother's sudden down-turn in fortune. The fish slapped Red on both cheeks with its tail and fell onto the sandy beach. It then soaked him with a Shamu-like sideswipe as it wriggled back into the water.

Ginger grabbed the end of her tail and holding it like

a microphone, announced in a Sea World type voice:

“People sitting in the splash zone are likely to get very, very wet!” She then creased up with laughter just as Ki landed next to them.

“Oh yeuk, slimy fish scales!” moaned Red, wafting his nose, picking at his lips and half-spitting smelly fishy bits. Turning to Ki he said: “Hey, thanks for your help, man. Are you off back to Sanctuary now?”

“I’ve been thinking,” Ki replied. “I might as well come with you two, if you’ll have me. I could keep an eye....or two out for Greys from above. Who knows....I might even meet up with another Kingfisher on the way up to Scotland.”

“Have a sort of Highland fling, eh?!” joked Red, nudging Ki so much he almost fell over and mimicking Ki’s previous Highland jig over a couple of pieces of driftwood.

“Oh brother!” groaned Ginger as she put her hand to her forehead and looked to the sky.

Undeterred, Red said: “We’d love to have you as an honorary member of the Squirrel Squad, wouldn’t we sis?!!”

“Sure,” said Ginger. “We’re gonna need all the help we can get to get past Bushy’s battalions of grey goons.”

Standing to attention, saluting with his wing and speaking in a very old style R.A.F. type way, Ki said: “Aerial division squirrel squadron leader reporting for duty, Sir (to Red).....and remembering his manners: “Madam” (to Ginger).

“Right,” replied Ginger. “Here’s your first order then. Get into hover mode and like make with those wing-things and dry me off!”

Ki took off and then hovered just above the sand as Ginger used his wing-power to dry her coat off from

muzzle to her lowest claw. “Perfect,” purred Ginger, twanging her now magnificently coiffured tail.

Red then got in on the action, pushing back his head fur into an Elvis quiff and then gyrating rather raunchily like the King himself as the air waves billowed over his fur. “I’m all shook up o’ heugh heugh!” he sang.

Ginger took out a compass from her bag made out of tree bark and tapped it.

“Where’d you get that from?” asked Ki.

“My mum and dad gave it to us. A scout must have dropped it. They’re always camping on the island. It’s like a second home to them. Right. Due North. Walk this way!” she said pointing.

The three pals walked/ flew for a couple of hours before Red gasped: “Phew. All this walking’s made me tired. Let’s make camp here.”

“C’mon you wuss,” piped up Ginger. “I could go on

for hours yet.”

“Steady on Ginger, “ warned Ki. “My wings are getting a bit heavy too. We don’t want to overdo it on our first day ‘cos there’s a long way to go.”

“S’pose you’re right,” conceded Ginger.

“Night Ki,” yawned Red as he snuggled down in the ‘y’ of two branches of his tree. “Night night sister dear. Don’t let the bed bugs bite!” he added.

“Hey what are you suggesting?” snapped Ginger.

“You’ve got more bugs on you than anyone I know. That nest of yours on the island was like flea city!”

“Give it a rest, you two.....literally,” complained Ki sleepily.

“Ki’s right,” said Red stretching. “I need to drift off to ‘Z’ city, just past Snoozeville. And you, sis, you need your beauty sleep.....better get your head down right away!”

“Why, you!” cried Ginger, incensed.

“Go to SLEEP!” hissed Ki, at his wits end.

Finally, there was silence, but just as tired eyelids started to droop.....

BOOM! WHIZZ! KABOOM!the most almighty racket started up combined with flashes of multi-coloured light.

“Whassup?” exclaimed Red.

“Whassat?” queried Ginger sitting up suddenly.

“What the.....” blurted Ki, startled.

Quickly, Red and Ginger went back to back in martial art stances, paws and claws prepared, while Ki hovered above, in alert mode, scanning near and far for clues.

“What’s happening?” asked Ginger through the side of her mouth. “Is it a Grey attack?”

Ki flew up higher, just above the treetops. “You can cancel the red alert,” he shouted down, relieved. “It’s OK. It’s a massive fireworks display....must be down at one of the seaside holiday resorts. You know...they put ‘em on for the tourists.”

The trio walked down into a clearing to get a better view.

“Ooh, aah,” cooed Ginger at one firework’s particularly spectacular finale.

“Wow, look at that one,” pointed Red.

“Brilliant,” enthused Ki, open-beaked.

The whole sky was lit up with the spectrum-packed display as Ki put his wings round his two pals’ shoulders.

The threesome strolled back to their sleeping quarters. “Phew, I’m bushed” said Ginger sleepily. “Hey ‘bushed.’ Get it?!” twanging her tail.

“And you go on about my jokes!” scoffed Red.

“Even hyenas don’t laugh at your jokes” retorted Ginger.

Ki, ever the voice of calmness and reason butted in:

“OK kiddies. It’s time for some serious shut-eye.

Please!!!” his voice betraying an element of desperation.

As sleep eventually took over, Red rolled and unrolled a leaf as he breathed in and out. Ginger was busy dreaming about martial-arming a pack of Greys and twitched and wriggled, mouthing “Take that!” while Ki went up and down a very shrill musical scale like a penny whistle as he got in some much needed ‘Z’s.

4

The next morning, the trio were making their way across an open field containing a solitary tree, when suddenly there was the sound of hunting horns being blown. A hundred metres away, a fox hunting party of

horse riders and hounds came out of the trees.

The ‘master’ of the hunt (that is what he was known as, but in fact he was a bit of a wally in a nice red outfit) was out ahead of the rest of the hunters. He was the local lord of the manor, very overweight with his belly straining to pop his jacket buttons, and his face was as pinky red as the wine he’d been quaffing before he’d set off. Screwing his eyes up (for he was too vain to wear glasses) he caught sight of some red shapes in amongst the tufts of long grass.

“Oh goody!” he shouted, pointing in the vague direction of the squirrels. “Over there chaps and chapesses. Some fox cubs!”

Then, tooting his horn, he started to gallop his hard-pressed steed. As the dogs caught up, he looked down on them, sneering “You mangey mongrels! Why didn’t you

pick up their scent? I've had to do the hard work for you!"

The dogs looked at each other with canine resignation through their big sad hound eyes and only start chasing a now scampering Red and Ginger when they see their 'master' getting out his whip.

"Move yourselves," said Big Belly, "or I'll warm your hides with my little flexible friend here!"

Red and Ginger scramble up the only tree in sight in the nick of time and make annoyed squirrel-chattering sounds at the perspiring hounds. Red then waggles his bottom at them and pats it as the dogs bark from the ground with their front paws on the trunk.

Turning round, Red shouts down: "I think you're barking up the wrong tree here, you crazy canines!"

The rest of the hunting party turn up and see what's gone on.

“Jolly bad show, what!” says one.

“Wild goose chase, if you ask me!” moans another.

“Wild *squirrel* chase more like!” complained a third.

“I blame that silly old duffer,” he added pointing at the ‘master.’

Red, Ginger and Ki are now pelting the assembled hunt with a mixture of nuts, small branches and bits of bark. The master’s wife, a balloon-busted woman of substance, steers her steed to the front. “They’re not fox cubs, you buffoon. They’re squirrels! Get your glasses on, you myopic moron!”

The ‘master’ tried to stammer his apologies to his beloved Mildre(a)d. She however was not one to listen and grabbing his riding hat, she pulled it up off his head by its elasticated strap. She then let go of it a full 30cm off his bonce and it came down with a brain-bouncing

‘thwack’ on his skull.

“Owww!” shrieked the ‘master.’ Spooked by his rider’s sudden outburst, his horse reared up and bolted, toppling Mr Mildread onto the turf. He was then dragged along by one stirrup up and down and finally through some particularly prickly undergrowth with the ‘master’ yelping in pain. The rest of the riders slowly moved off, ignoring his cries for help.

Red and Ginger crept cautiously down the tree head first, scanning nervously for danger signs. “I don’t know,” sighed Red to Ki as the kingfisher landed beside them. “One minute we’re rats, and the next we’re foxes! What a cheek! Hey, world. We’re red squirrels and we’re proud of it!”

“Right on, bro.....for once!” said Ginger.

5

After what seemed like hours, the tiring trio made

their way up yet another hill, only to be faced with a deep, steep, tree-lined valley.

“Yeah, we’ve got to go down there,” said Ginger , after consulting her compass. Then, seeing a recently fallen tree, she added: “Tell you what, you two. Let’s make this fun! Red, help me bite off a big, long strip of bark.”

“If it’s fun we’re going to be having, count me in, eldest twin!” piped up her brother.

Quickly the two squirrels used their razor sharp teeth to bite into the bark and then all three pals pulled off a long, rectangular piece. Ginger then dragged this to the edge of the valley and jumped on the front of it.

Carefully curling up the front piece towards her she held it in her two front paws. She then motioned to Red to get on behind.

“It’ll be just like sledging but summer style!” cried Ginger. “And it sure beats walking.”

Ki hopped over for a look. “Going down!” bellowed Ginger. “Coming Ki? C’mon, it’ll be fun!”

“I’m not sure,” answered the kingfisher. “It looks a bit steep to me.”

“Don’t be shy,” said Red, grabbing Ki’s wing and dragging him onboard.

“Hold on tight!” warned Ginger as they plunged vertically valley-wards. A communal “whoa!” was then let out by the tobogganing threesome. Ginger expertly weaved their ‘to-bark-on’ through the trees at break-neck-speed, dodging this way and that, often at the very last moment. It was like being on your own mini-rollercoaster. Ki, so unsure at first, was now really into the experience, whooping like a mad-thing.

A lady pheasant, making her way through the

undergrowth suddenly became aware of a fast approaching projectile behind her. “Beep, beep” shouted Ginger as the startled pheasant tried to run and take off. Too late though, as the tobarkaning trio passed between her legs momentarily slowed down by the friction of their heads on the bird’s bottom. As they emerged, Ginger, Red and Ki spat feathers from their mouths.

The pheasant, seeing her flowery underwear was now showing, squawked in horror, covered herself up as best she could and dashed into the undergrowth.

The bottom of the valley was then reached with a bush dead ahead which couldn’t be avoided. “E.T.A. 3-2-1 seconds!” shouted Ginger, as amusement turned to horror. “Engage breaks! Flaps down! Brace yourselves!”

Putting her back feet down either side of the bark, she dug in as hard as she could. Red copied her

and Ki added his back talons too.

Very quickly their tensed feet and legs disappeared into the earth up to their torsos. Their to-bark-an slid into the bush and their heads all shot forward, nearly colliding. Then they were thrown back by the reaction to bouncing into the bush's branch foliage. Viewed from above, they looked like some weird Red Indian totem pole with Ki on the top, Red in the middle and Ginger supporting the other two from below. Fur, tails and feathers stick out at all angles.

Momentarily stunned by the suddenness of the stop, they then all got up very groggily. Quietly returning to her usual bouncy self, Ginger let out: "Wicked!"

"Wow! Awesome!" added Red.

"Can we do that again? Can we??!! Go on! I'll pull up the sledge myself!" enthused Ki.

Ginger laughed. "No Ki. I think we'd better park the

bark and get going. It was a blast though, wasn't it?!"

"Did you see that pheasant's face....and bottom?"

"That must have stung!" grimaced Red. He then staggered around, holding his bits as if he was the bird in question. Ki tittered.

"Boys will be boys," groaned Ginger. "And 'vive la difference'," she added snootily, glad she was not of the male gender.

"Well 'excusez-moi'," retorted Red.

"Alright you two," intervened Ki, sensing another squirrel spat.

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And so our intrepid trio continued their trek northwards. But as they pressed on, paw and claw, the danger was mounting with them venturing further and further into Grey Britain.

6

“Hey look,” shouted Red, pointing. “There’s Stonehenge, that great big prehistoric circle thing the Humans built back when they were covered in fur too.”

He consulted his map and checked their progress. “That means we’re right on track. We’ll have to turn east soon though to go round Grey headquarters. Now that’s somewhere we really don’t want to go. Bushy. That chief goon of his, Power and greys galore.”

“Talk of the devil,” said Ki, landing next to Red and Ginger. “Look! There’s a bunch of Greys foraging for food down on the ground.”

“Best place for them,” said Ginger. “We’re better than them up in the trees cos we’re faster and lighter and more agile. Those great lumps of lard can’t catch us up top.”

Ginger then puffed her belly out and made out she

was a big, fat grey running around breathlessly.

Ki and Red laughed at her antics. Then Red went all serious. “Right,” he said. “We’ll head for the Stones and make camp there for the night. Everybody stay low and zip those lips.” He pretended to zip his own lips as he said this.

After a few minutes, they arrived, very tired, at the foot of the impressive stone circle structure.

“Phew,” gasped Red. “My feet are killing me.”

“I’m glad I’m not downwind of those stinkers,” sniffed Ginger, pointing to his feet and holding her nose.

Red sat down and showed the other two the bottoms of his feet which seemed to glow red on and off. He saw a little pool of water and placed his back feet in. Bubbles and steam rose up off the surface and the pool quickly dried up.

“Ah! That’s better,” breathed Red, relieved. “Right, clamber up on the columns. We can keep a good look out from there and it’ll be easier to defend if we do get a visit from any greys.”

Red and Ginger took possession of the top of a column each and tried to get some shut-eye.

“I’ll have a quick fly round,” chirped Ki, “to check we’re safe. OK?”

“OK, Ki. Thanks,” answered Red, in mid-yawn.

For thirty seconds, there was silence.

“Red, are you asleep?” whispered Ginger.

“Yes!” snapped her brother sarcastically. “What do you think?! What is it? The sandman’s calling!”

“Well.....don’t tell anybody,” said his sister, “but I’m starting to get a bit scared. We’re surrounded by greys on all sides. We saw some today and it’s only a matter of time before we have our first fight. I’ve only

ever taken on reds before. Do you think I'll be OK?"

"No worries," said Red, at the end of a massive yawn in which he showed all his sharp white teeth right to the back of his mouth. "They won't know what's hit them when you let rip with your Ju-kar-do moves."

"Do you reckon?" asked Ginger, comforted.

"Thanks, Red. 'Night."

"'Night, my little ninja," replied Red as he drifted into a deep, well-earned sleep.

7

It seemed just like another day with Red and Ginger walking along and Ki on aerial patrol. Then suddenly....

"Greys! Greys! Dead ahead! Hide!" squawked Ki, swooping down beside his companions.

They all dived for cover behind a hedge next to the path just as a very stocky, grim-looking grey led his

patrol out of the forest.

An American-style marching song started up. The leading grey sang/bellowed the tune at the top of his voice. The rest of his troop joined in but with much less enthusiasm.

Leader: "I don't know but it's been said."

Troop: "I don't know but it's been said."

Leader: "Big, tough greys go squash a red!"

Troop: "Big, tough greys go squash a red."

Red, Ginger and Ki watched and listened through the hedge. Red was annoyed at the song's words. Ginger was furious and could hardly contain herself. Ki had to 'shush' them and give them 'calm down' signs, flapping his wings as urgently as he dared. The song continued:

All: "1, 2, stompin,' 3, 4, stampin' " and as they picked up their feet to the rhythm, the leader stamped a large pine cone flat into the ground with obvious relish.

The leader spoke: “Power patrol, I want to hear you sing up, loud and proud! There have been reports of sightings of a couple of reds around these parts and I want those scrawny tree-rats to know that General Power here...” He tapped himself on the chest....”is on their tail. Right, pick it up. Second verse.”

Power: “I do know that I’m a grey.”

“I do know that I’m a grey,” repeated his patrol a little more loudly as their leader glared at them over his shoulder.

Power: “Don’t cross me, red. Get out my way.”

Troop: “Don’t cross me, red. Get out my way.”

All: “1, 2, stompin,’ 3, 4, stampin’ ”

Power is now really stomping and stamping his feet with an exaggerated high knee action and still scanning his group over his shoulder for any signs of lack of

enthusiasm. He doesn't notice a head-high horizontal branch and gets it straight in the face as he turns to face the front. The solid branch knocks him straight on his behind and the first few members of his troop stumble over him. At first, there is some tittering amongst the ranks. But these are very quickly silenced by a Power 'laser' look. Red, Ginger and Ki snigger too behind their hands.

Power scrambled unsteadily to his feet and glared furiously at his greys, brushing himself down.

"Who thought that was funny?" he bellowed.

"I did," said Red, throwing his voice to make it sound like it came from one of the patrol members.

Ginger looked amused. Ki however looked horrified, waving for Red to shush or they might be discovered.

After closing his mouth which had dropped down in disbelief, Power thundered: "Who said that? WHO said

that?”

The patrol looked nervously around at each other.

“Not me.”

“Me neither.”

“Must have been one of those reds, ” joked one, half convincingly, seeking to defuse the situation.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” retorted Power, pushing the grey roughly. “Right, line up. I’m going to tell you a story about the magnificent greys and those scaredy-cat little red rats.”

One of the greys moaned to the grey next to him:

“Oh no, not again!”

“Silence in the ranks!” boomed Power. “Now as I keep telling you. Greys are numero uno and reds are numero zero.”

“When it comes to squirrels, us greys are top of the

tree and those reds are a smelly little number two,” he continued, holding his nose. “And Bushy and me, no me and Bushy are going to drive those reds off the map until there’s not one left in all of our glorious Grey Britain.”

At this point, Power caught sight of a yawner in his ranks.

“You yawning, boy?” enquired Power, in a very menacing tone and then went behind the ‘culprit.’

“No.....” said the grey, submissively. “...Sir !!!,” he added in a very high voice as Power’s branch\crop came up sharply between his legs. The grey then straightened up, gulped and started to sweat visibly.

“Good job!” snapped Power, satisfied he’s nipped any slackness in the ranks in the bud. “Now, march on and let’s go round us up some reds!”

As the grey patrol head off, Red, Ginger and Ki

cautiously came out from behind the hedge.

“Ooh, that big head!” fumed Ginger.

“Yeah, but fortunately it only holds a small brain,” quipped Red. “I’m a numero uno!” said Red, sarcastically, walking round mimicking a big-bellied Power. “More like a lun-o!” making a circular ‘mad’ sign with his first finger by his temple. “I’m just as good as him.”

“Reds a number two indeed. I don’t smell!” Ginger added, smarting. “Ooh, I’d love to ‘kapow’ that Power!” She shows her intent by doing some very expert martial arts moves on an imaginary opponent.

“Steady, Ginger,” said Ki. “Save all that energy. We’re probably going to need it later. Probably sooner.”

“We’ll cut off his power supply and knock his lights out, all in one go if we need to, eh sis?” said Red.

“Now you’re talking, bro....” said a grim faced Ginger.

The siblings high-fived each other and then moved off together, with a very determined stride. Ki took off again with a rustle of feathers.

8

“Eughh!” yawned Ginger the next morning, her mouth very wide, which she then quickly covered up. She looked round sleepily, seeing Red still dozing nearby, but there was no sign of Ki.

She tapped her brother hard on the head with her knuckles to wake him. “Hey. Where’s Ki?” she shouted at Red. “Surely he’s not gone back to the island and left us on our own. We need his extra pair of eyes if we’re gonna make it up to Scotland.”

Red played with the fur on his head as his still sleepy brain pondered the problem. He then started

scratching himself. Pulling out a flea, he first examines it and then eats it. Ginger does not see this.

You worry too much, sis...” he said. “I’m sure there is some logical explanation for him not being here. He might just have gone for a....”

“Red!” interrupted his sister.

“An early morning walk,” added Red with a bit of a grin.

The two squirrels made a search of the area.

“Ginge! Over here. There he is. By that little stream,” cried Red finally.

They watch Ki diving down into the crystal clear water catching small fish. He then returns to his branch and gulps them down headfirst so the fins and scales slide down more easily.

“Yo! Ki!” shouted Ginger. “Bit of breakfast, eh?!”

The early bird catches the....fish!”

Ginger’s raised voice startles Ki and he ends up half-choking on his latest fish. Red and Ginger laugh a bit at his predicament.

“Yeah,” gulped Ki. “That’s right.” He speaks with difficulty because he’s still got some part of a fish in his throat. “These little fish slide down a treat....usually!” Ki then patted his swollen belly. “Yum, yum!”

“Hey, Ki. What’s that on your eyes?” enquired Red.

“This?” replied Ki, pointing to his face. “Oh, it’s an extra eyelid to protect my peepers when I’m underwater. Good, hey?”

He proudly moves his eyes around under their see-through shield to give his companions a better look.

“You betcha,” cooed Ginger. “With your colouring and all. It makes you look like Spiderman!”

“Spiderman, ay,” said Ki thoughtfully. He then used

the muscles around his eyes to make the shields look even more like Spiderman's.

He then went down with his wings half-bent, like Spiderman in his famous crouch-pose. Jumping up, he then leapt off his branch, grabbed an ivy creeper like some spider thread and swings along Spiderman-style.

“Look out! Here comes the Spiderman!” sang Red, smiling.

Then, a bit of a disaster struck. Ki-derman became well and truly entangled in a lady spider's web!

“Oh! Oh!” said Ginger mock-dramatically.

“Spiderman meets Spiderwoman! What will our hero do now?!”

A very irritated spider-lady bustled over to her tangled web and gave Ki a right telling off with all her arms and legs waving at once. She then cut through the

key strands holding him fast and a still trussed-up Ki dropped into the stream. The water broke his fall and the web came apart on touching the cold liquid. Ki quickly flew back to his original perch. He then shook himself as dry as he could and tried to regain his composure.

“Right,” he said, as if he’d meant to do all that. “And for my next trick. Here’s my greatest catch today.” He beckoned towards the tree foliage. A lovely lady kingfisher edged into view along the branch.

“Well, well, well, well, well!” gasped Red. “The ‘King’ has found himself a Queen!”

“This is Sky,” said Ki.

“Hello,” said Sky, eyes down.

“She’s agreed to be my partner,” added Ki. “Can she come along with us? Another pair of eyes, eh? And what lovely ones, too!”

Sky whacks Ki playfully with her wing at this

comment and Ki falls off his feet. He looked a bit stunned at his new companion's unexpected show of strength. He then got to his feet proudly.

“Hi Sky,” said Ginger. “Yeah, sure you can join up. Nice to have another lady along. We might just get these two macho men to improve their manners.”

“Then again!” said Red aside to Ki but loud enough for Ginger to hear.

“Ay nice one, mate,” added Red loudly, digging Ki in the ribs and pointing to Sky. “Ay ‘mate!’” He beamed realising he'd made a funny. “Get it?”

“Oh brother!” groaned Ginger, hand over her eyes and shaking her head. “Sorry about Red here,” she added. “I'm Ginger by the way. We're brother and sister from the same litter, but I can confirm here and now that we are definitely not identical twins!”

“Phew, that's a relief!” sighed Red loudly.

Ginger glared at her cocky little brother.

“Truce, you two!” scolded Ki. “Let’s get on.”

All four set off again on foot.

“Now, Sky,” said Ginger, putting her arm and tail round her. “Tell me everything. How did you meet? C’mon. Give me all the goss’. Oh, it’s so romantic. You little lovebirds, you!”

Red, following with Ki behind the two girls, turns to his pal and says: “I think I’m going to be sick!” and puts two fingers in his mouth and makes out he is about to throw up.

“Men!” said Ginger, looking over her shoulder with a withering ‘laser look’.

“Some of them are OK,” mused Sky, dreamily looking back at Ki. It’s all about finding the right one.”
Ki’s red face plumage goes even redder at this point.

“If they’re all like my brother,” muttered Ginger,

“I’d rather wed a warthog!”

“Hey!” complained Red, as they disappeared into the undergrowth.

Another day, another squirrel squabble.

9

With Grey headquarters dead ahead, our foursome sensibly turn to the ‘east’ in search of Motorway number One which will hopefully speed up their journey to Scotland and safety. But every paw print and wing flap is now a very dangerous one right in the heart of Grey territory.....

The four are walking along in conversation when suddenly a grey squirrel steps out from behind a tree a few paces in front of them.

“Well, would you look what we’ve got here.....” he says very confidently, folding his arms. Ginger steps forward to tackle him.

“.....lads!” continues the grey, and nine or ten other greys appear from behind trees and bushes.

Ginger is not quite so sure of herself now. But she goes back to back with Red in martial arts stances as Ki and Sky take off quickly into hover-mode above them.

“Looks like that report about a couple of red tree-rats being seen around here was true after all!” said the first grey. “Now we can’t just have anybody coming onto our territory now, can we?”

“Hey less of the ‘rat’ fat boy!” fumed Ginger. “This land used to be for everybody, regardless of fur colour, until you lot muscled in.”

“Ooooh!” cried all the greys sarcastically.

“I like a lady with a bit of spirit!” added the first grey. “OK, boys, round ‘em up just like all the others. My boss General Power will be well happy when I bring you two in.”

The over-confident greys surround Red and Ginger and move in for the capture, thinking it will be easy.

The two reds prove more than a match at squirrel scrapping however, with feet and paws being put to good use, ‘Ju-kar-do’ style.

After less than sixty seconds, all the greys have been knocked out and lie around in untidy heaps in the small clearing, some draped over branches, others just laid out flat on the ground.

Ki and Sky helped a lot by informing their friends of sneaky grey attacks from behind, or by distracting the greys with low-level aerial swoops.

“Right,” said Red. “Let’s get outta here. When those grey goons wake up, they’ll be hot-pawing it back to Bushy and then every grey in Grey Britain will be out there trying to pick up our trail.”

“You did good out there, sis,” commented Red, as

they scampered away from the scene. “Told you, you would! ‘Ju-kar-do’ rules OK.”

“More like ‘Ju-kar-do’ rules K.O.!” corrected Ginger, with a mischievous grin. “Ask that lot!” she added pointing back to the piles of duffed-up greys. “You didn’t do bad yourself, either.... for a boy,” she conceded. “That’s Reds 1, Greys 0, I reckon,” and Ginger, after licking an index finger, marked up a ‘one’ on an imaginary board in the sky.

It was evening time and all four friends felt very tired after their first squirrel skirmish.

“Right, Red,” said Ginger. “You’re on first watch. Watch out for greys and don’t fall asleep!”

“OK sis,” replied Red, stretching and cracking his fingers confidently. “Calm down! You know you can rely on me. ‘Night Ki. ‘Night Sky.’”

“Night,” answered Ki and Sky. Unbeknown to the four of them, greys were watching their every move from the nearby undergrowth.

Red tried his very best to stay awake. But then his head started to nod and his eyelids felt like lead. Once, twice he almost nodded off, but he managed to shake himself awake with a great effort.

Then, he picked up some thin twigs and ingeniously tried propping his eyelids open with them. This worked for a while before the twigs snapped under the ‘lids’ weight and his eyes closed for good. Red the guard was sound asleep.

“Go, go, go!” hissed the big grey leader to his patrol. “Now’s our chance,” after seeing the end of Red’s unequal battle with the Land of Nod.....

A few minutes later, Red and Ginger found themselves sitting down, tied up with ivy with their paws

behind their backs.

“Well! Well! Caught red-handed. Power’s the name. General Power to you!” said the grey leader proudly.

“Take them away to Grey headquarters!” he barked to some greys by his side. “Bushy will be very pleased with my work. Pity we didn’t catch those blasted birds. But what can they do against all of us?”

“I thought I told you not to fall asleep,” fumed Ginger at Red, as some greys grabbed her from behind, got her up and started pushing her along.

“Sorry, sis,” mumbled Red who was feeling very down. “Don’t forget Ki and Sky,” he whispered a bit more upbeat. “They’ll save us. Don’t worry.”

But Ginger looked back unconvinced. Red had never felt so miserable.

10

Red and Ginger looked around despondently. Their

hands are tied up behind their backs with ivy twine and they have been propped up with their feet out in front of them. Their current ‘home’ is a damp cave guarded by two big greys armed with stout branch staffs. Ki and Sky are hiding in a nearby tree, willing to help but unable. Things look bad.

Power and Bushy, on the other hand, are in an extremely good mood.

“Commander Bushy,” says Power, turning to his senior. “Shall we have a few verses of our glorious national anthem to celebrate the capture of those pesky little reds?”

“Excellent idea G.P.,” replies Bushy, beaming. “Men. The National Song. And sing it as though you mean it!”

Scores of greys all get up a bit half-heartedly and then stand with one arm across their chests.

Bushy and Power start the singing and the rest of the troops pick up the song as their leaders glare at them for more effort.

“The world is grey,
The world’s not red.
You’ve gotta be grey
To get ahead,
To get ahead.”

Red and Ginger hear the words of the grey song and look at each other incensed.

The Greys continue:

“The future is grey,
The future’s not red”

Red suddenly ‘corrects’ the second line by shout/singing: “The future is red!”

At this, some of the greys titter and smile at each other. But Bushy and Power glower and sing even louder

to drown out the reds.

“Chase off those reds,
Go for greys instead,
Go for greys instead.”

Power, Bushy and the rest of the greys carry on:

“The world is grey,
The world ain’t red.
You know what they say,
Better dead than red,
Better dead than red.”

Red decides to sing his own version loud and proud:

“The world ain’t grey,
The world ain’t red.
You know what they say,
Better red than dead.
.....But let’s share instead!”

A delighted Ginger joins him in repeating the last

line:

“But let’s share instead!”

Red and Ginger then sing their version of the greys’ song together and it echoes over the grey camp, with Bushy and Power getting more and more furious.

An irate Bushy turns to Power:

“Go and shut those two little big mouths up!”

Cracking his fingers ominously, Power gets up and puffs out his chest. “I’ll attend to this matter personally, Sir.”

He starts to walk very grimly and purposefully towards the cave, then trips over a fallen branch and falls flat on his muzzle.

He gets up and kicks away the offending object.

“Stupid branch,” he mutters. He then shoves some sniggering greys out of the way. “No one but no one disrespects the Grey song,” he warns. “I’m going to

enjoy this,” he says as he punches the inside of his hand and then grinds his fist into his palm. “They’ll wish they *were* dead not red when I’ve finished with them!”

He stomps across to the guards on cave duty. “Leave us,” he orders . “I want to have a little ‘chat’ alone with ‘Britney’ and ‘Justin’!”

“Are you sure, Sir?” queries one of the guards.
“They did take out that Grey patrol all by themselves.”

“Silence! Go now before I really lose my temper!”
snapped Power. “I’ll deal with this!”

The two guards intimidated, move off. Power enters the cave. His huge shadow is thrown up on the wall with his horn-like ears giving him a spookily satanic presence.

He turns to Ginger menacingly.

“Fancy yourself as a bit of a singer do you? Right little chart-topper, eh? You’ll pay for that!”

Power moves towards her. Ginger struggles up onto

her feet as he approaches. But then she can no longer retreat as she is backed up against the damp wall.

Wriggling furiously to get free, a still seated Red shouts:

“You leave her alone, Power or you’ll have me to deal with.”

“Ooh!!!” says Power sarcastically. “I’m so scared,” and he feigns wobbly-legged terror. He turns back to Ginger, leaning forward, holding her chin up with his index claw paw.

“Now then ‘missy top of the pops,’ what can we do to shut you up?”

Ginger pulls her head back as far as she can away from Power’s bad-breathed menaces. Suddenly, she brings her knee up as hard as she can between Power’s legs. Power’s eyes bulge out like big pickled onions. A big vein on his temple starts to throb. He drops to his

knees, moaning and clutching his bits, then passes out, falling straight forward onto his forehead.

Sky and Ki swoop quickly into the cave and bite through Red and Ginger's twine knots.

The two squirrels then quickly tie up Power's hands and legs and prop him up against the cave wall in the same place as Red was.

"Ki, quick," whispered Red. "Get me some sticky tree sap and some tree bark."

When these items arrived, Red rapidly stuck the bark over Power's mouth so he couldn't shout for help when he came around.

"Ginger lifted up Power's fat, wobbly head with her paw, saying: "Try and shut me up, ay? We'll shut you up, matey!"

"That should do the trick, sis," said Red. Patting

Power's head he added: "They do say: silence is golden!"

"And they're so right," beamed Ginger.

"C'mon you two," hissed a very jumpy Ki. "Let's get out of here! The place'll be crawling with greys when they find you've escaped."

"Ki's right," agreed Sky. "C'mon. Move it! Wow is that Power gonna be mad when he wakes up!"

"He'll be so mad, he'll be speechless," joked Red. "Stuck for words!"

All four stifled titters before they made their tippy-toed escape out and around the back of the cave.

Some greys were singing their national song but the alternative version as the escapees crept off into the undergrowth.

"Silence!" barked Bushy. "Or you'll be on a charge!"

Quiet ruled once again over the grey camp.

“What’s keeping that pea-brain Power?” asked Bushy, turning to another of the greys. “He must have finished his ‘little chat’ with the prisoners by now, surely?”

“My name’s not ‘Shirley,’ sir” replied the confused, not very intelligent grey. Bushy slapped the wally round the head with the back of his hand.

“Something’s not right,” said Bushy, getting up. “We’d better check it out.”

The grey squirrel leader marched over to the cave with a group of greys following. He goes in ahead of the others. In the corner of the darkish den, he spots Power, now awake, trussed up and furiously wriggling to get free.

“You nut-brained nincompoop! How did this happen?” bellowed Bushy. “How did you let those little

reds outwit you, you half-wit!?”

Power tries to speak but can't, just shaking with anger and going very red about the face through his fur.

Bushy rips off the gag with a tremendous wrench and ripping fur noise.

“Owwwww!” howls Power. A piece of fur is now missing all around his mouth. The two cave guards step forward and untie him. He shrugs them off as he gets up, holding his lips. “Sorry, Sir,” he says sheepishly.

Won't happen again.”

“You bet it won't, boy!” shouts Bushy. “You wait till I see your father. He said you'd be a good recruit.

Pah!”

Power thumped one of his fists into his other palm, promising: “They'll pay for this with their hides, when I catch up with them. And I will catch up with them!”

He holds his mouth, pondering his revenge and then

realises how much fur is missing. He grabs at a passing grey's leg and rips off some fur.

“Owww!!” squeals the grey. “Stop complaining and act like a man...grey!” scoffs Power.

To another of those standing around, he shouts:
“Get me some sticky tree sap. Now!”

At a gawping third, he snaps: “What're you staring at?!”

When the sticky liquid arrives, Power patches up his de-furred muzzle as best he can as members of his troop titter at another loss of dignity for the Grey number two.

11

Red and Ginger run as fast as they can with Ki and Sky flying along just behind them. Red pulls slightly ahead just as they arrive at a clearing. He hears a rustling

in the bushes on the other side.

“Down everybody! Greys!” he shouts.

All four dive for cover into the undergrowth.

Red is the first to peer above the foliage.

He scans the area where he heard the noise coming from. To his astonishment, what looks like a massive red squirrel’s head is sticking out amongst the bushes. Red blinks, rubs his eyes and looks again. The giant squirrel waves and then bobs down out of sight. Red’s companions’ heads come up and they look around cautiously.

“D-Did you see that?” stammers Red.

“Did we see what? What are you on about?” replies Ginger .

“I swear I saw a giant red.....” Red’s voice then tails off as he realises what he’s saying and how it might be taken.

“Well mum always said not to swear. So stop it right now,” quipped Ginger in a mock serious tone. “Anyway, a giant red what? Tomato? Strawberry? Fire engine?”

“Oh, ha, ha!” says Red sarcastically, a little hurt.

“No it’s ok. It must have been a trick of the light.”

“I think you’re losing it bro,” said Ginger to Red, making a ‘mad’ finger motion by her temple to Sky and Ki.

Suddenly, a huge red squirrel’s head poked out of the bushes and towered above all four of them, right next to Ginger.

Our foursome clock the massive newcomer.

“Wah!!!” they all shout, and hug each other in collective terror. Ginger gives out the greatest “Wah!!!” of all of them.

“Calm down,” said the big ‘red’ stepping out into the open. “It’s only me. I mean you no harm.”

With her long tail and powerful back legs, it becomes clear that they are dealing with a red-necked wallaby and not a huge, mutant of the red squirrel variety. Red and Ginger realise they are hugging each other, and promptly push each other away and try regain a bit of composure.

“G’day. Mathilda’s the name,” said the wallaby.

“Escaped from a small zoo a couple of years back. There’s quite a few of us in this area. Some have been surviving out here for ages now. Middle England’s not so bad. A bit nippy in the winter. But not too bad.”

Turning to Ki and Sky, she said: “Seeing you reminds me of home, back in Oz. You know Australia. You look like a couple of Kookaburras.”

“I think we are related,” answered Sky politely.

“But we are in fact kingfishers.”

“That name suits you, fair dinkum,” replied Mathilda. “Now what’s up? When I first caught sight of you, you were going like the hounds of hell were chasing you!”

“That’s not a bad description actually,” smiled Ginger. “But it’s those grey cousins of ours. They’re trying to catch us and get rid of us. We’re trying to join up with the reds in Scotland.”

“Oh yes. I’ve heard all about this. It’s Bushy’s bunch and that Power mad sidekick of his who are behind all of it. The rest of them are ok, if you get to know ‘em. It’s mainly just those top two who are the problem.”

“Bottom two more likely,” joked Red grimly. “I’d love to kick their butts so hard. Live and let live I say.”

“Anyway,” said Ginger, looking around nervously. “Which way would you suggest we go now, Mathilda, to get to Scotland. ‘Cos I don’t reckon Power’s posse are

too far behind us,” and holding her nose: “and Red’s scent is very distinctive and easy to follow!”

“Oy,” snapped Red, pointing accusingly at his sister. “ ‘Time out’ on the ‘smell’ jokes!”

“Wake up and smell the b.o. bro.!” retorted Ginger. “That’s a serious pong you’re packing there.”

“Everybody sweats when they’ve been running as fast as I have,” explained Red. “Even you!”

“We girls don’t sweat, do we, Sky? We just glow,” said Ginger, putting her hands on her hips in a girly ‘look at me’ pose.

“Now, now, you two,” said Mathilda in a calming, motherly voice.

“Sorry mum,” blurted out Red apologetically. Then realises what he’s said. He adds: “Oops, sorry about that. Just for a second I thought.....”

“That’s ok,” said Mathilda gently.

“If you don’t mind me asking ma’am, what’s that on your tummy?” enquired Ki politely but a bit embarrassed.

“Oh that,” replied Mathilda. “That’s my pouch. We marsupials have them to carry our babies around in.”

“I wish we’d got one,” said Red. “It’d be dead handy for keeping nuts in. I’m always forgetting where mine are.”

“I’ve just had a great idea!” shouted Ginger.

“I’ll make a note of that in my diary!” said Red sarkily.

After shooting a withering look at her smirking brother, one that had no effect on him whatsoever, she turned to Mathilda, saying:

“Is there any chance you could give us a lift in your pouch? We need all the help we can get with the greys

being faster on the ground than us.”

“No problemo,” replied Mathilda. “Happy to help. Hop in, both of you.”

Red and Ginger clamber inside and stand looking out with their paws over its edge .

“Oy, what’s the big idea?!” says a squeaky little voice from inside the pouch. “Get your bloomin’ great feet off me!”

A baby wallaby’s head pops up between Red and Ginger. He looks at Ginger:

“Did you wipe your feet before you came in?”

Ginger smiles and then forces herself to be serious, saying: “No, sorry.”

“And what’s that funny smell?” says the little newcomer, wrinkling his nose and shaking his head.

Red goes to speak..... “I rest my case,” says Ginger, shrugging her shoulders.

“Sorry, son,” says Mathilda. “This is Junior everybody. No harm done, Ju Ju?”

“Don’t call me that, Mum! Not when there’s people.....other animals about, anyway” complained Junior, avoiding eye contact with anybody.

“We’ve got guests for a few miles,” said his mum. “Hope that’s ok.”

“Oh boy. Ok ma. Move ‘em out. Forward ho!” bellows Junior, taking charge and brightening up.

Mathilda starts to bounce forwards with Ki and Sky flying above in close attendance, one on either side like an escort.

“Hang on, everybody,” warned Mathilda. “I’m afraid there are no seatbelts. And Junior.....please don’t hang onto my teats. It really hurt last time. They were sore for a week. They’re for use at milk time not as child

stabilisers!”

“Woah!” shout Red and Ginger as Mathilda starts to speed up a little and increases her height and length of bound.

“C’mon Mom. Turn up the turbo!” encouraged Junior. “You can do better than this. Are you a wallaby or a snail with the handbrake on?”

Mathilda looks down at Red and Ginger:

“Is it ok by you if we go faster? No travel sickness?”

“Go as fast as you like,” breathed Red enthusiastically.

“Yeah, whatever you feel,” added Ginger not very convincingly, but not wanting to appear a wimp in front of her brother.

“Overdrive!” called Mathilda. “Wallaby warp two,” as the speed increased.

“Weeeeeeeee!!!” squealed Red, Ginger and Junior,

all gripping the top of the pouch tightly.

“This is the way to travel, eh sis?!” said Red, turning to his sister.

“Yeah!” screamed Ginger into the breeze as she got into the experience. “Go ‘Tilda, go!”

With the help of their wallaby super-chauffeuse, our foursome put some serious mileage between them-selves and their pursuers.

“Right, that should do it,” gasped Mathilda, a little breathlessly. “I’ll drop you off here. I’ve got to get back now to make Junior’s father, Big Wally his dinner.”

“I understand,” said Red, clambering out. “Thanks for everything, Mathilda.”

“Yeah, thanks ‘Tilda,” added Ginger. “Have you ever thought of telling Big Wally to make his own dinner every once in a while?”

“Ginger!” scolded Red.

All right. Bye, Ju Ju. I mean Junior,” said a corrected Ginger, hugging the little wallaby.

“Bye Ginger,” said Junior. “Bye Red. If we see that Bushy or Power, I’ll get my dad to kick some ass!”

“Steady on, son!” interrupted a slightly frowning mother wallaby.

“Whoops! Soz, mum,” blurted out Junior.

Red and he high five, and shoulder hug and rub like street buddies do.

12

Our fleeing foursome suddenly are faced with a wide river. They stop at its edge and look up and down.

“Oh no!” exclaims Red. “Without the map, I suppose this sort of thing was bound to happen eventually.”

What I do know though is that there are no bridges for miles and I bet they’re all being guarded by those grey

goons anyway since we escaped. Anybody got any ideas?”

There was an awkward silence as heads were scratched, chins stroked and shoulders shrugged.

“Hey!” cried Ki. “I’ve had a brainwave. Leave it to me. He then flew up above the river about half way across.

“What’s he up to, Sky?” asked Ginger.

Sky showed the insides of her wing tips. “No idea,” she replied.

Hovering over the water, Ki seemed to be looking down at the surface of the water. Lots of bubbles appeared and fishes’ noses started to stick out of the river just below him. After a short while, Ki flies back to the bank.

“Sorted!” he reports happily. “I’ve had a little word with my fishy ‘friends’ and they say they’ll help you get

across. They don't really want me bringing back a kingfisher and heron club fishing party here one day! Tie some longish branches to your feet and make some loops in that ivy twine over there. Throw them into the water and the biggest fish they can find will put their noses in and give you a tow across. Ever tried squirrel skiing, you two?"

"No," said Red. "But it sounds fun. Let's get it on!"

Red and Ginger quickly collect the branches they need and strap them onto the bottom of their paws. They clomp carefully to the riverbank and take hold of their ivy twine ropes. Ki makes an 'everything all right' circle diver-style with the end of his wing to the river surface and then the twine starts to tighten.

"Right," says Ki. "On a count of 3, we'll hit the water." Ginger shoots him a look of terror. "Well you know what I mean," adds Ki. "Right...1..."

Ginger and Red join in with the count: “....2.....3!”

The ivy jerks taut and the twins are yanked out onto the water both struggling comically to stay upright, rear paws all over the place, bucking forward and back.

“Woah!”

“Argh!”

“I must have been mad to agree to this,” shrieks Ginger, looking back at Ki.

His confidence growing, Red looks across and says:

“Oh shush, sis. Hey, look at this!”

Red goes airborne over Ginger’s wake and lands with hardly a ripple, knees bent.

Not to be out-done by her brother, Ginger goes along one-footed, lifting her other back leg and branch out of the water like in some sort of bizarre ballet.

“Beat that, then,” she challenges Red. “If you can.”

The tricky twosome then try to top each others’ best,

last moves. One-pawed jumps are eclipsed by 180's then 360's. Then forwards somersaults are beaten by back-flips.

They 'diss.' each others' efforts as they quickly up the difficulty.

"That was easy."

"That was nothing!"

"Watch this!"

"This is a real humdinger!"

"Just watch and learn!"

"Ginger!!!" Suddenly Ki's voice rings out.

"Watch out! Dead ahead!"

Ginger spies to her horror a large pile of floating logs matted together with fallen foliage heading straight for her. She has no time to veer out of the way.

"Oh, Oh!" she groans helplessly.

Ki and Sky quickly take off as if inspired by the

same thought.

Ginger cowers, covering her face with her paws, waiting for the impact. All of a sudden, she is aware she is flying through the air. She sees this through half-opened eyes through her claws. Ki and Sky have grabbed a lump of shoulder fur and skin on either side of the young girl squirrel and lifted her up and over the mound of debris. They pop her down gently on the surface.

Ginger bends her knees into the landing like a pro skier:

“T’dagh!” she says with a one handed flourish.

“Water about that then, little bro!?”

“Yeah, not bad, sis,” nods Red. “But you did have a bit of help though!”

“Come off it, Red,” smiled Ginger smugly. “Let’s face it. You’re all washed up in this contest.”

But a tightening of the slack on the rope caused by the fish taking up the slack, presented Ginger with

another cause for concern. The whiplash effect of the tightening had flung her at top speed towards the opposite bank.

“Oh, oh.....part two!” moaned Ginger.

The ends of her ‘skis’ hit the thick gloopy mud bank both at the same time and she tipped up and started to fly head-first through the air and then SPLOP, she landed in the mud vertically. Her head and right up to her arms were covered in the stuff.

Her legs waved about frantically but helplessly.

She was well and truly stuck fast. Mud bubbles appear at the surface.

“I bet you weren’t ‘banking’ on that happening, were you, Ginge?” joked Red as he alighted expertly from his skis beside her.

“No ifs, no buts!” said Red patting his sister’s bottom. “You’re in a bit of a sticky situation, here!”

There are sounds of intense, muffled frustration and much rear, paw and ski waving.

Then suddenly Ginger's legs stiffen and start jerking in different directions to a steady rhythm.

“What the...?” blurts out Ki.

“Ay?!” adds Red, scratching his head. “Oh, I get it. She's sending us a message. Semaphore style. It's another one of those scout skills that our mum and dad taught us. Now let's see if I can read it.”

“G-E-T...GET...M-E...ME...O-U-T...OUT...
O-F...OF...H-E-R-E...HERE...N-O-W...NOW...
Y-O-U...YOU...S-T-U-P-I-D...STUPID...*-!+^?*!!”

There is a pause. “Ginger!! Where did you learn such language!?!” cried Red, feigning shock. “OK guys, we've had our fun. Let's get her out.”

Sky, Ki and Red reach up and remove the branches and then heave on her legs to pull her out. The mud

resists but eventually she reappears with a sound like the biggest ever twanging of the side of a mouth by an index finger the world has ever heard.

‘KERPLOPP!!!’

Ginger sits down. She is half ginger at the bottom, and her top half a black mud colour with her fur in a point on top of her head. The white and blue of her eyes blink out from her mud-caked mush.

“I’ve tried using a mud pack before, but this is ridiculous!” she spluttered, pulling clumps of mud off around her muzzle and splatting them on the ground.

Seeing Red laughing uncontrollably at her sorry plight, she hurls a big dollop of mud at him. It whistles through the air with Red ducking and swaying out of its path it at the last nano-second, ‘Matrix’-like.

“Ha. Missed me!” mocked Red. He then started jiggling around from side to side and backing away,

tempting his sister to throw another handful . His back foot catches on the edge of the bank and he overbalances backwards into the mud. His front is now red, his back black.

“Hey, you two,” called Sky mischievously. “I don’t know about Red and Ginger. I think your name’s mud now!”

“All right. Good one, partner!” laughed Ki and they five high-winged it at Sky’s joke.

As they turned back towards their squirrel chums, a large portion of muddy mess hit them both full in the beaks.

“You were saying,” smiled Ginger.

A no-holds barred slap-stick style mud-fight then ensued. All four end up very muddy indeed and then sit down finally, laughing at each other.

“I suppose we’d better have a wash now,” mused Ki.

“Oh, do we have to?” queried Red, pulling a face.

“Judging by the state of you,” said Ginger, “I think even you couldn’t say no to a drop of the wet stuff on this occasion.”

“Yeah but it’s only a few days since that fish soaked me...all over. You know, with his tail...” moaned Red.

“Ooh, you poor thing!” mocked Ginger. “Two baths in a week. But remember Stinky, we’ve got a hair...fur...drier now.”

“Oh yeah!” cried Red happily.

After staggering through the mud, he then dives headlong into the water. Ginger, Ki and Sky all follow and enjoy getting themselves clean. Ki and Sky are the first to exit the river. Following a furious flapping, they give themselves a quick preen.

Then they dry off the body-shaking Red and

Ginger as they go into fast hover-mode. Red does a Ricky Martin-style hip shaking dance of delight as the draughts tickle him all over front and back as he rotates 360 degrees.

“Ooh. That feels good,” he moaned, as he wiggled away.

Ginger meanwhile patted, stroked and claw-combed her fur from button nose to magnificent tail.

“That’s more like it.” she cooed happily, putting her paws on her hips, confident once again in her restored ‘babe in the woods’ look.

13

It is afternoon and Ki, Sky, Red and Ginger are continuing on their quest. A wind is getting up. Red is slightly in front of the rest.

Pointing, Ki says : “I don’t like the look of that.”

“He can’t help it. Red always looks like that! Sad, isn’t it?” joked Ginger.

Red turns around and pushes Ginger a bit.

“No, not that,” says Ki, laughing. “That!” he said, pointing grimly into the distance. “Look at those black clouds over there. I think there’s a storm heading our way. A big one.”

“I think you’re right,” nodded Red. “We’d better head for some shelter as fast as our paws....claws can carry us. Hey! Here comes the rain.”

The four of them sprint and fly to a tall tree nearby.

“He’s never liked water,” jokes Ginger to Sky, nodding at Red. “It reminds him of bath-night!”

“Wow. It’s really coming down, now,” gasps Red.

A lightning bolt rips across the blackening sky.

“Wow!” blurts out Sky.

Jagged lightning flashes cut up the darkness more and more now.

Torrential rain falls in bucket loads. Our four huddle together, trying to shelter below leaves. Unsuccessfully.

“This is better than that fireworks display we saw,” said Ki, after a particularly impressive crack and boom lit up the night.

Suddenly, a pure white lightning bolt hits the top of their tree. The tree splits. The bolt and the split are now hurtling down the main trunk towards them.

“Me and my big mouth !,” wails Ki. “Scatter everybody. Sky, fly for your life!”

Ki and Sky take to the air, looking back anxiously.

Red is about to jump, but he sees Ginger who seems paralysed with fear. The million volt bolt is heading straight for her!

“Jump, sis! Jump!!!” he screams desperately.

Just as the lightning shaft is about to burnt-toast his twin , Red dives across and shoves her out of its deadly path.

Ginger grabs hold of the falling side branch. Red Unluckily stumbles on landing and falls into mid air.

An ear-splitting thunderclap and one final massive lightning-bolt bring the storm to its end. Their tree, split in two, smoulders and crackles into flame periodically.

A very damp and dishevelled Ginger, Ki and Sky meet up on the ground.

“You ok, you two?” asks Ginger, shaking herself and patting down her fur as best she can.

“Yes, thanks,” replies Ki. “Sky?”

“I’m fine,” says Sky. “Wow! That was a close one! But how are you Ginger? You could’ve been killed out there!”

“I’m ok,” answers Ginger, rubbing her shoulder.

“Except for a big bruise here where that big oaf of a brother pushed me!”

“Now, steady on,” chided Ki. “That ‘big oaf,’ as you call him, saved you up there.”

“Yeah,” conceded Ginger. “I just couldn’t seem to move. S’pose I owe him one. He’s not so bad....in short bursts, I suppose.”

There is a short pause.

“Hey, where is Red? Red!” shouted Ginger, a bit worried. “C’mon Red. Where are you hiding, you fat little fur ball? Ya seen him, Ki?”

“No sorry,” replied the kingfisher. “The last I saw of him , he was with you. Have you seen him, Sky?”

“Not a whisker or a hair,” answered Sky. She starts to look around.

“Hey, what’s...who’s that? There he is,” cried Sky,

pointing at Red lying motionless and partly hidden at the side of the smouldering tree.

“Red!!!” they all shout and rush over to him.

“C’mon, Red. Get up,” implores Ginger, gently shaking her brother. No response. “Let’s go, bro...up and at ‘em. Let’s go get us some greys!”

She half-heartedly martial-arts some imaginary opponents. Turning round, she asks:

“Ki, is he.....? You know?... No he can’t be! Not Red!”

Ginger turns away, bursts into tears, sobbing and falls on all fours.

Ki goes across to comfort her, putting his wing around her back and then, carefully helping her up , tries to console her.

“You’ve got to be brave, my dear. Carry on the

journey up to Scotland. Red would've wanted it that way."

They start to slowly trudge away from Red's body. Sky is behind, one of her wing tips on Ginger's shoulder.

Without the others being aware of it, Red starts to come round. He blinks a bit and rubs his head, his fingers finding a big sore bump on the side.

He hears his sister: "He was the best brother anyone could ever have. I wish I could've told him before he...."

"I know," added Ki. "Why do the good have to die young. So brave, so strong, such a good friend. He would do anything for you."

Red revels in all this praise and positively glows with pride.

"Yeah, tell it how it is!" he murmurs under his breath, mock modestly.

“There’ll never be another brother like him,” added Ginger. “He was one of a kind.”

“What a guy!” purred Red to himself.

“I bet squirrels will come from all over to Red’s last resting place to pay their respects,” pronounced Sky solemnly.

“Lay it on me, sister!” said Red.

Then he shouted to the others’ backs, his ego-massage complete:

“Hey don’t stop! You were just getting into full flow. Carry on! What else do you like about me? Apart from being the best brother ever, brave, strong.....” As he swell-headedly lists his attributes, he counts them on his claws, one by one.

Ginger, Ki and Sky freeze in mid-stride. Then they turn around.

“You’re alive!” squeals Sky and rushes back and hugs him with her wings.

Ki arrives next. “Great to have you back in the land of the living. I really thought you were a goner there.”

“Thanks, Pal,” says Red. He then spots a very angry Ginger, slowly stomping in his direction.

“Got a big hug for me, Ginge?” he smiles mischievously. “What a eulogy! I didn’t know you cared!”

“I don’t care,” fumed Ginger. “And as for a eulogy. You’ll be sorry when I get hold of you!”

She goes for Red but Sky and Ki grab a front paw each and somehow restrain her with a super-kingfisher effort. Ginger carries on lashing out with her feet but Red makes sure he is just out of reach.

“Why you flea-bitten fraud!” roared Ginger at her brother. “You were alright all the time!”

“Now would I do that?” pretending his pride was hurt. “I could have a serious head injury.”

“Might finally knock some sense into you!” retorted Ginger.

“Now hold on a sec., sis.....I must have been knocked out by a fallen branch or something.”

“OK. I’m cool,” said Ginger to Ki and Sky, appearing to calm down. The two kingfishers relax their grip and immediately Ginger flies at her brother, stopping just before pretending to strangle him.

“Steady, tiger.....go easy with the wounded hero,” smirked Red a little uneasily.

“Ooh, you sneaky shammer!” shouted Ginger. “Anything for a bit of sympathy!” She hugs him begrudgingly. “If you ever try anything like that again, I’ll tear you into squirrel squares and feed you to the vultures!”

“Message received loud and clear, big sis,” replied Red, holding his hands up.

“Hey, less of the ‘big,’ ” snapped Ginger.

“You know what I mean!” explained Red.

“Just watch it!” warned Ginger, waving a very menacing index claw finger.

Red backs away, holding his hands up again in mock submission and then playfully tries to put his arm around his sister’s shoulders. She shoves him off. He tries again with the same reaction.

“Don’t push your luck, baby brother,” hissed Ginger, “or I might just send you to bed early without your bottle.”

“You are glad to have me back though, aren’t you really?” enquired Red.

An interesting pause followed.

“S’pose so,” conceded Ginger. “Don’t know why,

though.”

14

“Look!” said Red pointing ahead for his three companions. “There’s the motorway we’ve been looking for. The M1. That’ll take us to within a few miles of Scotland...and safety!”

Ki, on hearing a noise behind him, blurted out: “And look, there’s some greys....and look who’s leading them.... Power! He must have looked at our map. Quick! Get moving. Run for it. Head for the motorway. It’s our only chance.”

The chasing greys, with Power at the front, close in quite quickly on the fleeing reds.

“I’ve got you this time, Fred and Minger!” shouts Power.

“Minger!! Hey!” shouts Ginger. She looks back indignantly and cries: “You ain’t gonna catch us, if we

can help it, fat boy!” Quick bro., get up that tree!”

“Got ya sis. But what then?” asks Red. The twins both scamper up one of the trees next to the motorway.

At the bottom of the tree, Power pauses momentarily and yells up:

“Right, gotcha! Caught like rats in a trap. Red for stop!”

He starts to make his way up the tree’s main trunk, scattering twigs as he goes. Red and Ginger edge out onto a smaller side-branch near the top.

Power cockily steps onto the same branch.

“Pay back time! Revenge will be sweet!” he gloats.

Then beating his chest with his fists like an American wrestler, he hisses menacingly: “Come to poppa!” to the cornered reds.

Crack! The branch starts to break and bend towards the ground.

“Quick, Red,” shouts Ginger, looking around desperately. “Jump for it!”

She points at a passing lorry in the slow lane.

“Ready, steady, go! Jeronimo!!!”

Red, a bit stunned, is half dragged by the scruff of his neck-fur into jumping. But he eventually manages a super-squirrel leap like his sister. Using their skin flaps on the sides of their bodies, they start to fly/ float towards the canvas covering of the passing vehicle.

“Oh no you don’t!” growls Power. “C’me ‘ere!” and he lunges at the reds, just missing them by a whisker. He then realises he is in mid-air and a long way from the ground.

“Oh, oh!” he groans.

He makes a frantic lunge for the main trunk as he falls. The grey no.2 just catches it with his claws.

Unfortunately for him, his momentum takes him down

the trunk, scraping away at his front fur. A horizontal branch between his legs brings him to a sudden shuddering halt.

“Ooooh! Not again.” groans Power in a squeaky voice.

“Now that’s got to hurt,” says one of his men from below, wincing.

“Bummer!” says another.

Two ‘flying’ squirrels land quite heavily on the bowed canvas covering of the empty juggernaut.

“Oof!” exclaim Red and Ginger as the air is knocked out of them. They get up slowly and look back to the tree. They dangle their legs over the edge of the back of the lorry as Ki and Sky land next to them.

“Bye, Power. See ya!” waved Red. “No actually, I’ll be glad if I never see your ugly muzzle again.”

“Bye, bye,” shouted Ginger into the wind, waving

ironically with the tips of her fingers by her face.

Ki and Sky both wave with their wing tips and hug each other.

Red starts up a chant: “Cheerio, cheerio, cheerio. Cheerio, cheerio, cheerio!” which they all end up singing twice. They copy the cheeky soccer chant which is sung to sent-off football players or beaten opposition fans leaving early.

“Yes!” cry Red and Ginger ecstatically, high-fiving.

Power very gingerly makes his way down to the ground, helped at the bottom by his men. He tries walking on tip-toes but is in obvious discomfort.

“Ooh, my squirrel nut-kins!” he squeaks with his eyes screwed tightly shut. The front part of his belly fur is now quite patchy with bare red skin poking through.

“Phew, that was a close shave!” breathed Ginger.

“Especially for Power! Did you see him scrape down that

tree trunk? Ooh-wee!” She winces, imagining how much it must sting.

15

The two red squirrels and their kingfisher companions get down into the empty rear of the lorry through a gap in the canvas.

“This’ll do nicely,” commented Red, looking around. “Not exactly the Hilton hotel; not five star but not bad, and animals, especially squirrels are welcome, I understand.”

They all flop down on some piles of tarpaulins on the container floor.

“Why do those greys have it in for us so much?” grumbled Ginger. “We’re all squirrels, aren’t we, what ever colour we are? Surely there’s room for all of us and we can live together without having to fight, if we try hard enough?”

“It’s not as if we haven’t tried!” explained Red.

“Apparently, we’ve been trying to talk it through with them for years. Just about ever since they turned up over here, having been introduced by those human-types over a hundred years ago. But nowadays they just seem to want to take all our food, bully us and chase us out because they’re bigger than us. And now those two at the top are in charge it’s got even worse.” He paused. Then his mood brightened up.

“Hey, I could get to like it here,” he continued. Red fluffed up his tarpaulin a bit to make himself comfier. Wriggling, he parts the fur round his belly button, picks out a flea, briefly examines it and then eats it.

“Ooh, gross!” cringes Ginger.

“And what do you do with your fleas, then, pray?” said Red still chewing.

“On the very rare occasions when I find one of the

little fellows on me.....usually when I've been round at your place!" complained his sister. "I take him off and carefully throw him away onto some soft surface like moss and he runs off."

"Ay up. It's Ginger the flea-flinger!" mocked Red. "You're mad, you. A nut-shell short of a nut. If you do that, they only come back to haunt you with even more of their itchy and scratchy relatives."

He rolls around on the floor, itching and scratching as if being attacked by hordes of imaginary fleas.

"If you washed a bit more, they wouldn't," protested Ginger. "It's because they can smell you a mile off."

"Smell! Moi?" said Red in a comedy French accent, sniffing his armpits with relish.

"Eau d'écureuil. That's what the French would call it. The smell of a 100% all-masculine male. Natural perfume. Like that musk stuff but better."

“Eau de skunk more like!” retorted Ginger, wrinkling her nose.

“Look!” said Red, as cock sure of himself as ever. “All that washing morning, noon and night. It’s not natural. And anyway if you’re too clean, you can’t do this....”

Red starts to arm-pit fart the Grey national anthem. “Fart, fart fart fart,.....fart fart....”

“C’mon, Ki. Join in,” encouraged Red.

“OK,” said his friend. “Here goes.”

After two instrumental verses, the furry, feathered farters sing the ‘red’ alternative version while continuing with the unusual ‘accompaniment.’

“If you can’t beat ‘em...” shrugged Ginger to Sky, and the two ladies join in with the singing.

As the quartet get tuneful, Ki and Red mischievously try to put their arm-pits near the girls’ faces and Sky and

Ginger repeatedly push them away, looking at each other and then looking to the skies and shaking their heads.

Ki, to the two females' open-mouthed surprise and Red's great amusement, finishes off the final line with a big deep rear-ended bottom belter, really crouching into it and then looks around, with a big cheesy grin on his face.

"I hope you'll set a better example when the babies are born, Ki," said a shocked Sky.

"Course I will," replied Ki, a bit embarrassed.

Then, rewinding his mind to what Sky had said, he asked: "Did you say 'babies'?" and makes rocking baby movements with his wings.

Sky nodded shyly.

"Does that mean...?" enquired Ki.

"Yes," confirmed Sky.

"B-b-babies!" stammered Ki, with his eyes staring

wide open in a mixture of panic and pleasure.

Spinning around to Red and Ginger, he exclaimed proudly: “Hey, you guys. I’m going to be a dad!”

Cock-a-hoop Ki then starts to strut around with his wing tips on his hips.

“Who’s the daddy?!” he declares to anybody who’s listening.

“Long live the King!” says Red, patting his pal on the shoulder. “Congratulations ,Buddy!”

They high-paw and wing and side-bottom cheek bump in celebration.

“You’ll have your wings full though...” warned man of the world Red. “....when all those prince and princess-fishers come along. “It’ll be ‘dad, fetch us some more fish, dad this, dad that.’ Toilet training! Pooh!” He holds his nose. “Then there’s fledging. It never stops. Flying training.” He nodded his head gravely.

“Don’t worry about my twin, Tweedle-Dim here,” said Ginger, indicating Red with her thumb-claw. “I’m sure you’ll make a great father, Ki.”

“Thanks, G.” said Ki.

The soon-to-be a pa then goes over to his lady and nuzzles her round her neck. He hugs her round her waist. Quickly, he pulls away his hands, thinking he might have hurt her.

“It’s OK, Spideykins,” cooed Sky calmly. “I’m OK. Just don’t squeeze too tightly from now on.”

“Don’t call me that!” whispered Ki, hoping Red hadn’t heard. “That’s your special name for me in private.”

“I know egg-xactly what your little lady is going through,” butted in Red, patting his own belly area.

“Listen to the voice of egg-xperience in these matters.”

“Oh brother!” scoffed Ginger, raising an eyebrow.

“What do you know about baby stuff?”

“You’d be surprised,” answered Red.

“I’m sure we’d all be surprised!” mocked Ginger.

The boy-twin, seeing he might be losing face a little, tries changing the subject.

“Anyway, ‘Spideykins,’ ” he says, putting his arm round Ki’s shoulders very palily. “How does it feel to be a dada?”

“Oh no!” whined Ki. “I’ll never hear the last of this now!”

“Just kidding!” said Red, ruffling the feathers on the back of Ki’s head. “Hey.... ‘kidding.’ Get it? Kids, babies. Oh, suit yourselves. I’m wasted on you lot! Hey I tell you what though. If this luxurious limousine of ours...” He pats the lorry floor playfully. “...takes us as far up north as I hope, we’ll be sitting pretty. Getting to

Scotland will be as easy as “”2-4-6....what comes next Ginger?” he says turning to his sister.

“Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!” wailed Ginger. “2-4-6-8!”

“Oh yeah!” remembered Red, not squirrel school’s brightest pupil.

16

Four tired travellers are catching up on their sleep in a big lorry heading north. After several hours, their truck slows down and then shudders to a halt. The jolt rolls Red towards Ginger. Their lips come together. They kiss, still dreaming.

“Oh Brad!” sighs Ginger.

“Oh Christina!” sighs Red.

Something in their heads simultaneously tells them something is not quite right. Their eyes open. Horrified, they see each other, lips locked! They both jump up. Ki

and Sky, both bleary-eyed, look around to see what all the commotion is about.

“Oh yeuk. I’ve been poisoned,” complains Ginger, spitting imaginary germs.

“What’s that sticky stuff on your lips?” demands Red, frantically wiping his muzzle.

“I’ll have you know that is fruit flavour lip balm,” declares Ginger snootily.

“Come off it, sis,” replies Red. “Your nose has been running over night and it’s dribbled onto your lips.

Booger juice! That’s what that stuff is. You can’t fool me!”

“Are you sure you’re my brother...” enquired Ginger. “....And not some laboratory experiment that went terribly wrong?”

“Speak to the hand, snotty,” ordered Red, putting his paw up cheekily. “Cos the face ain’t listening.”

After stretching from head to toe, Red carefully peers out of the back of the vehicle and sees a ‘Newcastle – Capital of the North’ sign by the road-side. They are parked up at the far end of a long lay-by. Their truck is the only one in it.

“Yes!” shouts Red, fists clenched in front of his face in triumph. Then he realises he’s making too much noise which could be dangerous for him and his trio of companions .

“We’re in Newcastle!” he said happily. “Not far now! C’mon....let’s get out of here while the driver’s stopped.”

They all sneak out of the back of the lorry, looking round very warily. They crouch by the rear wheels. Everywhere looks deserted. A snoring sound starts to come from the driver’s cab. Our four smile at each other.

“Looks like it’s time to make a move,” says Ki. Sky

nods.

“If I remember right,” said Red, pointing to some fields with trees in the distance. “Hadrian’s Wall, that old Scottish border built by the Romans, is just over there and then it’s...” (switching to his over the top comedy Scottish accent) “...Bonny Scotland and safety. Och aye the noo, Jimmy!”

He and Ginger do a quick Highland jig and go round arms linked facing each other to finish. Then they realise they are enjoying themselves together far too much and push each other away. Ginger straightens out her fur and tail. Red looks around him embarrassedly.

“What was I thinking?!” he wonders out loud. “Hello,” he says spotting movement at the other end of the lay-by, out of the corner of his eye. “Get down!”

Three trucks are pulling in and parking up. Ki takes off for a look from above. He hovers above the other

three. His gaze focuses on the front of the first truck's trailer. To his amazement, he sees a grinning Power, surrounded by several other greys, waving his paw claws ironically at him. Power then points at Ki and draws a claw across his throat. Ki gulps.

“I don't believe it!” he cries to those below. “It's Power and his posse again!” He looks at their truck and Power's. “Our lorry must have been part of a convoy and they've followed us up here!”

“It's Power and his pack all right,” confirmed Ginger, standing up. “I can smell them from here. They smell even worse than you, Red!”

“Hey well. I've recently had a bath, remember,” said Red proudly.

“Guys!” cried Ki desperately. “We haven't got time for this. Let's make like a blur and get out of here. Head for the tree-tops. It's our only hope.”

“Gotcha, Ki,” breathed Red, starting to run.

“So near and yet so far!” sighed Sky, taking off.

Power and about 50 other greys pour out of the three trucks. They all congregate together on the pavement.

“Right! This time!” gloated Power, rubbing his hands with glee. “No mistakes! Revenge! You lot, go to the left. You lot, go to the right. We’ll surround them and there’ll be no escape this time for those little rats.”

He laughed a long, evil laugh.

The greys split up and set off in pursuit. One grey stays by Power’s side.

“Have you been missing some of your anger management classes, sir?” he asked in a concerned tone.

“Couldn’t we just let Red and Ginger make it up to Scotland and live happily ever after? I mean....we’ve had a nice day out and what have they ever done to you?”

Power is stunned by this line of thought and he actually starts to consider what the grey is saying, putting his hand thoughtfully to his mouth. He then feels the bald bits round his muzzle and dismisses any idea of leniency.

“No! We can’t let them go. They’ve got to pay. Look what they did to me!” bellows Power, pointing to his face.

“Yes, but first didn’t you.....?” interrupted the peace-loving grey.

“Enough!!!” boomed Power, cutting him off. Do as your leader orders or else. Now! You’re not here to think. You’re here to do as you’re told by people who know better.”

The grey backed away, intimidated.

“Yes, sir.....sorry sir. Just an idea,” he blurted out before joining the rear of one of the grey groups.

“There’ll be no happy endings if I can help it,”

muttered Power grimly to himself as he burst into stride.

“Whatever you do, don’t let them get to the trees!”

screamed the grey no. 2 .

Eventually, a breathless Red and Ginger are encircled by their pursuers. They go back to back, adopting martial-arts poses while Ki and Sky hover above them.

“Right, sis...this is it!” gasped Red panting. “But, if we have to, we go down fighting. Right?! No surrender.”

“Right on, bro.,” answered a grim-faced Ginger.

“Bring it on.” Then, turning to the greys: “Who’s first? You’re all big heroes aren’t you? When it’s 25 to 1! OK, who wants a piece of me?”

The first few greys are ‘ju-kar-doeed’ by the red duo. A devastating, dazzling array of chops and throws send their foes flying. Ki and Sky dive-bomb the greys at crucial moments to distract them and help their squirrel

pals.

“I’ve got to rest,” gasps Sky to Ki, holding her tummy. “We must think of the little ones.”

“Of course,” replied Ki. “Go up to that tree up there out of harm’s way. It’s only sensible.”

“I feel so helpless,” grumbled Sky. “I wish there was something more we could do to help Red and Ginger to even things up.”

“I’ve got it!” smiled Ki, pulling a wing across his face like a super hero’s cape. “This is a job for Super Ki. See you soon, my love.....very soon.”

He touches wing very briefly with Sky, then zooms off towards Scotland.

Five more greys go down to Red and Ginger moves. But slowly they are getting swamped by the waves of Grey attacks. They are now taking hits, mainly sneaky ones from behind, despite Sky shouting out warnings

when she can.

“I see that feather-brained ‘friend’ of yours has deserted you,” goaded Power. “Coward!”

“You take that back!” snarled Ginger. “Ki is more of a man and a faithful friend than you’ll ever be, Power. What about you coming and fighting here instead of hiding behind your men?”

“Ooooh!” retorted the grey general sarcastically, but he had been hurt by the comment. “Right. No more Mister Nice-Guy,” he continued. “Greys, rush them on the count of three. 1.....2.....”

“Hey, behind you!” shouted Red. “What’s that in the sky? Is it a plane? No, it’s a bird! Incoming!”

A blue and red dot hurtles towards the battle. It’s Ki!

“What!” says Power cockily. “You expect me to fall for the oldest trick in the book and look behind meeee!!!”

At this “me” moment, Ki has buried his beak deep

into one of Power's bottom cheeks. Power screeches in pain.

“Never make me the ‘butt’ of one of your jokes, Power,” says Ki, after pulling his beak out by pushing on Power's bum with his feet.

“Oh yeah,” added the kingfisher. “I've brought a few friends with me, too.”

Ki points towards Scotland and suddenly an approaching rush and roar can be heard. Some reds riding huge red deer and steering them with their antlers break through the edge of the forest and gallop furiously towards the battle ground.

“Quick!” whispered Ginger to Red out the side of her mouth. “Now's our chance!”

They set upon the nearest greys who had all turned round to see what all the noise was about. Several are flattened by the feisty pair's precise chops and kicks.

“Oosh! Heeee-yagh!”

The approaching reds now launch a hail of nuts, conkers, acorns and pine cones from ivy catapults on their deers’ antlers. The missiles rain down on the greys’ backs.

“Ouch! Ow! Hey!” protest the greys. Power hobbles around, holding his rear end.

Deer start to butt greys up the behind and chase them. Some Scottish reds put nuts on the ground and then hit them with golf clubs made out of branches. One of them whistles. A quartet of greys turn around. They all get a nut on the forehead and fall down, knocked out.

“Fore!” shouts a red. “Whoops. Better late than never, I suppose!” He’s not really sorry, of course.

A tall, rather handsome red runs up and joins Red and Ginger.

“Hello there!” he says flattening an approaching

grey. “Redwood’s the name and big, bad grey bashing’s my game.”

He swings his arm round and round and wallops the first of five onrushing greys with an uppercut. The force knocks all their heads back and together with the sound of coconuts being clacked together. Five knockouts in one!

“I’m Red, and this is Ginger,” said Red getting the introductions quickly out of the way. “Nice to have you here, Redwood.”

Another whistle is heard. A staggering Power turns around. Two nuts go straight up his nostrils.

“Now that is what is called a double bogey!” explained one of the golfers responsible for the shots to Ki.

Ki, impressed, nods to Sky.

Snorting out the nuts like a soccer player with no

hanky, Power limps towards Ginger. “Well at least I can take you out,” he snarls, picking up a thick tree branch. “No problem. Girl power. Ha!” He takes the branch to one side to whack Ginger.

Suddenly Sky swoops down and lands quickly and quietly behind Power. She pokes her beak into his back.

“Reach for the Sky!” she orders. Startled, Power starts to lift up the branch in surrender. Then, glancing slyly over his shoulder, he sees the young kingfisher mother-to-be and aims a clumsy swish of the branch at her. Sky nimbly ducks it and then flies back to Ki.

“Attack a pregnant lady, would you?!” booms Ginger, furiously. Summoning the strength of two super squirrels from her anger, she then really lays into Power. A flying foot full in the paunch doubles him up. She follows this with a karate chop which cuts the branch in two and knocks it from Power’s grasp.

Looking round and seeing he's beaten, Power shouts to his run-ragged rabble: "Retreat! Back! Get out of here!"

"Good to hear you're finally using some of your grey matter, Power" cries Red.

"Yeah, Power. Butt out!" shouts Ki, slapping the retreating one's rear.

Laughing, Sky says to her partner: "Enough with the 'butt' jokes, Ki!"

"But....OK!" smiles Ki mischievously.

Conkers, nuts and pine cones shower down on the fleeing greys. Ki and Sky peck a few bottoms. Deer butt them too. Knocked-out greys are slapped rudely awake by their retreating companions and then half-dragged/ helped away. A limping Power looks back, shaking his paw. His face is filled with fury.

The triumphant reds come together in the field.

“Now I see where the phrase ‘Scotland the Brave’ comes from,” said Ginger, “...because there were some bravehearts out there today.”

“Three cheers for Red and Ginger,” shouted Redwood.

“And Ki and Sky,” added Ginger, pointing at her two pals.

“Hip hip hooray,
Hip hip hooray,
Hip hip hooray,”

bellowed the Scottish reds each time louder and louder.

There then followed lots of back-slapping and hugging. Redwood hugged Ginger longer than anybody else but she didn’t think anything of it.

17

Red and Ginger are riding along on the biggest red

deer you've ever seen. All around them are Scottish reds on foot, clapping and cheering. Our top twosome are heroes. Redwood, because of his height, stands out amongst the rest of the reds. They all arrive at a long straight tree-lined grass avenue. The noise, cheers and whoops get louder and louder. Squirrels in the trees start to shower the twins with multi-coloured leaves. Red and Ginger feels like astronauts returning from the Moon getting a ticker-tape welcome. They look around a bit bewildered. Then Red jumps up on the giant red stag's back and starts waving furiously in all directions. Ginger waves from her seated position and smiling, tries to get Red to sit down with no effect. Sky and Ki fly and hover around their squirrel pals' heads.

At the end of the avenue, Redwood takes hold of the stag's head and gently stops him. Red and Ginger dismount. This, they are told, is Scottish red squirrel

headquarters. Ki and Sky then perform a daring, Red Devils flying team type stunt, racing towards each other at top speed, only missing each other by millimetres before soaring up symmetrically into the sky, grabbing some white cloud on the way and forming the letters ‘R’ and ‘G’ in praise of their pals.

Cheering reaches a crescendo as Redwood leads the duo up to an elderly, distinguished-looking red with a greying face.

He stands up from a throne made out of carefully – cut branches and helps a small bird of prey on his arm on to a perch.

“Father, may I present Red and Ginger,” says Redwood.

“Welcome to Scotland, RedGinger,” smiles Redwood senior in a broad Scottish accent, shaking them each

by the hand. “We have heard many things about you and your journey through Grey Britain. It must have taken a lot to accomplish such a mission.”

“It did have its moments,” replied Red, blowing out his cheeks. “Forgive me sir. But may I ask who you are?”

“The name’s James...King James,” came back the answer.

Responding to a cough from a regal-looking lady squirrel who steps forward, King James adds: “Oh, sorry...and this is Queen Anne.”

Anne is wearing a three-thistled crown on her head.

Red bows and Ginger tries a curtsy after first starting a bow.

“Now, now, you two,” scolds Anne gently. “None of that bowing and scraping. My husband and I are new

Millennium royals. Shake me by the hand.”

Red and Ginger do as they are asked, with heads still slightly down in respect.

“I’m very pleased to meet you both,” says the Scottish queen.

Turning to Ginger, she continues: “Well done, you! You’re a credit to squirrel sisters everywhere.”

“Thank you, your Majesty,” beamed Ginger.

“You can call me Ma’am if you want,” explained the Queen. “We’re trying to break down the barriers in the noughties.”

“The naughties?” tittered Red to Ginger.

“The years 2000-2009,” hissed his sister. “You know...swinging sixties, 90’s, noughties, with an ‘o’.”

A puzzled Red suddenly understood: “Oh right, got ya,” he said, giving a thumbs up.

“Excuse my brother, Ma’am,” apologised Ginger.

“His heart is in the right place. But I’m not sure about his brain, sometimes.”

Taking Ginger slightly to one side and indicating her husband with a nod, Queen Anne confided: “He’s just the same.”

Aware he’s being talked about, King James gives his wife a hard stare. She waves back nervously with the ends of her claws.

“Now, you two,” he says turning to Red and Ginger. “You’ve arrived at a very exciting time of the year. It’s our annual Highland Games celebration tomorrow. It’s lots of fun and we hope you’ll watch it with us and be our guests of honour.”

“Thanks very much, your Kingship,” answered Red.

“Please, call me K.J.” requested the King. “It’s got a modern feel. Anne thinks it’s a bit over the top. But I like

it.”

“K.J.?” queried Red. “King Ja...Oh right, gotcha. Very ‘street.’ Anyway, we’d love to get on down at the Games with you. Wouldn’t we, sis.?”

“ ‘Get on down’? ” asked Ginger, raising her eyebrows and shaking her head. “Yes, we’d love to come,” she added to the royal couple. “Thank you.”

18

It is mid-morning and the Scottish squirrels are busy preparing for their Highland Games festival of fun day.

Redwood escorts Red, Ginger, Ki and Sky to meet the King and Queen. The party weaves its way through scores of squirrels making last-minute preparations for all the different events.

“Have you slept well, all of you?” asked King James.

“Like a log....like a log,” replied Red, patting a passing caber being carried lengthways by four reds.

“And you, my dear?” enquired Anne, putting her hand on Ginger’s shoulder.

“Yes. That was the best night’s sleep I’ve had for ages,” answered the young squirrel miss. “No keeping half an eye open for Power and his cronies.”

“They shouldn’t worry us up here,” Redwood comforted her. “They are big and powerful but we have strength in numbers in this land and we’ve become highly organised at defending ourselves if we have to. And the deer come in handy too. Anyway, enough of this kind of talk. On to the competition.”

A fanfare is blown by a red with a trumpet made from of a hollowed out branch with curved tree bark on the end.

Climbing on to his throne and standing up to his full

height, King James announces:

“It is with great pleasure that I declare these Highland Games open. Let the games begin!”

A great roar of excitement went up and lots of clapping broke out amongst the assembled reds. Ki and Sky float down and settle on to Anne’s and James’ arms. James strokes his usual bird of prey who is on a stand at his side just to reassure him. The bird leans into James’ paw, enjoying the attention from his royal owner.

Branch and haggis-skin bagpipes start being played as some squirrel couples do a Highland fling dance over some crossed branches. One bagpipe over-inflates with some comedy bottom-burp noises, bursting with a bang. The royal party smile, and Red and Ki titter a bit to each other.

There is a drum-roll by a red using an old tree stump for a drum and branches for sticks.

Then an announcer struts forwards with a tree-bark megaphone, booming: “Competitors for the tossing the caber this way, please.” He adds in a boxing master of ceremonies-style deep voice: “Let’s get ready to trundle!”

Redwood, stretching his muscles, is amongst a group of reds who begin to line up.

The first competitor crouches down in front of his log. He can’t budge it, despite eye-bulging and near vein-bursting straining. Suddenly it topples on him, leaving with his paws and feet flailing either side of it. First-aider reds with an ivy-twined branch stretcher rush forward, roll off the caber and carry the squished squirrel away. Flying logs circle his head. He moans a lot but he is going to be OK.

A few more competitors have their go rather more successfully to polite applause. Then it’s Redwood’s

turn.

“Show ‘em what you’re made of, son,” shouts King James across the arena, rather losing royal poise. “Go K.J. Junior!” He then points at himself, American-wrestler style. “Who’s the daddy!?” he demands to all around.

Ki goes to speak and then doesn’t. He gives Sky a knowing grin. She smiles back then looks away, shyly.

“Now, now, James dear. No favouritism,” said Queen Anne.

“Sorry, Dearest. Couldn’t help myself. But if you can’t support your own children, who can you?” came the reply.

Anne lovingly pats her husband’s paw on the back and leaves it there. James then takes hers and holds it.

Ki and Sky hop onto the back of the King’s throne. Sky motions to Ki with her head and he goes over and

puts his wing round her.

Redwood, meanwhile, takes the strain, his paws at the bottom of the caber. He raises it and looks pleased with himself. He catches Ginger's eye and holds her gaze. She looks back at the handsome prince and then realises she's maybe looking at him for a bit too long as some strange feelings she's never had before rise up inside her. She turns away. Red, unfortunately for her, has seen this.

“Ay, ay!” he says to his sister, tapping his nose knowingly. “Someone's got an admirer!”

“You'd better zip that lip,” warned a rattled Ginger, “before I give you a fat one, baby brother.”

“Ooooh!” needled Red, knowing he's hit a nerve.

Then he started singing cheekily:

“Redwood and Ginger sitting in a tree,

K-I-S-S-I-N-G!

First came love.....”

He is now fighting off Ginger’s attempts to keep him quiet by putting her hand over his mouth. He continues:

“Then came marriage,

Then along came baby,

In a baby carriage!”

He starts singing it for a second time:

“Redwood and Ginger sitting in a tree.....” but Ginger finally manages to put her paw over his muzzle.

Red undeterred, continues to carry on the song’s rhythm in his throat as he tries to free himself. Red at his annoying best...or worst if you’re Ginger!

Redwood meanwhile, sees the twins struggling with each other, forgets the heavy weight he’s holding momentarily and pitches forward. He recovers for an

instant but then

slips on a damp patch of earth and the caber is suddenly out of control, falling away from him. The caber and Redwood are now heading straight for Red and Ginger!

Red spots the careering caber. But he can't tell his unsuspected sister because she's got her hand clamped firmly over his mouth! "Behind you !!" throats Red.

"Behind you! Behind you!" mimicks Ginger. "It might've worked on that pea-brained Power, Red . But it won't work on me!"

With an incredible super-squirrelian effort, Red drags his sister out of the way at the very last millisecond.

Redwood and toppling tree trunk are now hurtling straight at the King and Queen. Anne makes a decision. "Gangway!" she shrieks. "Women and children first!" and dashes off to the side. King James

bravely, or foolishly rises and raises his hand in front of his son.

“As your King and father, I command you to stop.”

He holds his ground for a couple of seconds but then sees he’s got to move or he’ll become the first royal in history to be clobbered by a caber!

He dives along the ground sideways to avoid a collision.

“How undignified!” he mutters as his chin scrapes along the earth.. Ki and Sky scatter too, skywards.

The main stand, made of crossed branches tied together, is now dead ahead for Redwood. Previously spectating squirrels, eyes full of terror, dash to its outer edges as the tumbling trunk karate-chops it in two. The force flings squirrels and wood up through the air.

When the debris settles, Redwood can just be seen in

amongst all the mess and mayhem. Everybody rushes over to see if he is all right. Ginger for some reason is the first to reach him.

“Redwood, are you hurt anywhere?” she asks.

“I’m sure she’ll kiss it better!” titters Red.

“One more wise-crack like that and I’ll crack you one, Red,” warns Ginger with a menacing thin-lipped ‘laser’ look.

“Just joking, sis.,” replied Red, paws up in apology.

“I feel such a fool,” groaned Redwood.

“Don’t worry” said Ginger. “Red’s been feeling that way since the day he was born!”

“Hey!” complained her brother.

“Remember the family motto – ‘onward and upward’ son” said King James, helping his heir to his feet. “Now, on with the Games.” Nudging Redwood in the ribs and nodding at Ginger, he added: “You could do

a lot worse. Good child-bearing hips.”

“Dad!” cried Redwood, squirming with embarrassment.

Ginger hears this, turns away and smiles to herself. Fortunately for her, nobody, especially Red, sees.

Trying to change the subject very quickly, Redwood, pointing, shouts: “Hey look! It’s my brother Hairy’s turn in the hammer throwing. Let’s see how he does.”

A two-thirds smaller version of his elder bro., Hairy is putting some tricky tree sap on his palms for extra grip.

“Hammer time!” he declares. He tries to flirt off some surplus sticky stuff by waving his paws but the sap doesn’t move.

“Oh well,” he pronounces unfazed. “Here goes.”

Stepping into the circle, he puts one of his fingers in his mouth, wets it and holds it up to test for wind

direction. He very quickly realises he's got a most unpleasant taste in his mouth.

“Oh yeuk,” he moans. “I shouldn't have done that!”

He then quickly spits several times trying to remove the nastiness from off his tongue.

Getting 'in the zone' again, Hairy concentrates:

“Right. Three turns and away we go.”

After a trio of circles, Hairy gives it everything he's got and releases his hammer....or tries to. The sap!

Hammer and Hairy fly through the air, before landing in a nearby clump of trees.

“Does that count?” asked Ginger, turning to Red.

“Don't see why not,” replied her brother.

At the judges' desk, four officials tell their marks to a runner. He takes the information to the scoreboard squirrels. They scurry up a tree and then hang side by

side from a long horizontal branch. They twist and turn their bodies and tails into number shapes to reveal how

Hairy has done.

8.7, 8.9, 9.2 and 8.6 .

The King's second son groggily parts some leafy foliage by his landing place and asks: "How did I do?"

Spotting his scores, he proclaims proudly: "Hey not bad! If I stick at it, I might become a Highland hero yet.

'Stick.' Oh!" He chuckles to himself at his unintended pun.

"Oh!" exclaimed the King. "It's the haggis-hurling next. That's one of my favourite events."

All the competitors are pummelling their haggises to get them in just the right shape for throwing. Some very disgusting farty, belching-squelching type noises are coming from the skin bags and their contents.

"Excuse me, your Kingliness," enquired Ginger. "I mean K.J." as she spotted the Scottish

monarch's slightly frowning face. "But what exactly is in those haggis thingies?"

"They're made from a special recipe. You don't want to know," answered James, shaking his head. "You don't want to know."

"Oh right," nodded Ginger.

There is a mass haggis launch shot putt-style on the judge's count of three just as Red arrives on the scene.

"Yo sis. Whassup?!" he asks in his best gangster impression. Splat!!! A wayward haggis hits him straight in the muzzle and bursts. Ginger bursts out laughing.

Suddenly Red's tongue comes out and cleans his face greedily, going round his features like the hand on a clock.

"Mmmm. Delicious," he moans happily. "That's offally good food."

“Offal?!” howls Ginger. “What, like tubes and entrails and stuff? Oh pukes-ville. How can you eat such a thing?”

“Going down!” says Red, gulping down the last mouthful. “Top grub that! Beautiful. Any seconds?” He pats his belly, then rubs it gleefully.

The royal party and guests move over to the pillow fight area. There is a raised caber to sit on and wrap your legs around.

Competitors try to knock each other off into the large water container below.

“This looks great fun, your Highnesses,” pipes up Ginger. “May I have your permission to have a go?”

“But, of course,” says James.

Ginger steps forwards, swiftly followed by Red who says: “Great minds think alike, sis.”

“Yeah, but what about you bro.?” retorts Ginger,

quick as a flash.

“We’ll see. We’ll see,” says Red, clambering up on the equipment and taking a pillow.

Hefty whacks are exchanged and both twins nearly fall on several occasions.

“Bravo Ginger!” encourages the Queen. Then turning to her royal rodent husband, she whispers: “She’s like the daughter I’ve always wanted.”

“C’mon Red. Do it for the boys!” shouts Hairy.

“Take that!” grunts Red, clouting his sister a huge blow round the side of the head. Down Ginger goes off to the side, seemingly set for a soggy finish.

But somehow she regains her hold with her head upside down, grabbing on again with her powerful foot claws.

Red thinks he’s won, relaxes his grip and starts celebrating to all, waving his pillow around .

His sister quickly completes a full 360 degree circle and

then gives him the mother and father of all whacks round the cheeky chappie's chops. He topples straight into the water, making a huge 'SPLOOSH!'

"What! Another bath for you, Red," calls down Ginger. "That's three in the past week. And you've only ever had four in your life!"

"That's not true," splutters Red. "I'm at least into double figures now!"

Jumping out of the container, he shakes himself vigorously and taps his ears hard from the side to clear out the water in there.

"One to the girls, I think, bro." gloats Ginger.

"You were lucky," said Red, then indicating the tug of war arena, "Now we'll see who's the best."

"Anything a boy can do....." challenged Ginger.

“Yeah, yeah,” replied Red,unconvinced.

It’s a male versus female tug of war and both sides mean business. Red, Redwood and Hairy lead the boys with Ginger captaining the ‘girl power’ gang .

“Take the strain,” announces King James solemnly, holding the rope in the middle: “And may the best man....woman....squirrel win!”

Back and forwards goes the marker on the rope as first one team gets the upper-hand then the other. No-one wants to lose this match. Straining faces are screwed up with the effort of trying to win. At one point Redwood catches Ginger’s eye and smiles. She smiles back. Redwood slackens his grip as he enters Loveland. His side suddenly start to slither defeat. On realising this, he grabs the rope quickly and with extra effort applied evens up the contest once again.

“I declare the contest a tie!” booms King James.

“Annoyed at this decision, the boys drop their side of the rope.

“No way, K.J.” protests Red. “We....”

Suddenly with nothing to pull against, the girls go flying backwards and end up in a long line on top of a big fat girl squirrel who was their anchor.

Turning round, the boys have a right old laugh at this, especially Red. The more mature Redwood runs over to Ginger:

“Are you OK,” he asks, concerned.

“I think so,” she replies, taking up his offer of a paw to help herself up. “I’ve got a bit of a bruise on my bum here but...”

At that moment, she realises what she’s saying and showing. “Ooh, too much detail,” she says shyly. “But thank you for asking.”

Then turning furiously on her brother, Ginger shouts: “Red! You did that on purpose. Wait till I get my paws on you!”

She starts to move menacingly in his direction.

“Now, now dear,” says Queen Anne. “I’m sure it was just an accident.”

“That’s right,” confirms Red, taking cover behind the Queen. “But a very funny accident!”

Ginger fumed powerlessly, rubbing a sore buttock and a bruised pride.

Trying to change the subject, Anne said to Ginger: “What about showing us your own special skills, my dear? I’ve heard you are the Queen of Kung-fu...the Princess of kapow. I’m sure everyone would love to see you in action.”

“I know I would,” butted in Redwood very enthusiastically, then adding nervously: “Er.....wouldn’t

the rest of you?”

“Yeah”s, cheers and claps of encouragement are heard from all around.

“Go on, sis. Go Ginger Ninja,” encouraged Red.

“Oh, OK then,” said Ginger a little uncertainly. “If you really want me to.” King James nods his approval as does his wife, who also gives her the ‘thumbs-up’.

Now full of confidence, Ginger shouts to herself: “Right. Let’s get it on. Ju-kar-do a go go!” She adds: “Red, you know what to do.”

Ginger moves around the arena like a martial art master or is that mistress, chopping and kicking an army of imaginary enemies. Red regularly holds up tree bark and branches which his twin sister expertly smashes to smithereens or cuts in two with precise fore and rear paw-power.

“Heugh! Ki-ya! Ooosh!” cries Ginger as she delivers her power-packed blows.

At one point, Red is knocked over by the force of a flying ‘540’ foot kick.

“Wow!” he utters, impressed.

Redwood’s lower jaw drops more and more as he watches Ginger’s amazing performance. What a girl! What a woman! What a babe!

Roars and whoops from a packed crowd conclude Ginger’s last move and she nonchalantly closes Redwood’s muzzle with the end of her finger as she walks past, pleased as a very powerful punch.

The squirrel scorers fire nuts from the ends of springy branches on to some mud boards to register 10s, a perfect score for the ultimate ninjissima.

“Beat that, bro,” challenged Ginger. “Big sister is watching you!”

“Nobody could beat that,” replied Red, genuinely gob-smacked. “That was amazing!”

“Do you really mean it?” queried Ginger, taken aback by this, but then very pleased. Red nods, smiling.

“Thanks,” blurted out his sister. “Now what about you doing your high bar routine, Red. It’ll knock ’em dead!”

“Do you reckon?” replied Red. “I haven’t practised recently. Are you sure?”

“Go ahead, my boy,” said King James, encouragingly.

After scampering up a nearby tree, Red starts with a death dive onto a horizontal branch. He catches it expertly and rotates round 360 degrees with arms fully extended. Releases and catches, full-circles using one paw, then amazingly one-claw are all performed with

power and precision. Loop the loops, twists in mid-air and last split-second recoveries, all follow one after another to gasps of delight at the daring master gymnast.

After five increasingly quicker one-claw circles, Red finally flies off the branch, back-somersaulting to a knees-bent/paws parallel perfect landing in front of the royal party. Applause and shouts break out at a deafening level.

Ten, ten, ten, show the scores on the board as Ginger rushes forward to hug her breathless brother.

Red catches sight of a gaggle of giggling lady squirrels waving their paw claws in his direction.

“I think I’m going to like it up here,” gasped Red, smiling.

“Me too. Me too.” smiled Ginger as she spotted Redwood in the crowd and they gazed into each others’ eyes, not caring who saw them this time.

