

# The Clever Foursome

An Advent Story  
Third Sunday of Advent

M. Manenti and A.G. Forgiarini



# The Clever Foursome

## Third Sunday of Advent

Gasping for breath, the squirrel collapsed in a fork between two branches midway up the tree. With shaky paws, she took one nut after another out of her cheeks.

The crow landed next to her and hopped around with half-spread wings before settling down. "Phew! That was close!"

The last hazelnut landed on the small pile. The squirrel took a deep breath and the world around her stopped whirling. "Thanks," she whispered.

"His ear will serve him as a reminder for a long while," said the crow smugly.

"Well, if that was not a stroke of genius." The sarcastic grumbling from above startled them both. Through the entangled branches, the squirrel spotted the dark shape of a nest. A magpie eyed them crossly over its edge.



"Do you want to insult us?" asked the crow. "What we do is of no concern to you."

"It is! Because you fools enraged that cat!" The magpie fluttered down to a branch just above the two thieves.

"But aren't you safe up here?" The squirrel did not understand the magpie's agitation.

"That's not the point. I planned to collect my tinsel from this house. And now there is no way I will safely

get in and out. That cat will lie in wait night and day.”

“Oh no!” Embarrassed, the squirrel pulled her long tail over her haunches and pulled at some stray hairs. “You could have some of our nuts,” she offered to mollify the magpie.

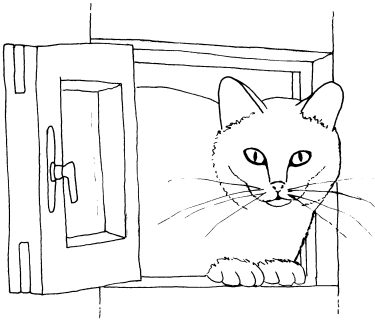
“And what exactly should I do with them? Since when do they sparkle and shine like tinsel? Anyway, these few scraps will not even be enough for the two of you.” She snorted disdainfully.

“This is just the start,” protested the crow. “Didn't you see how many packs the man brought?”

“And how exactly do you want to get them?”

“Through that window of course!” The squirrel turned her head to the house and pointed up at the window. “See! Now it is open!” Excited, she spun around, ready to run up the branch.

The magpie's snarl stopped her. “It is open, alright. But don't you see the cat lurking behind it?”



The squirrel took another look and shivered when the cat's glinting eyes met hers.

“Great! Now your greed has destroyed all our plans.” Frustrated, the crow hacked away at a walnut.

The magpie was right. The pitifully small pile in front of her would never get her through winter. Unless .... But that was crazy! But what other chance did she have? “Why don't we talk to the cat? He doesn't eat nuts after all and I doubt he cares for tinsel either.”

A low growl from the window sent a shiver down

her spine. "True, I do not need tinsel and I hate nuts. But I have an account to settle with all three of you!"

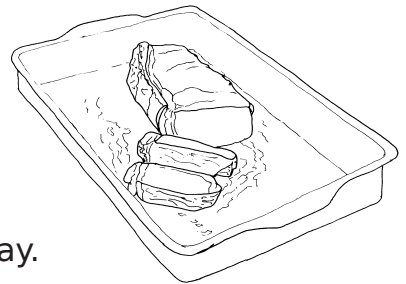
"I never bothered you!" The magpie squawked outraged.

"Didn't you now! And what about my slice of Christmas roast last year? They blamed me when they found the Christmas ornaments you shattered." His eyes shifted to the crow. "And you, you always eat my food! And who do you think pays the price when you dig up the vegetable patch?"

Neither crow nor magpie replied.

The squirrel was taken aback by the resentment in these words. She had to find a way to reconcile the cat or she was lost.

The loss of that Christmas roast seemed to be at the center of his anger. How could they make up for it? Only Niklaus and his wife had what it would take. But maybe she was going about it the wrong way. An idea dawned on her.



Slowly and almost afraid of her own daring she started to climb up.

"What are you doing? Are you mad? I will not save you a second time!"

She ignored the crow's protest. She felt the cat's gaze all the way up to a thin branch a safe distance from the window.

"You really crave for that Christmas roast, don't you?" She kept her eyes on the cat, ready to run at the first sign of movement. "What if we get you two slices this year?"



“Words are cheap. Why should I believe you?” The cat glared at her but his pink tongue sneaked out and ran along his nose.

“If you let me take enough nuts to get me through the winter, I'll tell you. Agreed?”

“What do I care about nuts? If you can deliver, you have a deal.”

“It's simple. The magpie will convince Niklaus that you were innocent last year.”

“What are you talking about!” The branch shook under the weight of the magpie that landed with flapping wings behind the squirrel.

Holding on for dear life the squirrel looked back. “Don't worry. You only need to fly into the house and get your tinsel.”

She turned back to the cat. “When the magpie is ready to leave the house, you will make a racket that will bring Niklaus running. He will realize that he punished you unjustly last year. I bet you will get two slices of the roast this time.”

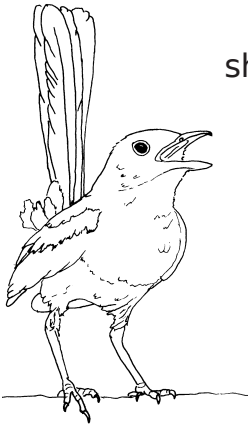
“I'm to risk my life for a beak full of tinsel? Go on dreaming!”

The cat licked his paw and rubbed his aching ear. “What about five beaks full of tinsel? I can wait until your sixth raid before I give the alarm.”

The magpie eyed the cat warily.

“Don't worry. The Christmas roast is one hundred times better than a tough, old magpie,” he sneered.

“One more thing.” He looked at the crow. “You will never eat my food again.”



“Trade those delicate morsels for some nuts? Never!” croaked the crow from a safe distance.

The squirrel's head sagged. She had been so close. Why was that crow so contrary? There had to be a solution. “Would you let the cat chase you from the vegetable patch in front of Nikolaus’ eyes every so often?” Turning to the cat she continued, “I'm sure you will get a treat for that and, in return, the crow will get a beak full of your food every once in a while?”

“Works for me but only as long as I never catch him eating my treats.” The cat’s ears pricked up. “Scamper! Niklaus is coming.”

“Well Mouser. Enough fresh air for today. Go sleep in the kitchen. From now on the front room is off limits to you. No playing with tinsel this year.” With that, Niklaus closed the window to the cold air of the approaching evening.