

In Providence: Squirrels



If you drove by an accident in Providence on a chilly Saturday night a few weeks ago, you might not realize it was caused by a squirrel.

“They’re all over the neighborhood. I don’t know what’s going on. I don’t know if they’re multiplying more because of the pandemic or what, but something’s gotta be done.”

The neighborhood is under siege.

“The first time one ran out in front of my car, I stopped short, and I almost went flying into the steering wheel. The squirrel’s just sitting there looking at me. Didn’t move. You got a big car coming at you and you’re this little squirrel, and you don’t move? What the hell? I told my wife when I got home, I said ‘This squirrel I just saw—No fear. We got fearless squirrels running around. She laughed at me. She thought it was a joke. Two days later, she comes into the house and tells me the same thing happened to her. These are some kind of new squirrel. They don’t care about anything. Live or die, they don’t care.”

He and his wife live on the north end of Providence on a fairly quiet street. Two kids (now grown and married), two cars (one’s on its last legs), and nights spent out in the yard with a drink now that summer is on the way. Aside from the kamikaze squirrels, things seem to be going all right, but never underestimate the toll of self-destructive rodents. It’s not just running out into the street either. The squirrels are wreaking havoc in all kinds of ways.

“The guy next door to me? They’re tearing up his patio door. I called Animal Control and told ‘em we got rabid squirrels around here. They told me they’re not rabid, they’re just mischievous. Mischievous? I’m on my third near-accident with these things. Now what they do is, they see you coming, and they wait by the side of the road. Then they run out and stop. Why would a squirrel do that? It can see the headlights. It hears me coming. Why would you run out into the road at that very moment? They’re trying to kill us. I’m telling you.”

Patio doors are being targeted, along with screens on windows, birdhouses, and an above-ground pool.

"Yeah, I got them running all over my deck *****ing and *****ing everywhere. It's a mess. Aren't they supposed to do that in the trees? They come down from the trees so they can treat my deck like it's a toilet bowl. You should see what I wake up to. I got pictures. You want to see 'em?"

I declined.

"Thirty-four years I've lived in this house, and I never had any complaints. This morning, right before you called, I'm going to get the mail, and who do you think is sitting right on top of my mailbox? Sitting there looking right at me. I said, 'You little bastard, get the **** off there, before I go get a shotgun.' I don't have a shotgun. I don't keep guns in the house, but he doesn't know that. He just sat there. I couldn't get my mail until seven o'clock at night. Do you believe that? What if something important had been in there? I called the city, and guess what they did about it? *Bupkis*. That's what they did."

Now he and his neighbors have started researching ways to ward off the invaders.

"Somebody said coyote **** will do it. Where the hell am I going to get coyote ****? They said if you spray it around the yard and the mailbox and everywhere that the squirrels don't like it, because they think coyotes are around. I said, 'How the hell do they know the difference between a coyote and a dog? The woman down the street from me has a Great Dane and all it does is **** in everybody's yard. The squirrels can't smell that? They're not scared of a Great Dane? Only coyotes? You know how big a Great Dane is? Look it up. But no, it's gotta be coyotes. Now I gotta see if I can get somebody to bring a coyote over my house so he can take a **** everywhere and that'll scare 'em. You believe this?"

A suggestion was made that a high-frequency noise producing device might do the trick.

"We had one of those years ago. Somebody bought one, not for the squirrels, but for something else. Hawks or something, I think. I could hear it. My wife told me, 'You can't hear it, only animals can hear it. Are you an animal?' I said, 'I must be, because I can hear this whistle clear as day and it's giving me a headache.' Good thing they cut that out after a while, because the dogs were barking all the time. Me and the dogs. I must have a special bond with animals or something, because everybody's telling me that I'm getting it the worst with the squirrels. Everybody's getting a little, but I'm getting the majority of it, and that's just my luck."

The whole thing reminds me of Tippi Hendren in *The Birds*, and when I ask him if he's ever seen the film, he tells me that he doesn't like movies where things "jump out at you" and so he avoids most horror films and anything with evil toys.

"You know the movies where the toys come to life and kill people? I don't like that. Should I watch this bird movie? Do they get rid of the birds? What do they do?"

I told him I haven't seen it in ages, but that I don't think they get rid of the birds. That if I remember correctly, they just escape in a car while the birds watch them ominously.

"That doesn't do me much good, does it? If I get in my car, the squirrels are going to run out in front of it. I told my wife, 'Next time, I'm driving right over them.' I don't care anymore. They know what they're doing. They're taking a chance running out into the road like that, and I'm not going to crash my car just to save the life of one squirrel. Bump off one or two of them, and the rest will get the point. That's

how you got to do it.”

I admit that any talk of hurting animals does not go over well with me, but when he senses my concern, he changes his mind.

“That’s just me blowing off steam. I got good brakes on my car. My wife’s car? Forget it. She’ll go right over them, like it or not. That car’s brakes are bad. Mine? I can stop short if I have to, but I don’t like it. I’m giving them until the end of the summer, and if they’re still doing this, I’m going to see about having somebody bring in a coyote. I hope they’re having fun, because one summer, and that’s it. I’m willing to give them a pass for now, because we’ve all gone a little crazy. You have to remember that. It’s not just us going through this. Everybody is. I was snapping at my wife for a long time over nothing at the end of last year, and she told me, if I didn’t want to get thrown out, I’d better fix my attitude. I was having a tough time. I’m doing better now though. But the squirrels aren’t helping.”

If you go for a drive in Providence, there’s no telling what might jump out at you. These days with GPS, it’s hard to get lost, but there’s no shortage of distractions now that cars can take phone calls and text messages all seem like they need to be answered before you can make it to the next red light. We’ve all lost some focus, and some of us have taken up some personal sabotage. We want to run out into the road, not because we want to get hit, but because we want to see if somebody will stop for us. That could be what’s going on with the squirrels, but I guess you’d have to ask them.

“I drive five miles an hour now. You should see me. As soon as I turn onto my street, I’m crawling like an old man. My wife says, ‘You are an old man,’ which is true, but now I’m driving like one.”

When it comes to managing modern life, having to slow down isn’t the worst thing in the world.

“I gotta go check the mail. I couldn’t get it again this morning, because there were two of them sitting on the mailbox. Probably talking about me. Little bastards.”

And if slowing down doesn’t work, you can always adopt a coyote.