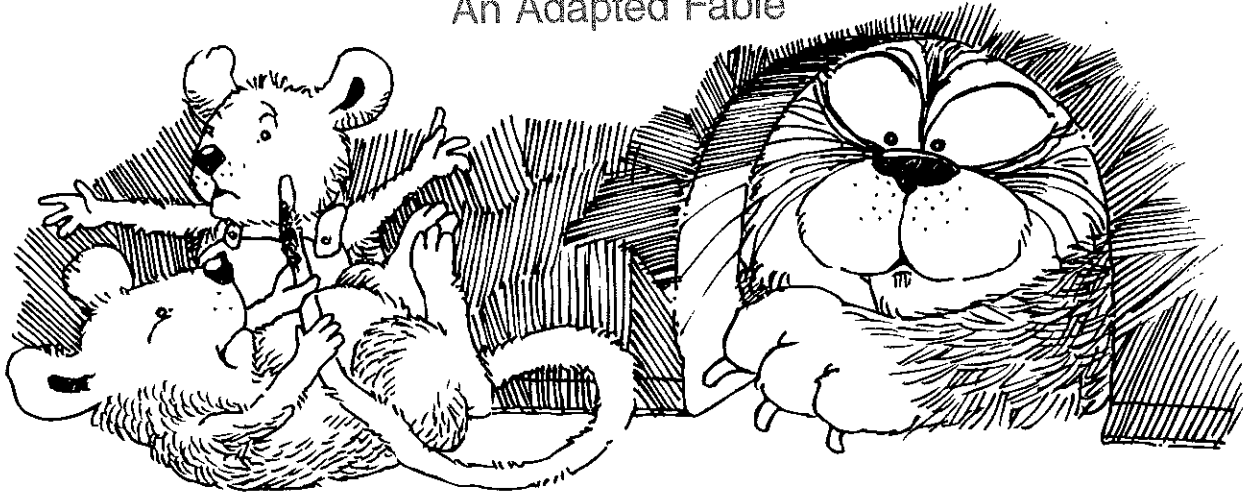


Belling the Cat

An Adapted Fable



Something must be done," said Percy. He collapsed on the floor of his mouse house. He sobbed and his body shook uncontrollably.

"You poor dear," said his wife, Agatha. She pulled him across the floor to their nest and covered him with a blanket. "It's the cat again, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is," said Percy. "He had his claws in my tail. I escaped by biting his paw. It's the third time this week that that fanged monster has caught me. I shudder to think what will happen to me, good wife. How will you and the children manage if I am eaten by the cat?"

"Don't even mention it!" replied Agatha. "You must not take any more chances."

"Then how will we eat?" asked Percy. "The cat hides in the kitchen. He hears every paw-step no matter how quiet. Three of our friends were taken by that fiendish feline last week."

"It's very unfair. There is so much food wasted here. Surely the people in this house could share. Perhaps we could ask the farmer's wife to deliver it to our door. Then we wouldn't have to bother with the cat or the kitchen."

"Good wife, you don't understand at all. The people who moved into our house with the cat are selfish and they despise mice. There are traps everywhere. I know how to stay away from the traps, but the cat is a sneaky, cruel creature. He has hiding places, and pounces on anything that moves. Hard-working, honest mice like ourselves will never be safe as long as that cat prowls the house."

"Well then, I suppose we must move," said Agatha. "There must be a house, a barn, or a store where we are welcome. After all, we do clean the floor of all crumbs and scraps. We are quite useful, I believe."

"Even if we knew of a safe place we could call home," said Percy, "we would never get past the cat and out the door with our nest and our children."

"For the life of me, I can't think of any way," said Agatha.

"It will be dangerous, but I will call a meeting," said Percy. "We can travel inside the walls and meet in the bedroom closet without running into the cat. We will discuss this problem sensibly and surely find the answer."

The next morning Percy tapped a mouse SOS on the wall. Every mouse from the attic to the basement scurried between the walls to the big closet in the farmer's bedroom.

Percy clapped his paws for silence. "We are all aware," he began, "of the dangerous creature that lurks in every corner of this house waiting to devour us. If we stay in the walls, we will starve. We must find a way to stop that cat."

Before Percy said another word, there was a horrifying yowl and scratching at the closet door. Sharp claws reached under the door, just missing Percy as he jumped away.

"Tomorrow in the attic," Percy squeaked. One by one the mice squeezed through the crack in the closet wall and hurried to their homes. Percy was the last to leave. He scrambled through the crack just as the closet door swung open and the snarling cat rushed at the tiny opening.

Percy heard the farmer's wife say, "Wonderful, clever Mr. Cat. Were you trying to catch those terrible mice that roam the house? You've caught three this week. In a month's time you will do away with all the mice just like you did in our last house, won't you?" Percy peered through the crack. The farmer's wife was petting the cat, which purred and snuggled in her arms.

"Disgusting," said Percy to his wife. "How could anyone be fond of a cat?"

The next morning all the mice climbed the inner passageway to the attic. When all the mice were quiet, Percy began again. "I have called everyone here to find a solution to our problem. If we leave our homes, who knows what other dangers we will find. We would have to flee for our lives, leaving all our possessions. Who has the answer?"

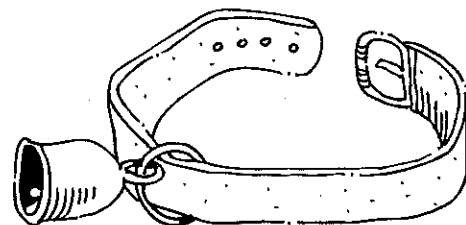
All the mice squeaked stories about their encounters with the cat. Finally, Leah, one of the newest mouse residents, stood by Percy and raised her paw for silence.

"The problem is very simple," said Leah. "If we knew where the cat was, we could stay away from him. When I lived in a barn, the barn cat had a bell on her collar. We always heard her coming and hid where she couldn't reach us. All we have to do is place a bell on the cat's collar."

"Why didn't I think of that?" said Percy. "A belled cat would be dangerous, but not as dangerous. All in favor of placing a bell on the cat's collar, squeak yes."

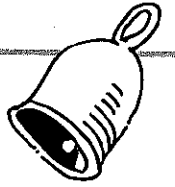
Every mouse except Agatha squeaked. She held up her paw. "Very clever indeed!" she said. "Now which one of you brave mice will volunteer to place the bell on the cat's collar?"

Every mouse was quiet.



Name _____

Questions about *Belling the Cat*



1. How had life recently changed for the mice?

2. What two ideas did Agatha suggest to avoid being eaten by the cat?

3. Why did Percy think her ideas wouldn't work?

4. Why did the mice have to meet a second time?

5. What did Leah think the mice should do about the cat?

6. At the end of the story, why didn't any of the mice answer Agatha's question?

7. What do you think the mice should do?
