

THE MOUSE THAT SOARED

A story for children of all ages

by

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CHAPTER 1

DOWN BY THE RIVER

It was a lovely spring day. The flowers and trees were in full bloom, the birds were filling the sky with happy songs, and the butterflies were dancing from flower to flower. Every living thing seemed to burst with joy and peace and fresh new life.

In a far corner of a meadow, near a little stream where turtles liked to come for a swim, there lived a very unusual field mouse. This mouse was an only child, a very rare creature indeed in mouse families. Her name was Aurora and she was happy by nature but her friends sometimes made her feel sad. They were jealous of her because they knew she was smarter than they were and she didn't need them to have a good time--her imagination could keep her busy for days at a time. Aurora was a friendly mouse but she also liked to spend time by herself, dreaming on the edge of the stream.

The other little mice didn't have any dreams and they couldn't understand what she was doing down by the river. It often happens that mice don't like things they don't understand. What was Aurora dreaming about? She sometimes imagined herself as one of those shiny fish she came to visit everyday. She wished she was free to travel like them, downstream into other rivers, and perhaps to the great ocean itself. When she looked up at the sky, she knew that the world had to be larger than her beloved meadow. And the stars! They seemed to twinkle just for her, whispering down through space wonderful stories of other worlds to the little mouse who took the time to notice them. Her mom and dad were always upset with her because she never did what all mice are suppose to do.

"Where is she today?" Dad-mouse would ask.

"Down by the river, talking to the fish," Mom-mouse would answer.

"Again? Why, she's the laziest mouse I've ever known," Dad would say as he hurried off to work. "Bring her back home and tell her she's grounded for three days. And no sesame seeds for desert!"

"But that's her favorite!" Dad shrugged his tail and left.

Mom was sad. She always defended her little girl-mouse, especially when Dad wouldn't let her have sesame seeds for desert. But this time she knew that there was nothing she could do. Aurora had gone too far. This was the thirty-second day in a row that she had gone to the river bank instead of helping the family gather their grains.

The mother mouse headed for the river with a heavy heart. She had wondered many times why her daughter was so different. She had even gone to see Heronimus the know-it-all owl who lived at the edge of the forest. It had taken her a whole afternoon to get there and the father mouse was very worried when she came back long after the sun had set. For all her

trouble, the old owl had simply told her:

"Your daughter is a dreamer."

"A dreamer? I didn't know we mice had dreams!"

"Well, I didn't know that either, my dear mouse-lady," the wise old owl said with a humility known only to the wise. "But this is clearly a case of dreaminess. What else could she be doing by the river? Those turtles get really boring to look at after awhile."

"But what could she be dreaming about?" asked the worried mom.

"Don't ask me. We owls don't dream either."

"But how can a mouse dream if they're not suppose to?"

"How can caterpillars turn into butterflies? How can frogs breathe under water? How can lizard tails grow back?"

"Then why do they call you the know-it-all owl?" the mouse-mom wondered.

"I don't know. I can see in the dark, that's about it."

So Mom-mouse made her way to the river to get her daughter once again. Sure enough, there was Aurora sitting on a little rock warmed by spring sun. She was gazing at the river and smiling at the passing fish. Aurora was a small mouse, a little round, with shiny blue eyes that noticed everything.

"What are you doing, Aurora?" her mom called out in an angry voice. Aurora was so surprised that she almost fell off the rock.

"Hi, Mom. I'm looking at the fish again."

Her mom was the understanding type even though she didn't understand what was on her daughter's mouse-mind. She put her arm around her.

"Why are you looking at the fish...again?"

"They're going somewhere. They swim with the river from up in the mountains where it begins and go toward the sea."

"So?"

"What do you think happens to them when they get to the sea?"

"Oh, I guess they get eaten by bigger fish," answered Mom, proud of her knowledge of life.

"Don't say that, Mother!"

"That's the way it is, Aurora."

"But what if one of them gets away from the big fish. Do you think they swim to the bottom of the sea? Maybe they discover amazing places! Maybe they meet mermaids and..."

"Where do you get this nonsense? Not from my side of the family, that's for sure!"

Aurora suddenly took her mom's hand and hurried toward the river.

"Careful! I can't swim!" cried the mom-mouse as they near the edge of the flowing waters.

Aurora pointed to a strange red fish moving slowly near the surface of the waters.

"Look! I know that fish!"

"How can a mouse know a fish?" asked Mom, worried about her daughter's strange ideas.

"He's the only one of his kind. I saw him last spring. He's coming back from the ocean."

"Oh, really? Did he tell you that?"

"He's swimming upstream, making his way back toward the mountains."

"Now why would he want to do that? All the other fish go with the current."

"Some fish are different," said Aurora with a special twinkle in her eyes.

"He's going home after a great adventure out at sea."

Mom-mouse pulled Aurora away from the river bank.

"What am I going to do with you? Why aren't you thinking of a boy-mouse or wheatberry grains?"

"Why would I think of that, Mother?"

"Because all the other mice-girls in the meadow are, that's why! Your Father is very upset that you're not like them. If he finds out about these crazy ideas in your head, I don't know what he'll do!"

"My ideas don't hurt anybody."

"No, but they don't gather grain for the winter either."

Mom pulled her daughter back toward the meadow. "Come along, now."

Aurora dragged her feet in the carpet of clover. She was sad. It's not that she wanted to be different, she just was. She had always been, ever since she could remember. As a baby mouse she would spend hours looking at the sky while all the other mice looked at the dirt. She would listen to the songs of the birds while her family and friends listened to each other talk about who found the best grain that day.

Her eyes fell upon a tiny four-leaf clover that waved at her in the spring breeze. It seemed to be saying "it's okay to be different, it's okay to be yourself." Suddenly, she was filled with excitement.

"Mother, I know what I want to do!"

"Well, it's about time," replied the mom as she led her into the meadow.

"I want to travel, just like that red fish! I want to see new places!"

That evening, Dad-mouse decided he had had enough. As the family sat around the dinner table, he proclaimed:

"We will send Aurora to mouse-obedience school!"

Aurora looked up from her grains in horror. Mom-mouse choked on a sesame seed.

"I know the instructor, Mister Rat. He is very skilled at teaching discipline, conformity, and obedience. He's trained many creatures to stay in line and follow their leader."

"What's conformity?" Aurora squeaked in a trembling voice.

"That's when you behave like everybody else," her mother replied. "They say it's important to the proper functioning of the universe."

"You mean...The sun might not come up tomorrow if I don't do what all the other mice do?"

"Maybe..." said the Dad in a dramatic voice. He wiggled his whiskers for added emphasis.

"We have to do what mice have always done, otherwise we create chaos in the natural order of things."

Dad-mouse sat back, pleased with himself. He had always thought of himself as a really smart mouse.

"What's chaos?" asked Aurora, impressed with her Dad's knowledge of philosophy.

"Chaos is when nothing works the way your dad wants it to," her mother answered with a gleam in her eye.

"Right!" Dad-mouse agreed as he tossed a sunflower seed into his mouth.

Aurora was desperate. She had heard many terrible stories about Mister Rat. The neighborhood squirrels had warned her many times to stay away from all rats because they were mean and had no sense of humor. "It's probably because they've been forced to follow orders blindly. That will do it every time," Nuts the squirrel had told her.

"We're sending you to Mister Rat tomorrow!" Dad-mouse announced solemnly.

Aurora snapped out of her memories of the squirrels' wisdom and found her dad standing

over her. He looked angry.

"Where did you fly off to this time? Obedience school will cure you of that very quickly!"

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Aurora didn't sleep at all that night. She knew she could not have her dreams destroyed.

But what was a little field mouse to do when everyone around her said she was wrong? As she tossed and turned in her little room under the earth, she suddenly noticed a tiny ray of light coming through a hole in her ceiling. It was starlight! Without quite knowing why, she hurried out of the family home and hurried off into the silent meadow.

The dark sky was filled with sparkling stars. Aurora had never before seen so many shining lights illuminating the night. They filled her little mouse-heart with a strange joy, a joy that was full of hope. Somehow she knew that she would be allright and that her dreams would not be taken from her. It was as though she could hear in her heart a beautiful voice coming down from the stars saying: "Don't be afraid, Aurora. Your dreams will come true!"

When the first soft colors of the sun began to hide the stars from sight, Aurora headed down to the river. She came to the old bridge that crossed over the waters. It was known to all inhabitants of the meadow as "the bridge of no return" because it led to a town full of people who either hunted or caged up every sort of creature from the animal world, except for spiders.

Aurora had always been curious about things unknown and she had often imagined herself crossing that bridge. Everytime she gazed across it, the other side seemed to say to her: "Come on over...Come on over and see the big, wide world!" Dad-mouse had told her to never cross over that bridge. But as Aurora, wet with dew, shivered in the cold of the

dawn, she knew that the time had come to step into the Unknown. Life over there couldn't possibly be worse than obedience school.

Near the bridge, on the other side of river, stood an ancient barn where farmers put their hay for the winter. Aurora could smell the sweet aroma of the golden grass from where she stood. It was a friendly, welcoming scent. Without a second thought, she dashed across the forbidden bridge and hurried toward the barn. There was no turning back.

CHAPTER 2

SAGE THE CAT

It was a strange feeling to enter a land feared and unknown. But when Aurora hopped into the grass on the other side of the bridge, she found that it smelled just the same as in her meadow, and that the birds sang the same songs. Aurora hurried to the barn as fast as her mouse-feet could take her and jumped through an opening in the old wall. She landed on something soft. Soft and furry. Furry and breathing.

Before she could let out a squeek, two large paws held her in their grip. She looked up in terror and found herself staring into the face of a cat! It was the biggest cat she had ever seen, with whiskers three times the size of her whole body. Two vast green eyes looked down upon her with that steady, cool gaze which cats inherited from their cousins the lions and tigers -- a look which says: "I've got you now, and you're not getting away!" It was the worst mouse-nightmare come true. No rodent could have imagined a more terrifying sight.

Aurora was only inches from the cat's razor-sharp teeth. She wished she were back in her meadow, obeying her mom and dad and gathering grains like all the other mice. An old saying passed down through her family came back to her: "curiosity killed the cat."

Somehow, they had gotten that wrong because the cat was fine and curiosity was about to kill the mouse! Aurora closed her little mouse-eyes and said goodbye to her parents and the fish and the birds she loved so much.

"Are you cold?"

For a moment, Aurora thought she was dreaming again.

"Why are you shaking like that?"

She opened her eyes, afraid she might find herself already in the cat's tummy. The two large green eyes were looking at her with surprise. She noticed for the first time that there was something different about them, something that other cats' eyes didn't have--gentleness. The big, golden feline purred.

"I won't hurt you, little field mouse. I stopped chasing your relatives long ago."

"You did?" asked Aurora with uncertainty. "That's right. I just like to lay around most of the time now."

"What do you chase after?"

"My tail once in awhile, but that's strictly to get exercise."

Aurora was still unconvinced.

"Well what do you eat?"

"Purina." Aurora was horrified.

"What sort of animal is purina?"

The mellow cat smiled. Aurora have never seen a cat smile before. It was a rather strange

sight.

"That's what humans feed me when I meow under their windows. It takes a lot of meowing, but it's worth the effort. The stuff is delicious."

The large feline licked his chops in memory of a can of seafood gourmet he had recently been served. Aurora couldn't believe her eyes. She was witnessing the most frightening sight known to mice, and yet she knew that she was not in danger.

"Do you live around here?" asked the overweight cat.

"In the meadow across the bridge," answered Aurora, remembering at that moment that her mother had told her never to give her address to strangers.

"Oh, it's very pretty over there," said the cat. "If you ever need references on my character, there are lots of friends of Sage the cat across the river. Do you know my friend Heronimus the owl?"

"Why certainly. My parents ask for his advice all the time."

At the thought of her parents, the little mouse became very sad.

"What would they want to do that for?" asked Sage as he licked his paw even though it was perfectly clean.

"He knows everything, that's why."

The merry cat rolled over in the hay and stretched all four paws at once.

"That's a good one! The only thing ol' Heronimus knows is that he's an owl who doesn't know much."

"I thought owls were wise," said Aurora, suddenly disappointed.

"They're wise enough to know that they don't know. Me, on the other paw, I'm wise because I do know."

"What do you know?" wondered Aurora courageously.

"I know that you're a mouse who is running away from home."

Aurora was astonished.

"How...How do you know that?"

"Why do you think they call me Sage the Cat?" he replied, eyes twinkling with self-satisfaction. Aurora's little mouse-mind was really confused.

"But how could you know about me? We've never met!"

"Oh yes we have," mused Sage. "I've often seen you on the other side of the stream, studying the fish with rare interest. Rare for mice anyway."

"You've seen me before?"

Sage chewed on his paw playfully.

"Sure. I even crept through the grass once until I was right at the edge of the water and could have jumped right on top of you."

Aurora gasped.

"Good thing I don't eat mice anymore, eh?" Sage smiled another one of his bizarre smiles and proceeded to clean the tip of his long, fluffy tail.

"Gee," said Aurora. "I thought I was all alone."

"Just goes to show you. Don't ever feel too sure of yourself. You never know who might be watching." Sage the cat yawned. It was time for his tenth nap of the day.

"So why are you running away?" he asked as his eyelids closed.

"My mom and dad want to send me to obedience school so that I stop dreaming and start gathering grains for the family."

Sage opened one eye.

"Stop dreaming! What a terrible idea! If you don't dream, you can't discover the wonders of life!"

"Mice don't know much about wonder," Aurora stated sadly.

"Well, that's probably because we cats keep them on the run. You can't stop to smell the flowers when a big furry thing with sharp teeth is out to pounce on you." Sage rolled over on his back and let his paws hang pensively in the air. "The world can be a tough place to live in sometimes."

He placed his left paw over his nose and was about to fall asleep when Aurora hurried over and shouted in his ear.

"Don't leave me, I'm scared!"

Sage jumped three feet in the air.

"You musn't do that! We cats are jumpy." He looked at the little mouse shivering with fear and his sleepy heart filled with compassion.

"Would you like me to take you home?" he asked gently.

"No!" cried Aurora, horrified at the thought of being seen in the company of a mouse-eater. No one would ever, ever play with her again after that. Besides, she could not accept going to Mister Rat's obedience school and having her dreams taken away from her.

"Well, what do you want to do then?" inquired the friendly cat.

"I'd...I'd like to see the world."

Sage laid down on his big round purina-filled belly and placed his head on his paws. "That sounds nice. How do you plan on doing that?"

Aurora thought for a moment.

"I'll go that way," she answered and pointed toward the direction of the town. Sage sat up

and curled his tail around his legs.

"A little mouse like you wouldn't last an afternoon in town. There must be a thousand cats over there. And not one of them thinks like me when it comes to your species."

Aurora started to cry. She realized that the world was too big for such a tiny explorer as herself. Sage the cat approached her and caressed her with the side of his soft, warm fur coat.

"Please don't cry. I can't stand to see anything cry." Aurora was broken-hearted. Her mouse-tears streamed down her cheeks and across her whiskers. She was crying for all the painful things in her young mouse-life: for all the times the other mice-kids had made fun of her; for her mom and dad whom she missed but who didn't understand her; for the fish in her beloved stream who could swim wherever they wanted to.

"I haven't asked your name," purred Sage as he tried to appease her.

"Au..Au." She couldn't squeek through her tears.

"Au? That's an...interesting name."

Aurora started to laugh and cry at the same time.

"I've heard some strange names in my time, but that one wins the grand prize."

Aurora laughed out loud. "Aurora! Aurora's my name."

"Oh, Aurora...Well, that's a pretty name," said Sage as he caressed her with the tip of his ear. The little mouse's tears stopped. A rainbow glistened in her eyes as the sunshine of happiness returned. Aurora suddenly realized that she had found a true friend.

"You sure are a nice cat for being a cat."

"I think so too," purred Sage as he wrapped his tail around her. "I'll tell you what. How about if I go with you on your visit to the world? You could use a traveling companion with

my experience and wisdom."

"Would you go with me? Really?" Aurora was so thrilled that she hopped up and down in the hay.

"I've got no other major plans today. And I need the exercise. All this laying around in the sun has filled me out a bit." Aurora kissed Sage on the tip of his nose. It was perhaps the first time in history that a mouse had kissed a cat. But this was only the beginning of first-ever experiences for the new friends.

CHAPTER 3

A NIGHT ON THE TOWN

That very afternoon, Aurora the little field mouse and Sage the big fat cat headed down the road toward the town. It would be nearly sunset when they came upon its outskirts. The first new thing which the curious little mouse saw was a four wheel vehicle. Sage had warned her about those metal deathtraps but she couldn't have imagined their noise and smell! A red pickup truck came rushing down the country lane. As the roar of the engine echoed across the horizon, Aurora turned to Sage and asked:

"Is that your tummy growling?"

"Nope," answered Sage.

"I may be cutting back but not that drastically."

Before he could give a word of explanation, a cloud of smoke was heading toward them at full speed. Aurora was amazed by the sight.

"Is that the wind?" she wondered.

"That's a Chevy," the wise old cat responded. In an instant, they were covered with dust as the truck raced by. Aurora dashed into the grass to find a hole to hide in. Sage licked the dirt from his whiskers.

"Aurora, come out, come out wherever you are. The big bad truck has gone bybye."

Aurora poked her head out of a goffer's home. She returned to her friend's side, rather embarrassed.

"This new world is going to take some getting use to."

"Last chance to turn back," Sage suggested.

"No!" Aurora replied with determination. "Aren't you interested in seeing the world with me?"

Sage eyed a bluejay in a nearby tree, but resisted the temptation. "I've seen it," he answered in a bored tone of voice.

"Well, I for one am very excited about our trip."

"Good. Just don't complain when it gets rough."

Aurora looked up at Sage. "You won't hear a squeek from me. I'm a brave mou..." She suddenly disappeared into the weeds, searching for another hole to hide in. "Now what?" said Sage with a frustrated meow. At that moment, a large shadow glided over him as an airplane flew by heading upward into the sky.

"Haven't you ever seen one of those before?"

From the bushes came a meek squeek.

"No...No, I can't say that I have."

"Well, it's plane to see that you've got a lot of learning to do. Now stop jumping into other

creatures' homes every time you hear a new sound or we won't make it to town by nightfall."

"So?" asked Aurora as she came up to her friend.

"That's when the coyotes come out."

"Oh...And what do they do?"

"Before or after eating mice?"

Aurora suddenly quickened her pace. They came into town as the last colors of sunset faded over the mountains. Sage knew that the alley cats would not appreciate his philosophy concerning small rodents. So he came up with a plan to hide Aurora in his overabundant fur. The little mouse climbed onto his back and buried herself in the golden-white hair. Sage made his way toward the restaurant district which, as far as he was concerned, was the most interesting part of the town. As he came into the alley behind "Guido's Delights", a big black cat suddenly appeared before him.

"What are you doing in this part of town, Sage?"

"Hello, Claw," Sage responded coolly. "I'm looking for spicy meatballs this evening."

Claw was in no mood to make small talk. He was one of the toughest cats in the whole region. It was rumored that he had never lost a fight, not even with dogs.

"You know this is my territory!"

Sage had become acquainted with Claw when they were both very young and he knew how his cat-mind worked.

"I've heard there is a new family of mice in the neighborhood."

He felt a nervous twitch deep in his fur.

"What kind of mice?" asked Claw with sudden interest.

"The best -- field mice. They migrated from my barn."

Claw could hardly contain himself. "Where are they now?"

"Let me have some of Guido's meatballs and I'll tell you."

Claw was alley-wise and nobody's fool.

"Give me proof that you're telling the truth," he said suspiciously.

"Take a whiff," Sage stated with confidence. Claw sniffed around Sage's fur. Deep within the soft coat, Aurora felt the wind of Claw's breath rush over her head.

"You've been stuffing yourself with fresh field mice!" Claw observed jealously. "I hope you've left some for me."

"Plenty."

"Good. Then this is what I'll do for you. You can enter my territory and check out the trash cans until I return. But if you find any fish, save them for me."

Aurora cringed at the diet of this species which seemed to be exclusively made up of her acquaintances.

"You've got a deal," said Sage.

"So where are the juicy rodents?" Claw asked impatiently.

"You know the abandoned building on the waterfront? They're in the basement."

"But that's halfway across town!"

"It's worth the trip." Claw stretched his claws.

"Allright. But don't let any other cats into my domain."

"Of course not."

Claw took off like a bolt of lightning. Sage smiled to himself.

"I'm so smart! I'm so incredibly smart."

Aurora poked her head out from under the golden fur.

"So what now?" she asked, still trembling.

"Now we eat!" announced Sage with great anticipation.

"Hold on!" he added as he darted toward the trash cans at the back of the restaurant.

Aurora hopped off her friend as he began to rummage through the discarded delicacies.

She was amazed to see how Sage lost his feline dignity digging through the spaghetti and ravioli.

"This is the life!" Sage called out as he poked his head out of the trash can, a strand of linguini hanging over his ear. "Love that Alfredo sauce!" he added as he licked his dripping paw.

Aurora was rather disgusted. Cats had such a reputation for cleanliness and good taste, whereas her species were often considered dirty and unkempt. Sage dove back into the smorgasborg of entrees.

"I found them!" The shrill cry of victory echoed up from the can and across the dark alley.

Aurora would never have guessed that her newfound friend was capable of such uncontrolled glee. Sage re-appeared with the widest cat's grin ever grinned by a cat. His mouth was full of Guido's spicy meatballs. He jumped out and began devouring the goodies. Aurora stared at him, disappointed. After a moment, Sage looked up from his messy feast. "What?" he asked, disturbed by her glare.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" Aurora asked.

"No...Why?"

"All that fuss over meatballs!" Sage was insulted.

"Hey! Just be glad you're not the meatball!" Aurora let out a gasp and realized she was

overstepping her boundaries. She had forgotten a well-known fact of life: cats don't take criticism well. This unfortunate flaw in their character dated back to their ancestors, the lions and tigers. Once you've been king of the hill, it's hard to be anything less.

"Want some?" Sage offered the mouse a half-eaten meatball. Aurora backed away in horror. "Oh, I forgot." Sage went back to his frenzied eating. He should have remembered that Aurora was a vegetarian. They never touched anything that had once breathed. The meat-eaters had often pointed out to them that plants also breathe, but the rodents couldn't make the connection. It was a moral issue for them. Finally, Sage finished his dinner.

"Can we go now?" Aurora asked impatiently.

"Go? Are you kidding?" Sage laid down against the wall of the restaurant.

"I want to see the town," Aurora begged as she watched her companion sink into a digestion haze.

"We'll see it. Just let me have a little time to sleep this off."

Sage had barely finished his last statement when he started to snore. Aurora realized that she had no choice but to wait it out. She sat next to her friend and looked up at the stars. They were fainter than back home because of the city lights. But they were still twinkling, calling out to their number one fan. Aurora felt a great surge of joy rise in her little mouse-heart. The stars, a friend, and freedom...What more could she ask for? It was a dream come true! Her happy feeling was short-lived, however. A tin can suddenly bounced into the alley. Aurora jumped in terror. She could sense that someone was watching her, someone who wasn't friendly.

"Sage..." she whispered, "Sage, wake up!" The fat cat covered his face with his paw and kept right on snoring. Aurora cowered against her friend's warm fur. She looked up at the

darkness surrounding them. Nothing moved. The alley was absolute stillness. Only the stars glimmered in the sky. As Aurora stared at them in hopes that they would appease her terror, she suddenly realized that two of the stars didn't look right. They didn't look right because they were looking...looking right at her. Those two stars were two eyes. Two feline eyes! Aurora tried to squeek, but no sound came out. Terror had frozen her vocal chords. A shadow moved slowly along the jagged edge of a fence across the alley. There was no mistaking that movement -- it was the ritual of a cat about to pounce. Aurora grabbed Sage's fur and pulled with all her might, but her friend only let out a loud snore. She could now see a twinkle of glee in the glistening eyes perched on the fence. The cat could already taste its prey. Aurora looked up at the stars in desperation.

How she wished she had never left her beloved meadow and its quiet little river! How she wished her parents could have understood her better so she would never have thought of crossing the bridge! The stars shimmered in the night sky as though singing a silent melody for her alone. Suddenly, Aurora heard the cat leap from the fence. She closed her little mouse eyes. The next thing she knew, she was surrounded by a whirlwind of fur and the shriek of fighting cats. Sage the big fat cat was knocking the Alfredo sauce out of the would-be mouse eater. In the flash of an instant, he had jumped from his curled-up position to wrestle his adversary to the ground. The intruder pulled himself free from the big cat's grip and dashed off as fast as his legs could take him, leaving a trail of fur behind him. Sage licked his whiskers.

"You saved my life, Sage," Aurora whispered as she trembled like a leaf in a winter storm.

"I thought it was all over for me."

Sage swaggered over to her, unable to hide his masculine pride. "Didn't think I had it in

me, did you?"

"How did you manage to wake up in time?" "We cats can hear in our sleep." "You mean, you knew he was going to attack?"

"Sure." Sage curled himself up again and proceeded to clean his paws. Aurora looked at him angrily.

"Are you telling me that you heard me when I called for your help?"

"Yeap," Sage answered with a knowing smile. Aurora suddenly swung her tail around and wacked him on the nose. "Ouch! What did you do that for?" Sage cried out as he rubbed his nose.

"Did you enjoy seeing me scared to death? Was that a lot of fun for you?" Sage sat up and caressed Aurora's mouse head.

"I wanted you to learn a lesson, Aurora. The big city is not a place for a little field mouse. There are hundreds of creatures here who would gobble you up as an appetizer without a second thought. And if they don't get you, the humans will. Have you every seen how some of them react to mice? They're downright hysterical!"

Aurora regretted having tailwhipped her savior. She approached him shyly and kissed him on his red nose. "You're my hero, Sage."

"Aw, shucks," said the cat as he swelled with pride. The two friends hugged.

"So what do we do now?" Aurora asked.

"Let's get out of here before that tomcat comes back with his friends. If word gets out that there is a mouse fresh from the fields in town, I won't be able to fight them all off." Aurora started rushing away, but her little feet only raised dust around her. Sage was stepping on her tail

"Not so fast. Where are you planning on running to?"

"We mice never think of that. We just run."

"No wonder your species never got anywhere in world. You've got to think before you act. That's a basic law of survival." Aurora concentrated very hard. Sage watched her strain her brain as best as she could.

"Okay, I've thought," Aurora finally announced. "Great. And what have you come up with?" "There's only one thing to do. Run!" Again, she took off at full speed and found herself running in place.

"Let me do the thinking," Sage suggested. "Let's go due East."

"Why?" wondered Aurora. "Because the city cats won't follow us that way."

"Oh...Why not?" Aurora asked, suddenly worried.

"That's where the desert begins. Cats don't like deserts."

"I see," said Aurora, nodding her head as she tried to follow Sage's logic. "Will we like the desert?"

"Not particularly. But I know a safe place out there. Follow me."

And with that, Sage hurried off into the night. Aurora dashed after him, grabbed on to his furry tail, and held as tight as she could. The little mouse was in for the trip of her life.

CHAPTER 4

OUT THERE SOMEWHERE

It wasn't long before the two companions were utterly exhausted and lost. Sage was still

trying to keep up a brave front, pretending he knew what he was doing and where he was going. However, Aurora wasn't buying it anymore.

"So how much farther is it now?" she asked sarcastically.

"Just around the corner," Sage replied calmly.

"There are no corners in the desert! Even mice know that. So what's the story, buddy? Are we lost or what?"

"Well, I'd say that was a pretty good guess."

"Great! You save my life so that I can enjoy a slower death in the middle of nowhere!"

"Would you rather go out with a bang?"

"I started on this journey fully expecting to enjoy a long and happy life." "We all do," responded the wise old cat.

They wandered in the blackness of the night, stumbling over sagebrush and Sage's weary tail. Just as Aurora was about to collapse from, Sage pointed to a huge silhouette in the distance. "That's it! That's it!" He picked up his little friend and tossed her on his back.

"Hang on, Aurora, you're going to love your new home!" Aurora clung to Sage's fur with her last ounce of strength as they hurried across the sea of sand. She was beginning to wonder if Mister Rat's obedience school wasn't a better deal after all.

By the time Sage reached the giant silhouette, Aurora had fallen asleep still clinging to her friend's coat. He quietly entered the great empty building and searched for a cozy place. Sage nestled in a corner and stretched his weary paws. In the deep silence, he could hear the soft mouse snores of his sweet little friend.

"I'll never let any harm come to you, Aurora," he whispered. "Never." With that, he fell into a deep well-deserved sleep.

* * *

An incredibly loud noise, the loudest they had ever heard, awoke the two friends. Within moments, their shelter began to shake and rattle and shake some more. In utter panick, they jumped up and started running. Smoke began to fill the air, blinding them.

"Where are you, Sage? I can't see you!" cried Aurora as she ran in circles, totally confused.

"Over here! I found the way out!" Aurora tried to follow the sound of Sage's voice, but kept running into the walls of the narrow space.

What kind of a building is this?" she called out as she tried to make her way through the smoke. "I don't think it's a building at all!" Sage answered.

"Hurry!" The noise reached a roaring pitch and the place shook like the top of a volcano about to explode.

"I can't wait any longer, Aurora!" Sage shouted. "We've got to get out of here! I think this place is going somewhere!"

Sage jumped from the opening he had found and landed on what felt like a fireplace. He dashed away as fast as his overheated paws could take him. He turned around in time to see the giant building rise into the sky on a huge cloud of smoke. It rose higher and higher, beyond the furthest cloud and soon was just a tiny spot in the vast blue space.

"Aurora!" Sage moaned. He licked his smoking tail as a cat tear fell from his large green eyes. The smoke cleared and Aurora began to see where she was. All that she could tell at first was that it was definitely not a place where a mouse should be. She scurried through the small metal room toward a ray of light cutting through the smoke. It was coming from a little window. Aurora hopped up on a large bolt and peered out. What she saw had never been seen by any mouse before. In fact, it had never even been imagined! She was looking

down at a large blueish ball which she instinctively took a liking to. It was a beautiful sight, colored by browns and greens and white splotches. It looked so peaceful as it slowly turned in a circle like a tired old dancer. Aurora was looking at planet Earth!

"Sage? Are you there?" There was no answer. All she could hear was the hum of the rocket engines as they sped her at supersonic speed into outer space. Aurora watched Earth become smaller and smaller as she raced away from it. She knew that her meadow and its gentle river were down there somewhere, wondering where their friend had gone. It must be especially nice there right now, she thought to herself. Dawn was her favorite time, when the birds sang their morning tunes and the air was cool. All of a sudden, a golden disk rose behind the planet and spread its glowing rays out across space. The light curved across the top of Earth, like a mother's hand caressing her baby's soft head. Aurora felt a similar warmth rise in her. Even though the light was blinding, she kept her eyes open in amazement.

She knew this was the closest she would ever get to a star. And what a star! The life-giving powers of the sun melted her fears away as she accepted her fate. If she was to become the first mouse in outer space, so be it! Surely, no other mouse could possibly love the stars more than she did. Her impossible wish had come true after all! She was out among her dearest friends. As she marveled at the sight, her mouse intuition suddenly told her that someone else was in the cabin. She looked around. There was no one there. That is, not at first glance.

"Howdy!"

Aurora looked around again. This time, she spotted a spot in the far corner of the room.

"Howdy!"

Aurora wanted to run but there was nowhere to run to. She remembered Sage's advice -- think before you run like crazy. So she tried it. A thought came to her mouse mind: how could she be afraid of a spot, even if it was a talking spot?

"Hi..." she said hesitatingly.

"Who are you?" Aurora asked as she approached it. At closer range, the spot looked more like a ladybug of sorts. Except that it was green and had three antennas, one of them twice as big as its whole body.

"I've never seen a bug like you before," she stated in a friendly voice, happy to find someone, or something, to talk to.

"I know that," replied the spot/bug. Its longest antenna wiggled as it laughed. "I'm not from your neck of the woods."

"Are you a city bug?" Aurora asked naively.

"Well, in a way." "I just visited a city. I didn't like it much."

"Oh? Why is that?"

"It's noisy, dirty, and scary."

"Interesting," responded the curious creature.

"What else can you tell me about it?"

"You should know more about it than I do," Aurora stated.

"Not really," answered the bug. "By the way, you're not a human, are you?"

"Well, of course not, don't be ridiculous!" Aurora was beginning to get suspicious.

"That's good. I just can't seem to communicate with those humans without being shot at or analyzed by their silly little computers."

"Where are you from...exactly?" Aurora asked, not sure she wanted to know.

"Are you familiar with the Sirius constellation?"

"Well, my parents always told me I was too serious." The large antenna shook with laughter.

"I'm talking about another solar system. You know, way out there somewhere."

"You mean...You're an alien lifeform?" asked Aurora, suddenly frightened again.

"Not in my country, I'm not. Where I live, they call me Elroy Z-30. But Earth creatures call me "Weird Green Thing." Aurora rushed to the other side of the room.

"What are you doing here?" she asked in a trembling voice. "I'm on an expedition. I'm the curious sort, you know." The bug from outer space moved toward Aurora. His strange waddling reminded her of an old duck she once knew.

Don't look at me so funny," said the alien, a little embarrassed. "I can't get use to your gravity problems."

"I'm not that serious," stated Aurora, insulted.

"Never mind. So what's your name and code of origin?"

"Aurora. I'm a field mouse."

"How interesting. What do field mice do when they're not traveling on a rocketship?"

"They sit around and eat cheese."

"Aha. Why do they eat cheese?"

"Because it tastes good."

"Allright, I'll buy that."

"What do you eat?" inquired Aurora in turn.

"I eat star dust, either sauteed or cooked medium well."

"Star dust?" Aurora was amazed.

"Yes. It's okay. But after awhile, it loses its flavor."

"Can I try some?"

"Sure. If you come to my home, you can eat as much as you want. And I'll introduce you to my family. I have a hundred and sixty sisters and three brothers." Aurora wasn't afraid anymore. She could feel that Elroy Z-30 was a nice creature.

"Say, maybe you can help me out," said the alien bug.

"I'd be glad to," answered Aurora. "These humans on the ship can't seem to understand that we are harmless curiosity seekers. I'm just here to study them."

"What humans?" asked Aurora, suddenly worried again.

"The ones in the funny suits who drive this old piece of junk."

Aurora started running around in circles, terrified.

"You sure are a jumpy species," observed Elroy Z-30. Suddenly, the door to the little cabin burst open. An astronaut entered the room. "There's one!" he shouted as he pointed to the curious bug. Another astronaut appeared behind him. "That's one of those little weird green things alright!"

They pulled out their weapons. Aurora suddenly rushed in front of her newfound friend. Never before had she experienced such a burst of courage. However, it did strike her that she hadn't really followed Sage's wise advice on this one.

"Hey, that's a mouse!" "It's protecting the alien!" The first astronaut aimed his weapon.

"Don't shoot the mouse, Frank!"

"Those little weird green things might destroy the world, Andy. We've got to get rid of them." Elroy Z-30 whispered to the courageous mouse.

"If they shoot me, my friends will blow up your planet. We're a close family."

"I won't let them shoot you!" Aurora squeaked. The astronauts looked at each other, astounded.

"That mouse is communicating with the alien!"

"Maybe it can save our mission!" Soon, the astronauts were in touch with their command center back on Earth. A picture of Aurora the mouse flickered on five giant screens. Next to her was a wiggling antenna. Elroy Z-30 was really happy. A loud uproar exploded among the scientists and generals in the command center. Within moments the state of full alert was called off around the world. The alien invasion was no longer a threat thanks to a little field mouse. In the alley behind the command center, a golden-colored fat cat hurried to the window. Sage purred like no cat had ever purred before when he saw the picture of his dear friend on the screen waving sweetly.

CHAPTER 5

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Aurora was treated to a national hero's homecoming. A great parade was scheduled in the city just for her. She had said her farewells to Elroy Z-30 on board the rocketship because his leaders had ordered him to return at once and stop causing all this commotion just to satisfy his overabundant curiosity. But the little green bug from outer space had promised his new friend that he would never forget her and would be sure to call on her if he was ever coming through this solar system again.

Aurora asked Sage to join her on her victory parade. The whole world was amazed to see

that a mouse and a cat could be best of friends. Enemies in every country got together and made up, figuring that if a cat and a mouse could get along, so could they! Soon, Aurora and Sage were taken back to her beloved meadow. They arrived in a shiny limousine.

Mom-mouse and Dad-mouse were bursting with pride and anxiously waiting for her on the far end of the bridge.

No one had every been hugged as much as Aurora when she leaped into their arms. As for Sage, the mouse community was a little worried about him at first, but they quickly adopted him as an honorary rodent lover. Sage the cat was welcomed to lay under the shady trees of the meadow with a firm guarantee that no smart aleck goffer would disturb him. They even introduced him to various vegetarian taste thrills.

As for Aurora, she was officially allowed to daydream down by the river whenever she felt like it. No one would ever again make fun of her love affair with the stars.

THE END