

## **Anon E. Mouse**

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{We move quietly across the dark wooden floor. In the corner of this country kitchen sits a gray shoe box. The kitchen is dark, except for the soft yellow glow shinning out a hole in the end of this small box. There is an electric cord running across the floor to the box and the small light bulb inside. As we move closer and look inside, we see an elderly mouse sitting on a small hand carved wooden chair with a small book and walking cane in his lap. A tiny young mouse is curled up at his feet, listening to his grandpa.}

Anon Edward Mouse is the name my mother gave to me. But everyone just called me Anon E. Mouse. I grew up right here on this small farm. But I moved to the city once, for the excitement and the bright lights.

You see when the sun goes down on the farm, there is not much light to see by. The farmer goes to bed early and I have always had night vision problems. I snuck into his truck one day a long, long time ago, and rode all the way to town. I am telling you this son, so that you will understand, that sometimes what we think we want, is not what we need.

I was a much younger mouse then, full of dreams and wonderment. The world is a very big place. And there I was, stuck on this farm. I had heard tell that the lights in the city never went out. I had to see this for myself. So there I was, holding on for dear life under the farmer's truck. The rubber tires fired gravel rocks in all directions until we were finally on the blacktop. Then, it was all I could do to just hold on. The wind was fearsome under that truck.

I did manage to hold on, as you might guess sitting there listening to me, and I made it all the way to town. When the farmer stopped I jumped out from under the truck and ran as fast as I could. I saw a huge green metal container and I ran under it. It was wet and sticky under that big box, and an awful smelling liquid was dripping out of a small rusty hole.

I hid under that big box for a long time, waiting for things to calm down a bit. You see, I wasn't use to all the noises and people and cars. Let me tell you, town is a busy place. But they were right. When the sun went down, all the street lights and all the building lights lit up the place like nothing I had ever seen.

The building behind the big green box was locked tight. I tried for what seemed like hours to get in, but there were no holes, and the doors were all tightly shut. As I was walking around this building, I saw a calico cat, and he saw me just about the same time. Well, let me tell you son, I was a fast mouse that night. I ran back to the only safe place that I knew... yep, you guessed it... the big green box and the rusty hole.

I just made it through that hole and pulled my tail in when a white paw came through and started feeling around for me. HA! That poor old cat got that stinky sticky slimy stuff all over his pretty white paw. I wiggled my tail over the top of his hair, just to tease him. It sure made him mad. He finally left me alone in that big dark box.

“But grandpa, weren’t you afraid that he would catch your tail and pull you out of the hole?” the young mouse asked.

“Naaa, I was just playing with him.” he continued.

The only light was coming in from that little rusty hole, and that wasn’t much. It was enough for me to see my surroundings though. It wasn’t a very clean place, this box, and it sure didn’t fulfill my expectations of city life. I just knew that there must be something better than this box.

Late that night, when all was quiet, I peeped out of the hole. All was clear, so it was time to go exploring. I ran over to some grass and I rubbed all the stinky sticky slimy stuff off of me. Let me tell you that was no easy chore. I was getting hungry, and I noticed that there were a lot of crickets under the street lights. Son, crickets are not the easiest meal to catch. I managed to catch one though, and just as I was about to take a big bite, a pair of bright lights appeared right out of nowhere. I never heard that car until it was almost on top of me. Whew, was that ever a shock.

Cricket catching is tuff enough without having to worry about getting run over by a car. I decided to try one of the houses, and get off of the main street. I hurried along the concrete walk until I saw a house that looked promising. It was just a little run down, so I figured that there must be a way in, there was. But what I found was a house full of cats. Thank goodness they didn’t see me or hear me as I jumped down from that open window. I quietly tiptoed back to the sidewalk, looking over my shoulder every other step I took. I’ll tell you sonny boy, city life ain’t as glamorous as it sounds sometimes.

I ran down that street until I was out of breath. When I stopped, I leaned up against a tire on one of the cars parked in the street. I panted hard trying to catch my breath. That’s when I met Marty Mouse. Smarty Marty he called himself. He said that it suited him just fine, because he was smart enough to still be alive.

Now Marty was a thin mouse, long and lanky, and he had a bent tail from a close encounter with a certain calico cat. He lived under a building where the cars park, and he invited me to his home. We walked along the driveway that led to the garage behind the house. I wouldn’t call it grand, but it was cozy and dry. I noticed that Marty coughed a lot. I didn’t think much of it at the time.

Marty shared what little food he had with me, and I settled in nicely in Marty’s mouse house.

“Do you want some more?”

“No, I’m stuffed!” I said.

I lied. Marty didn't have much to share, but he shared it freely. I felt bad about taking those few crumbs he gave me, and vowed to fill his house with the most delicious scraps I could find. I curled up in a corner and went to sleep with a growling tummy.

I slept nicely until a loud rumbling above us woke me up. The people were leaving in their car. Marty was already awake and ready to go to the alley and scrounge for scraps for breakfast. I yawned and followed him out into the bright morning sun light.

"Where're we going, Marty?"

"To the alley. There are cans all up and down, and some are just full of good stuff to eat."

He stopped and stuck his head under the gap below the white wooden fence.

"Ya gotta be careful here, there's a calico tom cat that loves to catch guys like us. Caligula is not a nice kitty... he likes to play with those unfortunate victims with his sharp claws."

"I had a run in with a calico when I got here. He chased me but I got up into this green box by the store across the road."

"That was probably h..[cough, cough.. hark-tuie] probably him."

"Are you ok?"

"Yeah, this darn cough. I can't seem to get rid of it. Listen, about that green box..."

"Yes?"

"There is a big truck that comes twice a week and pick's up that box and dumps it inside some kind of huge container it carries. You do NOT want to be inside when the truck comes."

"Really?"

"Yeah, REALLY! Look, a friend of mine was in there, I jumped out when it grabbed the box, but poor Jo-Jo got thrown in the back of that big truck. I watched from the corner of the store as the door closed and began squishing the garbage together. I never saw Jo-Jo again."

"Wow! I'll try and remember that!"

The coast was clear, so we crept out into the alley and headed for the first can. About half way to it Marty stopped and looked around.

"Ya can't be too careful Anon, just remember that."

"I will."

“They don’t call me Smarty Marty for nothin ya know.”

“Yeah, I’m beginning to see what you mean. I’m glad I met you.”

“Not a [cough, cough.. hark-tuie], dang cough, gonna get me killed. Not a problem.”

“Is there any thing I can do Marty?”

“Yeah, don’t let Cali catch ya!”

We scurried up the wooden fence behind the can and jumped. The can was almost full of trash. When we landed, Marty stood up and looked over the edge out into the alley.

“You can never be too careful, Anon.” Marty said as he stood on the edge of a milk carton. “Just remember before you start looking for something to eat, check and make sure there ain’t nobody watchin. And it’s a good idea to stop and check in between bites too!”

“I’ll remember Marty.”

So there we were, digging through the trash. It’s amazing what people throw away, son. You can make a pretty good living off of stuff that’s been thrown away. Well, I learned a lot from ol’ Marty in that alley behind his house. One of the most important things, I guess, was to always pay attention to what’s going on around you.

“Let’s see now, where was I? Oh! I remember. Do you need a pillow or something?”

“No grandpa, I’m fine. You and Mr. Marty were in the trash can.”

“Ah, right you are sonny boy.”

So there we were digging in the trash. We found all we could in that can and moved on to the next one. Some of the cans were shiny and had their lids on tight. And some didn’t have lids at all. You had to be very careful though. If you found a can that was almost empty, Marty said to pass it by. Nothing is worse than getting trapped in a can, with no way out.

We made it to the end of the alley, and across that busy street where the crickets were was the grocery store and that big green trash box. The cars were rushing by and I could feel the wind moving my whiskers.

“Lets go back Marty. All these cars are scaring me.”

“Yeah, right you are. Night time is best, when there aren’t so many. I wanted to show you around back of the store where they dump the meat scraps.”

“Another time Marty, come on, let’s go.”

We scurried back up the alley to the hole in the fence at Martys house.

“I think I need a nap.” Marty said as he squeezed under the fence.

Then he started coughing again. He coughed so hard I thought he was going to turn inside out. But he didn’t, and I helped him into his house and put him in his bed.

“Will you be ok?”

“Sure... you go on and have some fun exploring. I’ll be fine. I just need to rest.”

“Ok, I’ll be back and check on you Marty... you have a good nap.”

Marty didn’t say any more, he just rolled over and curled his tail and drifted off to sleep. I watched him for a moment, wondering what, if anything, I could do to help him. I had never seen any one cough so hard. He was resting peacefully so I left him to explore my new surroundings.

I peeped out from under the fence into the alley. All was quiet as the mid afternoon sun painted the warm alley in a golden glow. I headed up the alley away from the busy street and store. There were lots of cans on either side, but since my tummy was full, there was no need to check them out.

At the end, was another street. I looked across it to see a huge house on the left side of the alley. I looked both ways down the street and ran as fast as I could to a bush at the back corner of the big red brick house. I climbed up through the thorny limbs and looked out at the big back yard.

In the middle, was a fountain with a statue holding some sort of pitcher with water coming out and splashing down into a pool. Birds were splashing around and drinking and tipping their heads back and looking up. I looked up to see what they were looking at. Nothing but blue sky and a few puffy white clouds.

Then I saw him. Caligula stretched out on the back porch, watching the birds. So this was his home. What a grand place for such a mean cat. He hadn’t seen me, so I backed down the bush and headed back to check on Marty.

When I got to the other side of the street, I looked back. I could see just a hint of orange through the bushes. He was still watching the birds. I squeezed under the fence and ran to Marty’s door. He was still asleep. The excitement of my little adventure, and the sound of Marty softly snoring made me want to take a nap too. I curled up in my little corner and closed my eyes.

I began to dream of being chased by a hundred calico cats. Every where I ran, another one was waiting to pounce on me. Somehow I always managed to escape. Then I was trapped inside one of those old fashioned sewing machines in the middle of a street, with Caligula reaching up inside trying to grab me.

It just so happened that there was a shiny needle next to me inside that sewing machine, and I picked it up. It was perfect. I picked it up and poked the white paw feeling around for me. He let out a loud scream and then I heard a low growl. I waited. Then I was falling toward Caligula's open mouth and sharp claws...

"Hey there sleepy mouse! I'm hungry. Wake up!"

"Huh, whaa..."

"You were dreaming. Rather loudly I might add. Are you hungry?"

"Uh, yeah, I could be. Did I wake you up Marty?"

"Naaa... I finished my nap. I feel a lot better. Are you hungry?"

"Yeah, let's go."

It was dark now, but with all the lights on the houses and in the streets you could see enough to get around without having to use your whiskers. Marty headed down the alley toward the store across the street.

"Look very carefully at the lights. If they are moving, it's a car, and we should wait."

"Are we going to the store Marty?"

"Yep. I wanted to show you where the meat scraps are, around back."

He looked both ways down the street.

"GO!"

Marty charged across the street, and I was right on his tail.