

#1 Maxwell Mouse was scampering along through the forest one afternoon on his way to his friend Mortimer Mouse's tree hole for a cup of tea and some friendly discussion. He had slept well the night before and awakened early, read the paper, and busied himself with all the chores a mouse must do. After he had finished everything and taken a moment to admire a job well done, he decided he was in the mood for a stroll and called his friend Mortimer to ask if he would mind a little company. Mortimer, being an accommodating sort and eager for some company himself, said that it would be a lovely idea and he would eagerly await his arrival.

#2 It was a beautiful day in the forest and Maxwell had no reason to think that anything out of the ordinary would befall him, so he wasn't paying as much attention to his surroundings as might have been considered wise. He was concentrating more on the satisfying coolness of the forest and the anticipation of a lively conversation, so he never heard the cracking of the tree limb just above him. Had he heard it in time there is no doubt he would have had the agility and presence of mind to immediately scamper out of harms way or leap to one side or another, but as it happened, he did neither, and the great limb broke loose and crashed down on him before he realized what had happened.

#3 After he regained consciousness, he surveyed the situation. He was, it should be noted by the reader, in a most difficult situation. The limb, while it avoided crushing him altogether had the lower half of his tiny body pinned so tightly to the ground that there was no hope for escape without assistance. He wasn't in unbearable pain and took courage in the idea that the forest path was well traveled and it probably wouldn't be too terribly long before help arrived.

#4 Sure enough, almost as soon as the thought had left his brain he saw a Macaw peck-ing along the path looking for bugs to eat.

"I say there," managed Maxwell, "I was wondering if you might help me out of this awkward predicament I find myself in." To Max's utter surprise, the beautiful bird flipped his tail, flapped his wings mightily in an effort to fly past him and continued on his way as though he had not even noticed the dire situation that had befallen our friend the mouse.

Maxwell was stunned. "Perhaps he didn't hear me." He thought to himself. "Surely someone else will come along soon and I will speak louder."

#5 It wasn't long before a mole scuttled into view. Maxwell mustered all the strength he could and called out as loudly as possible, "I say there, dear mole, might it be possible for you to assist me in my release from the unfortunate grip of this limb?"

The mole gave him a blank stare, as if it might never have occurred to him to help if he hadn't been asked, and drawled, "Uh, I really don't have much to do with mice, you know," and before Maxwell could recover from the shock the mole had disappeared into the underbrush.

#6 Things were getting desperate. Maxwell's strength was slowly leaving him and it was beginning to get dark. Who would be able to see a tiny mouse trapped under a tree branch in the pitch dark, he worried?

Just then he heard what he was sure was his friend Mortimer singing a forest tune and his heart fairly jumped with relief. "Mortimer, is that you?" he called, "Oh thank goodness you have arrived upon this dismal scene, for now I shall be freed!"

#7 It is with great distress that I must inform the reader of the unfortunate turn of events. For while one might easily assume that a friend would never abandon a friend in dire need, I regret to have to tell you that that is exactly what happened.

As soon as Mortimer saw the situation he began to sputter and stammer his excuses so rapidly that had you been there listening to them yourself you would certainly have lost count just as surely as did poor Maxwell.

He was as sad as he was stunned. He could scarcely believe what his own eyes and ears had just told him was true. His friend had abandoned him.

#8 The sunlight had completely disappeared, and with it Maxwell's hope of rescue. He was ready to accept his fate.

What happened next should not be read by young children, for the fright of it was almost too much for the mouse himself. There, just in front of him, as if by magic, were the biggest, yellowest, pair of cat's eyes he had ever seen in his entire short life. And attached to them was the biggest, meanest tomcat you could possibly imagine! As if being trapped by a branch and abandoned by his friends weren't enough he was about to be eaten alive by every mouse's sworn mortal enemy. He squeezed his eyes shut and waited for the pounce.

#9 A moment later, after nothing had happened, he slowly opened one eye to see if by some miracle the cat had slipped on past without noticing him trapped and vulnerable. His heart rose in his throat as he peered directly into the cat's eyes. Maxwell was too terrified to speak or he would have shouted, "Just make it quick! Don't let me suffer anymore."

Then, to his utter amazement, and to yours as well, I assume, the cat wedged his body against the branch and pushing gently and oh, so carefully as to not inflict greater harm, lifted the branch off Maxwell.

#10 "Oh! He wants all of me!" thought the mouse. But instead of making a meal of him the cat began to lick his wounds. He purred a soft song of comfort and warmed him with his breath. He stayed with him all through the night and in the morning brought him fresh water to drink. He took the mouse home with him and nursed him until he was strong and feisty again.

"How can I ever repay you?" asked Maxwell the day he was well enough to return to his own home.

"Why," the cat purred, "You can repay me when you find someone in need of help and help them. It is what we should *all* try to do for one another."