

THE MOUSE RESCUE

By Emily Cameron April 2, 2010

Nibbles blinked in the dim daylight and glanced up at the sun which was peeking shyly through the clouds. He wiped a drop of sweat from his forehead with the back of his paw and gently pushed his nose into the damp dirt, searching hopefully for food. Nibbles lived on a large farm in a tiny hole in the ground with his older brother, John, his two younger sisters, Maria and Annie, and his mother and father. They were usually cheerful but always hurried. Winter was creeping nearer, and food had to be gathered before the cold season came. The children weren't allowed to sit back and relax—they had to look for things that were edible as well as their parents. Everybody was now dashing around faster than usual so they could get more food before the other little rodents did. Only Nibbles didn't approve of all this.

He thought it was silly to run about everywhere and just end up making a huge mess with all that skidding and scurrying, for the mice always knocked down furniture when they rushed. They already had all the food they needed, which Nibbles had stolen from one of the farmer's vegetable gardens. They didn't need any more than that. And each mouse just ate three tiny crumbs of food every day. If they collected any more, tons would be left over, and was probably already going rotten.

After winter came, it would be too cold to look for things to eat, so the mice had to stay in their homes with enough food to last the whole season. And that, Nibbles thought, was not fun.

Not that Nibbles didn't like to eat, because he did. He just didn't like to work all day and then find out that after all he had done the food was wasted and not edible anymore. It frustrated him when he saw all the food he had collected being dumped right into the garbage bin. After all his effort of stealing and looting! Nibbles could almost imagine a large pile of bread crumbs and cheese sitting there in the trashcan, wasted.

Even on rainy Saturdays Nibbles and his siblings had to work, searching for leftover or dropped food. Sometimes all the things Nibbles found were covered in mud and dirt, which didn't taste good.

The days were boring and full of work. And they were working in the

cold, sometime even working in the rain! It was like standing outside having continuous buckets of water being poured onto your head, and trying to look for food at the same time. Nibbles had had enough.

The tiny mouse thought about all this as he worked, finding a lump of moldy green cheese, two pieces of soggy bread, a floppy banana peel (great for licking), and several hard grains of rice. "I don't think Mother will like this garbage, but at least I got something," Nibbles thought grimly as he scanned the farmland around him to check if there was anything else he hadn't seen that could be eaten.

Just as the mouse was munching on a piece of dried grass on the ground, a large drop of water fell onto his head. Then another. Nibbles scowled at the sky overhead. It was raining. He had better get going so his food wouldn't get wet.

Nibbles started to sprint down a rocky dirt road, gracefully leaping over towering weeds and avoiding thorny wild rosebushes. It was getting dark now. The trees cast eerie shadows on the ground as they shook violently in the wind. There was no moon in the sky, only bolts of lightning zigzagging around like snakes.

Nibbles was so terrified that he didn't notice the large rock ahead of him. With a scream, he tripped on it and felt a searing pain in his left foot. He fell down onto the ground and lay sprawled there, unmoving.

The pain in his left foot was so intense that the mouse couldn't walk anymore. He had fallen into a puddle and was now soaking wet, but all he cared about now was his foot. Nibbles took off his worn-out sneakers carefully and looked at his foot. The big toe was covered with blood. He had broken it.

"Ooh, it hurts!" wailed Nibbles, and he started to cry.

It was so dark now that Nibbles couldn't see a thing. He couldn't get up because his toe was too badly hurt. And he couldn't find his way home in all this darkness. He would have to spend the night here.

Nibbles couldn't sleep that night. He was too worried. Would his family ever find him? How many days would it take for his toe to heal? The mouse glanced at his foot, which was resting on a pile of dead leaves he had managed to gather. The leaves were stained with blood from

Nibbles' injured toe. The rain had stopped, and the night was steady and quiet.

In a few hours, the blood on Nibbles' toe had dried. When the mouse sat up and looked at it, he could see something white sticking out. Nibbles gasped. It was a bone.

Nibbles had heard of broken legs, broken arms, broken necks, and broken toes, but he had never thought it would look quite as horrific as this. Sure, there would be a bit of blood, but he had never thought a bone would be poking out. Nibbles touched it gently, his fingertips brushing the bone, and almost instantly he pulled it back—he had felt a searing pain, a pain that he had never experienced before and did not want to experience again. He groaned loudly and tried to make himself comfortable on the rough ground.

And the whole night no mouse or any other rodent came to rescue him. Nibbles awoke early in the morning the next day. He gazed up at the sky for a few minutes, hoping that he had just been dreaming about breaking his toe. But his left foot was painful, and he finally had to admit it really hadn't been a dream. Nibbles blinked back the tears—his toe seemed somewhat more painful than it had been last night.

Nibbles rubbed his eyes and started to yell, "Help me! Help! I'm hurt! Somebody, please, help me!"

The mouse waited hopefully, and suddenly a sweet, squeaky voice called, "I'm coming! Just hang on and I'll be there in a minute! Please wait!" The voice was unfamiliar. Nibbles was sure it belonged to a mouse, and it was of course a girl's voice. She sounded quite young, about Nibbles' age.

There was a loud crash. "Ouch! I tripped on a rock!" the voice shouted.

Nibbles let out a whoop of joy. At last, someone to rescue him! Then the excitement drained out of Nibbles. How was a young mouse going to pick him up and carry him home?

Just then a small, pretty mouse appeared a few inches away from Nibbles. A pink bow was tied around her right ear. She was wearing a lacy purple dress, tight black shoes, and a pearl necklace. Nibbles' jaw

dropped. She was *beautiful*.

"What's wrong?" she asked anxiously. "Oh, how rude of me, I forgot to tell you my name! It's Constance, what's yours?" She smiled quickly and stepped closer to Nibbles.

"Um—hi, I'm Nibbles," muttered the injured mouse embarrassedly. He didn't grin back at Constance. "I broke my toe, and I can't walk. Can you help me?"

"Sure, yes, I will," said Constance hurriedly. "We must be quick. My mother doesn't like to find me out of bed so early. I got out of bed as soon as I heard you shouting." She talked very fast, merely glancing at Nibbles' broken toe. Nibbles had expected her to gasp when she saw the blood.

Constance grabbed a bunch of twigs nearby and put them together, so that they were all lined up. She seized a long green leaf and tied it around the twigs. She collected more of the long leaves and tied them around the twigs again until it was strong and sturdy. She found another long leaf and tied one end around a twig in the middle. *A sled!* thought Nibbles.

Nibbles soon learned something about Constance—she was very strong. She pulled Nibbles up so that he was sitting and put her hands under his arms. Then she picked him up and carried him over to the sled as if Nibbles were as light as a feather. She set him down on the sled and smiled at her work. Then she walked over to the front of the sled where one of the long leaf's ends had been tied to a twig and picked up the other end of the leaf, the one that hadn't been tied up. Then she started to pull the long leaf. The sled with Nibbles on it slid easily over the rough ground as Constance pulled the long leaf attached to the sled. Constance trudged on and on until she came to a hole in the ground. "That's my home!" called Nibbles. Constance stopped pulling.

"Let me help you get off," she said. She grabbed Nibbles under the arms and carried him over to the hole. "I'll take you to your family." She put her feet inside the hole and set Nibbles on her back. She slid down the hole until her feet landed on something hard.

Somebody screamed. Someone else gasped. And another cried,

“Nibbles!” Nibbles saw his mother, his father, and his siblings standing in front of him, their mouths open. “Nibbles broke his toe last night and he couldn’t get back home. That is why Nibbles didn’t come home yesterday. Today I heard him calling out for help so I went to him and helped him get home,” Constance explained.

Nibbles’ mother smiled. “Thank you!” she cried, and burst into tears. “It’s my fault. I asked you to go and get food and you broke your toe! If I hadn’t asked you, none of this would have happened in the first place.” She sobbed loudly and took Nibbles from Constance. She laid him on his bed and wiped away her tears. “You know, we already have enough food to eat from last year. Why do we need to collect more food if we already have some? For the next two years, we don’t have to collect food.” Nibbles smiled. The whole family was silent for a moment. Then, suddenly, unexpectedly, Nibbles’ mother threw her arms around Constance. “Thank you, thank you, thank you! What is your name?”

“Constance, Constance Ann Mouse,” said Constance.

“Thank you, Constance!” said Nibbles’ mother and father at the same time. “Do you want us to bring you back home?”

“No, it’s okay,” said Constance primly.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” nodded Constance.

“Constance,” croaked Nibbles. Constance turned around. “Yes?”

“Thank you,” said Nibbles. He smiled. It was a faint smile, but it told Constance that Nibbles really meant what he had said.

From that day on, Constance and Nibbles were friends. Best friends. Nibbles’ mother became friends with Constance’s mother, and Nibbles’ father became friends with Constance’s father. Nibbles’ siblings each became friends with Constance’s siblings. Nibbles’ broken toe began to heal. After a few weeks it was back to normal.

And the next time you ever see a mouse with a lacy purple dress, a ribbon tied around her right ear, black shoes, and a pearl necklace, make sure you thank her. Because, after all, she might be Constance, the brave mouse that saved Nibbles.