

Belling the Cat

An Adapted Fable



“Something must be done,” said Percy, collapsing on the floor of his mouse house after charging through the hole in the wall. His tail had a nasty gash in it, and his body shook uncontrollably.

“You poor dear. It’s the cat again, isn’t it?” said his wife, Agatha, as she pulled Percy across the floor to their nest and covered him with a blanket.

“Indeed, it is!” said Percy. “He had his claws in my tail! I escaped by biting his paw. That fanged monster has caught me three times this week. I shudder to think what might happen to me, good wife. How will you and the children manage if the cat eats me?”

“Don’t even mention that!” Agatha shrieked. “You must not take any more chances, and that’s all there is to it.”

“Then how will we eat?” asked Percy. “The cat hides in the kitchen and seems to hear every pawstep no matter how quiet. That fiendish feline had three of our friends for his snacks last week.”

“It’s so unfair,” complained Agatha. “After seeing all the food that gets wasted around here, you’d surely think that the people in this house could share. Perhaps we could ask the farmer’s wife to leave some of their scraps at our door. Then we wouldn’t have to go into the kitchen or bother the cat.”

“Good wife, you clearly do not understand the situation,” Percy responded. “The people in this house are selfish, and they despise mice. When they moved in here, they brought the cat with them and have set traps everywhere to get rid of us. I know how to steer clear of the traps, but that cat is a sneaky and cruel creature that lurks in every nook and cranny and pounces on anything that moves. Honest, hardworking mice like us will never be safe as long as that cat continues to prowl this house.”

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

“But even if we wanted to go out and find a safe place to call home, how would we get past the cat and out the door with our nest and all of our children?” asked Percy.

“For the life of me, dear husband, I can’t think of a way,” said Agatha.

“Then I will call a meeting of all the mice in the house,” said Percy. “If we discuss this problem sensibly, we will surely find a solution. We can travel inside the walls and meet in the bedroom closet without running into the cat.”

The next morning, Percy tapped out an SOS with his tail, and every mouse from the attic to the basement scurried between the walls to the big closet in the bedroom. Percy clapped his paws together for silence.

“We are all aware,” he began, “of the dangerous creature that lurks in this house, waiting to devour us. We also know that if it catches us, we will be tortured and killed. But if we stay safely hidden inside the walls, we will starve. We must, therefore, find a way to stop the creature. We must find a way to get past the cat!”

Before Percy could utter another word, there was a horrifying yowl and frantic scratching at the closet door. Sharp claws reached out from under the door, just barely missing Percy as he jumped away.

“Tomorrow! In the attic!” Percy squeaked as, one by one, the mice squeezed through the crack in the closet wall and scurried back to their nests. Percy was the last

to leave. He scrambled through the crack just as the closet door swung open and the snarling cat charged in.

Percy and Agatha heard the farmer's wife praising the cat. "Were you trying to catch more of those terrible mice that roam our house?" she asked. "You clever and wonderful cat. You've caught three mice already this week. In a month's time, you'll have done away with all the mice, won't you? Just like you did in our last house."



Percy peered through the crack and saw the farmer's wife petting the cat as it purred and snuggled in her arms.

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

The next morning, all the mice climbed inside the walls to the attic, and Percy began again.



"I have called you all here to discuss how we can save ourselves from the deadly and terrible cat and live, once more, without fear. If we leave our homes in this house, who knows what new dangers we will find. Furthermore, we would have to flee for our lives and leave all our possessions behind just to get out of here. Who has a solution to this problem?"

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

"The solution is simple," said Leah. "If we know where the cat is at all times, we can stay away from him. When I lived in a barn, the barn cat had a bell on her collar. We could always hear her coming and going so we could hide where she couldn't

reach us. Surely, then, you see that all we have to do here is place a bell on this cat's collar."

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

Every mouse except Agatha squeaked with enthusiastic agreement.

"Very clever, indeed!" said Agatha. "Now which one of you brave mice will volunteer to place the bell on the cat's collar?"

Every mouse was silent.



Questions About *Belling the Cat*

1. Percy and the other mice in the story are facing a dangerous dilemma.
 - a. What might happen if the mice stay in the house?
 - b. What might happen if they try to leave the house?
2. What are Agatha's two suggestions for staying away from the cat?
3. What does Percy think of Agatha's ideas?
4. How does Percy show leadership qualities?
5. Why does Percy change the location of the meeting place from the big closet to the attic?
6. Were you surprised at the way the mice responded to Leah's suggestion for avoiding the cat? Explain why or why not.

Vocabulary

A. Write each word listed below to match its definition.

fiendish	collapsing	feline	lurks	sensibly
shudder	prowl	gash	frantic	fond
utter	fanged			

1. to roam around looking for prey
2. a long, deep cut
3. to speak or say
4. falling down due to a sudden loss of strength
5. like a devil or demon
6. in a way that shows good judgment
7. behaving wildly out of fear or distress
8. any kind of cat
9. feeling affection or love
10. having long, pointed teeth

11. sneaks around and stays hidden, waiting to attack

12. to tremble with fear

B. Write a sentence for each of the words below. Make sure the sentence shows that you know what the word means. Use a dictionary if you need help.

despise

snarling

flee

Comparing Points of View

A character's opinion about or attitude toward someone or something in a story is called point of view.

1. Describe the problem in the story from the point of view of each character below.

a. Percy:

b. the farmer's wife:

c. the cat:

2. Use point of view to help you draw conclusions about the characters that answer the questions below. Support your conclusions with details from the story.

a. How does the cat feel about the farmer's wife?

b. How does Percy feel about people?

c. How does the farmer's wife feel about the cat?

3. Use point of view and details from the story to answer the following questions.

a. Why did Leah think that her suggestion to bell the cat was a good solution?

b. Did Agatha think that Leah's suggestion to bell the cat was a good solution? Why or why not?

Continue the Story

Use what you know about writing conversations to extend the meeting that the mice were having in the attic. Include how the mice respond to Agatha, what arguments are made for or against belling the cat, and another solution for the mice to consider.