

Where Mice Meet the Sea



Story by Victor Orne Illustrated by Catherine Aalto

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Somewhere along the Eastern Shore of a great land there lived a boat builder named Woodbury. His friends called him Woody. Woody was a simple man. He was interested only in doing what he did best, which was building boats. But they were not just any old boats. Woody's boats sailed across the water as effortlessly as the wind itself. It's been said that anyone who was fortunate enough to sail in one felt a magical kind of happiness.

Woody lived in a charming little house near the sea. It was the kind of home that made you think about stopping in for cookies and milk if you happened to be passing by. It looked out over a field of tall grass scattered with pine trees, juniper bush and rock ledge. A winding path, worn through the middle of the field, led down to Woody's workshop. The workshop was right at the shore. This made it easy for Woody to put his boats in the water once they were finished.

Animals were quite fond of where Woody lived. Sometimes you could see a rabbit hopping across the field or a chipmunk gathering acorns. You might even see deer under the old apple tree. There were also many kinds of birds nearby singing their happy songs. One of Woody's favorite things to do was to lie in the grass on his back, then watch and listen to the seagulls playing in the wind as they flew out over the water.

And of course mice lived nearby as well. Generally speaking, mice know that people don't especially like seeing them around. So for the most part they manage to stay out of sight. But sometimes while Woody was working, he would see one particular brown and white mouse running along the floor or dashing across his workbench. It liked to play amongst the cedar and oak wood shavings that decorated the workshop. Whenever Woody saw the little mouse scurrying about he'd just chuckle, then go about his business building boats.

Early one crisp fall morning, Woody was in his kitchen making pancakes. Woody loved fixing pancakes for breakfast. He

liked them best with lots of maple syrup and butter melting on top. As he was scooping flour from the flour sack, he noticed something that concerned him. A little uninvited guest had nibbled a hole at the bottom of the sack. Whoever it was left quite a mess behind.

After mending the hole with a piece of string and cleaning up the mess, the patient boat builder put the sack of flour up on the counter where he thought it would be out of reach. However, the very next morning, Woody entered the kitchen to find even more of a mess than the day before. This time several holes had been chewed into the sack and there was flour everywhere tracked in the shape of tiny paw prints.

Now, most everyone knows that mice have a way of finding their way into the warmth of a kitchen, hoping to find food. After all, eating is what mice do best. But Woody had to eat too. He simply could not stand by and watch the mice eat him out of house and home. There was no doubt about it, “The mice have to go,” he thought to himself.

This presented a problem for Woody. On the one hand he thought he should do whatever necessary to get rid of the little critters. On the other hand, he didn't like the thought of hurting them.

After much consideration Woody decided to get rid of the mice the same old way everyone else did. He put a piece of cheese in a spring-loaded trap and carefully placed it on the kitchen floor.

That night Woody was resting in his favorite easy chair in front of the fireplace. Staring into the crackling fire he was enjoying the peace and quiet. But, just as he was about to doze off, he heard a disturbing noise coming from the kitchen. It was a sudden "snap" followed by a thrashing sound, then just silence. Not quite sure what to expect, Woody got up from his chair and slowly headed for the kitchen. When he looked down at the floor he saw a very sad sight. A little mouse lay completely still, caught in the trap. The curious boat builder crouched down for a closer look. It looked like the same mouse that visited the boat shop. It had soft brown fur everywhere except underneath. There, its chest

and belly were covered with snowy white fur even softer than the rest. It had big round ears and tiny little paws. It also had a long tail with the longest of whiskers to match.

It wasn't until then that Woody realized how cute this particular mouse really was, and how helpless it looked caught in that mean old mousetrap. Just then, he began to feel a gentle throbbing in his heart. He knew something was wrong. "What an awful thing I have done," he said quietly as he wiped a single tear from his eye, "what an awful thing."

No longer able to stand such a sad sight, Woody picked up the trap, with the mouse in it, and took it outside near some wild juniper bushes across the field. There, in the darkness of night, he left the mouse. Needless to say, it was a most unpleasant way to end a long trying day.

Early the next morning, everything started off business as usual. The sun was rising to the east out over the water, the birds had just started to sing their songs and Woody had his boats to build. As he walked down to his shop, across the field, he took a

deep breath to smell the fresh sweet air blowing briskly off the ocean. Then, he saw the wild juniper. To his surprise the mouse and the trap were gone. They seemed to have just disappeared. This confused Woody. But before he could give it much thought, that same sad feeling came back. And Woody didn't like feeling sad, so he tried to forget about the whole situation. He tried to remind himself how much fun it was building boats. But, it didn't work. He could not forget, nor could he get rid of that sad feeling. Woody said to himself, "It just doesn't seem fair. After all, the little mouse was only doing what it knew how to do best." For several days Woody tried hard to do his work, but it was no use. Woodbury the boat builder was no longer happy. And because of this, his boats had lost their magic.

 Troubled and confused, Woody eventually put down his tools, left the boat shop and headed to the shore where he kept a very special sailboat of his own. It was special because his father built it long ago. He then climbed aboard, set sail and headed for

the open ocean. It comforted Woody to look over his shoulder and watch the shore, off in the distance, slowly vanish from sight.

As he lay back in his boat, thinking about the unhappy situation he left behind, Woody closed his eyes and started thinking to himself, and “There must be a better way. I just know there must be a better way.” Soon he began to feel easier. He felt the warmth of the sun’s golden glow shining upon him. He heard, as if off in the distance, the calmness of the sea trickling along the hull of the boat. Then, a most pleasant peacefulness was all there was.

Suddenly the boat builder became aware of a peculiar jarring sensation. As he quickly sat up he found that his sailboat was bumping against the very shore he had left behind who knows how long ago. For the life of him Woody could not figure out how the boat had found its way back from such a large ocean. But one thing he did know. He was feeling much better. Woody then jumped ashore with just one thing on his mind, “What the world

needs is a better mousetrap,” he shouted aloud, “something safe and simple for everyone to enjoy.”

With a burst of energy and ideas, Woody ran to his boat shop to build a much better mousetrap. He put together a simple little wooden box with a sliding door on the open end. He fixed it so the door would fall shut when the mouse went in to nibble on the bait.

After putting his tools in order and cleaning up his workbench, the clever boat builder took his new invention up to the house. He placed a small piece of cheese inside the harmless trap and carefully set it on the kitchen floor next to the patched sack of flour.

That night, Woody crawled into bed, snuggled up to his soft fluffy pillow and fell asleep wondering if the new mousetrap would really work.

The very next morning, at the break of dawn, Woody was gently awakened by a soft “ker-plunk” sound. Realizing what must have happened, he jumped out of bed and ran to the kitchen. The little wooden box sat on the floor right where he left it the

night before. Only something had caused the door to fall shut.

Woody carefully picked up the trap and found it heavier than he remembered. He felt a wave of excitement as he slowly lifted the door, just enough to peek inside. Sure enough, hunched in the far corner of the wooden mousetrap, safe and sound, sat a little mouse nibbling on a well-earned piece of cheese. Strange as it may sound, it appeared to be the same mouse that played amongst the wood shavings in the boat shop, and found its way into the warmth of the kitchen up to the house.

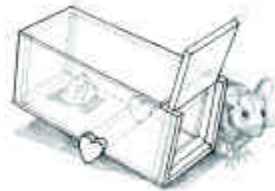
Nonetheless, Woody quickly got dressed and ran out the door with the new trap in hand. He peeked once more at the little mouse inside. Then, he knelt down near a rock ledge by the shore and opened the door to set the mouse free. To his surprise, the mouse was in no hurry. Instead, it hung on to the inside with its tiny claws. It liked the handsome little box. But with a gentle shake, the boat builder persuaded his familiar looking visitor to let go and jump to the ground. As it was running for cover, the bold little mouse stopped, turned around and stood up on its hind legs

straight and tall as could be. It poked its nose up high to sniff the sweet air gently blowing in off the sea. Its soft white fur glistened with an unmistakable golden glow in the early morning sun. Then, just as sure as this story is being told, the wise looking mouse looked right at Woody and winked. Faster than Woody could blink his eyes with amazement, it scurried off and disappeared.

Surprised to find himself waving good-bye to a little mouse, Woody realized something. Not only was the sorrow gone that he had been feeling not too long ago, his heart was overflowing with joy. He was feeling an abundance of happiness and love he had never known before. He too had been set free.

Over the years, news traveled quickly about the boat builder who found a better way. People came from far away in hope that Woody would share his discovery with them. Everyone enjoyed the new mousetrap. What tickled them most of all was that it was so simple and yet, it worked so well. They wanted to know exactly how he did it.

However, Woodbury, being a simple man, was not much interested in explaining all lengthy details of his adventure. He would much rather spend the time building boats or watching the seagulls playing in the wind out over the water. But if he were here today, Woodbury the master boat builder would say to anyone interested, with a gentle smile and a twinkle in his eyes, “All of the answers can be found in the calmness of the Endless Sea. Just climb aboard and set sail. Then you too will be free, and live happily ever after.”



Thank you for reading 'Where Mice Meet the Sea'.

Please feel free to send your comments to the author:

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