# The Unlikely Friendship

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The air came rushing through the door sweep and howled with a whistle. This immediately woke up Tilly and sent a shiver down her spine. She knew that winter was fast approaching, the frozen air was always the first tell tale sign. The second sign was lurking in her garden. The frozen leaves on her tomato plants told her that finding food in said garden was no longer an option. Tilly and Lionel would have to move somewhere warm if they wanted to eat. Tilly was a mouse, she lived in her little mushroom home and kept a small little life. Lionel was her cat. Lionel would sleep in the trees near Tilly's little house. Now you may think it rather odd, that a mouse should have a cat, but that is where the story lies...

One Autumn day Tilly was sweeping her entryway when she heard a rustle near the garden. She thought nothing of it and went sweeping along. Then suddenly above her, at first just casting a shadow across her walkway, then as it neared casting a shadow over her entire home, was a squirrel named Nesbitt. Now, when you think of a squirrel, you don't necessarily think predator. They mind their own, sorting nuts, and playing with other sweet, cute, lovable squirrels. Well, that is true of squirrels in the reality we know, but here in Harwell Grove, nothing is as it should be. This particular squirrel was the henchman for The Minister of Misery. For those of you who do not know, The Minister of Misery is the ruler of the land. He is there to make certain that laughter and happiness are squandered from existence. As he always says, "Tweet tweet, ahem, wherever happiness is present, people are not sacrificing enough. Tweet, tweet." I forgot to mention that The Minister of Misery was indeed a cute little Blue Jay. It was rather hard to take anything Bullworth Blue Jay said seriously and still no one tried to fight his wicked ways. Well, no one until today.

Yes, yes, yes - so, Tilly encountered Nesbitt and shuddered at the very sight of him. She was going about her business, minding her own, what in the dickens did he want? She was determined to stand her ground but moved slightly back into her doorway in case she needed to scurry inside.

"May I help you?" Tilly said in her meager mouse voice. "What have I done this time?" Tilly was always in good spirits and that was against the rules. Still, she always brought the Minister tomatoes and it seemed to suffice. She never showed her good spirits in public either and she had no judgments against her. She was a loyal Harwell Grove citizen even though she couldn't stand its wicked ways.

"You must come with me. We have a problem in the village and you're needed straight away." When Nesbitt asks, you just go and without a smile. If anyone in Harwell Grove smiled, they would be fined three books. Everyone in Harwell Grove only had one happiness in life: reading. They could venture into far off places and as long as they read in the comfort of their home, they could laugh, giggle and enjoy a good story. Because Minister Bullworth knew how much happiness the books brought, he found a way to use it against the people. Tilly was just happy he didn't ban books altogether.

Tilly followed Nesbitt into town and prayed that whatever lie ahead she could handle. Up the hill, across the bridge, through the cherry orchard they went. Squirrels walk far faster than mice and so yes Nesbitt was a little annoyed being slowed down. They finally reached Tawdry the Toad's General Store and through the store window Tilly could see something was a stir. The lights in the store were flickering and there were many critters gathered towards the back of the store.

"She's here, move out the way." Nesbitt was not the least bit polite. Everyone stared at Tilly as if she were the chosen one. "You'll have to squeeze in behind the wall there, we think one of your kind is stuck in the electrical panel."

Tilly was a little annoyed with the way Nesbitt spoke to her, but she proceeded to make her way up into the crawl space. She moved quickly to the electrical panel and didn't see any of "her kind," in sight. She was perplexed as to why the lights were a flicker. As she sat there scratching her head, she noticed a hatch window behind the electrical panel that had a strange furry tail stuck in it. This tail was large and she was worried what was on the other end of it. Whatever it was, the poor thing had somehow gotten its tail stuck in the electrical panel, then tried to escape and couldn't, so the window slammed down on the tail as well. Tilly felt bad for the creature and she used all her might to pull the tail free from the panel. The lights must have stopped flickering because all the critters in the store applauded and smiled with glee. This brought on all sorts of enforcement from the Misery Brigade. The patrol agents were an army of rabbits and they were passing out tickets right and left. The happiness subsided promptly and all were saddened to lose three more books each. For the moment, Tilly was glad she was on this side of the wall. Her joy could be masked. The creature's tail was still stuck in the window. With all her might she tried to lift it, but it wouldn't budge. Just then from the other side of the window there was a claw poking through to help with the opening efforts. Unfortunately, this claw looked very much like that of a cat's foot. It seemed all the help the cat needed, Tilly had given. The cat pulled himself loose from the window. She couldn't believe it, she had just helped the enemy. All she could think to do was run!

"Run, everyone, Run, It's a Cat!!!!!" Tilly yelled as she quickly made her way out of the General Store towards home. All the creatures scattered and chaos ensued. Tilly wasn't making much headway. Her little legs were usually faster than this. She turned her head and looked back to see if she was being chased and she was. She scurried faster and felt her heartbeat racing with fear. She had made it through the cherry orchard and was almost to the bridge when she thought she wouldn't make it all the way home. She decided that she would hide under the bridge. If she sped up fast enough now, maybe, just maybe the cat wouldn't see her. She made her way under the bridge and sat shaking and panting.

Little did Tilly know, the cat saw her every move. It slowed down and quietly made it's way to the bridge. With a swipe of a paw, Tilly now knew the cat had found her. She was so frightened and doubting her plan to sit under the bridge. The cat swiped a few more times getting closer and closer to Tilly. What was she going to do. Then she realized she was in public and what was the one thing no one in Harwell Grove was allowed to do?

"Hahahaha, hehehe, oh ah oh ah, hahahaha, hehehehe," Tilly started laughing hysterically. She had no other option. She hoped that the Misery Brigade would come and get the cat's attention thus taking the cat's attention off of her. The Misery Brigade approached and as soon as they saw the cat, they retreated, but the cat did not follow. The cat lowered his face to see the little mouse and swiped again at Tilly. Tilly scurried about one step ahead of every swipe. All of a sudden there was a squeak overhead.

"Squeak squeak, whistle whistle, stop that cat, I must take this mouse under arrest to Misery Manor. She has violated the code of Harwell Grove. You scared my Brigade away and now you have me to contend with." The Minister of Misery, Bullworth Blue Jay was flying about all proud. The cat took a swipe up at the little birdy. "Don't you know who I am? I can have you terminated. I am the Minister. Stop that now!" and those were the Minister's last words. With one swoop and gulp, the cat had defeated the Minister of Misery. He would be revered as a hero for generations to come thought Tilly as she feared for her life. The cat lowered his head again, but this time didn't swipe. Just looked at Tilly.

"Pttt - ptttt," the cat spit out a bunch of blue-jay feathers. "Ick, he did not taste good. Misery is bitter. hehehe."   
Tilly looked up at the cat and almost felt a calmness. This cat was funny and well normally they don't talk to their enemies. Still, she didn't want to get her hopes up.

"Please don't kill me Mister Cat!" She tried to add a touch of formality so that maybe the cat would feel respected and spare her.

"Kill you?" the cat looked insulted. "I don't want to kill you, I've been trying to shake your hand and thank you for freeing me from that electrical panel. I was stuck there all night."

"Well then why didn't you just tell me that in the first place? Why were you swiping at me?" Tilly wiped her brow with relief.

"I thought we were playing. You didn't say anything either." The cat had a point and well Tilly was just so programmed to fear cats, she didn't think to talk to it.

"So, do you realize you just saved Harwell Grove from the gloom of the Minister of Misery? You killed the Minister! They'll undoubtedly erect a statue in your honor. You are a true hero!"

"The bird? The bird was your evil master? Ha! You should have asked me to save your town a long time ago. Oh wait, that's right you're all scared of me." This cat was sassy.

"Why didn't I think of that. Let's see, me a mouse, just walking up to a big cat and saying hey, could I trouble you to eat our leader? That's a little ridiculous. Just the same, I appreciate it now. Thank you."

"You're welcome, but how can I ever repay you for freeing me from the panel?" Tilly couldn't believe this cat was asking what it could do for her. He'd already done so much, but at the same time, she thought it'd be nice to have a friend that everyone feared and will soon admire once they find out what it had done. "It?" She really should ask "it's" name.

"May I ask your name Mister Cat?"

"It's Lionel. Ma thought I had the heart of a lion. I think I'm definitely as handsome as one, don't you think?"

"Well, Lionel, you do have a nice coat. Anyways, I think I know how you can repay me. Would you be willing to be my neighbor and friend? I make delicious tomato salad and I would read you stories..." Lionel didn't seem too enthused.

"Cats don't eat tomatoes." Lionel made a sour face.

"I also know how to make ginger root casserole..." No change on Lionel's face, "...we can tell each other jokes now that the law enforcer is gone for good..." Tilly really wanted a friend, but she could tell he wasn't feeling her offer. "... oh oh oh, if you ever get stuck again, I could help you out. You'll never have to stay stuck, outside in a scary place all alone all night ever ever again."

"Okay, okay I need a friend too. Where shall I live?" and with that Tilly pointed to the tree above her mushroom house. That is how Tilly came to have a cat and I suppose Lionel came to have a mouse.

Now that the winter is rolling in, Tilly will scurry up on Lionel's neck as they head off on a new journey. Tilly will read "The Owl and the Pussycat," Lionel's favorite story, as they go in search of warmer climate. An unlikely friendship that began with a single kind act.