

A Mouse Sympathizer

One evening early this winter I heard a rustling among the paper bags under my kitchen sink. I slowly approached the cabinet doors and carefully opened them. I saw two field mice jump through a small crack into the next cabinet. Far from noticing how cute they were, I wondered with dread how many friends they had brought with them and how I could get rid of them.

My parents had dealt with the problem by setting mousetraps, but I always had felt sorry for the little creatures, having their necks broken for a never-eaten morsel of food.

My first step was to do

nothing. My apartment was heated only by an electric heater and was almost as cold as it was outside. They might decide to go back where they had come from. Or maybe we could co-exist peacefully, unaware of each other's presence.

In the next couple of weeks I discovered that such was not to be the case. Mysterious squeaks emerged every evening from somewhere behind my refrigerator. Pulling a clean sheet away from my closet one day, I watched disgustedly as a multitude of black particles shaped like long-grained rice rained to the floor from its folds.

I finally was convinced that

something had to be done when a mouse walked without much panic behind the couch and across the kitchen floor. My dog stared at it in terror and ran to hide in the closet.

The next day I discussed my problem with several people. They suggested various solutions like buying mousetraps or borrowing a cat. One of my neighbors swore killing one mouse and leaving its body lying around would scare away any further mouse tenants.

However, besides being afraid the stench of a dead mouse also would be discouraging to human inhabitants, I didn't want to kill even one mouse. The mice only were looking for a place to spend the winter — they didn't deserve a death sentence.

I plugged up all the holes around the pipes under my sink to prevent any more desperate mice from choosing my apartment as a refuge. Then I stopped at a local feed store to look at the various products available for purchase for dealing with rodents. There was the traditional mouse trap, poison and, finally, the live trap.

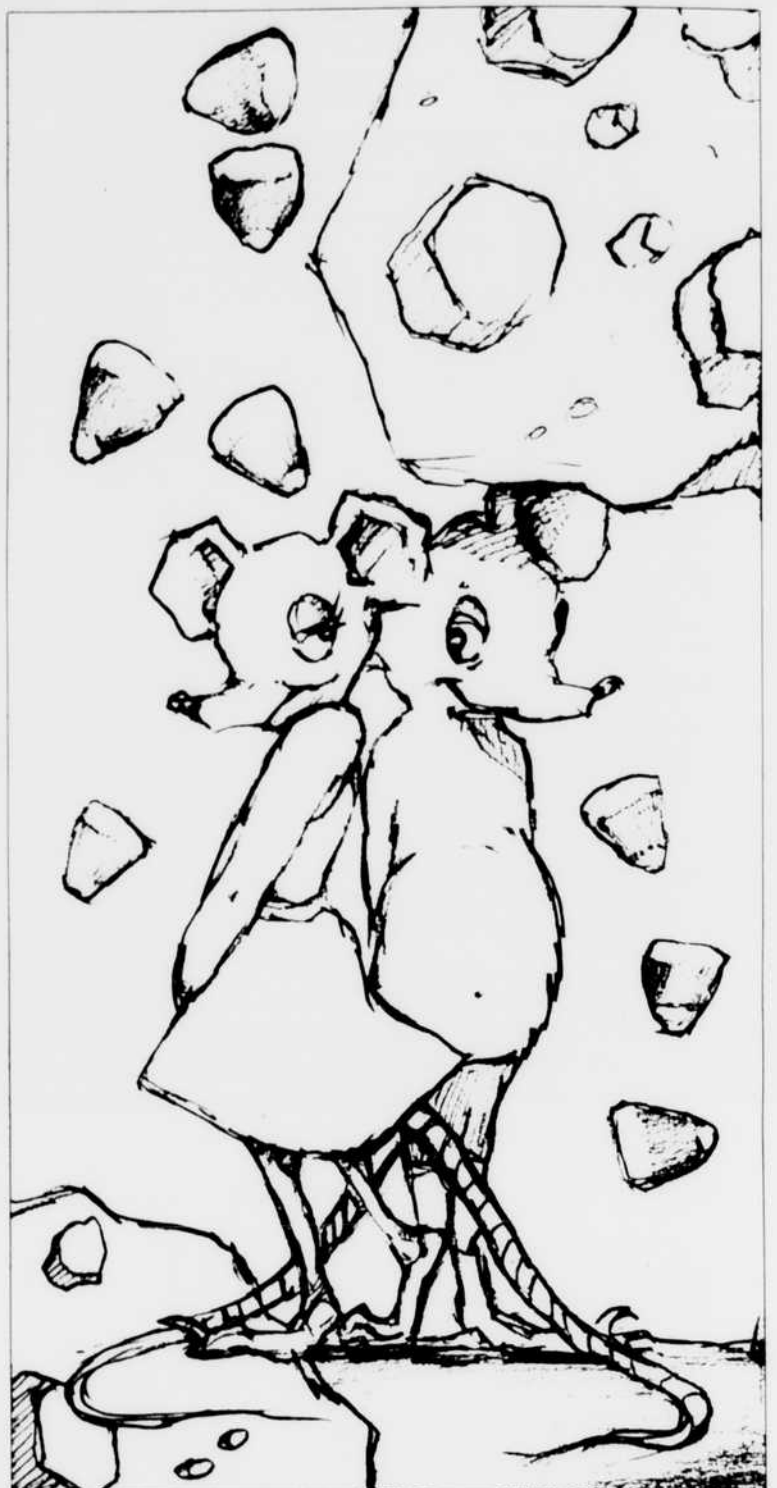
I bought two live traps. The advertising on the package said I would never have to see, hear or touch a mouse again. Just lure one into the trap and throw it in the trash. I wasn't supposed to think, I presume, about the slow starvation or the crushing inside the trash compactor that the animal inside would endure.

In two days, using peanut butter for bait, I trapped my first mouse. I could see its tiny, still silhouette through the dark blue plastic. I could feel a faint warmth against my fingers emanating from the little body.

Trudging down the driveway and across the street with my burden, I dumped the mouse into the weeds beside an abandoned shed. It clung to the open door for a moment, and then dropped to the ground. I caught a glimpse of pink feet and an underbelly of thick gray fur.

As I walked back with the empty trap, I felt sort of like Robin Hood or Superwoman, championing the weak and defenseless.

However, the squeaking continued during the next week. Just



Graphic by Lorraine Rath

as I was about to give up on my humane traps and call on the neighbor's cat, I came home one day to find that I had caught the second mouse.

I carried it to the exact spot where I had taken the first one and let it go too. It was dark, and I didn't see it go. But I could tell by the trap's becoming a few ounces lighter that it had gone.

On my second walk down the driveway, I felt even more magnanimous. Not a drop of blood shed I told myself. Not a single neck broken.

And now, reading in the evenings in my squeakless, mouseless apartment, I imagine the two brothers or sisters or sweethearts happily reunited in the old barn, a safe distance from humankind.

— MARILYN BURKHARDT

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