

Aesop's Fables

35. BELLING THE CAT

By Rob John

The mice who lived on a farm were very happy because the farmer's cat, which was supposed to hunt and kill mice, was old and lazy and spent most of his time sleeping in the sunshine.

'Can't be bothered with catching mice any more,' said the old cat. 'All that lurking about and pouncing. Got better things to do...like sleeping.'

So the mice ran about safely all over the farm and had plenty to eat...until one day an awful thing happened.

The farmer came into the farmyard carrying a wooden box. He put it on the floor and...out of the box walked a cat; a new young cat with black sleek fur and long sharp claws. The cat looked around the farmyard and she sniffed the air.

'Huh, she's nothing to be scared of,' said a young mouse. 'She's only a cat. Only a lazy old cat.'

But an old mouse wasn't so sure. The new cat didn't look old...or lazy. This cat looked young and keen and...hungry.

'Just be careful,' said the old mouse. 'Just keep your eyes open and be very careful.'

That night the new cat prowled the farmyard. She walked silently in the darkness; invisible in her black coat. She watched and she waited; listening for the tiniest sound.

In the morning when the mice met for breakfast in the barn there didn't seem to be quite so many of them.

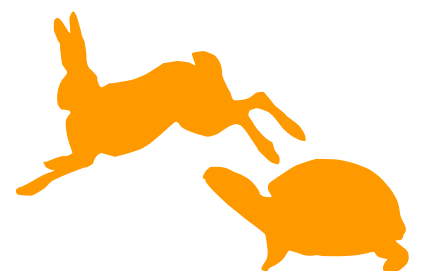
'Where is everyone this morning?' said the young mouse.

'I wonder,' said the old mouse looking at the new cat who was sitting outside the farmhouse with a big smile on her face.

Each night more mice disappeared...and the new cat seemed to be getting fatter.

Soon the mice were really scared.

Finally the old mouse called a meeting. 'We have to do something,' he said. 'If we can't get rid of this cat she'll end up eating us all. We need a plan. The problem,' said the old mouse, 'is that you can't hear the cat coming. She moves silently in the darkness. You don't know she's there... until it's too late.'





‘That’s it!’ said the young mouse. ‘We get a bell and tie it round the cat’s neck. The bell will ring every time the cat moves and we’ll know where she is so she’ll never catch us.’

The mice all looked at each other. ‘Not bad,’ said someone.

‘Actually, that’s brilliant!’ said someone else.

The mice leapt into action. One group found a little bell that had fallen off the back of the farmhouse door and another found some string which had been holding up a scarecrow’s trousers.

‘See,’ said the young mouse. ‘We have everything we need for my brilliant plan. That cat has eaten her last mouse. All our troubles are over.’

The mice all cheered and patted the young mice on the back. The young mouse had saved everyone from being eaten and suddenly he was a hero...for about ten seconds. ‘Just one question,’ said the old mouse. ‘Who’s going to tie the bell on the cat?’

The mice all went silent, then looked at the young mouse. The young mouse looked at the floor. He didn’t want that job. Nobody wanted that job.

‘Oh dear,’ said the old mouse. ‘It’s easy to say something but often harder to actually do it.’