

The Mouse With Four Lives

Story: The cat, his fur black as the night, slunk through the open valley, his eyes intently set upon his prey. Standing on its hind legs, the mouse with patched, ragged brown fur nibbled happily on its piece of fresh yellow corn, sweeping its chocolate-colored tail from time to time. It was odd, as mice are usually more active at night, but the cat did not stop to think; after all, he was mostly nocturnal too. Preparing his legs for the deadly leap, he smiled to himself, knowing this as an easy prey. The mouse had shown no sign of suspicion, and the cat positioned his tail, his whiskers twitching, and pounced. He grabbed the mouse by its plump body, plunging his claws into it, preparing to eat it; yet he paused when the mouse's eyes open, saw its whiskers twitch—then the mouse smiled. "Ah, but my friend," it sighed, "you cannot kill me, for I am the mouse with four lives." With that, it hopped to the ground and sped across the valley like a lightning bolt, leaving the cat to stare after it, bewildered, making no effort to put on the chase.

Under the gleaming light of the full moon, the pearly white owl glided smoothly and gracefully over the grassy plain, watching the river shimmer below, a glistening snake cutting straight through the green. Then she saw it; the caramel-colored mouse with patched fur zooming from place to place, eventually stop to rest, panting, its little heart beating deeply. The owl's amber beak curled into a smile as she swooped down, piercing the mouse with her razor-sharp claws. The mouse, however, did not heave one last breath, and then lay still, like

her usual victims; instead, it sneered at her, its eyes swimming like chocolate orbs. "But, my friend, you cannot kill me, for I am the mouse with four lives." It wrestled free of the owl's claws and sprinted down the plain, leaving the owl to gape after him, stunned, not at all exerting to fly after it.

The cherry red fox trudged through the farmer's field, checking hopefully for any remaining chickens, perhaps hiding or dead, but finding none. The fox's stomach rumbled impatiently, but stopped quickly as the fox spotted a plain, soft-brown mouse with patched fur, looking at him, frozen with fear. His hunger immediately dissolved as he slyly swept his tail around the shaking critter. The mouse could move no way, but didn't seem to question it; instead, it just looked up at the fox with those beautiful brown eyes and sighed, "Kill me, then." Its smile was too close to a sneer for the fox. Indignant, the fox pounced, his rough nails penetrating the mouse's fur, yet the mouse did not have a shudder pass through its body or lay limp in the fox's hand, ready to be eaten. It just smirked. "You cannot kill me, friend, for I am the mouse with four lives." It jumped down and, flashing a last smile, dashed past the fence and was gone, leaving the fox, wide-eyed, in a small cloud of dust, not even trying to go after it, his hunger building up again.

The next day, the owl, fox, and cat (who were all good friends) gathered in the fox's log. "I want to tell you something," they all erupted at the same time.

"Cat, you first," the owl offered nimbly. The cat nodded and began. "Yesterday, I—I *thought*—I killed a mouse. But it was still alive. It said... it said it had four lives."

"That happened to *me*, too!" cried the fox, then blushed. "Pardon me, I didn't mean to interrupt."

"No, quite right," soothed the owl. "And I, too, have experienced this."

"We must find a way to stop it," the cat went on. "I have a plan. Owl, can you go fetch that mouse now?"

"I am *nocturnal*, for heaven's sake," grumbled the owl, but she spread her wings and swept into the open sky. When she returned the mouse was clamped tightly beneath her claws.

"Ah, good work," the cat praised. "Now, if I have heard correctly, each of us had tried to kill this mouse. All in all, three times. And if it only had four... it only has one left." After a moment of stunned, confused silence, they all grinned insanely, grasping this new plan, and then turned, and, on cat's signal, they pounced.