

Belling the Cat

Once upon a time the mice sat in council and talked of how they might outwit their enemy, the Cat. But good advice was scarce, and in vain the president called upon all the most experienced mice present to find a way.

At last a very young mouse held up two fingers and asked to be allowed to speak, and as soon as he could get permission he said:

"I've been thinking for a long time why the Cat is such a dangerous enemy. Now, it's not so much because of her quickness, though people make so much fuss about that. If we could only notice her in time, I've no doubt we're nimble enough to jump into our holes before she could do us any harm. It's in her velvet paws, there's where she hides her cruel claws till she gets us in her clutches—that's where her power lies. With those paws she can tread so lightly that we can't hear her coming. And so, while we are still dancing heedlessly about the place, she creeps close up, and before we know where we are she pounces down on us and has us in her clutches. Well, then, it's my opinion we ought to hang a bell round her neck to warn us of her coming while there's yet time."

Every one applauded this proposal, and the council decided that it should be carried out.

Now the question to be settled was, who should undertake to fasten the bell round the Cat's neck?

The president declared that no one could be better fitted for the task than he who had given such excellent advice.

But at that the young mouse became quite confused and stammered an excuse. He was too young for the deed, he said. He didn't know the Cat well enough. His grandfather, who knew her better, would be more suited to the job.

But the grandfather declared that just because he knew the Cat very well he would take good care not to attempt such a task.

And the long and the short of it was that no other mouse would undertake the duty; and so this clever proposal was never carried out, and the Cat remained mistress of the situation.

Questions

1. What was the very young mouse's plan?
2. Why do you think the mice didn't carry out that plan?
3. What do you think it means when it says "the Cat remained mistress of the situation"?
4. Can you think of something important and helpful that most people don't like doing?