

The Fox and the Mouse

Original Telling - The thirtieth of November, two thousand and twenty



Nestled just inside a cheery wood that bordered an overgrown grass-filled field was Corin's Nook. Named, of course, after the famed mouse Corin, who bravely fended off a swarm of flies who never had any intention of doing anything other than flying lazily around the clear stream that ran just south of the town.

This was about the most exciting thing that had happened by the time they named the town. All the animals took a vote and they named it after Corin. Of course, by now, Corin's Nook had seen its fair share of excitement, but generally, it was a sleepy little mouse town.

The town was once the bustling center of the forest, with all of the forest animals living in harmony with each other. But as with all things, time marches on and that is no longer the case.

Gone are the days of bunnies playing hide and go hop with the mice children in the field, or deer trotting past on nearby trails. Oh no, ever since the King of the Forest had left the Vally it just wasn't the same place it used to be.

Around the time the King vanished, the other animals started to leave. The squirrels were the first to leave. Once they were gone, it was only a matter of time before the snakes slithered back to the swamps. Then the moles tunneled away. The Ladybugs left and took up residence in a grove on the other side of the field, and so on and so forth down the line until only the timid mice held on to the belief that the King would return, and it was that belief that would end up making all the difference.

That's not to say it was a sad, dreary, town. It was in fact a vibrant mouse town. There were many festivals and holidays celebrated, the town square was always full of children playing or adults talking adult business. Even the mayor could be seen regularly taking a walk and checking in on the citizens of Corin's Nook. The mice waited for the Kings return and had faith it would be soon. Months turned to seasons, and seasons turned to years and the mice remained steadfast in Corin's Nook.

Nine winters after the King had vanished, a lone mouse trudges through the snow near Corin's Nook. The bright red of his cloak was easily seen against the deep white snow that covered the area. He pulled the cloak tight around his little body to ward off the cold. He doesn't care that he sticks out like a sore thumb. He's not hiding, he's protecting. With his sword, tucked into his belt, and a shield slung onto his back, the Knight Mouse, defender of Corin's Nook, was on patrol.

Having lived in Corin's Nook all his life he was proud to be the town's protector. Now that all the forest animals had left, there was

only a weak peace between all of them. Sure the squirrels weren't at war with the mice, but they certainly weren't guarding the trees for them anymore. The moles were friendly enough, but their tunnels that once connected their nearby burrows to Corin's Nook have long since been overtaken by spiders and centipedes. The mice were exposed and needed protection now.

The Knight Mouse circled wide around the town. Scurrying under roots and between tall grasses poking out of the snow drifts. He looked for trouble, and that's when he saw it. Tracks in the snow. He rushed over to investigate.

"What kind of animal leaves these kinds of tracks?" he thought to himself. The Knight Mouse had tracked all sorts of animals through the woods but he'd never seen tracks like these before. They weren't huge, but they were not small either. There were four small toes, each topped with a claw.

"I'll have to be careful," he said aloud.

"Careful of what?" a strange voice said. The Knight Mouse spun to face the voice and drew his sword in one quick motion. His eyes met with a muddy orange...dog? The Knight Mouse had never seen anything like this animal before. It had orange and white fur, a sharp snout with a black nose, and a long bushy tail.

Confused, he lowered his sword, "Of whatever made these tracks," replied the mouse.

"Oh those? I was tracking that animal too. You can't be too careful these days, and strangers in the forest can mean bad things. Perhaps we can help each other?" the orange dog offered in a silky smooth voice.

Warily the Knight Mouse agreed and the pair started off into the woods. Side by side, they trudged through the snow.