

**THE CHIPMUNK  
AND THE  
MOUSE**

**BY**

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## THE CHIPMUNK AND THE MOUSE

**I**T was a warm summer day and I was sitting on the grass near the edge of my flower garden when a amiable chipmunk ran across the stones along the edge of the garden. I could see that it was my good old friend Mr. Red Bottom, a fat and

talkative chipmunk who had been in my garden for several years.

### 1 MR. RED BOTTOM



I looked towards the

chipmunk and said:

“Mr. Red Bottom, would you have a few moments to discuss a problem that I have?”

The chipmunk stopped, looked up at me, and then standing on his hind

legs, face stuffed with seeds, his cheeks almost exploding, replied:

“Why yes, I do, but it is a fine day, is it not?”

When he said “*fine*”, I was showered with seeds, the ones stuffed in his cheeks, and they flew at and past my face like shells from some shot gun, and he took no notice at all. He was clearly oblivious to his failings and I was certain he had very poor social training. However, that must be his mother’s fault, I thought, mothers are always so fussy and even chipmunk mothers must be careful to bring their children up with good manners.

I looked at him, and perhaps I was not as amused as I should be, for here I was talking to a chipmunk, with a stuffed set of cheeks, standing upright

on a stone, and spitting out seed, but I continued non plussed. I said:

“Mr. Red Bottom, I have been seeing that you appreciate the bird feeder that we have placed upon the tree. And, so also do many others friends we have back here in the garden. I see Mr. Antnee Squirrel, that fat fine friend of yours, and his family is there all of the time. Your family, those in the back and those in the front, the birds, and many others. We keep it filled you may say, because we enjoy your company. And in fact I enjoy our conversations.”

He smiled and said:

“Fat, Fine, Friend!” and with each word I was blasted from those cheeks with seed of all types and size. My face, my hair, my ears, my clothes, they were

now stuck with seeds of many types.  
He continued:

“Well I enjoy your conversation also. After all, we live on the same land and you are kind to share with us some of the fruits of your labor. So my big hairless friend, what is your question?”

I shook myself from the seeds, many had gone down my shirt and were now itching my belly, but I disregarded that to get to the point. I replied:

“Well, the Mrs. has seen, and I also have seen, a new set of intruders at the feeder. They look like rats, or at least very large mice. You know that these creatures have no respect for property, they come into our home, eat our food, leave their droppings, and just are a dirty mess. My question is have you seen them and what can we together

do to rid ourselves of these characters?”

He sat down, recognizing that this was likely to be a longer conversation than he thought and said to me:

“Ah, the rodents!”

I found that a bit humorous since frankly they were all rodents, including the chipmunk, but I felt that now was not the time to bring up the biological facts to which only I had knowledge. I said:

“Indeed, the rodents. So what are we to do?”

He looked at me this time I could see in his face and true signs of deep thought. He started his reply slowly and deliberately:

“You know, Sir, that we chipmunks sleep all winter. We gather our food, dig our nests, bury our food, sleep to keep safe, and from time to time we may awake, if perhaps it is too warm spell some winter, and we use our stored food in just such an emergency. But those rodents, they come down our homes, eat our food and put us all to peril, we could die, I mean that Sir, a true death, a freezing in the coldest of the winters. Do we ever seek refuge in your home, no, indeed not Sir, we would rather die. But rodents, true animals of evil, Sir, true animals of evil.”

I was thinking how indeed this poor creature of God who was subject to the most severe of extremes but that he obeyed his code, what was his and what was someone else’s remained that way. What dignity, what nobleness for this brave and charming animal.

But it was not getting me anywhere. I pressed on:

“But Mr. Red Bottom, what are we to do, they are varmints, unwanted interlopers, takers of what they have not earned, and takers from those in need. What, Mr. Red Bottom are we to do?”

He sort of wiggled into a large ball of brown and red fur sitting on top of the rock, the look of thought on his visage was relentless, and then he replied:

“I can think of only one person to seek out on this sir, one person.”

In a panting breath I asked:

“Who would that be Mr. Red Bottom, who would that be?”

He replied slowly:

“You must speak with Antnee Squirrel.”

I said:

“Antnee Squirrel, why him? He seems to just eat everything in sight, he is the fattest squirrel in the area. He is here all year long. Why him?”



The chipmunk looked deeply into my eyes and said:

“You live in New Jersey, you have been here for many years, and you do not know Antnee and his family, the family, the family of all families. Why we chipmunks go to Antnee, we call him “The Great One”, and we plead our cases, and then Antnee, with the help of the large squirrel family, they call it “The Family”, they take care of our problems.

The Family has helped the Rabbit family, the Turkey family, even the Pigeon family, why do you suspect that you see so many pigeons at the feeder, totally undisturbed. He helps us, he advises us, and then when he needs a favor, well, we do the favor, no matter what. Antnee is the individual who keeps us safe. But, and this is important Sir, Antnee also dislikes the Rodents, they have no respect for Antnee or any of the other Families. You must go to Antnee, Sir, you must,

and respect him. He will advise you, he will help you, but remember, you will owe him.”

He jumped off the rock and ran towards the stone wall, jumped on its top and off he went to the edge and down, down, down the hole to his home. He left me now waiting for Antnee, I did not even know which one was Antnee, other that he was the fattest squirrel. The sun was setting so I would look in the morning.

## 2 MR. ANTNEE SQUIRREL

I awoke the following morning to a bright sun, and cool air. I went out to the garden and looked about, and there before me hanging upside down on the feeder, fatter than any squirrel known to mankind, was Antnee.

I walked towards the feeder and Antnee was so busy stuffing his face, dropping seeds upon the ground at the



same moment, that he paid no attention to me at all. I came aside the feeder and coughed

a bit and said:

“Excuse me, are you Antnee Squirrel perhaps?”

He stopped for a moment, seed falling off the sides of his mouth, shells run a scanter and he looked at me, rather strangely since he was still hanging up



side down on the feeder and we were now both at eye level to one another, and he said:

“And who is asking for me?”

I replied:

“Well Mr. Red Bottom, the chipmunk you know, suggested I come and seek your advice on a problem I am having here in the garden.”



He went back to eating, but I could see that he had paid attention. He then

turned his head upward and crawled to the top of the feeder and then sat atop a small

bird house looking down to me, I would guess it gave him a sense of superiority over me now that I looked up at him. He then said:

“And what perhaps is your problem?”

I responded:

“Well you see it is like this....”

He interrupted me and said very bluntly:

“I do not have all day, you can see I am busy, now if you have a request of me make it quickly and in a succinct manner. Unlike you humans who loll around all day, we squirrels have a great deal of work to do, we have little

time for these pleasantries you waste your time with.”

I could see this would be interesting. I wanted to tell him the food I had paid for with money I had made and that making money took work....and even more, I wanted to tell him that all he did was play around all day and run up and down trees, but that would not solve my problem, so I replied:

“It is the rats, or the mice, or whatever the rodents are called, they have been eating here at the feeder, and I am afraid that they will come into my house. Mr. Red Bottom said you could help.”

He looked at me, the whiskers twitching and the eyes set aside his head, looking both ways at the same time, then they moved to look at me, a strange thing, I have never seen a

squirrel like this before. He then said, somewhat raising one eyebrow:

“Ah, the rodents. The neighborhood has never been as bad since they arrived. But you know they came here because of you, we were just fine, thank you very much, before you arrived, and then you show up, and then the rodents!”

I was aghast. We had been here thirty years, and now the rodents come, what was the causal relationship, and Antnee was at most seven years old, fat as he was, how could he remember who brought whom! This fat arrogant squirrel was going to be difficult to deal with. So I decided to be blunt. I said:

“Let me be a bit direct, Antnee, first, this food is mine, I work for the money which buys it and I put it here on the

tree. I do not mind you stuffing your fat face, but I will not tolerate rodents, got it. I also don't get too mad when you bring your fat carcass into my basement in the winter and lay down on my seedlings, on the warm heating pad and warm sun lamps, now do I, and if I cannot get a straight answer out of you, I will stop buying seed, I will seal the basement, I will set traps, and I will tell the chipmunks and pigeons that you, yes you my fine fat friend, were the cause of all of their woes. Then, my tubby little ball of fur, you will be slimming down like the end of the world is upon you and yours. Now, I want the rodents out, I am holding you personally responsible, and I want answers now!"

I stopped and thought to myself, why was I out here screaming to a fat furry squirrel looking down from his perch atop the birdhouse. He now he looked

down upon me as if I had just told him he had no mother or father and that he was an orphan from birth. He was on the verge of tears, then he said:

"Look here, I am trying to do my best, we have a, well I call it a pecking order here, and I sort of control this feeder. But I do not control the entire back yard no matter what Mr. Red Bottom thinks, besides he sleeps all winter and I have to dig up my old acorns and scrape out a meager meal here or there...."

I shouted:

"Stop, I feed you all winter, you sleep in my house, I saw the nests in my attic, seed shells and corn husks, now tell me what we can do to rid ourselves of the rodent!"

He replied:

“Well, you need someone wiser than me. I suggest you talk with Mr. Mortimer Turkey.”

I shouted:

“A turkey, you want me to talk with a turkey, why a turkey, they are never here?”

He smiled and said:

“Alas there you are in error my friend, for when the sun sets, they all fly back here, they are great flyers you know, despite what many humans may think, and they clean up all that I have put on the ground. You may think I am up here just eating on my own, oh no, hardly, I am here at the beckon call of the turkeys, they need seed, they need it on the ground, and I become the one who is responsible for getting it there.

No seed, and I am in deep trouble. I will get to Mortimer, and he will see you on the morrow. He too is concerned about the rodent, and he is big and powerful, he can tell you what to do.”

I was now a bit less flustered, but so far, two days, two animals, and each was suggesting another. I was concerned that this would go on for quite a while.

### **3 MR. MORTIMER TURKEY**

The next day, I arose quite early to meet Mr. Mortimer Turkey. Now I had seen the Turkey family many times, a few in the garden, but it had never occurred to me that they could or would have been frequent visitors to my charity works. But alas, as I sought

to rid my lands of rodents I am finding



more and more who have come to rely on my generosity. It was just past dawn when I saw the Turkey

family, a crowd of almost two dozen large birds walking in a large but tightly connected group savaging the land, and heading towards my fence which protects my garden from real rodents, the deer. But alas, that is the tale for a different day.

They approached my fence, these large masters of the land, their waddle, their attention for detail upon the ground, until they meet the fence. Then with the grace of a flying elephant, they lifted their bodies sky wards and flew

over the fence, like a C5A and three landed atop the fence, as lookouts. Thirty pounds of prime turkey each, feathers and all, like sentries, some special forces group, guarding the rest of the family now cleaning the ground of seed, corn, sunflower and whatever else was in the costly bags my wife brings from the store.

I approach the three on the fence, it is a six foot fence and the birds are another two feet higher, and I speak to the three on guard. I say:

“I am looking for Mortimer Turkey, perhaps you know him, I was told to speak to him by Antnee Squirrel.”

The three look at each others and are silent for all to long a while. Then the one in the middle looks at me and says:

“I am Jonathan Turkey, Mort my brother is the big one eating the corn, over there, next to your violet garden.”

I replied:

“Thank you, and I would like to get through the gate now if that is okay with you three?”

The two on the gate waddled across letting me open the gate at the end of the fence, they continued to scan down my driveway looking carefully at the street. I wondered what threat they were so concerned about. Then it hit me, here I am talking to three thirty pound turkeys sitting on top of my fence, and I have just asked them politely to move, and they did. Perhaps something is going on in my mind, I wonder if this is real, but then again these are the turkeys, I have seen them many times, all the detail is here.

Dreams only focus on limited detail, reality has overpowering detail, and this clearly is overpowering. Perhaps this is what happened to Alice, yet she also had taste and smell, so far I had not eaten a one of them, and the smells were not too great to endure.

I walked in and approached Mortimer. I said:

“Mr. Mortimer Turkey, I presume?”

Ah, it is like the finding of Livingston by Stanley, but now it is me in my own garden talking to a turkey. I hope no one ever finds out about this event. They will have me committed. Just thinking about this could be damaging enough. Then he says:

“Ah, yes, I am Mortimer, Antnee my good friend had spoken about you and your problem. What can I do to help?”

I was surprised, pleasantly so, in that he was more receptive than the little fat squirrel. But we had just started our talk, it could still go less well than I suspected. He then said:

“Rodents, you are infested with rodents. I see them on my travels, we try to avoid them, they are dirty, and frankly they are dumb creatures. Did you know that Benjamin Franklin wanted to have us turkeys as the national bird, we are much smarter than the eagle, a dumb bird indeed, you would never see an eagle doing this.”

I said:

“Do you mean speaking to a human?”

He snapped back:

“No silly, working as a group and eating this good corn. We work as a group, we keep the family together, we value the family you know, not like eagles, they are solitary, loners, the fathers do not stay with the family, they just fly off. We, however, we are what America is great for, family members, hard working families, and we stay local, we keep close so that we can hand down tradition. And here in New Jersey, there is no hunting, so we have no risk of seeing you people shoot each other, at least in the process of hunting us.”

He continued:

“There has not been a turkey killed in New Jersey in over 150 years. That is much better than you humans in Newark, Trenton, Camden and other cities in New Jersey. Why even here in your own neighborhood you had three

killers arrested and now doing time. You humans, you have much to learn from us. Too bad old Ben was over-ruled. We would have been a much better national bird.”

I stand with mouth ajar, I am being lectured by a 40 pound bird with dark brown and green tinted feathers. He is also making sense. Well I must get back to the problem. I then said:

“So tell me, what do you suggest to rid the garden of the rodents.”

He replied:

“Why rid the garden, there is plenty of room, plenty of food, and we are in no way even competing with one another, we take our turns.”

I then said:

“Perhaps you missed my point, rodents eating out here is not my problem, but rodents eating and defecating in there is my problem.” as I pointed to the house.

Mortimer then said:

“We never go in there, that is not of interest to us.”

I replied:

“I know, I know, but the rodents go in there.”

Mortimer then said:

“But I am told by Antnee that he and his friends also go in there and you have no problem with him, why with rodents?”

I replied:



“Now let me make this clear, I don’t want Antnee there either but Antnee does not eat my food in my kitchen and then leave his droppings on my plates and mess my house up. I can deal with Antnee but I cannot deal with rodents. The rodents leave behind droppings which have disease, they eat food and deposit disease, and these diseases can kill us humans. Neither you nor Antnee can kill us.”

Mortimer kept pecking at the corn and said nothing for many seconds and then turned and said:

“There once was a large cat in this area, not a house cat but some wild and vicious cat. He would kill us and our kind and it is said he would even go after Antnee’s relatives from many generations ago. So what did we do, did we try to kill the cat, no, we just

moved away, and with no food, namely us, for the cat to eat, he moved away as well. So just move away.”

I was aghast. I replied:

“This is my home, I paid for it, I buy the food for you all, I have a right to be here and to not have rodents here.”

Mortimer replied:

“You humans and your property. Well, I suggest you talk to someone not involved in your property, a wise man, he is Tomasso Tortoise, he has been here many years, as all tortoises live a long time, and he may help you. I seem not to have the wisdom you seek.”

At that point he went back to his corn and the conversation ended. I then thought that the eagle was a good

choice, for truly turkeys while not dumb are very thick.

#### 4 MR. TOMASSO TURTLE



Tomasso Turtle was also known as “Fat Tony T” in the neighborhood. He

waddled around the back yard, from time to time spending a cool afternoon in the garden pool, collecting meals from a variety of sources, and I am told that the seed we put out was one of the sources.

I went out at noon one warm day and there was Fat Tony T laying in the grass getting some sun. He was round

and well proportioned and he was like so many others, an eating machine. I walked up to him and greeted him:

“Mr. Turtle, Mr. Turkey said I should talk with you about a problem.”

He turned his fat neck upward and said:

“Hey, just call me Fat Tony, everybody else does, it is my name in the neighborhood.”

I had never thought that my garden was a neighborhood but as I met more and more of the residents I saw that what I had here was almost a continent. There were multiple interest groups with multiple agenda and each wanted to gain for themselves and yet protect the joint interest. This would be a interesting conversation.

I then asked him in a soft manner the following:

“Well Fat Tony, perhaps you can help me with my problem. It is the rodents. They come into my house, eat my food, leave droppings, and spread disease. I want them to stop. What do you suggest.”

That was the fastest version of my problem recited by me yet. Clear, well put, and I hope Fat Tony would help. He rolled his neck around, that fat fleshy neck with that pointed almost beak like face, the two small shiny eyes, looking directly into mine and he said:

“What disease, What are you talking about?”

I replied:

“Look Fat Tony, first you tortoises and turtles have your own diseases, it is salmonella, we get it from you and the kids are quite ill for many days. Now....”

He stopped me bluntly and brusquely and said:

“Sal who, I don’t know any Sal Monella, I know Sal Marzella, he is an older Raccoon, he lives near the edge of the pond, I see him sometimes at night. Then there is Sal Garabella, he is the middle aged ground hog, lives behind the barrier next to the highway. Never comes over this far though, he somehow likes to look at the cars all day, but Sal Monella, nope, never knew him.”

I was floored, I never thought this would be so dense a conversation. Tortoises, well they are supposed to

out run the hare, but this guy had the intellectual power of a flea, I must be careful with these thoughts, I may have to meet a flea next, and then I remembered, fleas, and the plague. I continued:

“Look, the rodents carry fleas who carry *Yersinia pestis*, the plague bacteria. It killed half of humanity in the fourteenth century. It is deadly, truly deadly. And while we are at it, Raccoons carry lyssavirus, that causes rabies, another deadly disease, but not spread as quickly as the plague. Rodents are dirty, dirty, dirty, and I want to find a way to get them out of here!”

He then said:

“Calm down sir, you seem to be taking all of this very personally. Now I don’t get upset when you call me a carrier of

some Sal Monella, and I am certain Mr. Raccoon, namely Sal Marzella, does not get upset calling him a carrier of rabies, but you seem to have a real problem with the rodents, and I believe they are mice. So what do you want me to do, it seems to be your problem.”

At this point I have tried every one of the creatures, every animal, none will assist, none will provide guidance, it is as if they are all saying it is just my problem, and they fail to see that it is I who keeps their garden alive. No me, no garden, nor place to live. They all seem to have some form of logic but they all seem so focused on their own interests. Strange, Stranger even that I have been having these conversations.

I then continued:

“Look Fat Tony, I need to get rid of the mice, any suggestions?”

He looked at me, I feared another prolonged discussion, but he just said:

“Oh is that all, talk to Sheldon Spider, he is ruthless, besides he is not an animal, he has no true heart.”

I replied:

“Thanks.”

Then I turned and went in my house. I was exhausted with all of these talks. Hopefully this would be helpful, a spider.

## 5 MR. SHELDON SPIDER

So off I went to seek wisdom from Mr. Sheldon Spider. There amongst the daylily leaves, atop of the violet plants, under the shade of the oak trees was his web, a large, even gigantic web, and

he was in the middle of the web awaiting my arrival.



I sat down on the grass and admired the complex web. Sheldon was in

the middle and he was colored in a regal manner, a gold body with dark black stripe with red tinged legs, all eight of them. He looked quite wise sitting there in the middle of the web with a sense of control. This was the first member of my estate who had not been replying on my seed for their day to day existence.

I spoke:

“Mr. Spider, Fat Tony T said I should speak with you, that you are wise, and can help me,”

The spider turned his head and looked at me. I had never looked at a spider this way before but I was game at this point to try anything. He responded:

“Call me Shelly, not Sheldon. My mother was the only one to call me Sheldon, and when she did I new I had done something wrong. Shelly is good.”

I then said:

“Well Shelly, let me lay out the problem, simply it is rodents, we hate them, they eat our food and leave their droppings in our home.”

Shelly replied:

“I know all too well, I keep a very neat home here and I have all sorts of stuff flying into it other than a good meal from time to time. But why not just get rid of the problem as I do, just catch it and eat it.”

I was a bit repulsed by the eating part but the catching made sense. I then said:

“So Shelly, you are telling me you would recommend catching and disposing of the rodents.”

Shelly said:

“Let me be clear, I have nothing to gain or loose in this deal, I keep my home here neat and clean, and anyone who enters is considered a meal. Got it.”

I was wary after all my other talks for he like so many others would then turn and say I was violating some unknown law of nature. I asked again:

“But all the other animals want to be left alone, including leaving the rodents alone. You seem to take the other course.”

Shelly sat up with his back on the web, his eight legs waving at me in a shouting manner and his fat spider belly glistening in the sun, he replied:

“Mammals, you are all alike, you all want your own way and at the same time seek to please while being seen as benevolent. We arachnoids have a much simpler existence, we eat, we reproduce, and we build. We seek to please no one but ourselves, to our own selves be true so to say.”

I then said:

“Shelly, I get it, I should do what I must do, despite the screams of the others.”

Shelly replied:

“Yes sir, do what you must, and scream they will. You feed them, you water them, you give them warm spots, you even protect them. You have that fence, it keeps out the cats, the dogs, the others who would prey on them. And do they thank you, no. The next thing they will do is protest. It is in their nature, they just whine all the time, they want more and will do less. Those rodents are little monsters. You should have struck at the beginning, you spend too much time being nice. I don't spend time being nice, come into my web, slam, you are lunch, dinner, a snack, whatever. Take

my advice sir, strike before they strike you.”

Shelly turned over and walked across the web, the beautiful, well architected web, not some Frank Gehry design which will fall apart in a few years by one of true artistry. I now knew what I must do. The river Rubicon would be crossed!

## 6 SOUVEZ LES SOURIS

The rodents, no they insist on being called mice, had been working the locals in their support. The next morning I came outside to see if the feeder need replenishing and there in front of me were three dozen animals; chipmunks, squirrels, turkeys, tortoises, a toad or two, and of course at the front were the rodents, oops mice. They were all singing to the tune of the Marseille the tune in French,

“Souvez le souris”, “Save the mice”. Sheldon was right, they ganged together and I would be their target.

French!, yes French, it is bad enough talking to squirrels in English, but now they have a protest song and it is in French, they man the barricades, they are motivated to protest, to stop the elimination of the rodents. Why me? I just want to get rid of rodents and I have started a movement amongst these free loaders and it has become an international movement. Talking has moved on to signing, protesting. Is there a Robespierre amongst these animals, is this the beginning of some revolution, are we humans in danger! All of these thoughts were running through my head.

Here I am at the barricades, with animals, a revolt of the locals, if you will, all ganging together to protect a



dirty rodent, or frankly rodents, and for what, because I am human and they are not, it is my food, it is my back yard, what is going on here?

I was approached by Antnee, and he said:

“You went to MIT we hear, and we further hear that you had mice there who helped many of the engineers and scientists. I have here in my hands a letter from one of your illustrious graduates. They tore down the sacred Building 20, the home of the radar development, of lasers, of many brilliant research efforts.”

He continued:

“They then built a new center, one of those Gehry disasters, of steel, glass, glass you can never clean, of cold inefficiency and dead to any form of

life, any form of inspiration. Your people tried to rid the mice from the building, but we hear they have returned, and one of the illustrious alumni writes the following:

*“I read this about the attempt to rid the new building of the mice and I felt I must reply...for the mice for those of us who lived, and I mean lived, in the old building 20, one of our many late nights friends were the mice. They scampered above our desks, under our feet and ate sandwiches which we had abandoned weeks before perhaps these wee creatures are the direct descendents of those mighty stalwarts who let us know at the strangest hours that there was life on the planet besides just us and our thesis problems.*

*I therefore humbly suggest that we may want to view these descendents with awe, that they have deigned to*

*enter the new edifice, and that as a sign of their great intelligence have found their way back again where their early ancestors roamed hand in hand with many an MIT grad student. I have no idea why I am spending time doing this but your mice rang part of my limbic systems memories of days gone bye...*

*What is becoming of me in my dotage? Back to the mice indeed "save the mice", we must have brilliant mice, they manage to find their way through a frank Gehry building, something even the eminent Professor Chan admitted difficulty doing. Also they come to us, whereas those body snatchers at Broad and Whittaker ensnare the poor creatures into experiments with dubious and deadly ends.*

*These must be genetically selected and superior mice, MIT Course VI mice,*

*capable of sneaking around on off hours and having productivity well in excess of many a graduate student and, in our multi-cultural environment, we should share with our murine relatives the wonderful community we have at MIT. Perhaps they could join in a committee or two, or even a staff meeting, we could elect them to mini faculty appointments, what else.*

*Again for some reason the mice are striking a chord but didn't we have the mouse before Stanford, they were still palm trees and surf boards when we had sturdy upstanding furry friends. Perhaps one can envision a movement from the 60s again, "save the mice", make them honorary MIT Course VI alumni"*

I was astounded. How did these creatures communicate some two hundred and fifty miles, how did they

get a letter from MIT and how did they know so much about me! Who are these mice, are they not the same descendents who brought the plague to Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, who almost wiped out civilization. It was not the turkey, the chipmunk, the squirrel, it was the mouse. Why this level of attachment? Why, even more, am I standing here in front of several dozen animals listening to a squirrel read a letter from Cambridge while to remaining group is singing Souvez Les Souris in French!

How did he get it, this letter, by email! Are these creatures using my computer at night, are the marks on my keyboard squirrel claws as they sit atop my desk communication with one another, I must check when I go back inside. This is a terrifying thought.

## **7 SNAP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT**

Well, I have talked and talked with every creature out there. I have spent days, and days speaking to squirrels, chipmunks, spiders, tortoises, turkeys, and the like, and all I have gotten in return is a massive protest, a demand for good treatment of rodents. And why, I wonder. Does talking help, or does it just raise the expectations of those already receiving. How, I wondered, did these little creatures evolve to where they are now without the hand out from humans, for it is said that we as a species arrived on this planet well after them. Had they just come to expect us to support them and not to return some respect for that support?

Well my wife still wants to feed the birds, and along with the birds comes

the squirrels and chipmunks, but alas also comes the rodents. The squirrels and chipmunks agree not to enter the house and mess up the kitchen area, but not the rodents. In fact the other animals will not even discuss this with the rodents, that I do not understand. Also I see not use in talking with rodents, and moreover they never agreed to even meet with me to discuss the issue. They stand aloof and to the side, they talk through their surrogates, the other animals. My only piece of wisdom comes from an arachnid, my new friend the spider, the one who in no way depends on what I provide, a hard working architect of beauty.

Alas I have no other option. I go and set the mouse traps, small wooden boards with spring loaded bars where I deposit cheese or peanut butter. No

“have a heart” for the rodents, just direct removal.

It has now been six weeks and I think I have gotten them all. I lie awake at night awaiting that now all too familiar “snap” and I will go and remove any remains. It is 3 AM and I lay awake, just listening. The wind outside blows strongly, the snow is on the ground, I wonder if my flower beds in the basement are home to vacationing squirrels, for I have put fencing around them to protect the seed as the grow, but alas the squirrels lay atop the netting, now ever so close to the sun lamps, it is a squirrel tanning salon, but not to worry, they cause me no harm.

Then, as the quiet descends and I am about to sleep, “Snap!”, there is another. I go downstairs and open the closet where we keep the cereals and

the cookies, my wife eats the cookies, and there in front of me is another rodent, still and caught in the bar of the trap. Scattered about are cookie crumbs and mouse droppings, for the rodent must be an eating and processing machine, in with cookies and out with droppings. I empty the trap in the garbage bag and then clean up the droppings, thrown out the half eaten cookie bags. I take one look around, and then I feel I must sleep. The remains are now in the garage garbage tins, the evidence of the neutralization of another rodent is eliminated. But, as usual, I go and reset the trap, just in case, the war continues, but at least I am winning, with the rodents.

The next morning I go out as usual, the snow is blowing hard, the temperature is below 10 degrees F and I walk to the feeder and bring it back to the garage.

I fill it with prime sunflower seeds, good expensive sunflower with many oils to help keep the animals warm, the sun has just risen, and I replace the feeder. Immediately the nuthatches return, the cardinals, the birds are grateful, then old fat Antnee comes out. I look at him and say:

“Well good morning Antnee, you seem to be faring well in this winter.”

He is a large ball of grey fur and fat, he must weigh ten pounds and he walks up to me and says:

“Well good morning to you too. I see we have the good sunflower seeds again today, thanks to the wife, she really has exceeded herself this winter.”

I was set aback, here I am in the snow, freezing myself and he thanks my wife

who is still in bed. How about thanking me. Well, I should not expect any more than what I get from him.

I wait to see if he says anything about the lack of rodents. Not a word. I am anxious to see what he thinks, especially after the protest last fall, but I know that frequently silence is the best alternative. I continue:

“Are you enjoying the winter, the snow, the beautiful white?”

He answers:

“We enjoy every day, sir, we are squirrels you know.”

I then asked:

“I gather that the chipmunks are sound asleep, the spider is in his

cocoon, and the turkeys are here from time to time. How are the turkeys?”

He replied:

“The turkeys are fine also sir, and I have even seen Mr. Turtle for he has spent time in the frozen pond by the outlet for the storm sewer. He seems quite well but like all tortoises he slows down a bit when it gets cold.”

I decided to return inside. I finished:

“Well Antnee, I am going in, I will keep this filled, enjoy the snow!”

He responded:

“Sir, I also thank you for that fine resting place under the sunlamps, it is much better than laying on the wet seeds you had there, and my cousins

and I really enjoy the days there. See you some time sir.”

I replied as I closed the gate:

“See you Antnee.”