

COPYCAT MOUSE

Lewis lived with his family in a grassy nest at the edge of the meadow. The meadow was a happy place, but Lewis had a problem. It was his little brother Milton. Milton followed Lewis everywhere and copied everything he did. Milton tried to walk like Lewis and talk like Lewis. Milton tried to eat what Lewis ate and play what Lewis played. And Lewis didn't like it! "You're a copycat, Milton," Lewis would say. Milton would shake his head. "I am not. I'm a mouse, just like you." But, in fact, Milton was a copycat (or a copycat mouse if you can imagine such a thing). And what made the problem worse was all the attention Milton got. If Lewis turned a somersault, no one seemed to notice much, even though Lewis was very good at somersaults. But if Milton turned a somersault, everyone was there, laughing and clapping.

"Oh, look," they would say as Milton turned upside down and flopped on his side. "What a big somersault that was! Very good, Milton!" And everyone would laugh and carry on as if Milton had done the best somersault in the world. Or if Lewis found a fat apple and dragged it back to the nest for supper, Milton had to copy him. He would bring back some dried berries or a hunk of grass or some old stick. And even though the apple was delicious and everyone enjoyed it, Milton still got more attention for his stick, and it didn't even taste good. Lewis was sick of it.

He couldn't play with his friends without Milton. He couldn't even visit Uncle Tyler and hear a story without

his small brother tagging along. "Wait for me," Milton would cry as Lewis tried to leave. His mother would make him wait. "Don't be selfish, Lewis," she would say. "Milton likes to go, too." So Lewis would wait for Milton. And waiting made him so angry that he would act mean to Milton all the rest of the day. But it didn't seem to matter. Milton copied him anyway. The day Milton got lost, Lewis hadn't really meant to lose him. He just found himself walking extra fast one day on his way to Uncle Tyler's. "Wait for me. I want to come, too," Milton cried. But Lewis kept on hurrying down the path and into the woods. "I'm sick of always having to wait for Milton," Lewis thought. "He'll just have to catch up with me." And Lewis walked even faster. By the time he reached Uncle Tyler's nest on the other side of the woods, Milton was nowhere in sight.

"Where's Milton?" Uncle Tyler asked. "I hope he's not sick." "He's coming," Lewis said. "He just can't walk as fast as I can." "Milton says you're the fastest mouse around," said Uncle Tyler. "I am," Lewis boasted. "I do good somersaults, too." And Lewis did three, right in a row. "They are good somersaults" said Uncle Tyler. "Milton was right. He told me that you do the very best ones." Lewis looked up in surprise. "He did?" "Oh yes," said Uncle Tyler. "Didn't you know? Milton is always telling me about you. He's very proud of you." Lewis had never thought that Milton might be proud of him. He couldn't believe it. "But he's always copying me," Lewis said. "Well, of course he is," said Uncle Tyler. "Small mice learn from big mice. Milton wants to be just like you. He thinks

you're the best mouse in the whole world." Well, right then, Lewis didn't feel like the best mouse anywhere.

Lewis felt ashamed. So instead of staying to hear one of Uncle Tyler's stories, he jumped up and ran out the door. "I'm going to find Milton," he called. He rushed down the path and into the woods. He was halfway home before he found Milton sitting by the path, right where it branched off into three different trails.

"I knew you'd find me," Milton said. "I didn't know which path to take. They all looked the same." Lewis gave Milton a pat. "It's this one, over here by the patch of violets. That's how you can tell. Now, come on, or we'll miss Uncle Tyler's stories." The two mice hurried back down the path. Lewis stayed close to Milton all the way to Uncle Tyler's nest and all the way home again. And when they got home, Lewis showed Milton how to do the best somersault in the world.