

Bruce
and
the Road
to
Honesty

by Gale Leach



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Bruce and the Road to Honesty

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*For Morgan, Scott, and Travis
with all my love*

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Chapter 1

The Ceremony

Bruce checked himself over again and straightened his feelers for the umpteenth time. His smooth, green skin shone. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. It was time.

All of his family had gathered around and were talking about his changing. Ceremonies like these were always large events, bringing family members and friends together for the happy occasion. Bruce was a little embarrassed at having so much attention, but he was also proud to be doing something that had once scared him so much. He thought back to the time, not so long ago, when the idea of changing from a caterpillar into a butterfly made his stomach turn upside down and his skin get all tingly. Now his skin was tingly again, but it was because the time of his changing was nearly here, and he was ready.

His family was not large. Unlike most butterfly households, his parents had only made one egg—his egg. Most other caterpillars had dozens of brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles. Looking around, Bruce could count the members of his family without using any of his legs twice. Grandpa Walter was there, of course. Aunt Bess and Uncle Howard had flown over, too. There were also cousins, aunts, and uncles

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he didn't see very often but who cared enough to join him as he began his transformation. Milton was there, too, and he'd said he would stay until Bruce emerged from his chrysalis. Thinking about that, Bruce smiled, wondering again how this friendship between a caterpillar and a spider could have happened.

Bruce was brought out of his reverie as Aunt Bess began running her forefeet over his shoulders, telling him not to be afraid and that it would be over before he knew it. Bruce made a crooked smile and answered "um hum" several times in response to her questions and comments. Looking around, Bruce saw his father talking with Grandpa Walter. He waved his arms a bit, hoping one of them would come and free him from Aunt Bess, but no luck. He looked the other way and saw his mother. He gave her a small wave and was relieved when she lifted off the ground and flew toward him. Bruce watched as she flitted this way and that, and he thought that his mother was still the most beautiful butterfly he'd ever seen. She landed behind his Aunt, nudging Bess until she stopped talking and turned around.

"Bess, would you mind checking on the raspberry dessert? I think it might be done now."

With a nod and a smile, Bess wandered away. His mother glanced at Bruce and then looked in his father's direction, nodding just a little. His father and grandpa flew over and landed near his mother. Bruce didn't like the serious looks on their faces.

"Arlene, did you . . ." Bruce's father's voice trailed off.

"No, not yet," his mother said, twisting her forefeet together.

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“Bruce, I know you’re excited to begin, but your mother and I want to talk with you for a moment before the ceremony starts. Besides going over the usual traditions for your changing, we need to tell you something . . . something we probably should have told you a long time ago but never found the right time.”

Bruce had no idea what they meant, and he just stood looking at his parents. A long, awkward silence settled over them, until Grandpa Walter snorted and said, “For goodness’ sake, Henry, get on with it. You can’t wait any longer.”

Bruce was more puzzled than before. He hoped it wasn’t something bad. His father’s feelers were twitching—a sure sign that he was upset.

“Ahem. Well, yes,” his father said, now twisting his front feet together. “Your mother and I have tried to find the right way to tell you this for a long time. For all of your life, in fact.” He paused. When the silence hung there and Bruce didn’t say anything, he continued, “We can’t let you begin changing without explaining how you came into this world. You need to hear the story of how we found your egg.”

Bruce couldn’t believe what he’d just heard. “You found my egg?”

“Yes!” Bruce’s mother piped in, moving forward to help his father who was obviously having difficulty explaining this. “We were so excited! We had tried and tried to make our own eggs, but we never had any luck. One afternoon, your father and I were out flying, and we noticed a small, round object lying in the grass. I flew down and realized it was an egg. Your egg. I couldn’t leave it behind. Neither of us had ever seen

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an egg like it before, so we knew it couldn't belong to any of the butterflies of our village. I didn't care where it had come from—I picked it up and flew home with it—with you—and tended it until you hatched.”

Bruce was still trying to absorb what he'd heard. He stood unmoving, looking back and forth between his parents.

His father spoke again. “Bruce, what we're telling you is that we don't know what kind of insect you will become when you change. You may be a butterfly . . . or you might be a moth.”

At that, several of Bruce's family members who were eavesdropping drew in a breath, like a collective small gasp. Bruce became upset. His family had no idea what moths were really like, and he thought it was stupid for butterflies to think less of them. He was about to say so when his mother spoke again.

“Of course, it doesn't matter what you are, at least not to us. We love you, and we will always love you. We were so happy to have found you, and we're glad you are our son. You've made us complete in a way we never could have been without you.” She paused and looked down at her feet. “I'm sorry we didn't tell you sooner. We tried so many times! We could never find a way to do it properly, and whenever we decided to tell you, something came up, and it didn't seem to be the right time. I hope you understand. We never meant to hurt you.”

Bruce looked at his parents and aunts and uncles. His thoughts were all jumbled up. He looked at Grandpa Walter, concentrating on his wrinkled face and legs and his wings that were faded because he was so old. Bruce wondered if he would even have

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wings after he changed. What if he became something else entirely? What if he wasn't even a moth? His eyes pleaded with Grandpa Walter for answers. His grandpa was the oldest butterfly in the village. He had to know something, didn't he?

Sensing Bruce's need for reassurance, his grandpa said, "I don't have many words of wisdom, young one, other than these. Your parents love you. That's more than a lot of young creatures can say. You can count yourself lucky for that. They took in your egg and cared for you. They chose you. That's something special. Whatever you may become, it won't matter. Who you are won't change, and all of us will still love you. Your parents may have been wrong to wait so long to tell you, but even parents aren't always perfect. We do the best we can, and that's what I expect of you now. You're my grandson, and I love you. Stand tall, and be as brave, as you always are."

Bruce felt numb, like his head had been cut off from the rest of his body. His feelers wiggled this way and that, but his legs were heavy, and he felt like crying. He wanted to go away, lie down, and curl into a ball.

Milton walked toward his friend. The fact that the jumping spider didn't somersault in the air or bound toward Bruce indicated that he felt serious, as well. "You're having an adventure right now, you know. It's a bigger adventure than you thought it would be, but you've been through things that were harder than this. You're lucky to have parents and family who love you. Seeing your family and how much they care makes me a bit homesick. After your changing, maybe we can try to find my family so I can introduce you to my

parents and brothers and sisters." Milton placed his foreleg on Bruce's shoulder. "But your mum's right: this family is special. They chose you, and they'll love you, no matter what."

"Mom—Dad—I can't believe this," Bruce said, ignoring Milton's words and still feeling confused. "You found my egg on the grass? What did it look like? Where did it come from? Did you ever try to find my real parents?"

Bruce's mother turned her head away, and his grandpa spoke quickly. "Bruce, these are your real parents. They didn't create your egg, but they are your parents because they raised and loved you as their own."

"Yes, but I want to know where I came from. I want to know what I really am. I might be a moth," he said, as if he were chewing a bitter leaf, hoping to get a reaction from his cousins, "or maybe even a beetle larva or a glowworm!" He enjoyed the whispers and titters that statement caused among his family members. "I can't change unless I know what I'm going to be when I wake up!"

Bruce's mother looked like she might cry, and his father's antennas twitched fiercely.

"I don't think . . . you're a glowworm," his mother said, sniffing. "Your egg was green like you are, and shiny. It was a very pretty egg, and I certainly don't think you're a beetle larv—" She turned toward Henry and buried her head in his wing. He raised a forefoot and wiped a tear from her eye.

Bruce knew he was acting badly, but he was upset, and he felt he had a right to be hurt. His mother and father shouldn't have kept this from him. They should

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have known that he would want to know about his egg parents—who they were and where they lived. Perhaps they didn't tell him because they were afraid he would leave. Maybe they cared more about having an egg of their own than about his feelings.

Now he knew for sure that he needed to find his egg parents.

"Mom, I'm sorry, but you and Dad should have told me. Sooner, I mean. I can't change without knowing what I am—what I'll be. You shouldn't have hidden this from me—that wasn't fair. And now you tell me, just before I'm ready to become a . . . something . . ." He shook his head. "Milton—you want to find your family again, right?"

Milton nodded, but he looked sad. "Bruce, think about . . ."

"What I think is that we should pack. We'll go find your family and look for my egg parents at the same time. Once I know for sure what I'm going to be, I'll come back and let all of you know," he said, gesturing at his relatives who were staring at him. "Then, if you still want to have a ceremony—if you still think of me as one of your family—I'll change. But I have to go now. I have to know."

"If you feel that way, you should go," Grandpa Walter said harshly. "You're being selfish and unappreciative. Your parents—these parents—have given up much to raise you. Until today, I thought they'd done a good job. I'm ashamed of your behavior. Perhaps this journey will give you answers, but I don't care whether or not you find your egg parents. I hope this trip helps you find some manners and common sense."

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Even seeing Grandpa Walter so angry didn't change Bruce's feelings. "We'll leave in the morning," he said to Milton, who nodded slowly. "Right now, I need some time to think."

Bruce turned and walked toward his home without looking back. Milton swayed from side to side. When he spotted a leaf bug that landed not far away, he headed in its direction. Bruce's other relatives mumbled to themselves and began flying away. After a little while, Bruce's parents joined them, sighing as they flew home.

Chapter 2

Leaving Home

Bruce woke up and shivered. He shook his head to rid his thoughts of the horrible dream he'd had. In the dream, he'd made his chrysalis and had emerged only to discover that he was a dung beetle. Not liking that, he'd made another chrysalis, only he turned into a cockroach. Just before waking, he dreamed that he tried again and came out as a centipede.

He was exhausted. Not a good way to start a new journey. It was still dark now, but it would be light soon. He pulled out his backpack—the new one his mother made after his other was lost in the bat cave—and walked to their eating area. He was filling his pack with tender leaves and was startled when his mother appeared out of the shadows.

“I thought you might come and get supplies before you left. I couldn't bear you leaving without saying goodbye this time, so I waited for you.”

“You've been here all night?”

His mother nodded and looked down at her feet.

Bruce dropped his pack and moved to where his mother stood by the wall. He reached out and hugged her, and she stroked his face with her forefeet.

“I'm sorry about yesterday. I know I hurt you.

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But I still don't want to change until I know who or what I am. Do you understand?"

She nodded and backed away a little, smoothing the edges of her wings with her feet.

"I'll be back soon. My egg couldn't have traveled very far on its own, could it? My other parents have to be somewhere nearby. We'll find them, and we'll find Milton's home, and then I'll come back. Milton's been away from home for a long time, and he's really homesick." Bruce knew he was exaggerating about Milton's feelings, but he thought his mother would feel better about his leaving if it was for Milton, too. "I'll say goodbye to Dad before I go. If I can send word about how we're doing, I will." He saw a tear forming in his mother's eye and leaned over to kiss her. "I love you, Mom."

She smiled, brushed her tears away, and reached out to hold his front feet in hers. "I love you, too, Bruce. Promise me you'll be careful."

"I will."

Bruce took the pack and walked toward his parents' sleeping area. He found his father awake, too.

"So, you're ready to go," his father said, gesturing at the backpack. His tone was gruff.

"Yes, sir. I came to say goodbye."

"Don't go without saying goodbye to your mother."

"I already did." Bruce shifted his weight from side to side.

"Well, I suggest you look for someone who can give you more information. How about those moths you stayed with—Angie's parents? Maybe they would

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know where your egg came from. I'd start by going there, if I were you."

"That's what I thought, too. If they don't know, maybe they'll know where I can find out. After that, Milton and I will look for his parents. Once we've done that, I'll come back."

"Then I'll see you when you come home." Bruce reached out to shake his father's forefoot, but his father rose, walked toward Bruce, and held him in a strong embrace. When he let go, Bruce was red in the face but glad for the hug.

"I love you, Dad. I . . ."

"You need to get this over with. Your changing will be better when you get back. Now, go—and the two of you be safe. Tell Milton I want him to watch out for you, and you for him."

"I will," Bruce said, and he headed out of the house before he could change his mind.

He saw Milton in the distance, hiding behind a tree trunk. Something was flying near him, darting back and forth in the air. Then Milton was in the air, too. When he landed on the ground, the dragonfly he'd been stalking was clamped firmly in his mouth. It didn't take long before Milton dropped the remnants of the creature and noticed Bruce. He bounded over and somersaulted, landing right in front of him.

"Are you ready? I'm excited to be going on an adventure again. Is everything okay with your parents?"

"Yes, I'm ready to go."

"Did you apologize?"

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Bruce scowled. "Everything's fine. After you," he said, sweeping his leg in a grand gesture in the direction of the road.

Milton somersaulted, and the two of them started walking the way they'd come not so long ago. They avoided the pavement that now covered the road and stayed along the edges on the dirt. Bruce hoped this journey would be easier than their last one. How hard could it be to find their families?

Chapter 3

The Moth Village

They made it to the outskirts of Angie’s village as it was starting to get dark. Bruce still thought it strange to see so much activity in the evening, since his village began getting quiet at sundown, and he and his parents seldom went out at night. But moths were nocturnal—as the sun was going down, they were waking up and starting their “day.”

One of the moths flying by recognized Bruce and Milton and let out a cry. “Hey, everyone, come out! Bruce and Milton are back!” The moth flew toward the center of the village, calling to everyone as he went.

Bruce and Milton continued walking toward Angie’s home. More and more moths and caterpillars showed themselves, rubbing their eyes and smoothing their feelers to shake off sleep. Angie’s youngest brother was the first to come out from their sleeping area, and he jumped up and down when he spotted them. Seeing this, Milton jumped up and down, too, until both of them were bouncing in unison, trying to see who could jump the highest. Finally tired from the exertion, the young caterpillar sat down and fell over on his side, panting. Bruce started to laugh out

loud when he was tackled from the side. He fell over as Angie hugged him, and when she let go and moved back, it looked like she was waiting for him to say something.

“Um, hi, Angie,” Bruce said, turning red. “How are you?”

“Oh, Bruce, it’s so good to have you here, but I thought I wouldn’t see you until after you changed. I’m almost ready to change myself. Did you just come to visit or can you stay until my ceremony?”

“No, we didn’t come to visit. Well, yes, to visit, but no, actually to ask questions. And to visit. But we can’t stay for the ceremony, I don’t think. We’re here mostly to ask questions.” He stopped and took a deep breath, trying to compose himself. “Is your father here?”

“My father? Yes, but why...” Angie stopped in mid-sentence. “Never mind. I’ll get him.” She scampered off toward her sleeping area. It wasn’t long before a handsome moth followed her out.

“Bruce!” Angie’s father said, holding out his forefeet so that Bruce could touch them with his own. “It’s good to see you, but we didn’t expect you so soon. Now I’m curious. Angie says you want to ask me some questions?”

“Milton and I came here trying to find our families.” Seeing the perplexed look Angie’s father gave him, Bruce realized he would have to start from the beginning. He explained about his parents telling him they’d found his egg, about wanting to find his egg family, and that Milton wanted to find his home again, too. “Can you tell me if you—I mean, your

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caterpillars—come from round, shiny green eggs?”

“No, our eggs are oval and white. We have some cousins whose eggs sound like those you’ve described, but they live far from here. I doubt any of their eggs could have ended up that far away.”

Bruce found he’d been holding his breath, and he let it out in a long sigh. He hadn’t realized until now that he’d hoped Angie’s father would say yes and that his search would be over. It wasn’t going to be that easy. “I guess we’ll have to keep looking.”

“Not tonight, young ones,” Angie’s mother said, as she flew over and landed near them. The air from her wings raised a little cloud of dust.

“Oh, I’m sorry for that. I’ll be happy when the rains come again. This dryness makes it so difficult to keep everything clean. But never mind that. Come dine with us and rest before you go anywhere. You and Milton are always welcome, and we’ll enjoy getting caught up on what’s been happening with you and your family.”

Bruce knew there was no point in arguing with Marta, so he and Milton joined the moths for their first meal of the day. Marta’s food was delicious, and Bruce ate more than he probably should have. When the meal was done, he and Milton and Angie went walking together. When they reached the edge of their village, Angie suggested they sit and talk. She described what she’d been doing since they’d seen each other last, and some of her stories made Bruce and Milton laugh. But as she was about to finish a funny story, she saw that Bruce was leaning against a tree trunk with his eyes shut, and he was gently snoring. Angie gestured for

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Milton to follow, and she led him to a sleeping area where he would be safe.

“Good night, Milton. Have a good sleep.”

“Good night, Angie. Thanks. It’s good to be with friends again.”

She smiled and went back toward her home to begin her day with her family.

Chapter 4

The Journey Begins

In the morning, Angie's family feasted again. Her mother had made small packages for Bruce and Milton to take on their journey, and Angie's father took them aside as they were packing to leave.

"I don't know if it will do any good, but you might inquire with the great owl at Stony Ridge and see if he can guide you in your search. He is old and quite wise, they say."

"The owl at Stony Ridge?" Bruce said, his voice quite high. "We can't go to see him. He'd eat us!"

"Oh, that's just stories parents tell their young ones when they want them to stop doing something or be quiet. Large owls rarely eat insects as small as we are. Only the smaller owls do that. Also, if you visit in the morning, the owl will most likely have eaten during the night, and you wouldn't look terribly tempting. Mind you, he might not know anything that will help. However, he's lived here for years, and everyone says he's the wisest creature around."

Bruce thought about it as he finished packing his bag. "Thank you, sir. If we can't find anything else along the way, we'll definitely think about talking with the owl." But even as he said it, a small chill ran

down his back. The owl at Stony Ridge had been so much a part of his nightmares as a young caterpillar that it was hard to think of him any other way.

Bruce hoped they might run into the pigs again. They seemed to know a lot about what was happening around them, and they might have seen eggs like his before. If that didn't happen, he would have to be bold and ask others they met along the way. Eggs didn't travel on their own, so his egg parents had to be nearby.

When they had packed everything Marta had given them, Angie appeared with a little more. Bruce smiled and made room in the already full backpack for the tasty milkweed leaves and the rose petals. She had even gathered some nectar in a pouch made from another leaf, but Milton decided that was too good to save, and he slurped it up on the spot.

"I have to start eating less or else develop more muscles," Bruce said, lifting the bulging pack onto his back.

Angie smiled and touched him on the shoulder. "I hope you find your egg parents, Bruce. I don't know how I'd feel if I'd been adopted, but when you find them, I hope that . . . well, I hope you like them."

"Me, too." Bruce leaned forward and hugged Angie, and then he touched forefeet with Angie's father. He reached toward Angie's mother, but she flew to Bruce and gave him a big hug.

Bruce looked at Milton and pointed back up the road leading away from Angie's village. "Are you ready?"

"I'm always ready!" Milton said, bouncing a

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little again. The sun's rays filtering through the trees illuminated the hairs around his body, making him look somewhat comical, and Bruce giggled.

"If you need the old owl," Angie's father said, "I've heard he makes his home in the huge oak tree about two days' walk up the road. You can't miss the tree. It's in the middle of a clearing with grass and shrubs. Just make sure you visit in the morning after he's had a chance to hunt during the night."

Bruce and Milton thanked Angie's parents and began walking toward the road. Angie waved when Bruce turned around, and he waved, too. Then everyone was waving, and Milton turned two somersaults. This continued until they had moved out of sight of the village.

The going wasn't difficult, but, as the sun rose higher in the sky, Bruce found himself getting hot due to his heavy load. At lunchtime, they sat and rested beneath the shade of an apple tree. Bruce set his pack down and began munching a crunchy leaf—a new taste that Marta had included in her sampling for him—and Milton darted this way and that, chasing flies. He knew that Bruce didn't mind his eating other insects. While their friendship demanded that they treat each other differently than they would other bugs, it didn't mean they had to deny their nature.

When Milton had eaten enough, he snuck behind Bruce and made a silent jump. When Milton landed right beside him, Bruce dropped the leaf he was eating, lost his balance, and fell over onto his side. Milton was very pleased and began humming to himself, looking around as if nothing had happened.

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"Don't do that! I hate it when you do that!"

When Bruce got to his feet, he was mad, but then he realized Milton had played a joke on him, and he was secretly pleased.

Milton pretended to be busy licking juices from his forefeet and grooming the hairs near his mouth. "Do what? I have no idea what you're talking about. Are you ready to go yet?"

"I'm going to get you for this. Just wait!" Bruce hid his smile as he picked up his pack.

"Let me carry that for a while. At least until you have your senses about you. Imagine being scared of me. I wouldn't hurt a fly. Well, then again, maybe . . ." Milton tossed the pack onto his back. He couldn't get his legs into the straps, but he wound some of his silk through the openings and fastened that around his midsection, which seemed to work quite well.

They headed out again, walking and jumping along the side of the road, staying as much under cover as possible. As the day went on, Milton passed the time by telling Bruce about his family and the place where he used to live. Bruce didn't say much. The walking was getting harder because they'd started climbing. He realized that Stony Ridge was probably quite a bit higher than his home. As the road climbed, Bruce kept thinking about his awful changing ceremony, finding his egg parents, and all the other things that now consumed his thoughts. He nodded automatically when Milton said something that needed his response. He began wondering what he would do when he found his egg parents. He knew that, no matter how many different ways he might imagine that first meeting,

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the real event would be different. Finally, he gave up thinking about it and started listening to Milton and asking questions about his home.

Bruce kept a lookout, but so far they hadn't seen many birds, and nothing else had bothered them. Thinking of birds made Bruce recall the first time he flew on Meryl's back during their last adventure. He was terrified, being so afraid of heights, but getting to the cave quickly to find Angie and the others was a stronger need, and he managed to do it. Bruce knew it was going to take longer on this trip without Meryl to fly them where they were going, but he thought back to Meryl's words again: "If it's worth doing, it usually takes hard work to get it done." Bruce sighed. He wasn't against hard work, but he thought having things easy wouldn't be that bad, either.

When evening came, both he and Milton were both tired. They chose a large nut tree to protect them as they settled down for the night. Milton found some loose bark that he used to create a shelter in a small hollow made by the tree roots, and they made their camp there. After Milton hunted and Bruce ate more of the delicacies from his pack, the two lay together, curled up near one another, as that helped to keep them warm.

While trying to sleep, Bruce decided that, if they didn't find anyone who was able to help them tomorrow, he would go to the huge oak to visit the owl. He shivered again and tried to think of other things. Angie came to mind. He settled into sleep thinking of her, while Milton was already snoring a little.

The next day, they walked nearly all the way to the

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clearing, and they didn't meet the pigs or anyone else who could give them any useful information. By late afternoon, they saw the huge oak tree and continued toward it, being careful to stay out of sight. Bruce's fears of the owl from Stony Ridge were huge, and he found himself constantly looking around to see if they were being watched.

The oak tree stood in the center of the clearing, just as Angie's father had described. A few bushes and some grasses grew in clumps here and there, but there wasn't much to give them cover there. Bruce decided they should get as close to the huge oak as possible without leaving the shelter of the trees outside of the clearing and make camp there for the night. In the morning, when the owl would have eaten, they would creep through the clearing and up to the tree. What they would do after that was further than Bruce cared to plan.

Chapter 5

The Owl at Stony Ridge

When he awoke, Bruce saw that fog had settled over the entire area. The sun was up, and it was light enough to see, but the fog gave an eerie, closed-in feeling to the place, and the clearing that had appeared so open and huge was nearly invisible.

Bruce touched Milton's shoulder and shook him awake. Milton sat up, looked around, and said, "What did you do with the trees?"

"Your snoring must have attracted this fog."

"What snoring? I don't snore."

Bruce snorted.

"See—you're the one who snores," Milton said, stretching each of his legs, one after the other. He stood and looked around. "It's going to be hard to find flies in this, but I'll give it a try." He attached a silken thread to the trunk of a tree behind them. "I'm setting a line here so I'll be able to find my way back if I can't see you. I won't be gone long," Milton said as he walked away into the fog.

It was eerily quiet with Milton gone. Bruce took a wild raspberry leaf out of his pack. Besides being juicy, the leaf was covered with many short hairs that tickled his mouth.

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When he'd eaten as much as he could, he sat and waited for Milton to return. A long time went by, but there was no sign of him.

"Milton? Hey, Milton. Are you out there?"

No response.

He called again. Still nothing.

After as much time as he could bear sitting alone, Bruce stood and tried to see something, anything. The fog was too thick. He moved forward and touched the line that Milton had fastened to the tree. His mind was busy conjuring all kinds of ideas. What if something had happened to Milton? He couldn't stand the idea of losing his best friend again. He would find Milton, everything would be all right, and they could get on with talking to the owl. He grabbed his backpack, put it on, and started following the line.

It was sticky, but Bruce discovered he could avoid getting stuck to the line if he touched it lightly. He learned the best way was to touch one of his feelers to the line as he walked along. It was slow going, since the line went in different directions from time to time, and there were rocks and sticks that he had to crawl over. He knew that Milton had simply bounded over these things, and he wished he could jump like that. After he'd walked for what seemed like a very long time, he called out again.

"Milton? Are you there?"

"Bruce, come here! I need your help."

"What's wrong? Are you all right?" Bruce made his way toward Milton's voice as quickly as he could.

"I'm fine, but this little mouse isn't. Come and help."